

“DOLL:”

A DREAM OF HADDON HALL,

BEING THE STORY OF

DOROTHY VERNON’S WOOING AND FLIGHT.

BY

J. E. MUDDOCK

LONDON AND MANCHESTER, 1880.

Edited by David Trutt

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	INTRODUCTION	Page 3
	NOTE BY THE AUTHOR	Page 4
CHAPTER I	THE REASON THAT DOLL WAS LATE	Page 5
CHAPTER II	LOVE FINDS OUT A WAY	Page 10
CHAPTER III	THE PRINCESS FALLS INTO DISGRACE	Page 14
CHAPTER IV	HOW THE TRYST WAS KEPT	Page 18
CHAPTER V	A LITTLE MYSTERY	Page 22
CHAPTER VI	AN OLD WOMAN’S STRATAGEM	Page 26
CHAPTER VII	A NIGHT MEETING IN THE ROOKERY	Page 31
CHAPTER VIII	THE FLIGHT	Page 37
CHAPTER IX	THE PURSUIT—THE RETURN	Page 44

Published 2010 by
David Trutt
Los Angeles, California
USA

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James Edward Muddock (1843 - 1934) was a prolific writer and a staunch believer of the Dorothy Vernon - John Manners elopement story. He also wrote under the pseudonyms of Joyce Emmerson Muddock and Dick Donovan.

Muddock draws heavily on the preceding stories of Dorothy Vernon. The main thread of *A Dream of Haddon Hall* is based on Eliza Meteyard's (1860) *The Love Steps of Dorothy Vernon*. Many details of Meteyard's story show up; Dorothy's devoted nursemaid reappears, as does Lady Maude as the "scheming scornful step-mother," and Dorothy once more runs down the eleven steps to her elopement during her sister's wedding celebration.

Muddock was familiar with the other early stories of the romance. He incorporated William Bennet's (1822) inclusion of Sir Thomas Stanley's younger brother as the favored suitor for Dorothy's hand. He incorporated Grantley Berkeley's (1867) game keeper spying upon the lovers' clandestine meeting.

Muddock makes important additions to the Dorothy Vernon - John Manners romance. He originates their elopement flight toward the Manners properties in Leicester, and their marriage at Aylestone (of which there is no record). He places on firm ground the bribery by Manners of the head forester to allow Manners to skulk around the grounds, and on firmer ground the familiar name of "Doll" Vernon.

Muddock's *DOLL: A Dream of Haddon Hall, Being the Story of Dorothy Vernon's Wooing and Flight* was first published in 1880 and became a best seller. The Fifth Edition was published in 1892 and is specified as representing a run to that date of Fifty Thousand.

Muddock is intrigued by the story of the Dorothy Vernon romance. In September 1882, he named his new daughter Dorothy Vernon Muddock, and now had his own Princess of the Peak. In 1900, Dorothy married Herbert Greenhough-Smith, the editor of the Strand magazine. As Dorothy Greenhough-Smith, she won a bronze medal for Figure Skating in the 1908 Olympics. Dorothy also won two British Figure Skating Championships, in 1908 and 1911.

One of the most interesting monuments in Bakewell Church is that erected at the South end of the chapel, over the tomb of Dorothy Vernon and her husband, Sir John Manners, where also their children lie buried. The monument is very imposing, and bears the arms of Manners and Vernon. Beneath a semi-circular arch is a pedestal at which kneel figures representing Dorothy and her lord. Sir John is attired in plate armour, and Dorothy wears a closely-fitting dress, with a large ruff at the neck. On her head is a cap. The figure is by no means a good one, and the lineaments of the features are a libel on the beauty of Dorothy. The inscription on the pedestal runs as follows:—

“Here lyeth Sir John Manners, of Haddon Hall, second soone of Thoas, Erle of Rutland, who dyed the 4 of June, 1611; and Dorotheie his wife, one of the daughters and heires to Sr George Vernon, of Haddon, Knight, who deceased the 24 day of June, in the 26 year of the raigne of Queen Elizabeth, 1584.”

At the time of her death Dorothy was still quite a young woman, although she had borne her husband four children.

J. E. MUDDOCK, AUTHOR.

On a chill October day I stood in the courtyard of the grand old pile of Haddon Hall. I had come as a reverent pilgrim—a lover of ancient things—to visit this relic of a far off age. I was desirous of wandering in solitude through the silent chambers of the time-worn mansion, and peopling them with the ghosts of those whose voices have long been still.

It was a weird, almost a sullen day, and yet a day of strange, wild beauty. The river Wye made plaintive moan. The autumn tints were on the land, and a chill autumnal wind was sobbing as if for the glories of departed summer; while the brown leaves seemed to swirl to the ground with a shudder. There were no sounds save for the sobbing wind, the shuddering leaves, and the moaning river. The laughter, the merriment, the revelry that once had made the rafters ring were long ago hushed, and I stood and gazed on the mouldering building with mixed feelings of pleasure and sadness, musing on the mutability of human beings. Long spectral shadows crept around me as ragged clouds flitted across the glary sun, and there was a soft sigh in the air as the wind played in the nooks and crannies of the grey mansion, whose solitude and loneliness impressed me strangely.

“Oh, stones,” I mused, “why have you not tongues that you might tell me something of the strange scenes to which you have been witnesses?” My footfalls awoke the echoes of the deserted chambers. The hush of a tomb was there, and it seemed to me as if the mouldering tapestry clung to the walls even as grave ceremonies cling to the dead. I passed from room to room, from corridor to corridor, until at last I stood in the bed-chamber of sweet Dorothy Vernon, stood where the beautiful English maiden had so often slept and dreamed of him who loved her. Suddenly a strange feeling crept over me. A mist seemed to swim before my eyes, and all things of the present faded away. Scenes and people of long ago were revived. *I* seemed to become impersonal, and to see and hear as one sees and hears in dreams.

A clear, ringing laugh—the laugh of a joyous girl—fell upon my ear, and a lovely maiden tripped lightly past me. She was slightly above the middle height, with a lithe, graceful figure, about twenty years of age, and very beautiful. Her soft auburn hair was twisted up in loose folds, and over it was a silken kerchief, which was tied under the chin, framing one of the sweetest faces eyes could behold. Her own eyes were deeply blue, her nose straight and delicate, her mouth small, and the rosy lips being parted revealed a set of pearly teeth.

She wore a tightly fitting gown, that came up high in her long white neck, which was encircled by a snowy frill, and fastened with a massive diamond-set buckle. This maiden, whose movements were as graceful as a fawns, and whose laugh was as musical as the silvery ripple of water, was Dorothy Vernon. She was a princess in that grand Peak country, for her father, Sir George Vernon, was “King of the Peak.” She was her father’s darling, and his pet name for her was “Doll.” Far and near the fame of her beauty had spread, and many a high-born youth would have given his little finger to have won Doll for his bride. But she was guarded jealously by her step-mother, the Lady Maude, who did not treat poor little Dorothy over kindly.*

It was a splendid summer morning about the year 1567, and the proud and haughty Elizabeth was Queen of England, but the equally proud and haughty George Vernon was King of Derbyshire, although he wore no regal diadem on his brow. His wealth was enormous, and his possessions extended over many and many a mile of that fair land.

As Doll reached the gallery overlooking the banqueting hall, she was met by her nurse, Dame Madge. “By my faith, sweet Dorothy,” cried Madge, “my old limbs ache in running after thee, thou saucy puss. I have sought thee everywhere. Where hast thou been, my jewel?”

With a tinkling little laugh, Doll caught her nurse’s hand, and exclaimed— “Dear old Madge, thou has surely been exerting thyself o’er much, for thy breath is wheezing like the wind amongst the rushes in the river!”

* Historical records agree on the point that Dorothy Vernon was an exceptionally beautiful woman, and possessed of such sweetness of manner and temper that she was worshipped by all who knew her [except, apparently, her step-mother].

In the year 1841, during the restoration of Bakewell Church, several of the old tombs were opened, amongst them being that of Dorothy Vernon and her husband, Sir John Manners. The remains in the coffins found in the tomb were carefully examined; the skull of the male was recognised as that of Sir John by its somewhat singular shape, and the likeness it bore to the sculptured effigy on the monument. The skull of the female was covered with quite a wealth of beautiful *auburn hair*, which was done up in rolls, and fastened with pins. Notwithstanding that sweet Dorothy Vernon has lain in her coffin since 1584, the hand of decay had left the splendid hair untouched. [Author’s Note.]

“Aye, baby darling, I hurried me quickly up the great staircase, for my lord bade my tell thee that thy palfrey [a gentle riding horse, especially one used by ladies] waited, and he wished thee to accompany him on a ride through the woods . But where hast thou been to, child?”

“I was on the Eagle’s Tower, Madge,” Dorothy whispered, at the same time putting her white finger on her lips as if to enjoin silence on the nurse, while a delicate blush spread itself over her sweet, girlish face.

“Oh, oh, my pretty Doll,” old Madge answered, in low tones, “I understand, I understand. And didst thou catch a glimpse of thy strange lover?”

“No, nurse,” said Doll, with a pout of her rosy lips, “he came not this morning.”

“So, so. Thou must be careful, sweet pet, for should the Lady Maude or my lord get scent that a woodman lover hovers about to waft sighs and kisses to their bonnie bird, by the blessed St Agnes but there would be mischief. But come, baby, and let me braid thy hair and put on thy coif, or thy father’s patience will quickly ebb away.”

The old nurse led her charge back to her chamber, where she prepared her for her ride, and in a few minutes Dorothy ran lightly down the stairs to the entrance hall. A haughty-looking dame was just coming in from the courtyard. This was Dorothy’s step-mother, the Lady Maude.

“Thou hast kept thy father waiting long,” she said, in a tone of severity.

“Methinks thy tardiness merits punishment, and when thou returnest from thy ride I shall set thee a task at tenter stitch.”

“I knew not, madam, that my father waited me,” Doll answered meekly, and looking a little frightened.

“Knew not,” cried the lady; “I sent the nurse to bid thee prepare an hour ago.” Dorothy trembled a little, for she could think of no excuse to make, but she was relieved from her embarrassment by Sir George Vernon, who had heard her voice, calling out to her from the courtyard—

“Doll, Doll, why dost thou tarry, my bird? The morning wanes, and I am impatient for my ride.”

“Adieu, madam,” Dorothy said with great respect and making a low courtsy, but her step-mother answered not, only frowned and swept away like a stately eagle. The poor girl was glad to be free from the haughty lady, and, running gleefully down the steps, she threw her arms round her father’s neck and kissed him fervently. A little retinue of followers were waiting, and when Doll was seated in the saddle of her palfrey she rode by her father’s side, and the cavalcade filed out of the great gateway.

Sir George Vernon was a short, square built man, with a dignified bearing, and a pleasing face. The deep-set eyes and firmly compressed lips told of a powerful will and great strength of character. So famed was he for hospitality, and so magnificent was the style in which he lived in his palace of Haddon Hall, that he was known far and near as the King of the Peak. His wealth was enormous, and amongst his possessions were many manors, and thousands of broad acres of the richest lands in Derbyshire. He had but two children—girls—Dorothy and Margaret, who were co-heiresses to a perfectly royal fortune, so that many a poor, though nobly born, gentleman cast wistful eyes towards these belles of Haddon.

