

WESSEX TALES

secured it in her private drawer; the lock of hair she tied with white ribbon and put in her bosom, whence she drew it and kissed it every now and then in some unobserved nook.

‘What’s the matter?’ said her husband, looking up from his newspaper on one of these occasions. ‘Crying over something? A lock of hair? Whose is it?’

‘He’s dead!’ she murmured.

‘Who?’

‘I don’t want to tell you, Will, just now, unless you insist!’ she said, a sob hanging heavy in her voice.

‘O, all right.’

‘Do you mind my refusing? I will tell you some day.’

‘It doesn’t matter in the least, of course.’

He walked away whistling a few bars of no tune in particular; and when he had got down to his factory in the city the subject came into Marchmill’s head again.

He, too, was aware that a suicide had taken place recently at the house they had occupied at Solentsea. Having seen the volume of poems in his wife’s hand of late, and heard fragments of the landlady’s conversation about Trewe when they were her tenants, he all at once said to himself, ‘Why of course it’s he! . . . How the devil did she get to know him? What sly animals women are!’

Then he placidly dismissed the matter, and went on with his daily affairs. By this time Ella at home had come to a determination. Mrs Hooper, in sending the hair and photograph, had informed her of the day of the funeral; and as the morning and noon wore on an overpowering wish to know where they were laying him took possession of the sympathetic woman. Caring very little now what her husband or any one else might think of her eccentricities, she wrote Marchmill a brief note, stating that she was called away for the afternoon and