

AGAINST THE LAW.

A NOVEL.

BY DORA RUSSELL.

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

3c., 5c.

CHAPTER V.

HOPE.

The next day was Christmas Day. All over the land the bells were ringing, and kindly words and greetings were exchanged on every side. But, still, in many a household care either lingered on the threshold, or sat as a guest at the Christmas board.

Beneath the roof of the old gray stone house at Seaton-by-the-Sea care reigned paramount.

Mrs. Keane was too ill to appear down stairs, and the young girls, therefore, ate their Christmas dinner alone.

This day Laura seemed the most depressed of the two.

The gifted child Maud—for she was but a child—had seen in the dawn of the Christmas morning an ideal of beauty, which one day she believed that all the world would behold when her pen had made her glorious visions live.

So there was a flush on her thin cheeks and a light in the large, big-pupiled eyes; for she was dreaming of days to come, and of fame, as has done many a young dreamer before her.

"We may not always be poor," she said. "Fancy, Laura, if—if one day people should come here, and look at this little room, and talk about us, and say how poor we were once—before I was known!"

Laura tried to smile.

"I hope it may be so," she said.

"It must—it must be!" said the poor cripple, starting up, and beginning to pace the room with her halting steps. "Laura, I know that I am clever—I know it by comparing mine with the writings of others. There are giants and pigmies; I shall try to reach the height of the giants!"

Alas! as the poor child spoke, her frail physical powers were too painfully evident to her sister. The giants to whose height she aspired must have had more vigorous frames and stronger nerves than this young struggler, or they never could have climbed so high. She was not fitted for the toil, the aching hand, the weary brain, the long, long journey before the goal was won. But she did not realize this. Longing like a young bird, to fly, she did not know her pinions were too weak to carry her through the storm.

So she talked to Laura of her glowing dreams and hopes, and thus the day passed quietly, and to Laura very sadly, away. And the next few days also were very quiet. Maud was busy with her pen, and Mrs. Keane was really too ill to make any particular disturbance.

But on the third day after Christmas, as the girls were sitting together over the fire in the early winter twilight, a visitor arrived at the old stone house.

They heard the door bell ring, and looked at each other uneasily.

"Some one wanting money, of course!" said Maud, impatiently.

But the next minute their little handmaiden rapped at the room door, and made some inarticulate sounds, but finally succeeded in uttering in Mr. William Glynnford's name.

Laura rose, flushed and nervous, to receive him.

Mr. Glynnford was also rather nervous, but he held out his hand, with a kind, glad smile.

"I've found my way, you see, to Seaton-by-the-Sea," he said.

"I—I am very glad," said Laura. "This is my sister, Mr. Glynnford—my sister Maud."

Again William Glynnford held out his hand.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance," he said. "And now, Miss Keane, tell me—(and he turned to Laura)—what kind of Christmas have you had?"

"Very quiet," answered Laura, in somewhat faltering accents. "My mother is ill—and we were alone."

"I dined at Bridgenorth House, of course," said William Glynnford, "and fared sumptuously, you may be sure. My good aunt a little overdid it, I thought; but then she generally does err in that way."

Laura laughed uneasily.

All this time Maud had sat with her gaze fixed on William Glynnford.

She had never seen any one like him before. The few visitors who had come to Seaton-by-the-Sea in the summer time were mostly stout, prosy, family men, who went down in the early morning to bathe, and came back looking very red, self-satisfied, and consequential.

But William Glynnford was neither stout, red, nor consequential. He was, in fact, a good-looking, gentlemanly man; but, to poor Maud, he was something wonderful, and she instantly determined to sketch the features of her favourite hero.

"And you live here?" he said, looking at Maud very gently and compassionately—for he had at once observed her deformity.

"Yes," she answered, shyly.

"And you missed your sister very much, I fear," he continued, "when she left home."

"Yes," again said Maud; and then, with sudden courage, she asked, "Have you known Laura long—all the time she has been away?"

"Very nearly, I think," answered Mr. Glynnford, smiling, and looking at Laura. "We became friends very quickly; did we not, Miss Keane?"

"Yes," answered Laura, softly; and her head fell low, and as the fire-light glanced on her fair features, Mr. Glynnford saw that she was blushing deeply.

He remained about an hour, and before he left told the girls that he was going to remain all night at Seaton-by-the-Sea.

"I shall see you in the morning, I hope," he said, rather significantly, to Laura. "May I ask at what time you usually walk?"

"Oh, any time," said Laura; and again she blushed.

"Any time is no time," said Mr. Glynnford, smiling. "Suppose, therefore, you tell me at what time you will appear to-morrow morning, and where?"

"Perhaps you would like to see the sands?" said Laura, in her pretty, modest way. "If you will go down on the sands about eleven—"

"Very well," said Mr. Glynnford; "I shall go down on the sands about eleven, and you must kindly point out their beauties to me. It is settled, then; you will meet me on the sands at eleven!"

"Yes," half-whispered Laura, and her breath came fast.

Maud had listened to this arrangement with considerable astonishment. Then she looked at Laura and Mr. Glynnford, and drew her own conclusions.

"Laura," she said, grasping her sister's hand as soon as their guest had left, "is he your lover?"

"Nonsense, Maud!" answered Laura; "he is a friend of mine—he is the nephew of Mr. Glynnford with whom I live, you know, at Bridgenorth House."

"Is he rich?" again questioned Maud.

"I believe he is very well off," said Laura, smiling.

"You are a lucky girl, then," said poor Maud, and for a moment gave an envious sigh. "He is so handsome; he is like what I shall make my Jasper in my new story. I did mean to make Jasper darker; but now I'll make him with brown hair and whiskers like Mr. Glynnford. Oh, Laura, if you marry him!"

