

AT WAR WITH HERSELF.

The Story of a Woman's Atonement,
by Charlotte M. Braeme.

CHAPTER XXXII—Continued.

A pleased light broke over his face. "I understand perfectly, darling. I appreciate your delicate consideration for others. It shall be just as you say—my happiness is purchased by another's pain. You accept me, and reject none else—is it so?"

"Yes," she said, in a low voice. "Wait at least three or four months before anything is said about it."

"I will do anything on earth you wish, Leonie. See, I must have some visible sign, known only to myself, that you are mine. I have brought this ring—will you wear it for me? It was my mother's. When she was dying she took it from her finger, and gave it to me. Will you wear it for my sake, and for hers?"

She held out her hand to him, and he wondered that it should be so cold, that it should tremble; he placed the ring upon it, and then held it to his lips.

"Some day—I pray Heaven not far from now—I shall place another ring on this dear hand."

He wondered again that she turned from him with what seemed a shudder. Her eyes lingered on that ring; to her excited fancy it would not have seemed strange if it had suddenly changed into a living serpent, and had turned round hissing to sting her. It had been told to the "other" whose son she had defrauded, whom she had robbed of his birthright. She could never look at it without keen pain.

"Leonie," said Captain Flemings, "although our engagement is to remain a profound secret as yet, you will let me come over to see you often—you will write to me—you will not be cruel, and keep me at a cold distance, as though I were a stranger."

"No, I will not do that," she answered, with white set lips.

"And yet, darling, do you know that I am growing frightened? I fancied your little probation was but to try me. I have never looked at it seriously. I believed that when I came to you to-day you would be all smiles, all sweetness, all gladness. Yet, Leonie, your face is turned from me—you have no word for me. What does it mean? Remember, darling, though I ask the question, I do not doubt you."

His generous trust, his devoted love, smote her as no pain could have done. She had to take this noble heart in her hands and break it; no wonder that her strength failed her, and that, with a long, shuddering sigh, she turned away, burying her face in her hands.

The next moment he was kneeling by her side, his noble face full of deepest anxiety.

"Leonie, what is the matter? What has changed you so utterly? My darling, where have all your brightness, all your gay spirits gone? Let me look at that dear face."

He raised it in his hands, and cried out in surprise, when he saw it.

"Where is your color? Your lips are white as those wild strawberry blossoms. Years, sorrow, and pain have passed over you—what is it, Leonie? Have no fear—tell me all."

"I hate to inflict pain," she said hoarsely, "and I know that I must pain you."

"Why, my darling? I do not see the need."

Her courage and self-command broke down all at once.

"I can not marry you, Bertram—I can never be your wife, and it hurts me to tell you so."

His nose drew very white, and a stern, angry light came into his eyes. "Repeat those words, Leonie! My sweet must surely have played me false—not you."

"I can never be your wife, Bertram; do not be angry with me. If you turn from me in anger I shall die."

"You can never marry me, Leonie! Am I dreaming, or are you? Do you know that you had almost given your promise? Do you know, although you have not said the word yet, that you pledged yourself over and over again with the pledges which a true and loyal woman considers as sacred and as binding as an oath?"

"I know," she said, raising her white, despairing face to his; "but I cannot marry you—I cannot be your wife."

"Will you tell me why?" he asked, and a gleam of hope came to him—it might only be some girlish fancy, after all.

"I cannot tell you that," she repeated, with the same quiet despair.

"Do you know what you are doing to me, Leonie? You are killing me! You would be ten thousand times more merciful if you stabbed me and let me die at once. Do you know that I cannot live without you? Heaven help me, I cannot. My love and my life are so twined together that if I go one of the other goes."

She did not tell them that he had gone with tears in his eyes—tears of earnest, heartfelt happiness; and that he had told her he could not talk "compliments" to other people after his interview with her.

Lady Fanshawe raised her eyes in mild rebuke.

"My dear, Lady Charnleigh, if it were possible to imagine one as charming as yourself could be pettish, I should say you were inclined to be so."

Leonie hastened to Ethel's side.

"Will you forgive me? I spoke without thinking. Have patience with me, Ethel—I am not very happy just now."

"Will you not trust me and tell me why?" said Miss Dacre.

"I do not know why. I am out of spirits—inclined to be cross, not only with every one else, but with myself also."

"Sir Bertram Gordon," announced the footman, who had just received a parting vale from Capt. Flemings, and who, with a grim sense of humor, smiled at the situation.

For one moment Leonie was inclined to give way. She had not expected him so soon, looking as happy and bright as the morning itself, utterly unconscious of the doom that hung over him.

"I have been counting the hours," he said in a low voice to Leonie, "and I really thought to-day would never come."

