

AN IMAGINATIVE WOMAN

could not feel that she cared about them half as much as usual.

‘Mrs. Hooper, have you a photograph of—the gentleman who lived here?’ She was getting to be curiously shy in mentioning his name.

‘Why, yes. It’s in the ornamental frame on the mantelpiece in your own bedroom, ma’am.’

‘No; the Royal Duke and Duchess are in that.’

‘Yes, so they are; but he’s behind them. He belongs rightly to that frame, which I bought on purpose; but as he went away he said: “Cover me up from those strangers that are coming, for God’s sake. I don’t want them staring at me, and I am sure they won’t want me staring at them.” So I slipped in the Duke and Duchess temporarily in front of him, as they had no frame, and Royalties are more suitable for letting furnished than a private young man. If you take ’em out you’ll see him under. Lord, ma’am, he wouldn’t mind if he knew it! He didn’t think the next tenant would be such an attractive lady as you, or he wouldn’t have thought of hiding himself, perhaps.’

‘Is he handsome?’ she asked timidly.

‘I call him so. Some, perhaps, wouldn’t.’

‘Should I?’ she asked, with eagerness.

‘I think you would, though some would say he’s more striking than handsome: large-eyed thoughtful fellow, you know, with a very electric flash in his eye when he looks round quickly, such as you’d expect a poet to be who doesn’t get his living by it.’

‘How old is he?’

‘Several years older than yourself, ma’am; about thirty-one or two, I think.’

Ella was, as a matter of fact, a few months over thirty herself; but she did not look nearly so much. Though so immature in nature, she was entering on that tract