But Sir George Vernon was a proud and ambitious man, and he was determined that when his daughters wed, their husbands should be chosen from amongst the highest noblemen in the land. The Lady Maude, who was a daughter of Sir Ralph Langford, was the King of the Peak's second wife. By her he had had no issue. She was a very proud, scornful lady, and by no means possessed of the sweetest of tempers. Of her step-children, Margaret, the eldest, was her favourite. To poor Dorothy she was stern and even harsh, and very frequently treated her with marked unkindness. However, what Dorothy lost with her step-mother she gained with her father, who was passionately attached to his "Doll," and he frequently chided his wife for her harshness.

As Sir George and his daughter and followers rode forth on their morning excursion, the land was golden and dreamy in the brilliant sunlight. The beautiful and well-wooded vale through which the Wye meanders presented a glorious panorama of forest and meadows that were yellow now with the nodding buttercups. In the hazy distance was the village of Bakewell, with the spire of its ancient church, beneath which sweet Doll was destined to sleep in the course of time. Around were the grand old Derbyshire hills, their outline figuring sharp and clear against the azure sky. The deep sequestered woods for many a league around Haddon Hall were the property of Sir George, and he was fond of riding through the leafy aisles, where birds filled the air with sweet music, and the forest flowers grew in rank luxuriance.

As the little cavalcade rode along, mounting a steep path that led through a dense wood, Sir George looked proudly down on Doll, who trotted by his side, and said, in his pleasant, cheery voice—

"Methinks that thou hast played truant this morning, fair Doll. We should have been abroad these two hours past. Where did thou hide thyself, my puss?"

Doll's face reddened and she seemed confused, while her gaze was averted from her father as she replied—"Nay sir, I hid not; but the beauty of the morning tempted me to the Eagle Tower, and my tire woman sought me not in the right place, and I myself was ignorant that you wished my company. I crave your pardon that I delayed you from setting forth on your ride at an earlier hour."

Poor Doll felt very guilty when she told the little fib about the beauty of the morning having tempted her to the Eagle Tower; not but what it might, and had done so before, for the view from the lofty tower which dominated the Hall was entrancingly beautiful; but she had gone there on this particular occasion for a totally different purpose, and may be her bonnie blue eyes took no note of the glories of the landscape.

"So, so, Mistress Dolly, we'll say no more about it," exclaimed Sir George with a laugh. "Hadst thou known thy father was waiting for thee, sure I am thou wouldst have flown to meet him."

"Aye, that would I, dear father," Doll answered, as she looked up lovingly into his face.

The little party rode on, making the air ring with their merry laughter, as the "King of the Peak" enlivened the journey with witty jests. The shadows of the great trees made the woods deliciously cool, and the air was heavy with the odours of the wild flowers; while the birds tuned their lays on every branch and bush.

As the cavalcade turned a sharp angle in the pathway, a man suddenly appeared from out of a tangle of brushwood, carrying over his shoulder a large branch, newly broken from a tree. His sudden appearance, and the branch together, caused Sir George Vernon's and Dorothy's horses to start and rear; while Dorothy, as she gazed upon the face of the man, uttered a little cry, and nearly fell from her palfrey.

The man whose untimely appearance had startled the horses, was attired in the garb of a woodman: a rough leathern jerkin, a slouch hat, and boots of untanned leather. He was a young and handsome man, and his face was browned with sun and weather.

Throwing down the branch, he sprang quickly forward, and catching the bridle of Dorothy's palfrey, prevented her from falling. When Sir George had recovered himself, he exclaimed fiercely—

“Thou fool and varlet! who art thou that darest to thrust thyself in our way?” He raised his riding whip, and was about to bring it down over the shoulders of the young fellow, when Doll put up her arm, and cried—

“Nay, nay, father, strike not, I pray thee. Knowest thou not that this is John, who was lately engaged as woodman by thy head forester?”

Dorothy's face was scarlet, and she was strangely agitated. Had her father questioned her as to how she had gained her knowledge about “John,” she would have been in a difficulty. But he failed to do that, and merely replied—

“Thy pleading, sweet Doll, has saved the churl a thrashing for his clumsiness.”

The young fellow drew himself up proudly, and in a haughty tone said—

“Know, sire, that I am no churl,” then, with a hasty glance at Dorothy, he plunged into the thicket, and was lost to sight.

Two or three of the attendants had dismounted, and were holding Sir George's and Dorothy's horses; but at a sign from him they leapt into their saddles again, and the party moved on, and continued their way for some time in silence. Sir George was brooding over the young fellow's answer which had annoyed him, and he resolved to order his head forester to discharge John immediately. Dorothy was silent from a far different cause. She was still agitated, so that her stomach rose and fell quickly owing to the fast beating her heart, and the deep scarlet had not yet faded from her face. In her little gloved hand she held a crumpled-up piece of paper, which had been secretly conveyed to her by the young woodman when he seized the bridle of her palfrey, which he had purposely frightened with the branch in order that he might get the opportunity to give Doll the note.

In a little while she recovered herself, and secretly slipped the crumpled paper into the bosom of her dress, and presently her father had so far forgotten the annoyance the incident had caused him that he commenced to jest again.

The ride was continued for some distance, and when the sun was declining the little troupe of horsemen clattered under the massive archway of Haddon Hall once more, and half a dozen servitors stood ready in the courtyard to help Dorothy to alight. Without waiting to speak to her father, she hurried through the hall, and up the staircase on the left which led to her chamber in the northern part of the building. Then closing her door and bolting it, she drew forth from the bosom of her dress the note the woodman had give her, and read with intense eagerness the few hasty lines that were written on the paper. They ran as follows:—

“Doll, my heart, my soul! I have tried these many days to catch a glimpse of thy sweet face, but fortune has favoured me not. My position is becoming insupportable, and I cannot endure it much longer. I intend to watch for thee the next time thou ridest with thy father in the woods, and I shall avail myself of some chance to give thee this; and on the night of the day thou receivest it be at thy window as the clock in the chapel tower tolls ten, so that I may have speech with thee. Thine own for ever. —John.”

As she ceased reading, she kissed the paper over and over again, and murmured—“Dear, dear, dear John.”

Then she summoned her tire woman, and bade her help her to change her clothes; and when this was done she sent the woman for the old nurse. Presently Madge came hobbling in, bearing in her hand a silver cup containing some liquor, and she joyfully exclaimed—“Ah, Mistress Doll, glad I am that thou hast returned, my sweet. I have been to the vintner, and procured thee a taste of lamb’s wool [sugared and spiced hot ale mixed with the pulp of roasted apples], which thou must drink, for sure I am thou needst something after thy ride, and it wants yet two hours to the evening meal.”

“Nay, nay, dear Madge, I have no appetite,” Doll cried, excitedly. “Put down the lamb’s wool, and I will drink it anon. I have news for thee now, dear old nurse. Whom thinkest thou I have seen?”

“Nay, and I know not, bonny one, save it be that daring lover of thine,” the nurse replied, as she stroked her charge’s hair.

“Thou art right, Madge, I have seen John, and he gave me a note. Poor fellow! He pines to see me, and will be under my chamber window to-night on the stroke of ten by the clock.”

“Gramercy!” exclaimed the nurse, “but he is a daring rogue, and thou must be careful, birdie. Alack! and alas! an [*an* is used in its archaic meaning *if*] my lady should discover thy love makings, there would be sore work indeed.”

“Aye, but the Lady Maude must not discover it, Madge. We must keep our own counsel.”

Madge, who had been in the family service almost from her childhood, was a privileged servitor, and was little more than a pensioner now. She had been deputed by “my Lady Maude” to keep a sharp watch on the “tiresome jade Dorothy,” but Madge had brought the “tiresome jade” up from her cradle, and loved her as her own child, and she aided and abetted her in her secret wooing, for at an early stage of it she had been taken into her confidence.

Some time before this story commences Dorothy had been at a hawking party, where, for the first time she met John Manners, a young man, and the second son of Thomas Manners, Earl of Rutland. He fell in love with her almost at first sight; for her marvellously beautiful face, and the flashing eyes beneath her hawking hat were sufficient to enslave any susceptible man. Soon after they met again by chance, as Doll was riding, attended only by her nurse. The young man was handsome and attractive, and Dorothy was no less struck with him than he with her. They had a long conversation, and when Dorothy went away she felt the first sweet raptures of love.

Young Manners was determined to win the fair girl for his wife, and he craved permission from Sir George Vernon to visit Haddon Hall in the character of a suitor for Dorothy’s hand. But the young fellow’s prospects were not sufficiently good to satisfy the haughty notions of Lady Maude, who was consulted by her husband as to the answer he should return to John Manners, who was the second son of a second son, and so far as any one could judge then he would have but little wealth. From the very first, Dame Vernon took a dislike to Manners, and as she possessed great influence over her husband she swayed him to give a flat refusal to the suitor’s request, and Dorothy was sternly forbidden to countenance him in any way. [There is no historical evidence that Lady Maude was in any way involved in a John Manners - Dorothy Vernon romance.]

This was a sore blow to the hopes of the young couple, and Doll was so closely watched by her step-mother that it seemed almost out of the region of possibility that she would ever be able to hold communication with her lover. But when was love baffled for a way? If its course never runs smooth it is equally certain that it is indifferent to bolts and bars and watchful servants. These things are but trifling obstacles which true love can always overcome.

When Manners learnt the decision he was much cut up for a little while; but renewing his determination to win the matchless princess of the Peak, he puzzled his brain to hit upon some plan which should check-mate the designs of the scheming Lady Maude, who wished to choose a husband herself for her step-daughter. John was clever and bold almost to rashness, and having a taste for adventure he resolved to take a step that to many would have seemed hopeless from the very conditions it imposed.

The King of the Peak's head forester was a man named William Dawson, and to this person Manners addressed himself, telling him frankly the state of affairs, and offering him a large reward if he would assist him. Dawson hesitated at first. He knew that his very life would not be safe from the fury of Sir George Vernon should the lord of Haddon discover the plot. But Manners reasoned well and eloquently, and pointed out to Dawson that the opposition really came from Dame Maude, and as the forester, in common with the rest of the servitors on the estate, did not like this lady, the argument told greatly with him; and so after more persuasion, and an increase in the money offered, he yielded—decided to take John Manners into his service, and disguise him as a woodman.

After this a transformation was very speedily effected in the ardent lover's appearance; and so complete was his disguise in a false black beard, leathern jerkin, slouch hat, and long, rough boots, that his own father would not have known him. Thus attired, he associated with the rough hinds and clodhoppers under Dawson's control. He was not a favourite, however, with these men, for they said that he was lazy, and did not do his share of the work; but, notwithstanding this, Dawson never rated him.

This kind of life was a severe test to the young man's love, for he had to live on comparatively coarse food, and was housed at night in a rough outbuilding at Haddon Hall, where the woodmen slept. But he cared not for these things. His heart was true as steel, and then he was enabled to be near his beloved Doll, and was not that worth much inconvenience? The opportunity to tell her his plans soon occurred, and so struck was she by this act of devotion, that if there had been any wavering in her feelings it was away now, and she gave all her love, and faith to Manners, and hoped that something might occur to bring her step-mother to a different frame of mind in the course of time. Madge was taken into confidence, and as her "love-bird, Doll," was all the world to her, and she was of opinion that John Manners was a very nice young man, she lent her countenance and aid to the scheme, and determined to do all in her power to bring them together.

