

whom, as a stranger, one might catch one's self staring as at something sufficiently puzzling to be well worth resolving. Ill-looking he was *not*, and yet one seemed to seek in vain for qualities of body or mind to neutralise to the sight what was assuredly a combination of much that was uncomely, and indeed, in one or two directions, absolutely grotesque. But then I had the secret.

The long and short of it was, my cousin, Sir Wilfrid Monson, was not entirely straight-headed. Everything was made clear to the mind, after a glance at his strange, weak, yet striking profile, with the hint that there had been madness in his mother's family. He was the eighth baronet, and on his father's side (and that was my side, I am thankful to say) all had been sound as a bell; but my uncle had fallen in love with the daughter of a Scotch peer whose family were tainted with insanity—no matter her real name: the Lady Elizabeth will suffice. He was frankly warned by the old Earl, who was not too mad to be candid, but the lovesick creature grinned in his lordship's face with a wild shake of the head at the disclosure, as though he saw no more in it than a disposition to end the engagement. Then the honest old madman carried him to a great window that overlooked a spacious sweep of lawn, and pointed with a bitter smile and a despairful heave of the shoulders to three women walking, two of whom were soberly clad in big bonnets and veils down their back, whilst the third, who was between them, and whose arms were locked in the others', glided forwards as though her feet travelled on clockwork rollers, whilst she kept her head fixedly bent, her chin upon her breast, and her gaze rooted upon the ground; and as the amorous baronet watched—the Earl meanwhile preserving his miserable smile as he held his gouty forefinger levelled—he saw the down-looking woman make an effort to break away from her companions, but without ever lifting her head.

'That's Lady Alice,' said the Earl, 'speechless and brainless! Guid preserve us! And the Lady Elizabeth is her seester.'

'Ay, that may be,' answers the other; 'but take two roses growing side by side: because some venomous worm is eating into the heart of one and withering up its beauty, is the other that is radiant and flawless to be left uncherished?'

'Guid forbid!' answered the Earl, and then turned away with a weak *hech! hech!* that should have proved more terrifying to one's matrimonial yearnings than even the desolate picture of the three figures stalking the emerald-green sward.

These were dim memories, yet they flashed into my head with the swiftness of thought, along with the workings of the eager conjecture and lively wonder raised in me by Wilfrid's visit, and by his peculiar aspect, too, during the few moments' interval of pause that followed his entrance. My servant shut the door; Wilfrid looked to see that it was closed, then approached me with a sort of lifting of his face as of a man half choked with a hurry

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