

# AT WAR WITH HERSELF.

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

CHAPTER XXXIX—Continued.

Leonie wanted to be alone. She felt as though someone had struck her across the face with a whip, and had left a stinging, scarlet brand there.

"A thief!" She, Leonie Rayner, who had been proud of her beauty—who had been fair and pure as the blossoms around her—who had been loyal and true—who had carried herself proudly by right of her innocence and fair fame—who had never known fear or shame, was now neither more nor less than a thief.

They called her Countess of Charnleigh—she was in reality a thief. They praised her; they said that the world was at her feet—that she was graceful, charming, and clever. Before heaven she was a thief. She said the word to herself over and over again, and each time it grew more hateful.

Yet it was perfectly true. She had stolen Paul's title—it was his, not hers. She had stolen his money, his lands, his jewels, his possessions—they were all his, and he who had stolen them.

Then came to her mind the solemn words of that brief commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." Had any one broken that commandment more terribly than she had done? As she stood, her white fingers playing with the rich scarlet blossoms of an Indian plant, a sudden thought came to her.

"Why not own the truth? Why not free herself from this miserable load of sin and treachery that darkened her life and made her wretched? Why not free her soul from its bondage, her heart from its weight of unutterable sorrow? Why not repeat of her sin before Heaven, and give back to Paul Fleming that which was most justly his?"

The very thought of this was a relief to her. Confess all!—give back that which was another's and not hers! free herself from this intolerable shame and anguish—win for herself again the love of heaven—an if she should but do all this!

Could she give up this luxury and magnificence to which she had no title? No, she could not; and with the stain of her sin still deeper on her soul, she went out from among the flowers.

CHAPTER XL.

Monsieur Dudevant had made for himself a great reputation as an artist; his portraits were like life, every one said; and so Monsieur Dudevant had always more work on hand than it was at all likely he could accomplish. It was owing to this pressure of business that the countess given to him long ago by Captain Paul Fleming was still unexecuted—the countess of copying the portrait of Paul's mother, which for so many years had hung in the late Earl of Charnleigh's room.

Leonie would insist upon Paul's accepting the original, but he said "No," he seemed to have some superstitions about the gift. He was grateful to be allowed to have a copy of it, but he never seemed to like the idea of taking it from the place which the late earl's maidens had made sacred. He wrote to Monsieur Dudevant, who placed his name upon the list requiring early attention, and promised to write when his turn came. It was now that the artist wrote, saying that if the picture was sent at once he would attend to it.

Captain Fleming had been summoned on military business to Weldon, where he was expected to remain for some days. He went over himself to Crown Leighton, and most carefully packed the picture. It was sent to Lady Charnleigh, in London, as she had promised to select a new frame for it.

The case containing the picture arrived one morning when the countess was preparing to attend a royal garden-party. She looked superbly beautiful in her cloud-like dress of pale, white, with the faintest suggestion of blue. Her brilliant face was flushed with animation. She was at the pinnacle of glory. She had received a royal invitation, and she knew that there would be few present at that party more admired than herself.

"To think that I should receive an invitation from a queen!" she said to herself. "I who three years since was insulted by servants and despised by schoolgirls—I am invited by the queen of the greatest country in the world. I wonder if her Majesty will have leisure to speak to me, and, if so, I wonder what she will say."

She had been more than usually solicitous about this party.

"Ethel," she said to Miss Dacre, "you have such superb taste in dress, design something for me more elegant than has been seen."

And Miss Dacre did as she was requested, the result being something exquisite.

"Are you satisfied with me?" asked Leonie, simply as a child, when the carriage was announced.

Ethel Dacre, with a sudden warm impulse, kissed the lovely face.

"You look," she said, "just as though you had come out of a white cloud, you are so fairy-like. I hope you will enjoy yourself very much, Lady Charnleigh."

"There is not much fear of that," returned Leonie, with a light laugh.

They remembered that day after day as the last of her bright, brilliant life. She had never looked so lovely, she had never been so greatly admired. The light, ethereal style of dress suited her to perfection, the light, fair-like hat was like a crown on the golden head, the clouds of rich white lace fell gracefully round the perfect figure, and the exquisite lace seemed to rise from them like a blossom from pale leaves.

