

in the stifling atmosphere of London, Elsie determined to spare her as long as she could, and, besides this, the winding up of Mr. Lawrence's affairs, the finding of a house in a convenient situation, and other business of the kind, would take some time. Thus it came to pass that Easter found her still at Donningdean; so did Percie, when he came home for the short vacation; and so did John Lawrence, when, to the surprise of all, he suddenly appeared.

It was not exactly keeping to the resolution he had formed of avoiding Elsie and temptation together, but we can easily find excellent reasons for any course we wish to pursue. John Lawrence persuaded himself without any difficulty and in perfect good faith, that a visit to his mother at Donningdean was indispensable. He would be very careful, and a week would do no harm.

The April evening was soft and mild as he entered the avenue at Donningdean. It was late in the month and the trees began to show the first indications of the leafy wealth to come; the sun was sinking, casting slanting rays across the verdant grass, and brightening into flame the windows of the old mansion. John thought as he slowly paced between the rows of stately elms (he had walked from Stormington), how beautiful the scene was in its evening peace and stillness; a stillness unbroken save by the occasional rustle of a bird among the branches, and the gurgle of the brook close by.

The murmur of voices which suddenly came on his ear, disturbed his reverie. His own tread on the grassy carpet made no sound, so that the speakers did not hear him, nor were they aware of his presence till he was close upon them. Once in sight of them he drew back, stood for a moment looking on them from the shadow of a beech tree, and then turned away.

Before him were Elsie and Percie Falconer; she seated on part of a felled tree, he lying on the ground at her feet. Elsie's face could not be seen, being partly concealed by a drooping veil, and partly turned away; but Percie's was plainly visible to the spectator, and in it he read all he wished, and more.

They were lovers. In Percie's speaking

features and eager eyes, John saw at last what he wondered he had never seen or suspected before—his love for his cousin. By the light of his own affection he read that of his rival, and submitted to his fate.

Or thought he did. He reasoned thus: He had said but little to Elsie. she might easily have misunderstood him, or taken his words as compliment or gallantry; she had seen but little of him, and it was not likely he had in so short a time made much impression on her heart; how far more probable that heart should be given to Percie, her constant companion, with every attraction of person and fortune to favor his suit! As he saw her bend to reply to some remark of Percie's, he told himself he was very glad he had been mistaken when he fancied she might have come to love him; who was he, what right had he now to think of love or marriage? No; he was glad she loved Percie; very glad indeed.

His face was not indicative of great gladness as, after his short observation of the two, he turned unheard and unnoticed away. It was a singular thing, but although he had expressly made up his mind that his visit to Donningdean had nothing at all to do with Elsie, he now retraced his steps towards the gate as if his business was over and done, and had proceeded some distance before he discovered the direction in which he was going. "Bah!" he said, impatiently, "I am but a coward after all. Why should I not see them when I know it to be the truth and acknowledge it to be for the best? Besides, it was my mother I came to see, not—not *her*. I'm a fool to care so much about what can't be helped. I'll make a virtue of necessity, and give her up with a good grace. I—I think, though, I'll just walk round the park before I go in."

He did so, and there was no trace of agitation in his manner or greeting when he presented himself among the surprised family group, just before the second bell rang for dinner. "Glad to see me, mother?" he said as she welcomed him. "I thought I should surprise you a little. That exchange business is settled at last, and I'm on my way to join the —th at Perth; but as Perth is a long way off, and as I'm not likely to get leave for some time, and shan't