

# AGAINST THE LAW.

A NOVEL.

BY DORA RUSSELL.

Author of "The Vicar's Governess," "Footprints in the Snow," "The Silver Link," &c., &c

## CHAPTER IX.

### BINGLEY'S VISIT.

The small handmaid's account of poor Laura Keane's state when William Glynford called at the house was strictly true.

She had, indeed, returned home in a state pitiable to behold. And what made it more sad was that both her mother and Maud had been indulging in very bright dreams for her future during her absence.

Maud had gone up to Mrs. Keane's room, and, unable to control her excitement, had (girl-like) began talking to her mother of Mr. Glynford's visit the night before, telling her how handsome he was, how kind he looked, and that Laura said he was well off; and finally, more than hinting that she was sure that he was in love with Laura!

This last piece of information threw Mrs. Keane into as great a state of excitement as Maud. She insisted upon getting up, and, for once, was neatly dressed and all right when they saw Laura returning.

But who was with her?

"That is not Mr. Glynford, I am certain," said Maud.

"If it is Mr. Glynford, he is certainly not handsome," answered Mrs. Keane, critically regarding the gentleman with Laura over the window-blinds.

She saw a middle-aged, somewhat coarse-looking man, with reddish-gray hair, and a reddish skin. She saw this middle-aged, coarse-looking man glancing with an amount of familiarity and admiration at Laura, which certainly seemed to indicate that they were not strangers to each other, and she saw them part.

Bingley shook hands with Laura, and said, apparently, a few emphatic words, and then Laura entered the house.

"Who is that gentleman, Laura?" asked Mrs. Keane, going to the dining-room door as her young daughter passed it.

But Laura made no answer. She was pale, and showed such signs of agitation that her mother grew suddenly alarmed.

"What is the matter, my dear?" she said, taking Laura by the arm, and drawing her into the room; and as her mother spoke, with a loud cry the poor girl fell down upon the floor.

A fearful scene followed. Laura's whole frame trembled so violently that neither her mother nor Maud could hold her.

"Oh, if I could die!—if I could only die!" she kept repeating; and Mrs. Keane and Maud looked at each other in absolute dismay.

With the greatest difficulty at last they succeeded in getting her up stairs. Scarcely had they done this when William Glynford's ring at the outer door sounded through the house, and a minute or two later the little handmaid brought his card into the room, and gave it to Maud.

"It is Mr. Glynford, Laura, dear!" whispered Maud, bending down over her prostrate sister. Then Laura opened her swollen and tear-stained eyelids.

"It is all over, Maud!" she said. "He—he never now can be anything to me!"

Maud did not speak. Poor Laura, in her hysterical agony, had betrayed more than her young sister even had suspected.

Laura had cared for this good-looking man, then, thought Maud, sadly, and something had come between them.

But Maud, who was romantic, with her brain much filled with the imaginary sorrows of lovers, which almost invariably cleared up before the end of their life histories, was by no means hopeless about Laura's case.

"Something, or some one had parted them," decided the young sister, as she sat watching poor, suffering Laura. "All may come right in the end."

Another visitor arrived, and inquired for Laura, before the day was over, and this was Mr. Bingley. He expressed, and felt, some sorrow when he heard from the same handmaid that Miss Keane was seriously ill, and he then asked if he could see her mother.

The little maiden demurred. Alas! by this time Mrs. Keane was not fit to be seen. Laura's sudden illness, and the shock that it had given her, was the excuse upon this occasion.

But it was always the same thing.

"You can see Miss Maud, perhaps, if it's anything very particular," said the young servant, deviously looking at Bingley.

"Yes; it was something very particular," he answered; and so he was ushered into the shabby drawing-room, and presently Maud made her appearance.

It did not startle him. He had heard, as well as William Glynford, from the landlord of the village inn, of the "poor bit deformed lassie," of Mrs. Keane's weakness, of their debts and their difficulties, and of how Miss Laura had only got the bailiffs out of the house on

Christmas Eve by paying away all her salary and giving a bond for the rest.

"Who put in the bailiffs?" asked Bingley.