She had never been so much admired. People said to each other afterward how kindly the royal lady had spoken to the beautiful Countess; prince dukes, and ambassadors paid homage to her. She was queen by right of her beauty and grace; however, a little group of the most eminent men of the day were gathered together, there in the midst was Lady Charnleigh to be seen.

On that day, too—the last of her brilliant reign—she excelled herself in wit and repartee. Her bon mots were repeated on all sides. Great men were away from her smiling, and saying to themselves that Lady Charnleigh was peerless in wit as in beauty. She had never been so successful in society as on this day, which was, in some respects, to her last. Royal princesses were most gracious to her; and one, attracted by her fair face and winsome manner, seemed to have conceived a sudden friendship for her.

Amidst all the homage and adulation, while she was the object of general observation, the queen of the fete, the most admired, while her heart beat high in triumph, while princesses bent before her, Leonie was outwardly calm and self-possessed. The sun shone bright, flowers bloomed, fair faces smiled around her, and the scene was one of splendor and beauty; but the still, small voice she could never stifle made itself heard. She, welcomed by royal lips, flattered by princes, crowned with her own beauty and grace—she was, after all, "a thief."

If they had known it, those great and noble ones who smiled upon her—had they not known that she had robbed a loyal man of his estate and his money, there would have been small mercy for her, their frowning lips would have told another tale.

Once or twice during those sunny, brilliant hours, when she was more quiet, and had fewer people around her, it seemed to her that, far above the sound of the music, the silvery laughter, the murmur of conversation, she heard the hiss of the word "thief."

"Thief! What would they think of her if they knew? How they would shrink from her! All her beauty, her grace, would fail to charm them. She would be scorned, despised—an outcast. Why, her proper place was a felon's dock, and not the grounds of a good and mighty queen."

Then the dark thoughts were all dispelled; a prince was talking to her, and she read admiration in his eyes. He laughed at her wit, he enjoyed himself, and again the spirit of vanity reigned conqueror within. There had never been a greater social success than that of Lady Charnleigh's. As she looked round, feeling herself queen of that brilliant throng, she said to herself:

"It is worth it all. My gifts were given to me that I might reign. They would all have been lost had I remained a poor, obscure governess. Why should I give up that which I know how to hold so well?"

She drove home with the sound of homage and adulation in her ears, triumphant and successful. Ethel Dacre had never seen her in higher spirits.

"There is no need to ask if you have enjoyed yourself, Lady Charnleigh."

"No, indeed, Ethel; I have laughed and talked without ceasing."

"You must be tired," said Ethel.

"No, I am not tired. Of what use is it to be tired? I am going to Lady Bagshawe's concert, and after that to the Countess of Arlington's ball."

Ethel raised her eyes in wonder.

"How you live through it puzzles me."

"How I should live without it would puzzle me still more. Are you going with me to the concert?"

"Yes, I will go. Lady Charnleigh, that picture of Captain Fleming's has arrived, and he has sent me a note asking me, if you are too busy, to attend to it. He wants the picture very carefully removed from the frame and sent to Monsieur Dudevant. Will you do it, or shall I?"

"Do it yourself, by all means, Ethel, if you will. I have neither skill nor patience to be careful over anything."

Miss Dacre was only too delighted. What would please her more than to do anything for Paul? To attend to this request of his was a great happiness to her.

"I will begin at once," she said.

"You had better get one of the servants to help you to take the picture from the frame, Ethel," observed Leonie; "those white hands of yours will never manage it."

"I should not like a servant's hands to touch it," said Ethel, eagerly.

Leonie laughed, and the laugh sounded harsh and unnatural.

"I am thinking in many respects, Ethel," she remarked. "You are so much like Paul. I should never have thought of such a thing. Keep all profane hands from it, my dear, by all means."

Miss Dacre went away to attend to her commission, leaving the countess alone. The laugh died from her lips as Ethel closed the door.

"I wish I were like her!" she cried, "I wish to heaven that I were only one-half so good!"

