

"There's a bit crack in the creature after all," said the Baron, displaying embarrassment and annoyance, and he quickly changed the conversation, but with a wandering mind, as Count Victor could not fail to notice. The little man, to tell the truth, had somehow laughed at the wrong moment for Count Victor's peace of mind. For why should he be amused at the paucity of the visitors from Argyll's court to the residence of Doom? Across the table at a man unable to conceal his confusion, Montaiglon stole an occasional glance with suspicion growing on him irresistibly.

An inscrutable face was there, as many Highland faces were to him, even among old friends in France, where Balhaldie, with the best possible hand at a game of cards, kept better than any gambler he had ever known before a mask of dull and hopeless resignation. The tongue was soft and fair-spoken; the hand seemed generous enough, but this by all accounts had been so even with Drimdarroch himself, and Drimdarroch was rotten to the core.

"Very curious," thought Montaiglon, making poor play with his braxy ham. "Could Bethune be mistaken in this extraordinary Baron?" And he patched together in his mind Mungo's laughter with the Baron's history as briefly known to him, and the inexplicable signal and alarm of the night.

"Your Mademoiselle Annapla seems to be an entrancing vocalist," said he airily, feeling his way to a revelation.

The Baron, in his abstraction, scarcely half comprehended.

"The maid," he said, "just the maid!" and never a word more, but into a new topic.

"I trust so," thought the Count; "but the fair songster who signals from her window and has clandestine meetings at midnight with masculine voices must expect some incredulity on that point. Can it be possible that here I have Blue Beard or Lothario? The laughter of the woman seems to