During the remainder of the day upon which Doll had received the note in the wood from her lover's own hand, she was restless and impatient. The hours seemed to go by on leaden feet. In the course of the afternoon she was summoned to "my lady's parlour," and here she had to devote herself for some time to tenter stitch, and to playing on the virginal, for the amusement of her step-mother. So full was poor Doll's head of thoughts of her lover that occasionally she dropped her needles, or forgot to touch the strings of her virginal. Then would my Lady Maude frown directly, and in an angry tone exclaim—"Thou art surely wayward and idle to-day, child; and I must bethink me of some means to correct thy stubborn temper."

Dorothy, whose amiability was a theme of universal praise, bore this unmerited rebuke without a murmur or a protest; but when her sister Margaret, who was present, rated her for being disrespectful to the Lady Maude, she could not control her feelings, and tears trickled down her cheeks. Margaret had none of her sister's beauty, although she was fair to look upon. She was irritable in temper and entirely under the influence of her step-mother, and consequently as much a favourite with Dame Vernon as Doll was the reverse. [There is no historical evidence about the relationship between the sisters or the character of Margaret.]

Margaret was the openly affianced bride of Sir Thomas Stanley, the son of the Earl of Derby. The wooing had been encouraged in every possible way by Sir George Vernon and his lady, who were extremely anxious that a union between their house and the noble house of Stanley should take place. The nuptials were to be celebrated during the coming Christmas time, and already preparations were being made. The festivities and rejoicings were to be on a scale of regal magnificence. Margaret had frequently twitted Dorothy about her attachment for John Manners, and when John openly preferred his request for Doll's hand, her sister joined her step-mother in influencing Sir George Vernon against him. And after that snubbed poor Doll for not aspiring to a man of higher standing, as she termed it.

As the afternoon wore on, Doll became more abstracted, and once when she let her needles fall into her lap, and was staring fixedly at the sunbeams that fell through the oriel window, and lit up the tapestried wall with a flame of gold, her sister turned round and noticed her.

"Child!" she exclaimed—she invariably called her child—"thou art strangely wilful to-day. One would think that that vulgar and low-born lover of thine was still in thy thoughts.

This was too much even for the gentle Dorothy to stand, and while the hot blood rushed into her face, and tears welled from her flashing eyes, she answered—"Sister, thou art unkind. John Manners is neither vulgar nor low-born, though his station may not be equal to that of thine own lord."

Lady Maude, who was engaged with a tambour frame, turned round like an aroused lion, and tossing her head scornfully, she exclaimed in a loud tone of anger—"Hoots, toots, minx! By my faith, but this is rebellion, and must be crushed with a heavy hand. Thou wilt have to be taught that thou art not to answer thine elder sister in that saucy way, for Margaret is right and Manners *is* a churl."

She turned up her nose and curled her lip as though the very mention of the young fellow's name was offensive, and had left an unpleasant odour. To hear her lover spoken of in such a disrespectful way was torture to poor Dorothy. It stung her into pain, and, indifferent to the consequence of her temerity, she cried—"Madam, he is no churl, but a true-born gentleman."

This was too much for the irascible Lady Maude, who, rising from her frame, crossed to where Dorothy sat, and shaking her with considerable violence, cried—"Thou saucy jade! an thou knowest not obedience it shall be taught to thee. Such impertinence is intolerable. Go to thy chamber instantly, and dare not to come forth again until I bid thee. Thou shalt sup on posset for these three nights to come, instead of joining thy father in the dining hall. By my sainted mother, but I must teach thee manners. I forbid thee even to think of the varlet who had the audacity to seek thine hand. An the rascal were here, I would order Robert, the dog master, to set his hounds upon him. To thy room, jade, instantly."

Dorothy rose. She could make no reply; her poor little heart was fluttering like a frightened bird's, and she was almost choking with emotion. She was glad enough, however, to get away from the presence of her tyrannical step-mother, and fled hurriedly towards her room. When she reached the passage beyond the banqueting-hall, she ran right into the arms of Nurse Madge, who had been to the bakery for her sippets, which she was carrying in a pewter basin, and to have a gossip across the bakery hatch.

"Why, sweet one, what frightens thee?" exclaimed old Madge, as she threw her arms round her charge and kissed her. "I vow me but my sippets will be spoilt, for in thine haste thou has spilled them out of my hand, and we shall have the chamberlain rate us for making such a mess on the floor."

"Oh, Madge, Madge, I am so unhappy," exclaimed Doll, as she buried her face in the old woman's breast.

“By St Agnes, but thou art weeping, my heart,” Madge cried in alarm, as she patted the beautiful head of her charge, and pressed her tightly to her bosom. “What is it, sweetest flower? Tell thine old nurse who is it that has offended thee, an he be as big as Goliath I’ll trounce him, or may I never more sip hot ale. Come to thy chamber, bonny one, and tell me thy woes.”

Leaning on the old woman, who almost supplied the place of a mother to Dorothy, the poor girl went upstairs; and when she reached her room, she broke into violent weeping. Madge wept too, and hugged and kissed the girl with passionate fervour. Presently Dorothy grew calmer, and then she told her nurse all that had taken place in Dame Vernon’s parlour. The wrinkled face of Madge expressed the greatest amount of indignation, as she cried—

“By the halimas [Hallowmas-feast of All Saints], but I’ll rate my Lady Maude for wounding my dove.”

“Nay, good nurse,” said Doll, between her sobs, “thou wouldst but draw upon thyself her displeasure.”

“Jade, indeed!” continued Madge, with great indignation, “an she called thee jade? jade to herself, say I! May my old gums never chew sippets again, but I would like to whip her! There, there, sweetest pet; dry thine eyes and let me see a smile on thy bonnie face again. An the eagle comes to my fond-dove’s nest, she shall claw me ere she reaches thee!”

Soothed and comforted by the old dame’s words and carresses, Dorothy dried her eyes, and lying at the feet of Madge, with her head in her lap, she fell asleep, while the faithful serving woman stroked the soft auburn hair, and crooned over her “dove” as a mother croons over her baby. The nurse sat still and patient for quite an hour, while the girl slumbered. Then Doll opened her eyes, and was a little confused for a few moments until she realised where she was.

“My lady-bird has slept well,” said Madge, with a smile of pleasure on her withered face, and at the same time pressing her lips to Dorothy’s white forehead. “Methinks I have dozed, indeed,” was Doll’s reply, as she rose to her feet, and commenced to arrange her hair before the ebon mirror that hung against the wall. Her beautiful eyes were a little red with weeping, and her bright young face was just tinged with a look of sorrow.

In a few minutes the dinner horn was sounded in the courtyard, and old Madge, starting to her feet, exclaimed—“Byr lady! but there’s the horn for the evening meal, and thou art not yet arrayed.”

“Nay, good Madge, it pleased the Lady Maude to say I was not to sup with my father to-night, but was to have posset in my chamber.”

“Only posset in thy chamber!” the nurse almost screamed, with indignation. “Does thy step-mother think thou art a kitten, that thou art to have naught but posset? Nay, an my head pays for it, I’ll hie me to the vintner and the cook and get thee something more fitted for thy meal than posset [hot drink of milk curdled by ale or wine, sweetened and spiced, and sometimes thickened with bread].”

Before she could be stopped, the kind old nurse had hobbled out of the room, and Doll was left to her own reflections. She was not hungry; she had no thought for food. She was thinking of him who, a few hours later, she hoped to see. “By ten of the clock,” he had said. It was a long time yet to look forward to. She went to the window, and gazing across the country, wished that she could put the time forward. The sun was sinking, and long shadows were creeping over the valley, but it was broad daylight still.

“Oh, if I only could hear his voice,” poor Doll thought, “I would not care what I suffered.” She continued to gaze meditatively on the long sun-rays that were lying like gold tracery over the moor-lands. She could think of nothing, dream of nothing, but *him*.

In a little while the nurse came back, bearing a taper drinking-glass filled with generous wine, and on a silver salver a wing of a woodcock, with some manchet bread, for Doll; and a black-jack of one month old ale for herself. She had been down to the bakery, the vintner’s, and the kitchen to procure these things, and she was chuckling with glee as she entered and exclaimed—“We’ll see if my Lady Maude will keep old Madge’s pet bird on possets. Gad’s truth, but such treatment were barbarous.”

Doll hugged the kind old nurse and kissed her, and to please her tried to eat; but she had no appetite, though she sipped a little of the wine and picked a bit of the woodcock. Madge had only time to hide the things away before a servant come up with a bowl of posset, sent by Dame Vernon, for the “rebellious jade, Dorothy.” The rebellious jade, however, touched not the posset, but sat at the window watching the daylight fade away, and the purple shadows creep up the valley, and all the time wishing that ten of the clock had come.

The day wore itself out at last, and the darkness of the night enwrapped the land. In the clear sky the white stars kept lonely vigil, and in the neighbouring thickets the plaintive notes of the nightingales made sweet music, which mingled with the murmuring of the Wye as it flowed past the walls. Silence reigned in Haddon Hall, for early hours were kept, save on junketing and feast nights. At half-past nine Dorothy was in her room, and summoning her tire woman, she bade her help her unpin her stomacher and unlace her gown. This being done, she removed the kerchief from her head, and the tire woman combed the beautiful soft hair, and when Doll had attired herself in a rich, embroidered night robe, and thrown a coif over her head, she dismissed the woman for the night, and as soon as her footsteps had died away, sweet Dorothy Vernon clad herself in a wimple, and crept as lightly as a mouse to the nursery again.

The window of this room was comparatively near the ground, and as ten tolled from the clock in the tower, Dorothy cautiously opened the oriel and waited with fluttering heart for her lover's signal. She heard the river and the nightingales, and she inhaled the night odour of the flowers and the rich, moist earth; but there were no signs of him she panted to hear and see. Several minutes passed, and she was worrying herself into nervousness, when she thought she caught the sound of a footfall, and in another moment a bunch of roses was flung into the room through the open casement, and she knew then that her lover had come. She peered out; then a man stole from the shadow of the trees and stood beneath the window. It was the same man who had startled her horse in the morning, and that was young John Manners. He was older than Dorothy by several years [historical fact], and looked still older now owing to the false beard he wore to disguise himself.

"Doll," he called in a whisper; and she, in an equally low tone, answered—"Oh, John, how glad I am you have come." He kissed his hand to her and said—"Darling o' mine! how long am I to wait for you?"

"Nay, I know not, dear, dear John," she replied. "Fate is not kind to us, and the Lady Maude and sister Margaret have spoken ill of thee to-day, and I have been unhappy. I am sure I shall never get my father's sanction to our union."

"But, Doll, why should you wait for that? My love for you is deathless, and will dare all for your sweet sake. Why wait, then, for the sanction which you say will never come? Fly with me; become my wife, and give me the right to shield you from your step-mother's annoyances. When you are mine, beyond the power of man to separate us, you father will become reconciled, and we shall be happy."

“Oh, John, I cannot, dare not, go away from my home without my father’s permission and his blessing.”