"Johnson, the grocer," answered the landlord with alacrity; "and, I think, at that time of the year, when we're all supposed to have a little bit of charity one to the other, it said very little for him. For my part, I like my just debts paid as well as any man," continued the landlord; "but before I'd take the hard earnings of a young lassie like that, and get her pledge to pay the rest on black and white, I'd eat my shoes!"

Bingley applauded this chivalrous sentiment, and commanded the landlord to bring forth a bottle of the best wine, which the two men discussed together, discoursing principally at the same time about the Keanes.

Bingley knew all about the family after that bottle of wine; knew about the kindly doctor dying broken-hearted, seeing his wife's maudlin looks during the whole of his last bitter illness.

What Bingley heard from the landlord also convinced him of the truth of Laura's story regarding the marked notes. He knew now why the girl had paid them away even after his emphatic warning to her at Farnham not to do so. She had ventured under cruelly pressing circumstances; and now, when Bingley knew, he felt a yet stronger interest in the pretty girl who had fallen so strangely into his power.

So he went to call upon her during the afternoon, and heard with some sorrow, perhaps even a little contrition, that Miss Laura Keane was seriously ill. Then he asked to see Maud, and presently the poor girl appeared before him. "I regret to hear that your sister is ill, Miss Maud," began Mr. Bingley. "I wished particularly to see her; but I suppose I can't."

"No, sir, you cannot," answered Maud, looking distastefully at Bingley's ordinary visage.

"Very sorry she is ill," again said Bingley. "hope it's nothing serious. Had the pleasure of seeing her this morning. Seemed all right then."

Bingley jerked these sentences out rather nervously. He was conscious that Maud's large, thoughtful eyes were fixed upon him disapprovingly.

Maud had not Laura's gentle ways nor gentle manner. She was more passionate, more characteristic; and her likes and dislikes were very apparent. She had taken a dislike to Bingley, and did not trouble herself to disguise this.

"Perhaps you don't know who I am, young lady?" continued Bingley.

"No, I do not," said Maud.

"I am Mr. Bingley, of Farnham," said he, with some of the pomposity of wealth. "Your sister is my sister's governess—Mrs. Glynford, of Bridgenorth House, Farnham—and that's how I know Miss Keane."

"Oh!" said Maud, contemptuously. "Then," she added, "you know Mr. William Glynford, of course?"

"Yes, of course," said Bingley. "What about him?"

"I've seen him, that's all," replied Maud, cautiously.

"Yes, I know," said Bingley, with a laugh. "He's been here, hasn't he? And what do you think of him?"

"He is a gentleman," said Maud; and her tone conveyed to Bingley's ears the thought that was in her mind. She could have said no words more bitter.

Bingley was rich; but he was not a gentleman, and Bingley hated the very name of Glynford. His sister all but ignored his existence, and William Glynford gave him a careless, indifferent nod when they met in the street; and yet Bingley considered himself as good as any Glynford who ever was born.

"Humph!" said Bingley; "so you think a great deal of what you call a gentleman, do you? And perhaps your sister does also?"

"Of course she does," said Maud. "Papa was a gentleman."

"If you call a poor, half-starved country doctor one!" answered Bingley, with a coarse laugh.

Maud turned scarlet at these words. Then she looked defiantly at the man before her. "You are not a gentleman, at any rate," she said; "and I will tell Laura never to speak to you any more."

Again Bingley laughed. "That would be of no use," he said, significantly. "Miss Laura and I have some secrets between us."

"I do not believe it," said Maud, proudly.

"Give her my message, at any rate, little miss," continued Bingley. "Tell her I am very sorry to learn that she is ill, and that she needn't fret about what she heard this morning, for I shall make it all right. And tell her I will call upon her to-morrow morning at twelve o'clock. And now, my young lady, good morning." And Bingley took up his hat and quitted the room, leaving the sensitive Maud trembling with passion.

## CHAPTER X.

### AT SEATON-BY-THE-SEA.

She was so angry that she dared not go near Laura until she had grown cooler, lest she should again excite her sister. But when she did go, and did give Laura Mr. Bingley's message without any comment, Laura took it very quietly.

"It was kind of him to call," she said. "I will see him to-morrow."

