

terrific hush of the mountains, in whose mist or sunshine he had ridden for two days. The woods, with leaves that fell continually about him, seemed in some swoon of nature, with no birds carolling on the boughs; the cloisters were monastic in their silence. A season of most dolorous influences, a land of sombre shadows and ravines, a day of sinister solitude; the sun slid through scudding clouds, high over a world blown upon by salt airs brisk and tonic, but man was wanting in those weary valleys, and the heart of Victor Jean, Comte de Montaignon, was almost sick for very loneliness.

Thus it came as a relief to his ear, the removal of an oppression little longer to be endured, when he heard behind him what were apparently the voices of the odd-looking uncouth natives he had seen a quarter of an hour ago lurking, silent but alert and peering, phantoms of old story rather than humans, in the fir-wood near a defile made by a brawling cataract. They had wakened no suspicions in his mind. It was true they were savage-looking rogues in a ragged plaid-cloth of a dull device, and they carried arms he had thought forbidden there by law. To a foreigner fresh from gentle lands there might well be a menace in their ambuscade, but he had known men of their race, if not of so savage an aspect, in the retinues of the Scots exiles who hung about the side-doors of Saint Germain's, passed mysterious days between that domicile of tragic comedy and Avignon or Rome, or ruffled it on empty pockets at the gaming-tables, so he had no apprehension. Besides, he was in the country of the Argyll, at least on the verge of it; a territory accounted law-abiding even to dulness by every Scot he had known since he was a child at Cammercy, and snuff-strewn conspirators, come to meet his uncles, took him on their knees when a lull in the cards or wine permitted, and recounted their adventures for his entertainment in a villainous French: he could not guess that the gentry in the wood