



# THE HAIR OF ELSPETH HALMERS.



BY HERMAN  
SCHEFFAUER.



ILLUSTRATED BY

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*"Now, with deft fingers, she began braiding her hair anew into two long, thick queues."*

THAT afternoon the young widow of the Baron Nicolay, having chanced upon Franz Roslahr, wandering with dreamy eyes about the *schloss*, had set an hour at which he was to await her at a certain spot in the adjacent wood.

When night came, making an excuse to her maids, she went swiftly in her rustling velvet dress, huge headgear and tinkling chains, down the stone steps of the terrace toward the trees at the end of the garden.

"Are you there, Franz?" she called into the shadows.

A young man stepped forth from behind a gnarled oak, sank on one knee and kissed her hand.

"My lady," said he, "I have not even left."

"That is foolish. I do not like it."

"I could not leave whilst I could see you."

"Ah, but you must not watch me—not if you love me. And you say you love me, Franz?"

The sleek, patrician lady stroked his cheek. A flame shot through him at her touch; a sigh escaped him.

"And you will do what I ask?"

"All that you wish, Lady Gisela."

She flung a glance behind her, guiltily. In her eyes glinted a ray like a dagger flash. Lawns, walks and terraces were all deserted. A yellow glow, prisoned within the lozenge-shaped panes of the long windows, smouldered here and there. Against the sky the curved gables and copper

cupolas of Schloss Nicolay rose dark and dim.

"Listen, then," said the Baroness, "she lives in Korbingen—on the Saale. She is an orphan, and lives with her brothers and grandmother. One brother is an apothecary, the other a farrier. Their name is Halmers. Hers is Elspeth—Elspeth! You will not forget."

"No. Korbingen. Elspeth Halmers. But what is my business with her?"

The Baroness bent her silk-hooded head and whispered in Franz's ear. Her eyes sought to melt the darkness and read his face. But the backward step he took, and the little cry of surprise, were enough.

"Afraid!" she exclaimed with a sneer, "afraid! Very well. I thought there was gallant blood in you." She turned to go.

Franz Roslahr stretched out his hand imploringly.

"Wait, dear lady," he said; "it is a strange request."

"Yes—and full of danger. If you are caught they will hang you."

"I have never borne arms," said the young man, "yet I would rather kill a man than do this deed upon a woman."

"Bah! a village wench! See, I give you a kiss—and another and another when you bring it! It shall be a proof of your devotion and love. So—good-night."

Roslahr poured forth his thanks, raised that smooth white hand to his lips once more and bade the young and beautiful widow good-night. She called him back.

"You will not betray me?" she asked. "Even if you are caught? Even under torture?"

"Not even under torture, Lady Gisela."

"Then you shall always call me Gisela."

She heard him make his way down the sloping ground until his boots gnashed upon the pebbles in the lower path. Then, slowly, she walked to the stone terrace and seated herself upon the balustrade, sidewise, as on her palfrey. Up from the village at the

foot of the hill on which the castle stood, came the strokes of a bell—eight double strokes. Restlessly she began to pace back and forth, then, as another sound struck her ear, she halted, upright and alert, in a splendid feline attitude. The thudding of a horse's hoofs. She ran swiftly to an armchair near the entrance to the great hall, sank into it and closed her eyes.

A horseman came cantering into the grounds, hitched his steed to an iron ring in the stone ramp, and ascended the stairs toward the lighted portal. He was booted, gauntleted and spurred. His cape and jerkin were of green velvet. A baldric, stitched in gold, crossed his breast and supported a long sword. His broad-brimmed hat was of beaver; a black plume nodded from it. A starched collar of point lace encircled his neck. As he strode toward the door he stood suddenly arrested, and doffed his hat. The light that swam out from the candles burning in the iron hoops and sconces in the hall fell on a tall young man with tanned face, black moustache, sharp eyes and long hair. The cavalier had seen the lady slumbering in her chair. On tip-toe he advanced, bent and kissed her. She started, stretched, slowly opened her eyes, as if under a drowsy spell.