He looked so bright with the unfold gladness of his heart that Lady Fanshawe bethought herself of something that required attention in the house-keeper's room. Sir Bertram did not even hear the apology she made—he had no eyes or ears save for the lady of his love. Miss Dacre took up a book and wandered away into the cool, pleasant fernery.

"Sir Bertram looks as though he did not want me," she thought with a smile at the situation.

The fernery was very pleasant and the ferns looked cool and refreshing; the waters fell with a soft rippling. The air was laden with sweet subtle odors. Miss Dacre sat down with her book, but she turned no page in it. A sudden chill had come over her. Why should Lady Charnleigh look and speak so strangely? Could it be possible that she cared for Paul Flemings?

"It cannot be possible," she said to herself. "If there be any truth in looks and actions, she loves Bertram Gordon."

To theplash of the falling waters she wove sweet, bright fancies of her own—of the day when this hero, this prince among men, would see her with loving words, and woo her to be his—bright day! fancies of a life that would be spent in mini-tering to him, in looking up to him as the flowers look up to the sun. Would it ever be so? She had loved him so long, so faithfully, that it seemed to her her love must meet with some return—that the very force of her own affection must win something from him. On the night of the ball he had held her hand in his, and had spoken so kindly to her that the girl's heart had overflowed with delight. The music of that falling water, the breath of that warm, sweet wind, helped to fill her mind with fancies melodious and sweet as themselves.

"Leonie," repeated Sir Bertram, "I thought to-day would never come. I have counted the minutes and the hours, yet I have had hope. You have not been trifling with me!"

She stood before him, her colorless

face drooping from his sight, her hands trembling in his strong grasp.

"I want your answer," he said, bending his hands over her Saxon head, over the white hands and kissing them. "I asked you to be my wife, and you told me to come to-day for the reply."

"Let us go out," she said, with a strange stifled gasp; "I cannot speak—I cannot breathe here."

A sense of horrible pain had almost mastered her. How was she to tell him they must part when she loved him so dearly that she would have given her life for him? How could she inflict this anguish upon him when she knew that his life was wrapped up in her?

Silently she passed through the long open passage over the steep lawn, where great clusters of scarlet verbenas shone in the sunshine, past the great sheaves of white lilies and the fragrant roses, past the tall chestnuts, until she came to the grove of blossoming limes. Their tall branches met overhead, and formed a deep shade. The sunshine came through the dense green foliage with a mellowed light such as is seen in the dim cathedral aisles. The turf was thick and velvety; the banks were covered with wild thyme; the whole place was lovely as a fairies' glade. A fal'en tree, over which scarlet creepers had grown, lay half across the path, and on it Leonie sat down, raising her beautiful face to the rippling foliage above her head, then suddenly hiding it in her hands. She had no right even to look at the smiling summer heavens—she who had stolen an inheritance, and was about to barter her love for it.

"I could not breathe in those warm rooms," she said. "How quiet and beautiful it is here."

"Leonie," said Sir Bertram, earnestly, "I am sure that you are no coquette; and you cannot help having many lovers—all fair women are much admired. You are no flirt—you would not lead a man on by kind words and kind smiles until his heart lay under your feet, and then trample upon it."

"No, I would not do that," she answered, with white set lips.

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She looked at him with a smile.

"CHAPTER XXXIV.

"I must know the truth," said Sir Bertram, in a clear firm voice. "You owe it to me. What am I to think of you, when you own that you love, yet refuse to marry me?"

"You must think as you will," she replied, despondingly; "I can only repeat my words—that never, while the sun shines and the birds sing, can I be your wife."

"Did you know this when you lured me on to love you—when you stole my heart from me by the witchery of your beauty, when you let me speak to you of love, and did not chide me? Did you know this then?"

"No reply—but the beautiful face grew more ghastly in its pallor. He peeped over, shook his head, went home and married the cook.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

Deaths Spread by Funeral Flowers.

Two years ago a young lady died in New York of diphtheria, and her remains were sent to her home at Madeline, Dutchess County, for burial. On the casket when it reached the village there were several floral tributes. The flowers composing them were distributed among the children of the Sunday-school class. In this manner the disease was spread through the village and all the neighboring village of Tivoli. It has never been wiped out, two years diphtheria has prevailed. In that vicinity, causing many deaths and of late deaths from the contagion have grown so numerous that the people are alarmed and an effort is being made to wipe out the disease.

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"I am answered," he said, "bitterly. You, Leonie, whom only one short hour since, I looked upon as the very flower of womanhood—you whom I thought more pure than a lily, loyal and true as the angels in heaven—you tell me deliberately that you love me, but have promised to marry another?"

"I will do anything on earth you wish, Leonie. See, I must have some visible sign, known only to myself, that you are mine. I have brought