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him. He is worthy of you, and you of him—the liar and the thief."

"It is false," she cried, her fear of the man forgotten at the insult to Hugh. "You know it is false, if you know him at all!"

The old man grinned malignantly. "What if I can prove it to be true?" he asked, slowly.

"You cannot prove it; nothing could prove a malicious falsehood to be true."

"What if I can prove it so clearly that you yourself must confess?"

"It is impossible."

"Then put it to the test if you have such faith in your lover's truth and honesty. Put it to the test."

"He is not my lover."

"So my task is the easier. He is your friend, your dear old friend. Are you afraid to know him for what he really is? Well, within the week, I will prove my words if you will give me the chance. Are you afraid?"

"No," she answered, proudly; "you can prove nothing against Hugh Limer."

Old Pallacio turned away his head to hide a smile of evil triumph. "We shall see," he muttered. "In a week's time we shall see."

He rose from his seat and shambled to the door. On the threshold he paused and looked back. "Remember your promise," he said, and in spite of her faith and courage, Sybil's heart was chilled by the calm assurance of his voice.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Stolen Picture.

THE gaunt and shaggy figure of old Pallacio was a blot on a scene whose beauty was unrivalled even in the fair and fertile region of Kent. His head bowed between his shoulders, uncouth as a grizzly bear, he walked with shuffling strides along the famous Sternholt avenue of lime trees, that stood well back from the roadway—two huge ramparts of vivid verdure stretching for more than a mile without a curve. Here and there through openings artfully cut in the high green wall, a glance was had of the wide demesne with a flash of water in the distance and the fitting shadows of deer through the dim vista of the woods. Rabbits, white and brown, tumbled over each other in the grass and scampered off at the approach of Pallacio. Without a look or a thought for God's beautiful work, under the blue sky, over the green sward, Pallacio walked unheeding, his eyes dimmed, his mind wearied and fouled by evil plotting.

A bold sweep of the avenue brought him in sight of the Sternholt Towers. A great house, standing brave and big against a background of verdure, its lines so bold and clear that it seemed rather carved than built. The many sharp pointed turrets shot up above the tallest trees into the vacant air. In front stretched a wide expanse of smooth, green sod, raised terrace over terrace, backed by stately trees with flowering shrubs between. On the farther side was a glimpse of the red brick walls of the garden, which was the chief glory of the place—a wide wilderness of a garden with winding walks and quaint shady nooks and open spaces, huge cedars and oaks lifting their tall branches above the fruit and flowers, with a clear stream sweeping smoothly through it all.

But Pallacio cared for none of these things. It was a curious limitation in the man's nature. The beauty of a picture appealed to him powerfully, the beauty of nature not at all.

As he climbed the high stone steps and stood under the lofty portico of Sternholt, his whole soul was absorbed in the fancied wrong of his daughter—the one being in the whole world whom he truly loved—and in his scheme of bitter revenge.

It chanced that the big footman at the door was a newcomer who knew not Pallacio, and he blocked his entrance in the wide doorway when the old man would have pushed past.

"Lord Sternholt is in the picture gallery," the footman said, "and is not to be disturbed. I will take your message or you can write."

"Bring him my name," growled Pal-

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