"Ah, Walther," said she, smiling, "it is you," and half raised her arms. "Come, kiss me."

"Ah, your slumbers have given me riches—without your knowledge—but could I refuse more?" He kissed her again and laughed, toying with the head-dress of silk and lace the Baroness wore. Instantly she shrank from his touch, raising swift and anxious hands, and testing the firmness of the long jewelled pins that held it all in place.

"And how long, my Gisela, are you going to wrap up your beauty in this way? When am I to see that wonderful hair again?"

"Not until the appointed time. Shall I break my vow to the dead?"

"Why should the living suffer for the dead?" he exclaimed, impatiently. "Is it not enough that we cannot marry

until two years after the Baron's death, but must you garb your head like a nun?"

"A vow is a vow;  
I shall keep mine  
until——"

"Until when?  
Gisela, if you  
only  
knew  
how I

torch-fire! I wonder all that beauty does not burn its way through your hoods and wimples. The most beautiful

hair woman ever bore,  
hidden from my eyes!"

"Your words are idle,  
and you have used them  
to others."

"Gisela! What!  
Whom do you mean?"

"Oh, let us say a red-  
haired trollop in a village  
drug shop in Korbingen."  
Venomously came the  
words. The caval-  
ier gazed at her  
with lifted eye-  
brows, then  
laughed.

"A mere  
child—a



*"Roslahr poured forth his thanks, and raised that smooth white hand to his lips."*

longed to kiss those tresses of yours—  
beautiful long tresses, like rich dark  
autumn leaves, like the polished bronze  
of cannon and crucifixes, like dusky

simple girl who gave me a draught from  
her brother's shop one day when I felt ill."

"Tales are brought me. You have  
been there many times."

Walther von Brenntor, captain in the service of the Grand Duke of Hessen, grew suddenly silent. She felt that his mood was disturbed. But this only added weight to her convictions. Well, she had already taken measures to cure both her lover and the girl of Korbingen of their folly. Yet it was a mistake on her part to have shown the least sign of jealousy.

He did not again beg her to remove her strange headgear. She, by her long, unvarying refusal, felt that she bound him the faster under her spell, mystified and enchained him, and goaded his fervour through curiosity. The rich robes and jewels of the patrician dame were in odd contrast with the stiff, square-cut head-dress of fawn-coloured silk which, though rich in material, was nevertheless in form such as a nun might wear. This gave the Baroness a *bizarre* and startling appearance. Already she was known as the hooded lady, and this conjunction of worldly pomp and austere simplicity, of the profane and the divine, pleased her as much as it displeased her betrothed.

Soon after Captain von Brenntor took his leave, gravely and gallantly, albeit somewhat thoughtfully. The Baroness, leaning against the portal, listened until the sound of his horse's hoof-beats were lost in the distance; then, frowning, she went slowly upstairs to her dressing-room, seized a silver handbell, and rang it angrily. Her maid appeared, a plump Swabian, with pippin cheeks and round, blue eyes.

"Uncoif me," said the mistress, and seated herself on a stool. And Minna uncoiffed her lady, loosening and unpinning the silken hood. Then she lifted the elaborate structure; but no glorious tresses of burnished hair, such as the Captain had once adored, came to view, for in nursing her husband of a fever contracted in a campaign the Baroness had been smitten by the same malady which ended his life. During her illness her beautiful hair had first turned a mouldy grey, then fallen in great masses from her head until her entire skull was bare. With the utmost

secrecy, but all in vain, had she attempted to find some woman with hair to match her own. She would have offered princely sums for enough to make a good-sized wig. Only lately had she heard of this girl of Korbingen, and then, to her fury, of the Captain's attentions to her. And she had spun a deep and double plot.

Now, in the light of the tapers only a thin fluff, such as a new-born babe's, was visible. Grotesque, manlike, and pathetic she appeared. Her face was shorn of all beauty save the beauty of her eyes; and even these, as she sat staring into her mirror, were filled with rage, despair, and horror.