“Doll, do you love me?” John cried quickly.

“Can you doubt it?” she answered. “Should I be here to-night if I did not love you truly and sincerely!”

“Then, if you love me, why hesitate to fly, seeing that our love cannot be consummated in any other way?”

“John, I cannot, cannot go from my home,” she answered in great agitation—

“My love is yours, that you know: but, oh, do not tempt me to break my father’s heart by running away.”

John seemed by his manner to be a little annoyed. He walked backwards and forwards over the soft turf two or three times, as though he thought that it was necessary to cool down before trusting himself to speak. At last he stopped and said, with some trace of agitation in his voice—

“Thou art not consistent, Doll. In one breath you tell me you love me, in the next that you will not fly with me; and yet you admit that it is perfectly hopeless to expect that your father will sanction our marriage. What, then, is to be done? I have turned myself into a hind for thy sake. I have slept with common varlets on straw for thy sake. I have risked and dared dangers and overcome difficulties, all for thee; and now you tell me that you will not fly with me. I cannot endure this sort of life much longer, for I am as well born as thyself, and this roughness and discomfort suit me not.”

There was some reproach in the way he spoke, and gentle Dorothy could not help but feel it, so that the tears stole down her cheeks. She was as timid as a fawn, yet loved this man with all her heart and soul, though she could not bring herself to determine on flight. In fact, that had never occurred to her until he suggested it. She had hoped—and could anything have been more womanly?—that something would happen to favour her lover’s suit, though what that *something* was she had not the remotest idea, unless she imagined that by some strange miracle her father and step-mother would be brought to her way of thinking, and so sanction her union. At all events, she loved John Manners fervently and passionately, but still she could not reconcile herself to the idea of an elopement. That, to her, seemed so very dreadful, so totally opposed to her ideas of what was right.

Her step-mother had extracted from her slavish obedience, and to seriously oppose Dame Vernon's wishes would appear almost as a crime. Apart from these considerations, she was her father's joy, his companion at hawking and in his rides. "What would he do without his Doll?" she mused.

A sense of filial duty was strong within her, and yet love was stronger, otherwise would she have been at an open window holding converse at that hour with one who had been denied access to her? In those days position and wealth were the first considerations of parents when they thought of disposing of a daughter's hand. Love was quite a secondary matter. If it existed well and good; if not, it was of not great consequence, so long as its loss was compensated for by riches. Had young Manners not been the second son of a second son—in other words, had his prospects been better—he would in all probability have been the freely accepted suitor of the sweet Dorothy.

It is true his father was blue-blooded and a favourite at the Court of Queen Elizabeth, and his ancestors had been nobles for many centuries. One of them was Governor of Norham Castle in the first year of Edward the First's reign. The Castle was attacked by the Scots on the night of Edward's coronation day, but Sir Robert Manners made such a stout and courageous defence as to utterly rout his assailants. He was also present at the bloody battle of Neville's Cross under Queen Philippa, and fought with the courage of a lion, for which he received much royal favour. Another of his progenitors, also a Sir Robert Manners, mated with Eleanor, daughter of Lord Ross, and by this marriage he brought into the family great estates, including Belvoir Castle, the present seat of the noble Duke of Rutland.

Later still, a Sir Thomas Manners was present with Henry VIII and his consort at the celebrated interview with the King of France at Guisnes; and in the seventeenth year of Henry's reign he was created Earl of Rutland. Dorothy's lover was the second son of this first Earl, and the great-grandson of the sister of King Edward IV; consequently he had royal blood in his veins, but his eldest brother being still alive, and having sons of his own, John's prospect did not seem very brilliant.

But it is possible that had not position and monetary considerations influenced Sir George Vernon and his wife against young Manners, one other circumstance would, and that was the fact that he [Manners] was in favour at the Court, which is equivalent to saying that he was a Protestant, for Queen Elizabeth's edict had gone forth against the Papists, and no man who professed Catholicism could hope to gain royal favour. Sir George Vernon still clung to the religion of his fathers in so far as he dare do, and therefore he secretly hated those who were adherents of what might now be described as the State Church.

This short digression will enable the reader to understand that the obstacles John Manners had to contend with were not ordinary ones. He lived in bigoted and intolerant times, when nothing aroused the fierce passions of men so much as religious differences of opinion. The "virgin Queen" was a bitter and unprincipled foe to her sister Mary's faith; and Mary's followers were no less bitter against those who rallied round the standard of Protestantism.

Dorothy dwelt upon the words her lover had spoken, and her fair cheeks were wet with tears she could not restrain. In a little while she said, very tenderly, and in low musical tones—"Ah! John, do not reproach me. I appreciate all you have suffered for my sake, and love you, oh, so much, so very much; and those bright stars shall fall from heaven before I am untrue to you. Have a little patience, dear, dear John, and perhaps our wishes may be gratified."

Manners was touched by her gentle, pleading tone, and feeling perhaps that he had been slightly harsh, he replied—"Sweet bird o' mine, thou art an angel, but I cannot take the hopeful view which you do. Our happiness can only come out of flight; an thou wilt not consent to that, then we must part for ever."

"Oh! say not so, John, say not so. Let us wait a little while and see. Have patience, lover o' mine, and fortune will yet favour us. Ah! it is eleven o' the clock," she cried; "can it be possible an hour has so quickly flown? I must go now. Good night, good night. Would that I could only touch thine hand; I think it would give me strength."

"That shalt thou do, jewel of my soul," John exclaimed, as seizing the stout branches of some tough old ivy that trailed up the wall, he commenced to climb. Could he mount but half-a-dozen feet from the ground he would be enabled to clasp the dainty fingers of his love-bird; but it was not to be. The ivy would not bear his weight. It tore away from the stones, and he fell to the ground. Dorothy gave utterance to a little scream, and hastily shutting the window, fled to her own apartment, in her fright losing her presence of mind, and not even waiting to ascertain if her lover was hurt, for she was afraid the noise would arouse the guard and lead to a discovery. She had not been in her room five minutes before the door swung back, and the Lady Maude stood on the threshold.

Dame Vernon was as watchful as a hawk, and ruled her household with a severity that amounted to tyranny. It will therefore be understood that she was not a favourite with her domestics. She made a rule of going round the house each night when everyone but the watchers was supposed to have retired. The King of the Peak's guard of bowmen and halberdiers kept watch and ward outside during the silent hours, while inside the chamberlain and keeper of the keys periodically patrolled the corridors and passages. On that night Lady Maude had been unusually vigilant. It is just possible that she had some faint suspicion that Dorothy was still in communication with John Manners, this suspicion being the result no doubt of what had transpired during the afternoon.

While John was in conversation with Doll, my lady was talking to the chamberlain by the door of the vintner's closet, and she heard the noise caused by Manners' fall. Instantly—her mind being all alert with suspicion—it occurred to her that Dorothy was in some way associated with those sounds, which, judging from the direction whence they came, must have been close to her window, and so the mistress of the household hurried to her step-daughter's room.

Doll's heart was beating at a tremendous rate, and her face was all aflame. She had thrown herself into a chair on reaching her room, and caught up a missal which lay on the table, so that when the dame stood in the doorway Dorothy appeared to be reading. "What, not a-bed yet?" Lady Maude cried, in astonishment. Dorothy was trembling like a hunted hare, and so agitated that she could scarcely speak, though she did manage to stammer out—"No, madam; I am perusing my missal."

"So, so; thou art unusually devotional tonight," cried Lady Maude, as she advanced into the room; "and yet methinks thy thoughts must be far from thy book, since thou hold'st it upside down. Is that thy usual way of reading?"

Dorothy glanced at her book and saw now that this was the case; then she felt as though she would sink through the floor with fright, for her step-mother looked so severe and terribly angry. Scarcely knowing what she said, the poor girl muttered—"I am fatigued, madam, and perhaps was a little absent-minded."

"Thou art fatigued, art thou?" returned my lady, with irony, at the same time crossing to the window and scrutinising it to see if it had been recently opened. "Thou art fatigued, eh?" she repeated. "It is thine idleness that fatigues thee, and I warrant me I'll find a cure for that. By seven of the clock in the morning thou wilt come to my parlour, and I'll set thee two hours of tenter stitch, followed by two hours at the virginal. Thy father is going a-hawking, but thou goest not with him. Fail to carry out my instructions at thy peril."

She swept from the room with a great rustle of her hooped skirts, and with her keen eyes flashing fire. Dorothy breathed freely when her step-mother had gone, but she still felt terribly frightened, and was very unhappy about her lover. Putting the missal down, and blowing out the lamp flame, she threw herself on to her bed and wept bitterly.

The noise of John's fall had reached other ears beside those of Lady Maude. The sentry in the courtyard heard it, and thinking that a night attack by marauders was being made on the Hall, he roused the guard in the guard-room, and a small wicket in the great gate that barred the main entrance was opened, but as nothing could be seen or heard the men formed themselves in military order, the captain drew up the ponderous bars, shot the massive bolts, and flung half the gate open, and at the word of command the men sallied forth. The silent stars were shining over the peaceful valley, and the only sounds that floated on the night wind were the nightingales' sweet melody, and the murmur of the river.

While some of the men waited at the entrance, the others went round the castle, and had John Manners been caught then it might have fared ill with him, as it is more than possible his life would have been sacrificed. One of the soldiers on watch at the gateway suddenly caught sight of the trailing ivy that had been torn from the wall in great stripes, and this at once led him and his comrades to the conclusion that an attempt had been made by some desperadoes to scale the wall and get into the castle by the window. It was not a very intelligent conclusion to arrive at, but it was the best they could think of. As nobody, however, could be discovered, the gate was once more closed, and the men returned to the guard-room.

In the morning the captain, as in duty bound, made a report of the incident to the King of the Peak, and he in turn told his wife, and was a little surprised to learn that the lady had heard the disturbance.

"And what thinks thou was the cause of the alarm?" asked Sir George. "Common housebreakers know better than to try their skill upon such a place as Haddon Hall." The Lady Maude smiled a little contemptuously, as it were, no doubt thinking at the same time that her husband's perception was not over quick.

"I have my thoughts, I have my thoughts," she said, with a knowing twinkle of the eyes. "Aye, and what may they be, dame?"

"Canst thou not guess?" "Tut, my lady, I am not good at guessing riddles." he cried in a petulant tone, for he did not like to be tantalised.

His wife smiled scornfully as she answered—"Thy Doll, perhaps might give thee information." "Ah! what meanest thou?" he exclaimed, turning suddenly upon his wife, and looking almost fiercely at her.

She returned his look, and, frowning deeply, made reply—"Thou seemest to forget that the girl has a forbidden lover."

"Byr lady!" he cried passionately, and stroking his beard, as was his wont when angry, "thou wouldst not suggest that my sweet Doll is deceiving me?"

"I suggest nothing," was the answer of the haughty dame; "but when I went to the girl's room I found her agitated, and holding her missal upside down. *That* was strange, was it not, my lord? And when we take that fact in connection with the other, that the ivy is stripped from the wall beneath the nursery window, I think thou wilt admit—an thou art not unreasonable—that a strange tale might be made out of these materials."