A man-servant carried the packing-case into the morning-room, and removed the heavy outer covering.

"Do not touch the picture," said Miss Dacre. "I will attend to it myself."

She waited until the man had left the room. Some delicate, womanly, graceful feeling led her to take her first look at this picture alone. It was Paul's mother, and perhaps Ethel guessed how dearly Paul had been loved and cared for. She withdrew the paper that hid the portrait, and gazed long at the sad, beautiful face, so like Paul's.

"Does she know how much I love him?" said the girl to herself. "Does she know that all my life is dark and dreary to me, because he does not care for me?"

She looked long and sadly at the beautiful face, wondering to herself what was the secret of life, why the picture had hung in the Earl's room, and why he had loved it better than he had loved any living woman. Then she carefully took back from the frame, and as she did so it struck her how very loosely it had been placed there—it seemed as though the back had been removed before.

Then she took out the picture, and she did so a folded paper that had been placed between the back of the frame and the portrait fell out. At first she took no notice of it, thinking it had been placed there to protect the canvas, but her eyes falling carelessly on it, she saw that it was covered with writing, which was yellow with age.

She laid the picture down very carefully and took up the paper. She opened it and read it, then paused and read it again, her face grew very white as she did so, her eyes filled with surprise and dread, her lips trembled.

"What does it mean?" said Ethel Dacre. "It frightens me—what does it mean?"

CHAPTER XL.

It was a small, square paper, written closely over, yellow with age and worn at the edges, which had fallen from the portrait of Paul Fleming's mother.

Not one detail escaped the keen, wondering eyes upon it. Ethel Dacre had read and re-read the letter, her wonder growing greater each time. It was addressed to Captain Fleming, and these were the words that filled her with such unutterable astonishment:

"My Dear Paul—You will perhaps wonder that from all those who have equal claims upon me, I have chosen you as my heir. It is not because you are my nearest of kin; there is no nearer than yourself. It is because I loved your mother, Paul. All words are weak to tell you how dearly I loved her. Fraud and treachery parted us when we were young, and since then I have loved no other woman—no other face has ever charmed me so much as your voice has made music in my ears. I have been true to her in life; and I shall be true to her in death; so, I have left you all that I have in this world, because I loved your mother—loved and lost her. You will be a rich man, a great and powerful man; but always remember that your wealth, your rank, and your position come from your mother, not from me. You must be grateful to her, not to me. I have no particular wishes to leave with you; nothing has interested me much since your mother died. Her picture hangs in my room, and no day passes without my looking at it. As age creeps on me, I like to sit and gaze at it, to imagine myself how the face I have loved so well looks among the angels in heaven, and to wonder if, when I am dying, that same sweet face will be by my side."

"The whim seizes me to-day to write this and place it in your mother's pic-

ture. If you never find the letter it will not matter; but I have a belief that, when you—my heir—come home, there will be a new and handsome frame wanted for the picture, and that it will be taken from the quiet room where I have spent many hours, and put in a place of honor, as befits the portrait of the mother of the heir. Then you will meet with this, and you will know that the 'miserable old car' as they called me, spent his time in faithfully loving one woman, and also that you owe all you have to your mother, and not to me. Good-by, and Heaven bless you, Paul Fleming. You will be Earl of Charnleigh when you read this. May heaven grant that you may have a happier life and a happier life than mine!"

ULRIC CHARLEIGH.

Ethel Dacre stood perfectly still with the letter in her hand. What did it mean? The late earl wrote as though he had left a will, which was in favor of Captain Fleming. If so, where was it? Why had it not been found? She was almost stupefied with the disclosure—Paul the true heir, and not Leonie!

Reports from Many Points.

Boreas emulated the belated camel of history Monday morning. He got a hump all records for many a year. The whole country has been swept by a blizzard. Across the entire continent the whooping, howling monster made an impartial and indiscriminate tour, but the storm was most severe after the Pacific air column was re-enforced by another column in Illinois. Starting out beyond the Missouri River it laid embargo on the railway travel in Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota and the Northwest generally. It sent the visitors in the big Hot Springs hotels huddling about the steam radiators, and made the teeth of the Texas cowboys chatter. Its course eastward was marked by snowed-up trains and tangled telegraph wires far into the Middle States. Its center passed along the Ohio Valley, and its terrible force was felt in all the areas within a few hundred miles of that line. The earliest reports came from the large cities. These were struggling in snowdrifts, while the smaller towns were almost completely snowed out.