A single tallow-dip in an earthenware holder was burning in Elspeth Halmer's chamber. She—tall, shapely, and virginal—stood in her white smock before a glass in her little bedroom on the fourth story of an old house which leaned over the market-place at Korbingen. Plucking forth combs and pins, she let down her hair. It fell rippling to her knees, a shining cataract of reddish-brown. The girl's brow seemed wrinkled and touched with pain as she struck her crackling comb impatiently through the thick mass, and shook her head, sending snake-like undulations down the writhing tresses. Their weight was enormous, and she was suffering from one of the frequent headaches caused by this burden of beauty. Now, with deft fingers, she began braiding it anew into two long, thick queues.

Suddenly, her fingers buried in the long strands, she stopped short and listened, with head aslant. Had something stirred within the room? She crossed herself and went on. The evil spirits which sometimes came to harass the villagers had never molested her. The braiding done, she went to the window and looked out, leaning on her white, bare arms. The moon was beginning to rise behind the trees, cutting its disc against the steeple of the little church. At last Elspeth turned, blew out the taper, clad herself in a snowy robe of linen, knelt down beside the huge poster-bed, and said

her prayers aloud. There was a sound like a sob. She listened. Perhaps it was the cry of some poor soul in torment beseeching a prayer from the heart of a spotless maid. Frantically Elspeth mumbled it, then flounced into

the bed. There it disclosed Elspeth lying motionless, her two magnificent braids hanging partly on and partly over the high coverlet. Something else began to creep into the moonlight—first a man's booted leg, then a buff leather jacket, with white cuffs and collar, then the distorted face of Franz Roslahr, his eyes wide and fearful. In

one hand he held a pair of heavy shears. Slowly he tip-toed across the room, knelt down, then gently inserted the open shears beneath one of the braids of the sleeping

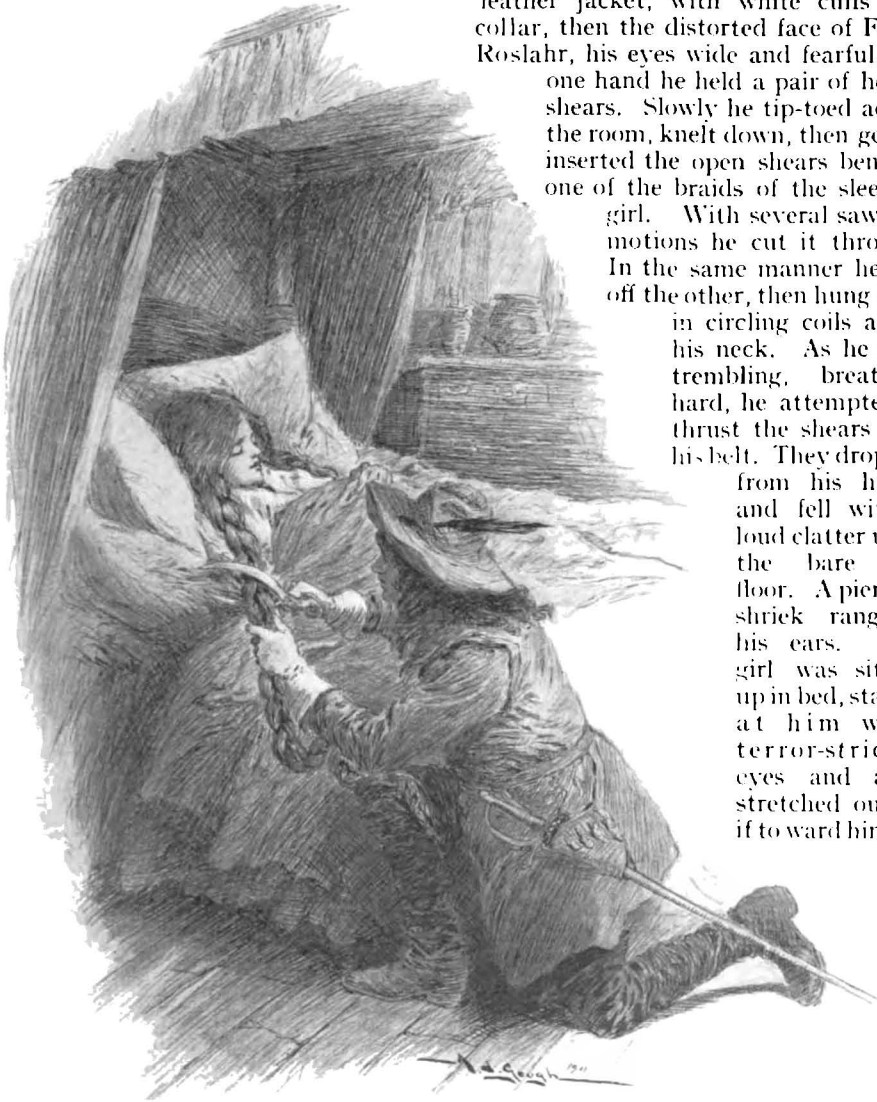
girl. With several saw-like motions he cut it through.

