

hung across the village street of Aston Ripley; the school-children were busy setting it in place when he drove by in his car, and he had noticed that the bunting bore the single word "WELCOME." His cadaverous, pain-twisted face softened to a smile of pleasure; the welcome was rather a compliment to him than to Deryk, who had lived little at home, but he accepted it on the boy's behalf and bowed his acknowledgments. No one would ever know how much in the last two years he had longed for this day; his servants, elderly and uncommunicative as himself, all equally hushed in tone and spellbound by the silence and desolation of the house, would never know the sense of vast lifelessness which it had borne since Deryk went away.

But he was forgetting his promise to Mrs. Benson. Glancing cursorily at the music-room and drawing-room he had himself wheeled into the ballroom and idly pushed his way under a row of Stornaway portraits from a reputed van Dyck to an undeniable Lely, struck for the first time by the immense and wasteful size of the house. He had kept it for Deryk, and Deryk would be able to fill it, but until it changed hands it would remain an unwieldy barrack . . . The dining-room he did not need to see, but he spent a few minutes in the morning-room, looking curiously at a collection of black-figure pottery; he had almost forgotten its existence, yet at one time it was said to be the finest private collection in England; scholars from two continents had come to photograph it, dealers would approach his secretary with extravagant offers, and on Tuesdays and Fridays in the summer months cultured tourists would send in their cards and be led round by Mrs. Benson. The elect she would also take to see the china and the tapestry, but the other collections were hidden away in rooms not open to the public. Sir Aylmer decided that some day, when he had the strength, he must look into this question. . . .

Leaving the morning-room he wheeled himself into the lift and explored the upper stories. Since Forsyte, the Aston Ripley doctor, had told him to avoid stairs and make