

### WOODING BY PROXY.

Stephen Earnshaw was a small tradesman in the village of Swallowfield. He had the reputation of being a careful, saving man, and people said he had a few hundred in a savings bank.

He was tall and handsome, having a manly figure; a strong hand. He was might have been a man of huge, brown, arms, more capable of wielding a smith's hammer than weighing out tea and sugar; his hair was dark brown, and curled. When he smiled, the expression of his face was very sweet, but when his frown'd the thunderbolts of Jupiter might be expected.

So little did he care about a tradesman's life that he left the grocer's business almost entirely to his mother, and betook himself to the day to day little work of plowing land, part arable, which he rented in the neighborhood from Mr. Hewitt Langley, the owner of most of the landed property thereabouts.

Many girls belonging to the village of Swallowfield were in love with Stephen Earnshaw, but he did not pay them much attention in return for their glances.

It was just "good evening" and "good morning" with Stephen when he met people; but there was one name, and that was Margaret Minton.

When she had accepted her in the street, he had always a kind word for her, and would fain hold her little hand in his after shaking it, by way of greeting.

If she was in a good temper, she let him retain his hold; if not, she snatched it rudely away, with a "How dare you?" uttered in anything but the mildest of tones.

It was evident that Margaret did not care much about the good-looking giant, or perhaps she did not know her own mind.

She had given him the least encouragement, he would have proposed at once, but she did not.

She smiled upon him one moment, scolded him the next, and turned her back upon him half an hour afterward. Stephen was in honest fellow, blunt at times, but having a keen perception for all that, and he saw that he was being made a fool of.

Like all men of retiring disposition, he was very sensitive, and he grew angry when he thought that his love was ridiculed by the only girl in the village to whom he had shown any civility, and which had openly evidenced a decided partiality.

He saw Margaret in the street one evening in July when he was returning from his work on his farm. She also saw him, but, pretending ignorance of his presence, walked on till his voice arrested her progress.

Margaret was taller than most women, very dark, wearing her hair brought severely over her temples, speaking quietly, and sometimes cleverly, following your every movement with her eyes, and only laughing when she had said something to cause pain or annoyance.

"Have you left your spectacles at home, Margaret?" asked Stephen Earnshaw.

"I can see like a cat in the dark, so I do not stand in need of any artificial vision," she replied.

"How was it you did not see me then?"

"Perhaps I did not want to see you,"

"Oh, if that is the way the wind blows, I'll wish you good-night, and be going homeward," said Stephen, a little nettled.

"And I will walk a little way with you, Stephen," she replied smiling.

"What?" he demanded.

"If you won't tell me that I have lovely hair, and beautiful eyes, and pretty teeth, I have heard it so often that I shall begin to think it true presently."

"I wish I could call you mine, Maggie," he said.

"But you can't, Mr. Earnshaw," she answered. "I have no intention of relinquishing my liberty in any man's favor. Being one's own mistress is so charming."

"Has a matrimonial life no charms for you?"

"At present, none."

"You know what people say, Maggie," exclaimed Stephen.

"What?" she queried, fixing her great eyes on him.

"That you and I will be man and wife some day."

"People had better mind their own business, I think," said Margaret, angrily, while the hot blood flushed her usually pale cheeks.

"Do you mean it?" he pleaded, as if deprecating her wrath.

"I am angry. I don't like to hear such things repeated. You have no right to annoy me in this way. I am glad we have reached home; and I'm sorry I said I would walk with you."

Before Stephen Earnshaw could make any reply to this torrent, she quickly left his side, and, crossing the road, lifted the latch entering her mother's house.

Stephen stood looking after her for some little time; and then, with a hasty stride, very different from his usual deliberate walk, made the best of his way to his house, which was situated in the middle of Swallowfield, High street.

He found the shop closed, and his mother in the parlor with Annie Ruthven—little Annie, the milliner, his friends called her.

She presented a great contrast to Margaret Minton, being short, plump and stout. Her eyes were not bold and impudent, like those of the latter, though they were lustrous enough at times. Their expression was difficult to grasp. They were deep and cunning; but Annie was a good girl, and a general favorite.

She was an orphan, and lived with an aunt, to whose slender resources she contributed by working with her needle.

Only herself knew that she had a secret love for Stephen. She had never breathed a word of this love to any one, and she dares not confess it to herself in the privacy of her own chamber.

Both Stephen's mother and Annie saw in a moment that something had occurred to ruffle his temper. He cast his hat in a corner, and, sitting down before the empty grate, leant his elbows on his knees and his head on his hands.

"What's the matter, Stephen?" said Mrs. Earnshaw.

"Nothing much, mother; but I don't like being laughed at!" he replied, biting his lip.

"Who in this place dare laugh at you?"

"It isn't a man at all, mother!" said Stephen, cutting her short.

"Then it's that Margaret Minton. Who is she, I should like to know, to give herself airs? A trumpery piece of goods!"

"It's no use talking, mother," he cried, interrupting her again. "Your standing in the river wouldn't stop the stream, would it?"

"I don't suppose it would."

"Then all your talking won't make Margaret Minton more civil to me," he said with the same bitter air.

"Perhaps I have done something for you with her, Stephen!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. I may be very silly and insignificant; but Margaret and I are great friends. I help her make dresses, and I will give her any message from you, but

you must tell me to-night, for I am going."

"Going? Where?" he asked.

"To service," replied Annie. "I am tired of being here. I must go into the world, and try to make my way."

"That remark is rather premature," said Mr. Langley.

"I like to tease Stephen," she answered, as Earnshaw strode away, with a smile.

The fiddle struck up a waltz, and, without another word, Mr. Langley grasped her firmly by the waist, and whirled her round and round in a giddy day of the week."

Stephen tossed her head, and turned to go. Every one of Annie's malevolent shafts had hit its mark, but she still pretended to be overflowing with the milk of human kindness.

"What makes you think so?" he asked, in a contradictory mood.

"I am not blind, Stephen," she replied.

"I wish I was blind and deaf, too!" he said, wildly.

Stephen leaned against the wooden wall of the barn, and did not know that Annie was close to him until she spoke.

"Margaret is not treating you well," she said.

"Well, I wish you luck, I'm sure, Annie," exclaimed Stephen Earnshaw, heartily; "I think you do your best for me, Margaret, and I'll give you a dance in the barn at the back of our house before you go."

"It's a bargain!" cried Annie, clapping her hands delightedly.

Stephen was delighted to hear that Stephen Earnshaw had not in favor with Margaret.

"Oh," she thought, "if he would only love me as he loves her, what would I not do for him? His every wish should be anticipated. I would live for him all day, and all night, too, if he were to let me have him."

Her little heart fluttered as she thought of what the future might bring forth. If Margaret remained obstinate, Stephen Earnshaw might look favorably upon her.

A miracle, though, must be worked, she thought, before the handsome Stephen could fall in love with her.

She was not going to service? Would she not go miles away instead of living close to him, and enjoying his society, while visiting his mother?

She now regretted having made up her mind to go to the world, but, having arrived at such a determination, and made it generally known, she could not turn back.

The next day she looked upon Margaret with a more than teatime, ostensibly to show her a dress she had finished for the doctor's wife, but really to talk about Stephen.

Stephen admired the dress, and said, "I wish I were a lady, to be able to have a dress for every day in the year."

"That would be extravagant," laughed Annie. "Would not every week in the year content you?"

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