In the same manner he cut off the other, then hung both

in circling coils about his neck. As he rose, trembling, breathing hard, he attempted to thrust the shears into his belt. They dropped

from his hands and fell with a loud clatter upon the bare oak floor. A piercing shriek rang in his ears. The

girl was sitting up in bed, staring at him with terror-stricken eyes and arms stretched out as if to ward him off.



"With several saw-like motions he cut it through."

bed and turned her face to the wall. She had done her duty to the world of uneasy spirits. In a few minutes she slept, breathing low and evenly. The moonlight began to pour through the window and sink down the walls. In spectral greenish-white it crept across

Franz Roslahr tried to speak, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He made for the door.

"Hollo, hollo, Elspeth!" came a voice. A flickering light drew nearer from below the winding stairs, another glowed from above. From both direc-



tions someone was approaching. The girl was screaming like a mad thing from within the room.

"I'm here, I'm here! What's the matter?" shouted a thunderous voice; another added its deep bass; then came a piping treble—this from a short, crooked female figure which appeared suddenly in a doorway to the left. A burly, bare-footed fellow came rushing up from below, holding a flaring candle. From the floor above a red-haired man in a night robe, and a black cap with a red feather, came leaping, a long sword shaking in his hand. By the tossing light Franz Roslahr saw the farrier, the apothecary, and the old woman closing in upon him. The black-bearded farrier pounced upon him and seized him by the collar.

"A thief!" he cried, "a dog of a thief!"

Elspeth Halmers came bounding out of her room.

"My hair!" she screamed. "He has cut off my hair!"

A shriek, horrible to hear, came from the throat of the old woman. There stood the culprit, the auburn braids about his neck, the shears clasped like a dagger in his hand. Infuriated, the two brothers flung themselves upon him, bore him to the floor, tore the braids from his neck, pounded, kicked, and throttled him. The apothecary began lashing the prostrate man across the face with the two long switches.

"A rope! Bring a rope to bind the dog!" roared the farrier. Elspeth stood still, gazing calmly, even curiously, upon the handsome young fellow upon the floor. But the old woman, bent of body and hooked of nose, hobbled away and brought back a stout rope. Grunting and muttering and baring her few teeth like a wolf, she knelt and fastened Roslahr's legs and arms together while the two brothers held him helpless.

"A sack for Kurt, the hangman!" said the farrier, glaring at the captive. Furiously the old woman turned upon him. Her face writhed with passion and hate terrible to behold, and when she compressed her lips a stump of a tooth stood up like the tusk of a boar.

"No, no!" she screeched. "We'll have no hangman—no public hangman for this wretch! I—I shall attend to him! We shall have justice for the black deed he's done upon an innocent maid!"

There was that in her tone which struck a greater terror into Roslahr's heart than all the blustering rage of the two brothers.