Sir George Vernon was greatly annoyed. He did not like to think for a moment that his Doll was deceiving him, and yet he had to admit to himself that the circumstance mentioned by his wife pointed strongly to that conclusion. He walked up and down briskly for a minute or two, with his hands behind his back. An angry frown sat on his face, and he bit his lip and gave other signs that he was enraged. Suddenly he stopped, and demanded in a loud tone to know where Doll was.

"I have set her a task at tenter stitch," was his lady's answer.

"Let me to her, and I will question her then concerning this matter," he cried.

"Nay, thy rashness and impetuosity are just like a man. Thinkst thou that the girl would confess to thee that her lover was trying to climb to her window? No, no; leave a woman to manage such matters. Thou wouldst spoil all, and Doll would take means to warn her lover, an it were he."

"What wilt thou do, then?" he asked, showing by his tone and manner that he was far from pacified.

"I will remove Doll for a time to an apartment on the east side, where she will be more immediately under my own eye. And I will take strict care that all chance of her communicating with anyone outside is carefully guarded against."

“I will leave the affair in thy hands, then,” Sir George growled, yielding, as he usually did, to his wife’s influence, although he did not feel altogether comfortable, for Doll was such a favourite with him that he would have been very indulgent with her had he not been swayed by his better-half; and it galled him terribly that there should be even the shadow of a suspicion against the child who was his idol. It seemed, however, the more he thought of it, that he had no alternative but to fall in with Lady Maude’s views, and wait patiently the result. And so that morning he went out hawking without sweet Doll, whose eyes and fingers were aching with the task set her by her hard step-mother.

The change made by Lady Maude in Dorothy's apartment was a great blow to the poor girl, for she guessed at once the motives that had led to it. Moreover, she knew that it shut off all hope of being able to hold communication with John Manners, and to endure that was worse than everything else.

In her distress she took counsel with her faithful, loving old nurse, who railed in no measured terms against Dame Vernon. "But there, there, dry thy tears. sweet rosebud," she cried, as she stroked the head of her charge. "True love knows not defeat, and I'll forgo the new gown I promised myself at Candlemas an thy lover does not find a way to reach his bird in spite of bolts and bars."

Dorothy was soothed by the nurse's words, and she determined to control her impatience and wait the result of events. Her step-mother guarded her strictly now, and she was almost a constant prisoner in the house, her walks being confined to the terrace and the lawn; and even then the eagle eyes of Lady Maude watched every movement. Thus a week, then a fortnight, passed away, and Dorothy heard nothing whatever from John, so that she began to despair. The confinement was beginning to tell upon her health, and her cheeks lost some of their beautiful bloom, while the brightness faded from her eyes. Sir George noticed these signs, and he insisted on Doll accompanying him again at hawking and in his rides, although believing now—and yet reluctantly—that there were probably some grounds for his dame's suspicions, he determined to be unusually vigilant.

Dorothy was very glad indeed at the liberty thus accorded, for she was sanguine that John would soon know that she was her father's companion once again, and would devise some means to communicate with her. A whole fortnight had gone without her having any sign from him. It seemed a terribly long time, and then when another week passed she got uneasy; and when still another week was added to the number she began to despair indeed. She felt sure that something dreadful had happened, and fears came upon her that he must have been seriously hurt the night he fell when trying to climb by the ivy to her window.

The position of suspense in which she was placed was very painful, more especially as no means suggested themselves to her by which she could ascertain what had become of John. Once or twice the thought flashed through her brain that he had grown tired and deserted her; but she tried to put these thoughts away as unworthy ones, for after what he had already dared for her sake it did not seem likely that he would abandon the game. But as soon as she had come to this conclusion she remembered that when she saw him on that memorable night, now more than a month ago, he had pressed her to fly with him, and she had refused.

“Ah! I see it all now,” she thought; “he thinks it hopeless to try and win me, and so he has gone for good, and I shall never see him more.” Of course she flew at once and poured her troubles into dear old Madge’s ear; and when she concluded in a great burst of sobbing, the nurse pressed the little head to her bosom, and said soothingly—“Silly little baby, why dost thou weep thus? Wipe thy tears away, sweet one, and take an old woman’s word for it, thy lover has not deserted thee. Nay, an I thought he had”—here the expression on the nurse’s face was stern and wrathful—“an I thought he had, these old hands should mar his beauty so that maiden never more would notice him so long as he might live. Methinks even that I would *slay* him.”

Dorothy hung round the nurse’s neck, and looking up into the kind and withered face murmured—“Ah! dear, good Madge, I should die an you were not here.” Madge was all smiles now; the wrathful expression had passed. Her skinny fingers toyed with the soft auburn locks, and she looked into the blue eyes as a mother gazes into the eyes of her baby. The toothless gums showed themselves between the thin lips as she smiled on her charge, and answered—“Take heart, my sweet, and never fear but what thy lover will come again. There are happy days in store for thee.”

These words encouraged and strengthened Doll; but day after day went by until another three weeks had been numbered with the past, and still no tidings had reached her of her absent lover. During this time Madge never failed to whisper words of hope to her; but still despair came again, for so long an interval had elapsed. Owing to the earnest entreaties Dorothy had made to her father, she had been allowed to go back to her own apartment; and much of the vigilance exercised by her step-mother had been relaxed, for even that astute and sharp-eyed lady had been unable to detect aught that justified her suspicions.

The summer waned and the autumn had come. Golden, brown, and yellow tints were on the land, and the chill wind whistled round hoary Haddon. Great preparations for Margaret’s marriage were being made; and as it was to take place at Christmas, the usual Christmas festivities had to be provided for also, and in all the country there was no more hospitable board at Christmastide than Haddon Hall. The poor from far and near flocked to receive the daily dole of broken victuals [leftovers], which, during the great Christian festival, were served daily under the great gateway. Money and food were given away; and many a sinking heart was made to rejoice then by the liberal generosity of the King of the Peak.

Margaret had shown more consideration for Dorothy's feelings during the last week to two, and had treated her less harshly, although she always patronised her with a lofty air, as though she considered herself infinitely superior. She was never tired of boasting about the great marriage she was going to make; and, knowing she would bear no comparison with Doll in point of beauty or sweetness of temper, she took delight in twitting and telling her that she was such an insignificant little thing that no man of taste would have her.

Poor Doll bore all this patiently and uncomplainingly; and she began to think at last that there was some truth in her sister's spiteful remarks, since they were repeated so often. One day when she was walking on the terrace, Margaret joined her, and in her proud, patronising way, said—"The Lady Maude tells me thou art not to be present at my wedding. Thou hast surely offended madam mightily, for she has ordered thee nothing from London, but when the Nottingham packman comes on Thursday next, I'll buy thee some trinkets and lace for my marriage gift to thee."

Doll was too much hurt to make any reply. She could only sigh and wonder what she had done to deserve such treatment. Growing very soon tired of Doll's company, Margaret went away to play with her spaniels on the lawn, and then the old nurse came hobbling up to Doll, exclaiming—"Thou art lonely, my queen, and thy dear face has sorrow upon it. Draw the fur closer round thy throat, baby, for the wind blows cold. Nay, thou art careless of thyself, and I shall have to chide thee. Come here while I fasten thy tippet." As Madge adjusted the fur she glanced hastily round to see that no one was within hearing, and then she whispered softly, "Smile, love-bird, I have news for thee."

Dorothy almost cried aloud, for she guessed what that news was. There was something in the nurse's tone and manner which told that the news was good. She crimsoned to the roots of her hair, and, grasping the beldam's hand, said quickly—"Ah! thou hast seen *him*. I pray thee, good Madge, keep me not in suspense."

"Thou art wrong, chick, I have *not* seen him; but he has sent a message to me through Will Dawson, thy father's forester. I met Will within this hour, and he said, 'Tell thy sweet young mistress that *the hind comes from the moors to-night*.'"

Doll pressed her hand to her heart, which was beating wildly, for though the words were as a riddle, they were pregnant with great interest for her. "Go on, Madge, tell me more," she murmured.

"I have no more to tell thee, my treasure. Thou must be patient till the day has sped. But come, it is growing cold. Let us go in."

Dorothy was glad to reach her room, for she was not very well, and her head was aching. She made this an excuse for begging to be free from an order that came from Lady Maude that she was to go to my lady's parlour and spend an hour at prick song. By-and-bye "my lady" came in *propria persona* [representing herself] to Dorothy's chamber to satisfy herself that the excuse was not an idle one; and when she saw that the poor girl was really unwell, she told the nurse to heap more logs upon the dogs, and said that Doll was to have a gruel of hot ale.

When her step-mother had gone, Dorothy drew a sigh of relief, for she knew she would not be troubled with her any more that night. Several times during the evening she pressed Madge to go and see if the hinds had arrived; but the nurse enjoined patience, saying that they were busy storing the Christmas logs, and would not be in till late. It was long after ten when Madge descended the stairs. As she reached the hall the Chamberlain was talking to Sir George Vernon, who was giving him some orders for the Christmas-tide.

"It is time thou wert a-bed, nurse," said the chamberlain, authoritatively, rattling his great bunch of keys, as if he meant that to be a sign that bars and bolts were up for the night.

"Aye, aye, good master chamberlain, thou art right," Madge answered, a little taken aback at so unexpectedly meeting her master and the chamberlain; "but I have a faintness, and crave thee to give me access to the kitchen, that I may beg the vintner to make me a jack of mulled ale."

This was the best excuse Madge could think of, and she knew that the men servants generally assembled in the kitchen to smoke and talk and drink ale till twelve o'clock, this being their privilege after their day's work. None of the females, however, were allowed to go there, and so the chamberlain shook his head and said—"Thou knowest, good nurse, that my lady is strict; I cannot let thee go. I will fetch thy ale myself."

This would not suit Madge's purpose at all, as her object was to get a word with Will Dawson, and so she answered—"With thy leave, master chamberlain, I would get speech with the vintner, for he has a wicked trick of over-spicing my ale."

The chamberlain still looked doubtful, but Sir George exclaimed—"Nay, give the nurse entrance to the kitchen; she will not remain long."

The old womanly inwardly chuckled at the success of her plan, and thanked her stars that the master was there. The chamberlain swung open the kitchen door, and when Madge had preferred her request to the vintner, she looked round for Will Dawson, and spied him in a corner. "I give thee good night, Master Dawson," she cried. "Shouldst thou be going to Derby fair thou shalt bring me a ribbon to match my new gown."

"Aye, that I will," answered Dawson, cheerily; "come here, good mother, and tell me what thy gown is like." She hobbled over to where he sat on a bench, and commenced to gabble about her gown, and he, taking advantage of a moment when no one seemed to be looking, slipped a tiny note into her hand.

In a few moments the vintner announced that her ale was ready, and so, bearing her black-jack, she went out and hurried up to Dorothy as fast as her old legs would carry her. "Did I not tell thee, little one, that love would find out a way? See, here is a letter for thee."

With a cry of joy Dorothy seized the note from the nurse's hand, so eager was she to read its contents. It contained only one line—"To-morrow; one hour after curfew; in the Rookery." Doll knew his handwriting, and pressing the scrap of paper to her heart, she murmured—"To-morrow I shall see him! Oh! nurse, how leaden-footed will be the hours till to-morrow!"