Maud bit her lips to keep back the indignant words that were rising on her tongue.

"Do you know him well, Laura?" was all she said.

"No," answered Laura, lying back wearily, and Maud compelled herself to be silent.

But the next morning, when Laura was better, Maud did speak to her.

"Laura," she said, "Mrs. Glynford could not have been a lady, I suppose, as Mr. Bingley is her brother?"

"She is not very refined, Maud," answered Laura, with a sad smile: "neither are many others who call themselves ladies."

"He is horrid!" said Maud, decidedly. "I would have nothing to do with him if I were you, Laura!"

At twelve o'clock Mr. Bingley called, and Laura immediately went into the drawing-room to receive him.

He was standing hat in hand as she entered, looking around at the shabby furniture, and thinking how poor the Keanes must be, and how differently his own house was supplied. Then, when Laura went in, he thought how fair she was, how ladylike and gentle, and how well she would look in a handsome house, and with handsome dresses to yet further adorn her.

And so he made up his mind. He would ask this young girl to share his widowed hearth, but there was no occasion that he should put her in the house over the "establishment," as he always called it in Front street, Farnham.

No! he would have a villa outside the town, he decided, and would hold his head as high as the Glynfords any day. For Bingley was richer than William Glynford, he told himself—and was not going to put up with his sister's absurd airs of superiority any longer.

"I am glad you are well enough to see me," he said, warmly shaking Laura's chill little hand. "I got a fright, yesterday, I can tell you, when I heard you were ill, and I was vexed with myself for not breaking that disagreeable affair to you more gradually. However, don't you fret about it any more. Money does a lot of things, and it won't fail to make a detective shut up. You get well, and come back to Farnham, and I'll engage you'll never hear anything more of these confounded notes."

"You are very good," faltered Laura.

"I don't say I'm good," cried Bingley; "but when I like a girl, I'll do my best to help her. That little miss of a sister of yours, by-the-bye, was not over polite to me yesterday. What a little spitfire she is, to be sure; but I've noticed that all deformed people are spiteful. I go a great deal by a girl's looks, and I like 'em straight and tall."

Bingley looked admiringly at Laura as he said this, and intended her to understand that he admired her. The poor girl grew a shade paler as she noticed this. But she was afraid of Bingley, and dare give no further sign of her aversion.

"And there's another thing, Miss Laura," he continued, "that I meant to say to you. Come, sit down, and let's have a little comfortable talk together. In a place like this—a gossiping little place, you know—one picks up bits of news, and I've heard one or two things about you and your family."

Laura looked up quickly, and blushed.

"I—I—hope that you will repeat nothing that you have heard here at Farnham, Mr. Bingley," she said.

"You mean to Mrs. Glynford?" answered Bingley. "Not I—I'm not so fond of her, for that matter; and another thing, I want you to seem all right and on the square there, at any rate! No, what I mean is (you mustn't be offended), but I've heard about an agreement you've made with Johnson, the grocer here, to pay the rest of your mother's account out of your next half-year's salary. Now, I don't want you to have this hanging over you, and pinching you so that you can't be properly dressed, and all that kind of thing. So what I am going to propose is that I settle with Johnson for you, and get this agreement back from the fellow at once."

"Oh, Mr. Bingley," said Laura, her cheeks now crimson, "you must not do that!—I cannot allow you to do that!"

"Why not?" said Bingley. "The money is of no consequence to me, and I'd much rather pay it than think of you fretting and bothering over a paltry sum. And, besides, Miss Laura," he added, with an attempt at facetiousness, "you must not forget that you are my debtor already, and I shall have to pay a good deal more than this grocer's bill for your sake, as it is!"

"I—I know," said Laura, bitterly humiliated; "but please do not interfere in this matter, Mr. Bingley. I don't care about dress now—I have plenty of things to wear—and I can easily pay this man out of my salary."

"Well, we'll see about it," said Bingley.

"So Mr. William Glynford is gone, is he?"

"I do not know," answered Laura, and again she flushed crimson. "I have not seen him." Bingley saw that blush, and did not like it. A vague jealousy passed through his mind at that moment, but the next he smiled contentedly. He had this pretty girl too fast, he

thought, to be afraid. He meant to marry her, and would marry her, and so he need not disturb himself about Mr. William Glynford.