"Do you know this villain?" asked the apothecary of his sister. She shook her head and looked down upon Roslahr. He was lying quite still, his face white, his lips bleeding. In his eye she read a plea for forgiveness. And he saw only her tall lily-white figure leaning against the door-frame, her bronzen hair mutilated and disorderly with uneven shocks and wisps. Her feet, like those of some marble statue, shone from beneath her white robe. How fair she was, even with her despoiled hair! And in her eyes what seemed a wistful pity began to shine. Suddenly the apothecary recollected his sword which stood against the wall. He seized it, and set the point upon Roslahr's breast.

"Speak, you swine!" he snarled. "Who sent you to do this devil's work?"

Elspeth sprang forward and struck away the sword.

"Do not kill him, Karl," she cried; "not for anything he did to me."

"We shall find means to make him talk," cackled the old woman, "or he is made of something tougher than flesh! Heave him into the loft. And hold your tongues to all! Come here, girl, and let me see your head."

Elspeth came and lowered her shorn head, and again the hag screamed and set up a dreadful wail.

"O gone, gone, gone; all the length and beauty that I've tended ever since you were born, and that made you fit to be a prince's bride! By your hair you were the fairest thing in all the land. And the young noble captain's heart was tangled in it, like a fish in a net. He would have made you his lady, or my spell was all for nought! Ee! ee! ee! But this dog shall suffer for it—suffer, suffer!" She spat at him.



*"Swiftly he descended, fearing the strands might part."*

"I do not want him to suffer, grandam," muttered the girl sullenly, looking away.

The two brothers picked the prisoner up by heels and shoulders and carried him into an adjoining room. Here they flung him upon what seemed to be a pile of musty bags and straw. He heard a heavy bolt jar into place.

To his stunned senses and straining eyes a square window began to glimmer faintly, as through a curtain of dust and cobwebs. There was a sound of rushing water. Roslahr groaned for the crime he had committed, then again for the shameful failure of that crime, for the loss of the hair, for the pains the taut ropes brought his flesh. He thought of the scorn of the Baroness Gisela, the black, cruel fury of the old woman, and trembled. The terror-haunted night passed; the dawn came with its graveyard light.

The house began to awaken to noises, voices, footfalls. Cocks crew without. The beams above were black, and the walls about him grey with age. Enormous festoons of cobwebs hung everywhere. Thick dust covered all things. Broken chairs, rusty armour, bales of herbs, ancient alembics, a shepherd's crook, flagons of green glass lay there in a mass. Directly overhead a large, heavy, rusted hook protruded from the ceiling.

The day climbed towards noon; no one entered the place. Franz's throat, burning with thirst, was like a raw wound. He tasted the salt, black-crusts blood on his lips. The bolts grated. The mistress of the house—the old woman, surely she was mistress here!—entered with a jug of water and a lump of dry black bread. She gave him a fiery glance from her small black eyes, then said:

"You trussed ruffian! move, and I'll call the men, who will strangle you. Your judge has not come yet—but when he comes! Eat—drink—while you've the chance."

She bent and loosened the ropes with her gnarled fingers, stood and glared at him, hemmed and cackled, then went limping out. He fell upon the bread and tore it with his teeth, and drained

the jug almost at a gulp. Then, with flesh and muscles aching and numb, Franz crawled to the window, loosened the rotten sash and looked out. It was over forty feet to the bottom, and the bottom was a clump of sharp rocks near a tearing stream. A leap from here would mean a broken neck. A low humming sound began to fill his ears; at first he thought it must be the feverish blood pounding in his brain. It was a steady purring as of a wheel—a spinning wheel. And there was also the humming of a voice in a sing-song tune. It was a brooding tune, such as his mother used to sing. It seemed to come from the room next door. There was a wooden panel between the bricks and twisted beams of that wall. He set his ear against it. Plainly now he heard the voice; it was the grandmother's. At last, by fragments, he made out the words to the mutter of the whirling wheel:

"Weave the strands and weave them right,  
Weave them fast and weave them tight.  
Ropes for rigging and for deck,  
Nooses for a villain's neck.  
Weave the golden, hempen strands  
Ready for the hangman's hands."