The preparations that were going on, and the excitement consequent on the approaching festivities at Haddon Hall, were the means of distracting attention from Dorothy for a time, so that the vigilance hitherto exercised over her by Lady Maude was greatly relaxed, and the poor girl enjoyed more freedom, and consequently was hopeful that an hour after curfew she would be able to steal away unperceived, in company with her nurse, and meet her lover in the Rookery.

The visitor to Haddon Hall need not be told that the Rookery is the upper terrace, now known as "Dorothy Vernon's Walk." It was reached by a long flight of stone steps, opposite the door of the ante-room through which sweet Dorothy was destined to come a little later on a memorable occasion that was for ever afterwards to stamp that doorway, and the steps leading from it, with an undying interest. But the time was not yet. She was a dutiful girl, and from her very earliest years had been taught that it was the primary duty of a child to pay almost idolatrous reverence to its parents, and that disobedience was a crime of such heinousness as to well-nigh merit death. But there is a passion deeper and stronger even than the love for father and mother, and that is a woman's love for the man she looks upon as her future husband.

Dorothy had given her whole heart to John Manners, although she knew that her parents had expressly forbidden her to hold any communication with this young man, whom they affected to despise. With true womanly inconsistency, however, she could not bring herself to entertain for a single moment the idea of an elopement. Secret meetings with her lover she did not object to; but to go clandestinely from her parents' house to become his wife, seemed to her so terrible an act of disobedience that she felt as though she could never, never bring herself to consent to such a step.

And yet, if she did not consent, how could she ever hope that John Manners would become her husband? And yet there was a hope—a faint one it might be—still lingering in her heart that some circumstance totally undreamed of might happen that would reconcile her father and step-mother to John. This was illogical, but it was also very womanly, for women reason not by logic. While a man is struggling in a maze of logic to arrive at a conclusion, the woman reaches it by instinct, and very frequently she is right where the man, in spite of his elaborate reasoning and calculations, is wrong.

During the weeks that had passed since Dorothy last saw her lover, her parents had discussed the question of trying to arrange a match for her with a younger son of the noble house of Stanley, and brother to Margaret's future husband. A double connection by marriage with the Earls of Derby was a thing much to be desired, at least so thought Lady Maude, and she easily talked her husband into the same way of thinking. The consequence was that the visits of young Stanley were encouraged; and there can be little doubt that had Dorothy been so inclined she might have wedded into the great family from which sprang a race of Earls. But she did not like this suitor. Her heart was already gone from her, and was in the keeping of the bold John Manners, who had herded like a low-born peasant with hinds and kitchen varlets for her dear sake.

How wearily and heavily that day passed away. It seemed to her as if the curfew hour would never come; but the winter sun set at last, and up crept the darkness from the sombre east. It had been a cloudy, dull day, and it was evident that the night would be starless and gloomy, while the moan in the rising wind told of coming rain. At last the joyful moment arrived, and Madge and Dorothy stole out of the Hall and made their way to the Rookery. In another few moments John Manners had come from out the shadow of the sycamore trees, and Dorothy was clasped in his strong arms, and he was raining kisses on her rose-red lips.

It was a blissful moment for the lovers. It repaid them for much that they had endured. To be enfolded in each other's arms, to feel the pressure of each other's lips, was rapture that could find no utterance in words. The faithful old nurse stood apart, keenly vigilant for any sound that might indicate the approach of unwelcome intruders. Not that that was likely to occur, unless Dorothy's absence should be discovered, for nobody ever came to the Rookery after dark. It was too weird and ghostly, and the wail of the wind among the limes and sycamores was too sad to be attractive in a superstitious age; but Dorothy had no ear for these things; she was oblivious to all save her lover, whose strong arms now clasped her to his throbbing breast. It was a moment that would have compensated for an age of pain.

"Oh, John, how glad I am that you have come," she murmured at last, in a low, musical voice. "The weeks have been so weary and long since that unfortunate night that might have proved fatal to all our hopes. Why did you not come sooner?"

"I have been away, my own sweet Doll," he answered tenderly. "Some pressing business took me to London, I did not know that my absence would have been so long, or I should have contrived to send you news. But the past is dead. It is the future we must look to. I felt I could not live unless I got one more glimpse of my Doll's face. Good Will Dawson undertook to convey a message for me, and that message has brought us together in a rapturous embrace. But what news hast thou for me, sweet one?"

"Alas! nothing that can give you joy. Young [Edward] Stanley, my sister's future husband's brother, is a suitor for my hand." [There is no evidence that a match was ever contemplated between Dorothy Vernon and Edward Stanley.]

"And do you encourage that suit?" John cried, with a touch of fierceness in his tone. "No, indeed, John; indeed no."

"But the Lady Maude and Sir George are anxious thou shouldst wed with Stanley?" "Aye, that is so," she returned sadly; "but, John, my heart is yours."

Manners was silent for a few moments; he was struggling with his feelings, which were almost choking him, for he realised that she would never be his bride unless she fled with him. In an uncertain voice he exclaimed—"Your heart is mine, Doll; but I must have your hand with it, or *my* heart will break. To wait longer for you is to lose you, and I have dared too much for you to let you slip from me now. As well might I hope to climb to the stars as to hope to move thy obdurate step-mother. You must be my bride without her consent; and, therefore, I beseech you, Doll, to fly with me."

She shuddered in his arms. She could not bring herself to give consent to do as he wished. It seemed so dreadful; and she pictured her father fretting himself into his grave with inconsolable grief for the loss of his Doll. "John, do not ask me to do that!" she said.

He relaxed his hold of her slightly, and could not repress the symptoms of anger which made themselves manifest in his tone. After his months of devotion to her, in spite of danger and extraordinary and trying obstacles, it seemed unreasonable for her to refuse to take the only step that could possibly make them man and wife. "Dorothy, do I possess your love?" he cried passionately.

"Why do you wound me, John, by asking such a question?"

"Then, why do you torture me by refusing to become my wife?"

The high tone of his voice attracted Madge's attention, and coming forward, she said—"Nay, Master Manners, be not angry with my nursling, for her cradle is yet young. She is a tender bird, and thou must be gentle, or thou wilt fright her into death."

"Gentle I am and would be, nurse, with this the sweetest woman that ever breathed," he answered; "but Mistress Dorothy pains me when she declines to become my wife. What sayest thou, Madge? Should she not fly with me?"

"It is for Doll herself to say," was Madge's judicious answer.

"Ah, John, rather than vex you I would die," said Dorothy; "but I cannot reconcile my conscience to the act you counsel me to take."

"But do you not wish to become my wife?" "Yes."

"Then how do you think that wish can be gratified?"

"Alas! I know not; but wait, have patience, dear John. Wait until after my sister's marriage. My father might consent then."

"Tut, Doll, you do not reason well," John exclaimed with great petulance. "I have waited long enough, and cannot wait longer. An you do not decide to-night we shall not meet again, for I will hie me to the wars. Life is not worth living without you."

Poor Dorothy was weeping now, with her head on the nurse's shoulder; and Madge was crooning to her as she was wont to do when she was troubled. Beyond this the old woman did not interfere, since she knew that John was right when he said that Doll would never be his wife unless she eloped. Therefore, with that discretion which characterised the beldam, she deemed it prudent to let the lovers settle the matter between them.

"John, John, you would not leave me?" Dorothy cried, as she raised her head, but clung like a frightened bird to her old nurse.

"To leave you would be to break my own heart and destroy my life," he answered; "but you will drive me into that an you consent not to my prayer. Nay, I swear upon my honour that I will go an you will not become my wife."

He was firm with her, even apparently harsh, though in reality not so, for he loved her to distraction, and a man cannot be harsh with the woman he loves. But John recognised the imperative necessity of displaying resolution if he would conquer Dorothy's fears. He must rule her to win her. When he swore upon his honour she knew that he was in earnest, for that was an oath no true gentleman ever broke; and yet she could not bring herself to pronounce the *yes* he wished, although she was wavering now.

There was a pause between them. Old Madge mumbled soothingly to her nursling, whose bonnie head she pressed to her bosom. The trees waved their spectral-looking branches, and the wind wailed with deep melancholy sounds, while drops of rain warned the lovers that their meeting must end.

“An you were to go away, John,” Dorothy said, mournfully, “it would not be long before I should be borne to Bakewell Church.”

Manners caught his sweetheart in his arms, and strained her to him with passionate warmth, while she thrilled with delicious delirium as she once more felt his lips pressed to hers.

“Doll, Doll,” he cried, with moving earnestness, “why should you make both our lives miserable? Consent to fly with me, and be assured that when our nuptials are over your father will become reconciled and welcome us back to Haddon.”

“Oh, if I could only think so,” she murmured.

“I am sure it will be so,” he exclaimed, “for how can the King of the Peak live without his princess? Say that what I wish shall be.”

“Oh, John,” she sighed, as she nestled closer to him.

“Answer me, sweet love, for the rain is falling, and it is not good for you to be exposed to it.”

It was the supreme moment. She felt that the whole happiness of her life depended upon the utterance of one little word; and yet her womanly weakness prevented her speaking the word. But John saw that he had gained an advantage, and he pleaded his cause with passionate earnestness, and pressed her with such pathetic entreaties, that she would have been less than a woman had she not been touched into a complete yielding up of herself to her lover’s desires, so that presently she murmured, with the softness of a zephyr—

“John, I am yours for ever.”

He almost lifted her from the ground in his wild delight, as he pressed her to his heart, and rained on her unturned face hot, passionate kisses; and when he could speak, he said—

“You consent to fly with me then?”

“Yes.”

“Nothing on earth will alter your decision?”

“Nothing on earth shall alter my decision,” she answered solemnly.

“Good. And when shall it be?”

“Let it be after sister Margaret’s marriage.”

“Nay, that will not do, for then my Lady Maude would be more watchful and on the alert, since she would have more time to devote to you. Three weeks from this very night is your sister’s wedding night; let it be then, when revelry and excitement divert attention from thee. Shall it be so, my Doll?”

“An you will it,” she sighed, nestling her head closer to his great, broad chest. “I *do* will it,” he returned. “In the meantime I will make all preparations, and take every precaution to ensure the success of our plans.”

Doll seemed to be in a dream. Her head was swimming. She felt the warm kisses of her lover, and heard the night wind telling her love story to the spectral trees; but it was all in a dreamy way. She scarcely knew how she got back to her chamber, but she found herself there, with her head buried in the nurse’s lap, and weeping hysterically from over-excitement.

John stood and listened to her retreating footsteps, and when they had died away, he murmured—“Angels guard her!” Then he went down to join the forest hinds for the last time in their coarse revelry.

During the three weeks that elapsed Dorothy had frequent opportunities of enjoying stolen interviews with her lover. It is true that such interviews were necessarily very brief; but they were all the sweeter on that account.

It was decided that Margaret's nuptials should be celebrated with almost royal magnificence, for the union of two such powerful houses as the Stanleys and the Vernons was an event of such importance as to call for special rejoicings. The festivities were to be kept up for several days, and many noble families were invited. Extensive orders had been sent to London for mercery and decorations; and the foresters and park-keepers were busy the live-long day in bringing in large supplies of logs and huge bunches of holly and mistletoe.