"I have come to the conclusion," he continued, presently, "that I had best go to London myself about this affair of the notes, and arrange things on the quiet without any go-between. I mean to start this afternoon, and I'll write and tell you how I succeed. In the meantime, as I said before, don't you be afraid. Every man has his price, they say, and I'm going to buy my detective."

And Mr. Bingley laughed aloud, well pleased with his own wit.

He remained a few minutes longer after this; and finally took his departure, after pressing Laura's hand.

"You trust me!" he said, again looking admiringly on the girl.

Yes, he had made a good bargain, he was thinking; this pretty young lady was worth paying heavily for!

## CHAPTER XI.

### RECALLED TO FARNHAM.

Bingley left Seaton-by-the-Sea well satisfied with his visit.

Half an hour after he was gone a note was handed to Laura from Johnson, the grocer. It was couched in the humblest and most apologetic of terms.

"The unprecedented depression of trade alone had induced him," and so on, to trouble Mrs. Keane's respected family by applying for their little account. He begged Miss Keane would, therefore, excuse him, and had great pleasure in returning the little friendly agreement which had been exchanged between them. He also enclosed a receipt for Mrs. Keane's whole account, which had been settled that afternoon by Miss Keane's respected friend, Mr. Bingley, of Farnham; and Johnson concluded his epistle by begging for Mrs. Keane's future patronage, and enclosed a list of new groceries, &c.

Laura flung this letter down.

"How dare he do this?" she thought. And then moaned, "Alas! he dare do anything!" She was in his power, and was helpless in his hands.

But it was very bitter to her, recalling as she did William Glynford's looks and words; the thought of the bright and happy future which might, perhaps, have been hers if she had not yielded to the miserable temptation which had brought such cruel punishment upon her.

And what would William Glynford think?

He had not thought unkindly, that was clear, for the night's post brought her a letter from him.

She read and kissed the following lines:

"My Dear Miss Keane,—

"I heard with deep regret that you were ill yesterday when I called, and I am going to take the privilege of an old friend, and write to-day to inquire how you are. Besides, I have not forgotten our conversation about your clever young sister Maud. I called, indeed, for the purpose of asking you to give me some of her writings to carry away with me, and I am now going to ask you to forward them to me. I will consult a publisher that I know in town about them; and you can assure her from me that I shall do everything in my power to advance her interests. When you return to Farnham, I hope to have some news for you to communicate to her, and meanwhile she must, as we say in the North, 'keep up her heart.'"

"And now, dear Miss Keane, I am going to approach a yet more delicate subject, and you must pardon me if I do it awkwardly. I noticed that you seemed annoyed yesterday when we so unexpectedly met Mr. Bingley. He is, as no doubt you are aware, a connection of my uncle's by marriage, and therefore I know something of him, and that something is not altogether favourable. It struck me afterwards, therefore, that in some way or other he may have attempted to annoy you, and I shall be so glad if I can be of service to you in any way. Please treat me as a friend, and believe that nothing will give me greater pleasure than to assist you. You have lost your father, and have a young invalid sister, and must necessarily have many cares; and if I can, I hope that you will allow me to lighten them."

"Yours very sincerely,  
"WILLIAM GLYNFORD."

All the night after she had received it, this letter lay on Laura's pillow; and in the morning, when Maud went to her, the letter was lying under her soft, fair cheek.

Maud, however, made no remark, pretending not to see Laura hastily grasp her letter, and hide it; but presently, while she was dressing, Laura told the news that William Glynford's letter contained regarding Maud's writings.

Only those who have toiled and waited almost without hope, as this poor child had done, can understand her feelings.

Her delicate cheeks flushed crimson, and she seemed to taste the (to her) intoxicating draught of fame.

Alas! she knew not that this draught is mostly drunk by those whose hearts are too sorrowful and world-worn really to enjoy it. Fame rarely decks the threshold of a life, but chiefly comes when the mellow, autumnal hue falls softly upon the furrowed brow and on the wise, sad heart.

But to Maud, the immature and passionate child of genius, this seemed impossible. Her