He turned faint and sat heavily down upon a dust-covered chest, and let his head drop into his hands. The horrible tune went on, and the remorseless purring of the wheel. A ring of women's faces swam before him—the cold, contemptuous features of the Lady Gisela; the twisted nose, rotten tusks and cruel glare of the lame hag; then his mother's face, full of reproach, and the strange impassivity and tender eyes of her whom he had deprived of her crown of beauty. It was *her* face that returned again and again. The spinning and singing ceased; the night came. Some heavy body set itself against the door. Now and then it stirred and a sword clanged. It was one of the brothers mounting guard. In the morning Roslahr again heard the sound of the wheel; and at noon came the grandmother, with her devil's eyes, and brought him bread and water. She stood with bent legs, and arms on her hips, a misshapen lump, and cried, with a leer:

"A little longer, you ruffian, and you'll be quite free—free as a bird, swinging back and forth in the air. Do you see that hook?"

Franz could not bear the red spots burning in her eyes. He turned away.

"That is for a rope, and the rope for you! And three men at the other end! And it's I that am spinning the rope. And d'ye know of what I'm spinning it? Of her hair, mark you! It's of her hair that I'm spinning the good long rope to bind and turn you into carrion. Be sure there's plenty of it—plenty of the lovely hair your butcher's hand cut from her head. By that you shall hang by the neck, by the hair you hacked off her lovely head!"

Her look was gorgon-like, her eyes flamed, her voice was like rasping iron. She moved towards the door.

"And you might thank the devil that fathered you that Captain Walther von Brenntor is not here. But he will come—to-morrow, or the next day! He will kill you for the deed you've done—for the dog's deed you've done to win a few black crowns!"

Roslahr started at the Captain's name. More than once had he heard it whispered as that of Gisela's lover.

"It was not that," he said, stung to the soul; "it was not to sell the hair."

"Then 'twas to feed a woman's hate or spite, eh? Some foul cat that was envious of my grandchild's beauty, some black-hearted dame that sought to win the noble young Captain from her? And since you will not talk, manikin, we shall find means to make you talk, aye, shriek, with little iron fingers that press and press!"

She coughed, then broke into fierce and hollow laughter, and shambled out. The spinning-wheel began its droning once more. With the ice that shot Roslahr's blood came jets of lava—horrible doubts and fears. Had he been merely a blind, unthinking gull in the hands of a crafty woman? Had she used him for this damnable deed, professing love for him and humouring him in his, only to make herself more secure in the affections of the Captain? Now he recalled a hundred question-



able words, acts, and looks on her part, all of them suddenly set forth in an evil, selfish light, and defined by that deadly logic of appearance and circumstance which could not be gainsayed. Overwhelmed, he cast himself down upon the filthy straw and wept. Life, love, and liberty—he had forfeited them all. How long would it be

ere the vengeful witch in the next room had woven that wonderful hair into the halter that was to strangle



*"The whip-like coils of Elspeth Halmer's hair shot forth and encircled the slender neck."*

him? It did not matter now; it would even end the remorse that was gnawing him. An overpowering pity for the sweet Elspeth whom he had disfigured sprang up like a green plant in his heart. The mercy she had shown undid his soul; he longed to cast himself at her feet. Ah, the glance she had given him with her tender eyes as he lay on the floor! That night, when the sentry came to guard the door, Roslahr heard the gruff voice of the farrier.

"Here, take this sword, and if there is trouble, shout—and stab."

His heavy boots went creaking down the steps, and a soft body sank rustling against the door. Something told the prisoner that it must be Elspeth Halmers. So she was to guard him, too, in that house of hate and disaster! Dared he speak to her, if only to crave her forgiveness? At last he tapped lightly on the thick, bolt-studded panel.

"Elspeth Halmers, Elspeth Halmers," he whispered hoarsely.

There was no answer. Perhaps, after all, it was but the old woman. He called once more. He heard her stir; then came her voice, low and hushed:

"I hear. What would you have?"

"Your pardon. Say you forgive me!"