In the great kitchen everyone seemed to have gone daft with excitement, and yet an immense amount of work was got through in the course of the day. Fat stirks [young bull or cow] were cut up by the butcher and put into the salting trough; and the bakery shelves groaned beneath the weight of monstrous pastries and sweetcakes.

At length the eventful day arrived. A bright, crisp, frosty morning. The moorlands were whitened with the first dusting of the winter snows; and the leafless trees were silent in their nakedness. For several days the guests had been arriving, until there were nearly three hundred of them, with their retainers. From far and near the poor had flocked, knowing that the generous owner of Haddon would keep open house, and that a sumptuous feast awaited those who chose to go.

The marriage was solemnised with much pomp and splendour. Sir George Vernon would have had the ceremony performed with all the magnificence and parade of the Roman Catholic Church had he so dared, but Elizabeth's laws against the Papists were too severe to be defied even by such a powerful noble as the King of the Peak. As it was he went as near to the prohibited ritual as was prudent.

The little chapel in the south-west corner of the pile of buildings was crowded to suffocation, and the winter sun streamed through the splendid stained-glass windows on to the elegantly dressed assembly of ladies and gentlemen, until the effect was one of entrancing splendour. From the roof depended numerous banners emblazoned with the arms of Vernon and Stanley; and the superb paintings on the walls had been cleaned and brightened up for the occasion. Altogether the scene was one of most impressive grandeur and well worthy of the occasion; nor was it likely to be soon forgotten by those who had the good fortune to witness it.

Dorothy Vernon was present at the wedding, notwithstanding that her step-mother had previously said that she should not be; and in all that vast assembly of fair women she was the most beautiful.

She wore a dress of superb cream-coloured satin, made with the long waist and full elbow sleeves. Over the skirt of the dress fell a cloud of the most costly Irish lace, that was looped with gold buckles set with diamonds. Her hair was braided loosely, and in its massive folds rows of pearls were woven. There were few men beneath that sacred roof but gazed at her with admiration, as well they might, for she was a perfect picture of radiant beauty.

In so far as the ceremony was concerned she felt little interest. In all human probability she would be wedded herself in a day or two, but it would be in a far humbler way than her sister. Not that that thought affected Doll. She cared not for pomp; hers was a pure love-match, and could well dispense with gaud and glitter; but her mind was filled with solemn reflections on the step she was about to take, and she wondered what the future consequences of that step would be, and whether her father, maddened by the loss of her upon whom he set so much store, would curse her or receive her back with open arms and call her his Doll as of old. She knew that a momentous crisis in her young life had come, and it was a question whether that crisis would turn for good or ill.

When the ceremony was over the vast crowd streamed into the house, where the feasting and drinking commenced. Outside, at a gigantic bonfire, two oxen were being roasted whole for the poor, while for the other guests there were literally tons of venison, fish, beef, mutton, and game of every description. It was long since the great banqueting-hall presented such an appearance; it was decorated with holly and mistletoe, and scores of banners waved on the walls. In the gallery the minstrels discoursed sweet music, and a perfect array of retainers attended to the wants of their lords and ladies. For a time the clatter of knives and forks on silver dishes, and the babel of tongues, were deafening. But presently four strong men appeared, bearing between them a large wooden tray, on which was a gigantic silver bowl filled with the finest red wine punch, wherewith to toast the bride and bride-groom. When every glass and horn had been filled to its brim, the host called for silence, and at once a pin might have been heard to drop. Raising a beaker filled with the ruddy fluid, he proposed the health and prosperity of the newly-married couple.

He expressed himself as being peculiarly proud and gratified that Margaret had made such a noble marriage; and he hinted that the day was in all probability close at hand when he would again invite his present guests to do honour to the nuptials of his dear Doll. Dorothy, who sat in the dining-room with the other ladies, heard this remark, and her heart sank a little as she thought that her father's hopes were doomed to be falsified.

When Sir George finished his speech and resumed his seat, the minstrels played a grand triumphal air, and the company broke into thundering cheers that made the rafters ring. Then the feast was continued, and a gigantic boar's head made its appearance, followed by venison pasties, each one of which required two men to carry it. These were succeeded by black-cock and snipe, plover and partridge, widgeon and ptarmigan; and, justice having been done to these dainties, a grand procession of retainers was formed, headed by the minstrels, and amidst great cheering and enthusiasm, two superb swans were carried in with great ceremony and pomp, one being placed at each end of the board. These right royal birds having been despatched, geese and ducks, sucking pigs, and roasts of veal followed. All these things were washed down with gallons of ale, wine of all descriptions, and usquebaugh [Irish liquor flavored with spice]; and the feast, having lasted several hours, at last came to a close, and when the nobles rose, over five score retainers sat down to partake of *their* dinner.

Dorothy, who had sat out the meal in obedience to her step-mother's commands, fled to her room as soon as the guests rose. She was weary of a scene in which she took no interest and had no heart. The boisterous merriment and the wild laughter jarred on her over-strung nerves, and she wished that midnight had come, for at the stroke of twelve she was to bid farewell to dear old Haddon and fly to the arms of her lover, who would be waiting for her. Already the daylight had faded and night had come; but for Doll there were several weary hours yet, before she would see John. She had been ordered by my Lady Maude to be early down in the ball-room; and so, notwithstanding that she was fagged, she had to submit herself to the hands of the tire woman to be arrayed in ball costume, and when she rose from her toilet she looked more than superb. Her own natural grace and charms were enhanced by the marvellous beauty of her wardrobe.

She was now arrayed in a gown made of the very finest silk, of a delicate flesh-pink tint, that fitted like a glove to her perfect figure. The bottom of the gown was looped in festoons, fastened with artificial flowers sprayed with brilliants. The looping displayed a richly brocaded white satin petticoat, and a pair of little twinkling feet encased in morocco shoes, with high red heels and diamond buckles. Round her waist she wore a massive gold zone, set with almost priceless gems. Her hair was arranged in an elaborate series of rolls that rose one above the other; and she had no other ornament for her golden tresses now but a little bunch of white rosebuds, fastened with a string of pearls. Even old Madge, as she looked at the beautiful girl, could not help exclaiming—

“Thou art indeed a picture, my nursling;” then she suddenly burst into tears, and lowering her voice, said, “and this night thou art to go from me. Alack, well-a-day! when thou art gone I shall pray to die.”

“Nay, thou naughty Madge,” said Doll, as she lovingly caressed her old nurse, “speak not so wickedly. Thou knowest well enough that when John takes me to his home thou wilt come too; so that thou wilt not be parted from me long.”

When this dainty maiden appeared in the ball-room she was the observed of all observers, and everyone rose to greet her; while men who had been paying attention to ladies in the recesses of the oriel windows forgot their companions for the time, and feasted their eyes on this living picture of radiant beauty. Sir George Vernon was in high good humour, and was doubly proud of his Doll when he saw the sensation she created. The scene in the ball-room was a singularly animated one. The room itself was one of the most magnificent in the country; and the gorgeously painted and gilded ceiling was the admiration of everyone who saw it. Splendid pictures hung in the arches, and flowers and wreathes were festooned over the oak wainscoting; while the whole apartment was one dazzling blaze of light, that flashed and scintillated amongst the sparkling gems worn by the ladies. Many a stately dame and young miss gazed with envious eyes on sweet Dorothy; and the gallants and gentlemen and knights disputed amongst themselves for the privilege of tripping a measure with her.

Flushed with excitement and the heat, Doll’s cheeks glowed and her eyes flashed like gleaming stars. She seemed full of spirits, but in reality she was sad, for she knew that very soon all this gaiety would be clouded by sorrow and disappointment when her flight was discovered. At present, however, the wildest merriment reigned.

In the banqueting-hall the vassals still feasted and drunk, and made the roof peal with roystering songs. The whole building was brilliant with light, and everywhere there seemed to be fair women and brave men; the rustle of skirts, the sparkle of jewels, and the clank of swords. Sir George Vernon, in a slashed doublet of the richest Genoese velvet, and trunk hose of the finest silk, with his long, straight beard neatly trimmed, and his long hair brushed back, and a keen Toledo blade on his thigh, looked every inch a gentleman, courteous and noble in his mien and bearing. Anxious about the comfort and pleasure of his guests, he was never still, but was constantly moving from chamber to chamber, from ball-room to banqueting-hall, to see that no one wanted for anything, and that even the humblest servant was cared for.

As the night wore on the sounds of revelry increased, and the fun became fast and furious. Dorothy grew more nervous and anxious as the hour for her departure approached. She looked around at the gallants and knights, all armed with swords, who filled the room, and trembled as she thought what the consequences would be if John Manners should be caught. There was scarcely one of her father's guests but would gladly run him through the body for trying to steal away Haddon's brightest jewel. Excited with the dance and wine as those gentlemen were, they would have highly enjoyed a night chase after a runaway couple; and Dorothy was certain that if overtaken, John would never yield her up while he had an arm to strike, for he was brave and rash, and had dared too much for her sake to part with her now without a struggle.

As she reflected on these possibilities, she could not resist a feeling of nervous sadness, and she wished she could convey a message to John, begging him not to put his plan in execution until the marriage guests had gone. But, then, she saw no way of sending this message, and so perforce she had no alternative but to keep her tryst, for she had promised solemnly to do so, and dare not break her plighted word.

It had been arranged that Madge was to be in waiting with a heavy shawl and a few relics in the "Orange Parlour," an ante-room leading from the ball-room, and which, from its smallness, not being in any special use on this particular night, was but dimly lighted. In this room was a heavily barred door that opened on to a flight of eleven stone steps, with a balustrade on each side, and over-shadowed by ancient yews. These steps led down to the terrace, and opposite was the other flight of steps leading up to the Rookery. Here John Manners was to be in waiting. Madge was to have the bars of the door undone and the door ajar, so that there should be no delay.

The last hour seemed to Dorothy the longest. Several times she felt as if she would fall down from very fright, and she was oppressed by an almost overpowering desire to burst into a fit of hysterical weeping. But as she remembered her brave, devoted lover waiting for her out in the cold and darkness, while there was all this warmth, light, and merriment inside, she struggled desperately with her own feelings, and so gave no sign of what she was suffering.

About half past eleven she stole up to her sister, who, being hot and tired, had withdrawn for a few minutes to one of the oriel recesses. "Thou art surely a-weary, dear Margaret," said the gentle Dorothy, as, throwing her arms round her sister's neck, she kissed her fervently, for she felt as if she could not go without the kiss, although Margaret had never treated her kindly, at least not since the Lady Maude had come to the Hall. "I wish thee joy and peace, sweet sis, and pray thee long life," she continued.

"Thou art over affectionate to-night, Doll," Margaret replied. "I thank thee for thy wishes; but thou hast disturbed my stomacher and disarranged my hair."

"I crave thy pardon, sweet sister," Dorothy meekly returned. "I longed to embrace thee and give thee my good wishes."

"Why, Doll, one would think thou and I were never going to meet again," Margaret cried, as she refastened the gold pins in her tresses. Dorothy sighed as she thought how highly probable that was; and then she took the opportunity to slip away as a gentleman came up to speak to Margaret.

It was now close on twelve o'clock, and the revelry had reached its height. The wild strains of the music floated and flowed round the stately apartment, and the twinkling feet of the dancers glided over the polished floor. Doll excused herself with the partner with whom she had engaged to dance, on the plea that she had a faintness and wished to retire to her chamber for a little while.

