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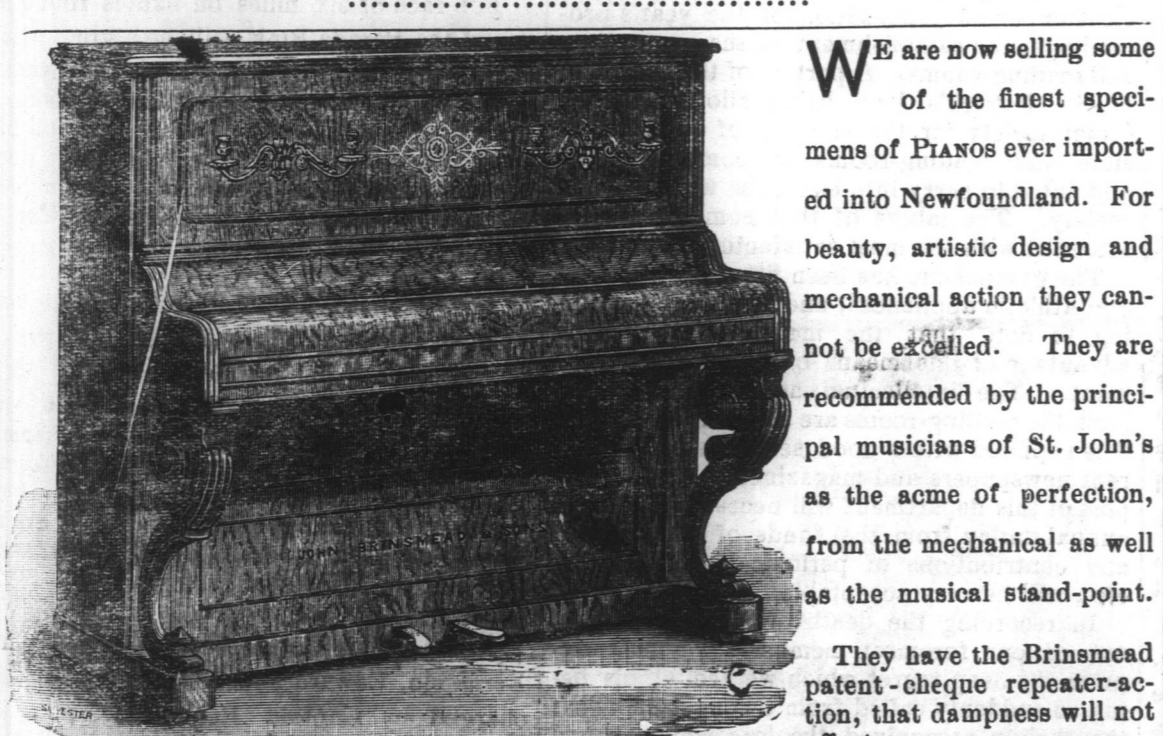
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Walton Court;

ADELAIDE CAMERON'S "SHADOW LOVE."

By the Author of Dora Thorne.

CHAPTER XLV.
(Continued.)

'You would like to return to Walton Court,' he said, 'and get anything belonging to you? You will not think of living there again?'

Return to where she had suffered? Go back to the place where the will lay with its secret—back to the house of the husband she had disgraced? No, never! She would die a hundred deaths first. She would go far away. She would go where never a familiar face was to be seen—into the world of strangers. She looked at the lawyer. Keen and shrewd as he was, he seemed to become insignificant as the beautiful face with its calm expression of despair was turned toward him.

'You have charged me with theft,' she said. 'I told you I was innocent. I swore to you that I was not guilty. You would not believe me. You have done that which will cloud my whole life and darken it. I will hold no communication with you, I will speak no further word to you; but I pray Heaven to judge you as you have judged me.'

Her voice was calm and passionless, but there was something in the tone which thrilled the very hearts of these present.

Mr. Beale held up his hand with a warning gesture. 'Hush!' he said. 'These are terrible words. I have acted for the best—I have done what I thought right.'

She did not repeat them. Mrs. Grame turned to her. 'I will attend to all your things,' she said. 'If you do not like to return to the Court, I will have them all prepared, and send them to you.'

Margarita made no reply, but her dark eyes lingered for half a minute on the housekeeper's face, leaving in that estimable lady's mind a conviction that she was not considered of the least importance, and then Miss Cameron's companion turned away.

Mr. Layston spoke to her—she did not hear or heed. The door was opened, and she went slowly out. They watched her with an uncomfortable feeling.

'It is hard for her if we have been mistaken,' said Mr. Beale.

'How could any one be mistaken who saw her at the safe?' asked Mrs. Grame, indignantly. 'She is guilty enough, but she has more effrontery than most people.'

In silence Margarita walked out of the house, and, as she passed over the threshold, she said to herself:

'This is my tomb. Here I have left my youth, my love, my hope, my fair name—here the best part of me has been killed.'

She went on through the park without any definite idea as to where she was going. She was beginning to lose the power of connecting her thoughts. The one idea that haunted her was that after this disgrace Lord Rylestone could never own her as his wife.

'I have brought it all upon myself,' she said; 'but I was acting for him.'

