

was never so masterful as when he lay nearest to death. After the first month he deliberately took stock and asked himself whether he could possibly continue. His own will was being so steadily checked, disregarded and set aside that he felt the lines of his personality becoming blurred; he was treated like a down-trodden wife (as, had he known it, Gwendolen Lancing had come to be treated within two years of Deryk's birth); he was becoming an obedient shadow like the recently engaged male nurse (but he was *paid* to be docile and unresentful). Yet what good did this stock-taking do? He could not abandon the Lancings, if he wanted to—any more than a swimmer could stand and watch a child drowning; you might not like spoiling your clothes, but it could not be avoided. . . . Sir Aylmer brooded for months over his dead wife and his own powerlessness, vaguely conscious that for years before her death they had drifted apart; not knowing why; wondering why she had become so inanimate; then he would feel a touch of deceptive strength returning to his worn-out body, and for a week would plan, direct and execute with the fury of his own youth. The spasm of energy would pass as abruptly as it had come, and he would sink back into morose inertia, varied by outbursts of violent irritability.

The neighbouring houses, suspicious of American millionaires, spent a cautious year in testing him, only to find that their lives held nothing in common, and that he was too preoccupied to meet them. Hatherly tried to find him society by choosing suitable tenants, but of all who came to settle on the estate Colonel Penrose, a widower in retirement from the Indian Army, was the only one who established a foothold in the house. Three years earlier Penrose had got at loggerheads with the War Office, and had been told in effect that, interesting as were his views on army reform, he must do his prescribed work in the prescribed way or send in his papers. Petulant and never dreaming that anyone would get rid of a man merely because he was enlightened, Penrose resigned his commission, cut short a career that he loved, and returned to England