

THE HUNTING AT ROSSNESS.

(CONTRIBUTED.)

How the blue sky flashed that day! Was it ever before so bright? The autumn wind, pure with the night's frost, came glad through the scattering leaves.—not too cold, either; for my new red cloak that my father had given me on my birthday was thick and warm, and fitted snugly enough, even if the burrowing wind would toy with the skirts of it, and my hair was all coiled close so that hardly a lock of it might be blown astray.

We were like children, my waiting-woman and I, out in the castle garden, where the leaves ran riot with the wind, whirling and scurrying, now across the rain-washed paths and ruined flower-beds, now soaring high against the turret-walls and falling into the circled, wind-ruffled water of the moat beneath. Down they came, leaf after leaf, from the poplars that stood ranged like tall sentinels forgotten at their posts, leaf after leaf fluttering and falling with a laugh of the wind as they fell, and with a loud shriek of victory as the last red reluctant leaf went spinning from the black boughs of the old oak that raps by night upon the window of the Ghost's Walk.

How we ran and danced and sang snatches of song, and laughed, loudest of all when the wind blew Lillian's hair loose all over her eyes, till she cried for vexation, and laughed she could not say why. I remember I had just caught Geraldis, and was holding her fast, trying to twist some red leaves into her hair, and we were both laughing and struggling, when we heard footsteps approaching, and we stopped and stood apart and upright and dignified, not to be caught in unworthy and unmannerly behavior.

It was Gilsey, my father's messenger. He had a strange look in his face, and came up slowly as if loath to speak, holding a folded paper in his hand.

"My lady Alice," he said to me, "I bring a letter from the Knight D'arbois,"

and, straightway, before I might question, he was gone.

"Come, Geraldis," I said, "thou shall read me the letter, but let us go by ourselves to my tower-room, where none may trouble us." So we left the others, and raced breathless up to the turret-chamber, that we called our own, and threw ourselves panting side by side on the rug of bearskin before the roaring fire. "Read it," I said, "and quickly, for I am mad with eagerness."

"Nay, wait," she answered, "but a moment, till my breath be come again."

So for a space she lay panting and loosened the fastenings of her bodice. At last she took up the letter, and broke the seal, and read it swiftly and without stumbling, for she was well taught.

"Listen," she answered, "for it runs thus: 'To my lady Alice: It is a sad letter that I write thee, and of sad presage of things whereof, before thou receive this, the end shall be determined. Know that last night my Lord of Rossness, the Scot, came to me, and bade me give over my claim to thy hand, for some ancient vow's sake that thy father had sworn; and thy father urged the same, for this is a man of power and command among his Scottish nation. And I, knowing how thy heart was set, said firmly, 'nay.' Whereupon he gave me the challenge to fight with swords before the noon to-day, upon Bentham Moor by the oak coppice at the crossways. Therefore, I write this for a message of hope or of farewell; and, if this word be my last, I wish thee a good life and a soon death, for thy love's sake and for his sake that loves thee, who sets this kiss to the paper for thy lips, praying thee to await him if he be living, or, if he be dead, to hold his love a little in remembrance, till the day come of reuniting.'"

It was not fear that I felt, nor horror. It was only wonder, a wonder blind and insup-