The sun was shining now in its full noontide splendor; great clusters of blackberries were on the hedges; the autumn morning was fair and pleasant, but she walked through it without glancing around her. Once she did wonder whether she was going—whether her uncertain, trembling footsteps would lead her; she could not tell. Never would she return to Walton Court, where the beautiful heiress lived who had her husband's money, and who loved him—never would she return there again.

She would walk on, she said to herself, until from sheer fatigue she fell and could walk no further. So she proceeded along through the high road and over the fields, past quiet little homesteads where the rooks were cawing in the trees and the gleaners were busy in the cornfields; and as she walked the burning pain that seemed to hold her head like an iron crown grew worse. Presently a red mist came before her eyes; there was a murmur as of rushing waters in her ears; and then she turned aside from the high-road into a green lane that was in summer filled with wild roses and woodbine. She never remembered very clearly what followed. The earth and sky seemed to meet. She caught at the trunk of a tree, and tried to steady herself, and then she gave a great frightened cry—the shadows of evening were falling, she was all alone, and death

seemed so near—a cry that pierced the silence, and then she fell with her face hidden in a heap of fallen autumn leaves.

When the lawyer and Mrs. Grame returned to the court, dire tribulations awaited them. Miss Cameron was standing up—very pale, proud, and stately. Mr. Beale told the young heiress what he had done, and she overwhelmed him with reproaches. It was in vain that he unlocked the library-door, and showed her the valuable contents of the safe on the floor—she would not hear one word against her companion. She broke out into a most generous defence of Margarita, and then added:

'I am sorry to speak harshly to you, Mr. Beale,' she said; 'but I consider you have taken an unwarrantable liberty. You have presumed upon what you believe to be my inexperience.'

'But, my dear young lady,' cried the lawyer, eagerly. 'Sir!' interrupted Miss Cameron. 'I beg your pardon, my dear Miss Cameron. Pray listen to reason. That young woman was deceiving you.'

'I do not believe it,' said Adelaide. 'Her coming here was only a scheme, a plan to rob you.'

'I do not believe it,' repeated the heiress, scornfully. 'I would rather trust to my womanly instinct than to all the lawyers and detectives in the world; and my instinct tells me that as regards Miss Avenel you have made some terrible mistake.'

'What mistake could I make when I saw her myself on her knees here, the safe opened with the keys she had taken from you, and the jewel cases, money, and other things spread around her? How could I be mistaken when I saw that?'

'I cannot tell how, but I know you are wrong. I love Miss Avenel. I cannot tell what she was doing at the safe—I do not understand why she went there; but I am quite certain it was with no thought of robbing me. You are a poor judge of character, Mr. Beale, if you think Miss Avenel would steal. Anything romantic would suit her highly strung temperament; but, as to robbery, you might as well accuse a butterfly of drawing a plow.'

'What else could I have done when I saw her at the safe?' he asked, humbly.

'You should have sent for me,' said the young heiress, with a burst of pride. 'I am mistress here. I have heard all you have to say, and my answer is that I will stake my life that you are wrong and Miss Avenel is innocent. Again—even if it were not so, even if she had robbed me of all I valued most, I would have spared her because I love her! And the generous heart beat with anger, the sweet voice thrilled with passion.'

'I love her,' continued Miss Cameron. What should you, who have spent your life amongst law books, know of such women? They are beyond your comprehension—grand, passionate, noble women, who could not live in the narrow grooves you would assign them.'

'My dear Miss Cameron, you are too severe. Answer me one question satisfactorily, and I will own that I am wrong. What was she doing at the safe?'

'I do not know—I do not really care. I only repeat and affirm that she was doing nothing wrong. And, Mr. Beale, I think you took a liberty in acting as you have done without my consent.'

'I merely tried to save you from being imposed on,' he returned. 'If you are angry I am sorry for it. I thought that I was doing my duty.'

'I am sure, madam,' interposed Mrs. Grame, 'you were being robbed—imposed upon—and no one could say how it would have ended. I do not think your life would have been safe.'

'That is enough, Mrs. Grame,' said Adelaide, with a scornful laugh. 'I shall not easily forgive you for what you have done. You also have taken a very great liberty.'

'Very well, my lady, since it pleases you to say so, I submit humbly. I am sorry that you should be angry with me. I have served you faithfully and well. My own fault is that I could not stand by in silence to see you robbed.'

The pain in the voice and in the quivering old face touched Adelaide. She could not be angry with her faithful old servant, whose only fault was that she had been over-zealous.

'I forgive you,' she said; 'but you must never repeat the offence.'

'I hope never to have the chance,' she replied, leaving Miss Cameron's presence with much show of dignity.

'You were both blind—worse than mad—to treat Miss Avenel in that fashion,' resumed Miss Cameron, after the housekeeper's departure. 'I must have all possible amends made to her.'

But the opportunity for that never came. Day by day, and night by night, Miss Cameron waited for tidings of Miss Avenel; she made all inquiries, longing for her return; but to the house whence she had been driven as a criminal, Margarita Rylestone returned no more.

(To be continued.)

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J. F. CHISHOLM.

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