There was no answer, but the young man thought he heard a sob.

"When the rope is woven I am to die."

"The rope is woven."

"Oh, then, forgive, forgive me!"

"I forgive you," she murmured in a voice scarcely audible.

"Thank you, Elspeth Halmers! Oh, thank you!"

And now it was she that heard a sob.

"You are weeping," she whispered.

"You are sorry. Oh, why did you do it?"

"I was sworn to it—out of madness, out of love. I was possessed, bewitched!"

"It was for a woman?"

"Yes," breathed the captive, and was silent.

"Her name?" the girl continued.

"Was it the lady of Schloss Nicolay?"

Franz clenched his teeth lest any sound should escape him.

"Yes, it was she!" the girl whispered. "I know it was no other—she, the betrothed of Captain Walther, she who hates me—she bade you do it!"

Roslahr, crouching against the door, groaned.

"What harm have I done her," said the girl in a plaintive tone, "that she should wrong me? She has the love of the Captain; she has hair more beautiful than mine."

"I do not know. But if I am to die," murmured the young man, "it is fit that it be with the rope woven of the hair I dishonoured. Such a death may seem sweeter now that I have your forgiveness."

There was a pause; then, with sudden intensity, she spoke again:

"I have thought of you more than of myself. I do not hate you. You shall not die—not for me nor my hair! Make no noise. Leave all to me."

Franz Roslahr's heart gave a leap back to hope and life. He heard her tip-toe away. When she returned there was a soft swish as of garments cast down before the door. Then came a rustling for some minutes. Then she stole into the adjoining room where the spinning-wheel stood. A moment later a key crept into the lock, the great wards were silently forced back and the bar withdrawn. Inch by inch the door creaked open. Vaguely in the darkness, now half-diffused by the moonlight on the dusty floor, he saw the figure of a man in high boots and black cap decked with a red feather—the apothecary's. There was the glint of a sword, and something dragged and dangled from the left arm. Roslahr started back with a half-smothered cry, and clutched a long-necked flagon.

"Hush! it is I—in my brother's clothes!" whispered Elspeth Halmers. "I was forced to steal the key from him. Be still!"

He stared at her, overcome by her presence and the new strange beauty of her face and figure. Across her arm she carried a coil of rope. With small, swift steps she advanced to the window.

tied one end of the rope to a ring in the sill, jerked open the sash, and flung forth the loose coil. It was the rope of shining hair the old woman had woven for his hanging.

"It is light, but very strong," whispered the girl. "It will bear your weight. Take hold, let yourself down. Take this sword."

He stood still as loth to move. She urged him again. He then passed the naked blade through his belt, climbed to the sill, seized the hand of Elspeth, showered kisses upon it; his tears fell. Something wonderful was happening, and both were conscious of it, as of a sudden light. He babbled a few broken words, then said good-bye. He grasped the smooth silken rope in both hands and let himself over the edge. For a moment she clutched him tightly about the shoulders with both hands; it was as if she wished to say something. Then he felt her soft, thrilling lips and warm breath at his ear:

"Wait," she said in a strange, failing voice, "wait below—in the shadow."

Swiftly he descended, fearing the smooth strands might part. His heel grated upon the rocks; he stepped into the shadow against the wall and waited. Then, to his amazement, he saw her emerge from the window and begin to climb down the rope, clutching it with her booted legs somewhat awkwardly, so that it swung back and forth like a plummet. He came, a great joy in his heart, and stood beneath, to catch her should she fall. Safely she came to ground. He caught her in his arms; she clutched him with a sudden helplessness. He saw her eyes shine; her breath, warm and fresh, as with the scent of milk, was on his face. He kissed her; she made no resistance, and in that moment he knew himself not only absolved of his crime, but his empty life filled with something rich and rare.

"Take me with you," she whispered, frantically. "I cannot remain now. I should be beaten to death. My grandmother is terrible at times. I am a slave here. Take me with you, or I will hang myself with my own hair.

