

Some of them are cadets of his own family, always blunt opponents of mine and of our cause here and elsewhere; some are incomers, as we call them; a few of them from clans apparently friendly to us when in other quarters, but traitors and renegades at the heart; some are spies habit and repute. There's not a friend of mine among them, not in all the fat and prosperous rabble of them; but I wish you were here on another errand, though to Doom, my poor place, you are welcome. I am a widower, a lonely man, with my own flesh and blood rebel against me"—he checked his untimely confidence—"and yet I have been chastened by years and some unco experiences from a truculent man to one preferring peace except at the last ditch."

"*Eh bien!* monsieur; *this* is the last ditch!" said Montaignon. "Spy and murderer, M. le Baron, and remember I propose to give him more than the murderer's chance when I agree to meet him on a fair field with a sword in his hand."

"I have seen you lunge, sir," said Doom meaningly; "I ken the carriage of a fencer's head; your eye's fast, your step's light; with the sword I take it Drimdarroch is condemned, and your practice with the pistol, judging from the affair with the Macfarlanes, seems pretty enough. You propose, or I'm mistaken, to make yourself the executioner. It is a step for great deliberation, and for the sake of a wanton woman——"

"Sir!" cried Montaignon, half rising in his chair.

Doom's eyes gleamed, a quiver ran over his brow, and a furrow came to the jaw; his hand went to his side, where in other days there might have been a dagger. It was the flash of a moment, and died again almost before Montaignon had seen and understood.

"*Mille pardons!*" said Doom with uncouth French. "I used the word in its most innocent sense, with its kindest meaning; but I was a fool to use it at all, and I withdraw it."