Then when everybody's attention was engrossed, she gave one last look round on the fascinating scene that she would never more behold, and stole away unperceived to the Orange Parlour. Here the faithful and devoted Madge was waiting. Doll was too confused, bewildered, and frightened to know precisely what happened; but the nurse threw a heavy shawl and a wimple over her, completely concealing her gay ball dress; then she took the shoes from her little feet, and substituted them with walking boots; and while all this was being done Dorothy Vernon was in a dream. Completely disguised in her wimple and shawl, she was ready for her flight. Then old Madge caressed her in a wild passionate way, murmuring several times—"May the blessed Jesus and all His saints guard thee, sweet one. Farewell! farewell!"

Then she broke down, for her sobs choked her. She opened the door. It creaked on its great hinges, as if uttering a protest against Dorothy's flight. One last pressure of the hand, one long and last embrace, and sweet Dorothy Vernon passed through the doorway, ran down the steps under the shadows of the yews, and reached the terrace. The night was dark, and the wind whistled amongst the trees, and in her excited imagination the sounds seemed to her like voices calling her back. She saw the long lines of light from the windows lying across the lawn, and fancied she saw crowds of people coming out of the light towards her while the leafless branches appeared to clutch at her.

She took all these things in in a brief moment. Her heart was throbbing like a startled fawn's when it hears the bay of the hounds on its scent. She sped with the lightness of a roe across the pathway, now strewn with dead leaves. The sounds of the music and the revelry grew fainter. She flew up the steps that led to the Rookery, and when she reached the top she was clasped in the powerful arms of her faithful lover; then, overcome with the intense excitement, she swooned away.

"It is a night with never a star,
 And the Hall with revelry throbs and gleams;
 There grates a hinge—the door is ajar—
 And a shaft of light in the darkness streams.
 A faint, sweet voice, a glimmering gem,
 And the two figures steal into light;
 A flash, and darkness has swallowed them—
 So sudden is Dorothy Vernon's flight!"

[From *The Elopement Door* by William Kingston Sawyer, 1869.]

It was a terrible moment of anxiety and suspense for John Manners, as he stood there on the top of the old Rookery steps and held the unconscious form of his sweetheart in his arms. He had no fear for his own personal safety, he was too brave and noble for that; but he knew that if Dorothy was missed, and search made before they could get out of the grounds, he would in all probability lose her for ever. The good sword on his thigh, his strong arm, and stout heart would enable him to defend himself against long odds; but he was aware that at the bidding of the King of the Peak quite a regiment of knights, gentlemen, and retainers would issue against him, and though he were possessed of the strength of a lion what would it avail against overwhelming numbers, and so, after all he had dared and endured he would lose the one woman who was infinitely more precious to him than his own life.

He strained his hearing and listened. He heard the wail of the wind in the leafless trees, and the weird rustle of the dead leaves that strewed the ground as the wind tossed them about as if in fury. He heard the wild song of the river as it sped on to join the Derwent. He heard the strains of music, the sounds of boisterous laughter, snatches of Bacchanalian songs, and he saw the great broad belts of light that streamed from the mansion; but as yet there were no signs of an alarm having been given. He bent over and kissed the cold forehead of his beloved Doll; then, lifting her up, he bore her hurriedly along to the end of the terrace, where he had placed a ladder to enable him to mount the wall. As he was wondering how he should safely bear his burden over the wall, she gave signs of returning consciousness. He placed her on the ground, letting her head rest upon his knee, and throwing back her wimple, he allowed the cool night breeze to play upon her face.

“Doll, Doll, my heart, awake,” he whispered in her ear, and in a few minutes she murmured softly—“Where am I?”

“In the arms of him who worships you,” he answered.

“Oh, John, what happiness,” she sighed, as she touched his cheek with her soft white hand, to assure herself that she was awake.

In another few moments she had quite recovered, and was on her feet. Then he helped her to scale the ladder, and she took one last farewell look at the grand old Hall which had been her home from her birth, and which was now a study with its brilliantly lighted windows, and its turrets and towers looming against the dark sky.

The wall was safely passed. Then Manners gave a low whistle, and honest Will Dawson came from a clump of trees, leading a fleet and powerful horse, furnished with a pillion saddle. John lifted his lady-love to the saddle, sprang up himself, pressed the horny hand of Will Dawson, who had served him so well; left a purse of gold in the man's hand; cried in a cheery voice, "Ho, for Leicester!" and in another moment the sound of horse's hoofs rung on the turf, and were caught up by the night wind, and the noble steed, as if conscious of the burden he bore, and the responsibility that was his, tore along at a break-neck speed that would have defied pursuit.

Sweet Dorothy Vernon had left her father's home, and that night ride was destined to change the fortunes of dear old Haddon, and pass Doll's name down in a halo of romance to ages yet unborn. Haddon itself might fall into decay and ruin, and the spot where it stood be known no more, but Dorothy Vernon's name should never fade from the pages of history so long as the world lasted.

For some hours after the flight, although Doll was missed, no one seemed to think much about her absence, for the revelry was as mad and furious as ever. But as the lights of the Hall were paling before the flush of dawn, a knight with whom Dorothy had promised to dance the final dance, asked Lady Maude where her step-daughter was. Then that lady was struck by the fact that she had missed Doll for some time, and thinking that she had stolen to her bed, she rushed off to rate and chide her for what she deemed her unpardonable rudeness in leaving the company.

"My lady" went to Dorothy's chamber, but found the bed unpressed; from there to the nursery, where old Madge, with a horn of "lamb's-wool" beside her, was dozing, or pretending to doze, over the log fire.

"Where is Mistress Doll?" cried Dame Vernon.

"An it please you, my lady, I know not," exclaimed the nurse, as she jumped up with a start and with well feigned alarm.

The dame waited to hear no more, but hurried out of the room, questioning every servant she met, but no one had seen the missing girl, and in a few minutes the alarm spread through the great house that Dorothy Vernon was lost,

When Sir George Vernon heard the news it instantly flashed upon him that she had eloped; then he flew into a towering passion, and there was wild excitement amongst the company.

“Dorothy has eloped! Dorothy has eloped!” cried everyone. The drunken servants were mustered and questioned, but all expressed entire ignorance of Doll’s whereabouts.

Then there was a clanking of swords and an examination of pistols. Horses were saddled, and servants and knights and gentlemen rode forth in the grey light of the morning in search of the fugitive, some going one way, some another. Hill, dale, and wood were scoured for miles; the country around soon knew the news, and scores of peasants joined in the chase, prompted to strenuous efforts by the promise of a large reward if the runaway was brought back. But it was all useless: no sign or tidings of her could be gained; and so the merriment of Haddon Hall was turned to wailing, and the marriage feast became a feast of sorrow.

Sir George Vernon was inconsolable, for Doll was as the apple of his eye, and she had gone from him. But Lady Maude, with that scorn which was so characteristic of her, vituperated the runaway, called her an ungrateful jade, and said she was not worth troubling about.

To return to the fugitives. The horse was kept at his great pace, for John knew that when Dorothy’s flight was discovered—as discovered it soon must be—the hue and cry would be raised, and therefore it was necessary to put as many leagues as possible between himself and Haddon while there was a chance of doing so.

On they sped along the valley of Matlock, past Miller’s Dale, and through the lonely forests that looked ghostly and weird in their winter nakedness. It was a wild ride. He was riding to win a lovely wife; and she because John was dearer to her than aught else in the world.

When the daylight glimmered on the land, and the country in all directions round Haddon was being scoured, the runaways had reached a little village a few miles from Derby. Here a halt was made and refreshments procured. The tired, foam-flecked horse was left in the stable, and two other steeds procured, one with a side saddle for Dorothy, and after a short rest the journey was resumed, at a slower pace now, as they did not wish to attract attention in passing through the villages, which it was impossible to avoid. Doll looked fagged and weary, but she bore up bravely, and uttered not a single word of complaint. They rode all day, and at night rested in the house of a miller in a secluded dale, John stating that Dorothy was his sister, and that they were journeying towards London on an important mission.

With the rising of the sun they started the next morning, and continued their flight south, until as the darkness of night was settling on the land they rode into Aylstone in Leicester Forest. John had some days previous to this sent a confidential servant on to this place to make all arrangements for the marriage, and on the following morning John Manners was joined in holy wedlock to his faithful and beloved Dorothy. The wedding was a very quiet one, only a few of the villagers, who guessed it was a runaway match, being present. After the ceremony, the newly-wedded pair took up their residence in the house of a gentleman with whom Manners had some slight acquaintance, and to whom he told his story. From this place Dorothy and her husband immediately addressed letters to the King of the Peak, informing him of the marriage, and craving with earnest entreaties his forgiveness, as they felt they could not live without each other. A special messenger was despatched with these letters, and was instructed to reach Haddon in the shortest possible time. When he arrived Margaret and her husband had departed for the Isle of Man, where they were to reside for a time at the seat of the Derbys. All the guests had gone, so that Sir George was lonely and desolate, and was fretting for the loss of his youngest and best beloved child.

When he read the letters he felt that he could not withhold the craved pardon; and so in the course of an hour or two the messenger was speeding back to Leicester Forest with word that the fugitives would be welcomed at Haddon. In less than a fortnight from the night of her flight Dorothy Vernon returned to her childhood's home as an honoured wife. Once more there was rejoicing in the Hall, and the rafters rang with laughter again; even "my Lady Maude" yielded to the force of circumstances, and toned down the acerbity of her temper. As for old Madge she almost went out of her senses with joy.

Before the new year ended the mournful news came from the Isle of Man that Margaret—less than a year a wife—was dead. This placed Doll in the position of her father's sole heiress, so that enormous estates owned by the King of the Peak passed into the possession of the Manners family when Sir George Vernon paid the debt of nature.

* * * * *

I awake from my dream; no sounds break the silence save the murmuring river, *that* still flows and murmurs exactly as it did on the memorable night of Dorothy's flight.

But where are the revelers who with shouts and laughter and song made the old Hall gay? Where are the grand ladies, the belted knights, the high-born gentlemen? Where the beauty and rank and fashion? Where the good old nurse, Madge? Where the roystering retainers, the soldiers, and the servants? A voice comes from some where in the gloomy chamber, and answers—Dust.

“The light still shines through the latticed pane
 As it shone to them, and the shadowed door
 Is the shadow they saw, and the stains remain
 Of the wine they spilled on the dais floor.
 The river that runs by the old Hall’s walls
 Murmured to them as it murmurs now;
 The golden glow of the sunset falls,
 As it fell for them, on glade, river, and bough.
 The hall where they feasted, the church where they prayed,
 Their cradles, and chambers, and gravestones, stay;
 While lord and vassal, youth and maid,
 Knight and lady, have passed away.”

[From *The Elopement Door* by William Kingston Sawyer, 1869.]

Beneath the church, the tall spire of which rises there in the distance at the end of the Wye valley. sweet Dorothy Vernon sleeps. She bore her husband three sons and a daughter, and went to her rest in 1584. He survived to be created a knight by James I in 1603, and twenty-seven years after he had carried he beloved wife to her tomb he joined her in the dreamless sleep which knows no awakening.