Take me to your village—to your home. I trust you. I do not cherish anything against you. Since you cut off my heavy hair I'm free of all pains in the head—which is well. See! I have dressed it like a man's. I can pass for your brother."

Franz Roslahr sought to pull the hair-rope from its hook, but in vain. So he cut off a length with the sword, kissed it, and thrust it into his jerkin.

"We must cross the stream," said the girl; "it surrounds the house."

Franz stooped and lifted her, stepped into the water, which rose to his hips, and waded slowly to the other bank. The scattered drops glistened in the moonbeams as they emerged, the red feather nodded, the wet sword shone haggardly, then the two figures vanished in a clump of trees.

The next morning Captain Walther von Brenntor came cantering up before the apothecary's shop in the market-place at Korbingen, and drew rein. As he entered the narrow door, the plume in his hat stroked the mailed hide of a stuffed armadillo hung from the ceiling. He sniffed the spicy air, and slapped his whip across the counter. Shuffling, the old woman appeared.

"Morrow," said the Captain. "Where is the fair Elspeth? I want my draught."

"Oh, your worship! Such a crime, such misfortune! She is gone, think you, gone! Stole Karl's clothes and went off in the night—and with whom—would you believe it? With a young villain that had cut off her hair—a vile wretch we had caught and kept locked up, awaiting your worship's arrival—to see justice done."

The astounded officer asked several hurried questions. The crone hobbled off and returned with the rope. The Captain groaned, then swore deep and passionate oaths as he touched the auburn coils in distressful pity.

"It was spite-work," mumbled the grandmother, "the young dog was only a tool. It was hell's envy and black jealousy, and none but a woman's, I'll vow."

Like the flash and roar of one of the

mortars at the siege of Tramelshelm, a sudden thought burst in the Captain's mind. His brows gathered, his blue eyes took on the bleak glare of steel. He raked the rope of Elspeth's hair together, stuffed it under his baldric, slapped his thigh with his whip.

"I *will* see justice done!" he cried, and rushed from the shop.

Like a thundercloud, bristling with destruction and wrapped in wrath, he dashed down the dusty roads. In little more than an hour he was urging his panting horse up the steep winding road that led to the great stone gates with the moss-covered heraldic beasts at the entrance to the grounds of the *schloss*.

Stately, with slow and languid steps, the Baroness Gisela was walking up and down the grass terraces. She had heard the well-known gallop of his horse and was therefore at the moment deeply absorbed in a velvet-covered missal she held in her hand. Her gold-stitched bag and ornate ring of silver keys and trinkets swung to the advance and retreat of her knee. Her spreading nun's hood of silk cast a soft shade upon her face.

Dusty, begrimed, his locks and forehead streaming, the Captain came on, spurs clinking. She professed not to hear him until he was quite close. Then, with wide-open, surprised eyes and a winsome smile, she raised her head. But she gazed upon black and

frowning brows, flashing eyes, and lips quivering with scorn and wrath. She uttered a little cry, held her book to her heart, and made a step backward. The Captain raised his gauntleted hand. The whip-like coils of Elspeth Halmers' hair shot forth and encircled the slender neck of the Baroness. Speechless, she stared at him for a moment, closed her eyes, screamed, and fell fainting. He caught her, and let her sink gently to the grass. The Swabian maid came running.

"Water," said the Captain. "Get water and hartshorn."

He bent, loosened her stiff lace collar, and began to pull the jewelled pins from the crumpled head-dress. The silken thing fell off—the bare skull shone forth in the sunlight, grotesque, babyish, bleached like a harlequin's. Captain von Brenntor gave a cry of horror and leaped to his feet.

"Accursed! bewitched!" he muttered, as he stared at the prostrate noblewoman with the bronze braids twined, like avenging serpents, about her neck. Minna came running with the water and hartshorn. At sight of her uncoiffed mistress she screamed; Captain Walther seized her roughly by the arm.

"Mind you," he said, "no word to her that I have seen her thus! Lie, if you must!" Then, with bared head, he left the terrace and strode swiftly toward his horse.

