

WESSEX TALES

‘Well, I’m sure you’d be interested in him, ma’am; if you could see him, only he’s so shy that I don’t suppose you will.’ Mrs. Hooper seemed nothing loth to minister to her tenant’s curiosity about her predecessor. ‘Lived here long? Yes, nearly two years. He keeps on his rooms even when he’s not here: the soft air of this place suits his chest, and he likes to be able to come back at any time. He is mostly writing or reading, and doesn’t see many people, though, for the matter of that, he is such a good, kind young fellow that folks would only be too glad to be friendly with him if they knew him. You don’t meet kind-hearted people every day.’

‘Ah, he’s kind-hearted . . . and good.’

‘Yes; he’ll oblige me in anything if I ask him. “Mr. Trewe,” I say to him sometimes, “you are rather out of spirits.” “Well, I am, Mrs. Hooper,” he’ll say, “though I don’t know how you should find it out.” “Why not take a little change?” I ask. Then in a day or two he’ll say that he will take a trip to Paris, or Norway, or somewhere; and I assure you he comes back all the better for it.’

‘Ah, indeed! His is a sensitive nature, no doubt.’

‘Yes. Still he’s odd in some things. Once when he had finished a poem of his composition late at night he walked up and down the room rehearsing it; and the floors being so thin—jerry-built houses, you know, though I say it myself—he kept me awake up above him till I wished him further. . . . But we get on very well.’

This was but the beginning of a series of conversations about the rising poet as the days went on. On one of these occasions Mrs. Hooper drew Ella’s attention to what she had not noticed before: minute scribblings in pencil on the wall-paper behind the curtains at the head of the bed.

‘O! let me look,’ said Mrs. Marchmill, unable to