ELWOOD.

—The most severe storm known in this vicinity for fifteen years. The wind from the northeast reached a velocity of sixty-five miles an hour and was accompanied by a wet and blinding snowstorm. Streetcar traffic was completely paralyzed. John Janeschau, all at the street corner, and when found was covered with snow and died in an hour.

Wind, Snow and Snow in Indiana.

PORTLAND.

—A terrible blizzard has been raging here, the worst for years. Four persons have been killed and all outdoor work is stopped.

CROWN POINT.

—Country roads are blocked in all directions, and it will doubtless be two or three days before farmers can find their way in to town.

ELWOOD.

—The worst blizzard known in this country since 1863. A drop of 20 degrees in temperature caused much suffering among the stock. The east wind blew a hurricane and the air was a perfect mass of flying snow.

INDIANAPOLIS.

—The heaviest storm of sleet and snow which has visited Indiana in a number of years began early in the morning and continued without intermission during the day. Outside of the inconveniences which resulted from impeded traffic on the railroad lines and the difficulties under which business was transacted in this city the damage of the storm was not material. In many sections the snowdrifts were so great the roads impassable, and throughout the northern part of the State the drifts interfered with travel. South and southeast the storm consisted of rain until early next morning, when it began to snow, but the fall is not large.

SOUTHERN IOWA FEELS IT THE MOST.

BRIGHTON.

—Snow has fallen to the depth of about a foot, and has drifted badly. Railway traffic is much impeded.

DUBUQUE.

—The storm at and north-west of Dubuque was comparatively light, and trains from Chicago and St. Louis only were delayed.

WASHINGTON.

—A fearful blizzard has been raging here for twenty hours. All trains on the Rock Island have been abandoned and general business is at a standstill.

GRINNELL.

—A blizzard has been raging here for twenty-four hours, with the snow drifting badly. Trains on the north and south roads are ten hours behind time.

BURLINGTON.

—Snowdrifts are piled high everywhere. Street car traffic is at a standstill and no effort will be made to clear the tracks until the snow is gone. All trains are late.

CEDAR RAPIDS.

—Snow lies on the ground to the depth of six or seven inches, and as a high wind prevails the railroads are badly blocked, especially those from the western part of the State.

DES MOINES.

—The storm abated during the day and was practically over in the evening. The minimum temperature reported was zero at Ottumwa and at other points the thermometers stood at only three degrees below zero. The snowfall in Des Moines was seven inches and at Fonda, in the north of the State, a foot of snow fell.

Then, as she went up the broad staircase of that superb mansion, it suddenly occurred to her that it would be very hard for Leonie to renounce all this state and splendor. Hard, indeed; but then at the call of honor people should be willing to lay down their lives even. She inquired were Lady Charnleigh was, and Florette told her that she was in her own room. Ethel went thither.

TO BE CONTINUED.

EARLY IN THE MORNING.

How a Man Minded His Own Business Secured Economic Success.

"I am an old story, boys," said the speaker, "but I may suggest an idea in these hard times, when many men are out of work, and rich men who would like to help them do not know how to go about it. Stephen Girard, the philanthropist, was a man who admired industry at strongly as he did tested laziness. Early one morning, while the millionaire was walking around the square, near his residence, a man named John Smith, who had worked on Girard's fine buildings as a laborer, applied to him for assistance.

"Assistance—work—ha? You want to work?"

"Yes, sir; it's a long time since I've had anything to do."

"Very well, I shall give you some. You see dem stone yondar?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; you shall fetch and put them in this place. You see?"

"Yes, sir."

"And when you done, come to me at my bank."

Smith diligently performed his task, which he accomplished by o'clock, when he reported to Mr. Girard and informed him that it was finished, at the same time asking him if he would give him something more to do.

"Ah, ha! you all need more work?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. How much money shall I give