"Yes, it," said Laura, still smiling happily; "but its ands, you know, Maud, are very precarious!"

"Then we should be no longer poor," said Maud. "Then, perhaps, he would help me to become known."

CHAPTER VI.

BY THE SEA.

Laura Keane scarcely slept the whole night after William Glynnford's visit. And Maud also was very restless.

Though Laura would not admit it, she, like her sister, hoped that brighter days were in store for them, and almost persuaded herself that Mr. Glynnford had had a particular purpose in coming to Seaton-by-the-Sea.

So the girl lay restless, but full of hope. And her reflections were not altogether selfish. Again and again she thought of Maud—how she would cheer and brighten this hitherto cheerless life—how the child should have her books published, and how all her bright dreams and visions might be made to come true.

Once during the night she rose and kissed her pale young sister, on whom the moonlight was falling.

"I can't sleep," she said, as if half-apologizing for this act of affection. "I wish the morning would come!"

"So do I," said Maud. "I wish to-morrow were here."

To-morrow seemed to come very slowly. A thick fog from the sea made the night even darker than usual, but about eight o'clock a rosy colouring began to penetrate the white mist, and presently like smoke it vanished before the rays of the rising sun.

"It's going to be a fine day!" cried Maud, joyfully. "Oh, Laura, I trust and hope it will be a happy day for us!"

Laura did not speak. She was nervous and agitated, and could scarcely pour out the tea at breakfast; and when she went up to her mother's room, even Mrs. Keane noticed her manner.

"What is the matter with you, Sissy?" she said. "Your cheeks are flushed, and your hands are trembling. Who was the gentleman that called last night? I hope you told him I was indisposed?"

"Yes, mamma," answered Laura.

"And who was he, my dear?" again asked Mrs. Keane.

"He is Mr. Glynnford's nephew, mamma—Mr. William Glynnford," hesitated Laura.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Keane, with fresh interest.

"The Glynnfords are rich, are they not, Sissy? Is this young gentleman well off?"

"I really do not know, mamma," said Laura, in an annoyed tone.

"Because, my dear," continued Mrs. Keane, whose delicacy of feeling had passed away long ago, "it would be such a good thing for us all if you could get well married! Don't think too much about love, Sissy—love is all very fine, but money is better; and if this young gentleman is rich—"

"Oh, mamma, don't talk in such a way!" interrupted Laura; and left her mother.

How could she expect that Mr. Glynnford, when she had such a mother, would think of her, when she would bring him such a degrading connection!

But this painful thought had faded somewhat from the young girl's mind by the time that the clock had struck eleven. At this hour she was standing before the dim little looking-glass in her bedroom, carefully arranging her hat and jacket, and nervously preparing to go out to meet Mr. William Glynnford on the sands.

Maud came into the room when she was doing this, and went up and kissed her sister, but said nothing. Still Laura understood what the poor child meant, and returned the little kiss very tenderly.

"But you mustn't take any nonsense into your head, dear," said Laura, smilingly, and trying to speak lightly. "Mr. Glynnford is only a friend, and has no intention of being more. And, indeed, you must not think—"

"I'll not think anything," interrupted Maud; "but do go, Laura, or you will be late, and will not see Mr. Glynnford."

"Very well," said Laura; and, a few minutes later, was on the road to the sands.

The sun was now shining on the sea, and each wavelet that broke upon the shore was crowned with a golden glory of its own.

A beautiful sight this; but the girl hurried on, scarcely noticing it, for, in the distance, she saw a solitary figure, which her beating heart seemed to tell her was Mr. Glynnford.

The solitary figure was standing close to the sea, apparently watching the waves break one after the other at his feet.

It was Mr. Glynnford, Laura was sure; though he was in reality too far off for her to recognize him.

But, as she stood a moment hesitating, the solitary figure looked round, and then began walking rapidly towards her, and, four or five minutes later, Laura and Mr. William Glynnford had met.

They were mutually embarrassed.

William Glynnford liked Laura too much to feel quite at his ease with her under the circumstances, and Laura naturally felt very nervous.

"I did not know whether to call for you or not," began William Glynnford; "but I thought, that as Mrs. Keane is ill—"

"Mamma is better to-day," said Laura, as Mr. Glynnford hesitated.

"I am glad of that," he answered, gravely and kindly, looking with a certain amount of tender pity at the fair girl before him.

For he had heard all about the terrible family misfortune attached to this young girl's name.

His aunt at Farnham had told him long ago that Miss Keane's mother was a drunkard, and that the young governess sent all her money home to support this unhappy woman.

And since he had been at Seaton-by-the-Sea he had heard still more.

In a little place like this in the winter season a visitor was so unusual that the landlord of the village inn, where William Glynnford was staying, had, on the evening before, felt that it was his duty to go up-stairs and try to amuse his guest.

"And so you know the Keanes, sir?" said the landlord, after some preparatory remarks.

"I know the young ladies," answered Mr. Glynnford, not particularly relishing this familiarity on the part of his host.

"Ay, it's a sad thing for them!" said the landlord, shaking his head. "And the doctor was a perfect gentleman! But it's just fallen like a curse upon them all!"

"You mean—" said William Glynnford, uneasily.

"The old lady's love of the bottle! Ay, she's a good friend of us publicans! They do say she'd let you bit deformed lassie starve rather than do without her drink!"

Glynnford said nothing, and the publican talked on.

"They've had the bailiffs in, and no end of trouble this week, I'm told; and Miss Laura, the one that's the governess somewhere in the north, had to pay all her salary away, poor lass, and give a bond for the balance then left to get the man out on Christmas Eve! Ay! ay! it's a sad business; and she's a bonny lass, too; but who would wed her out of such a home?"

Again William Glynnford moved uneasily, for the landlord's words were making a very painful impression on his mind, and he began almost to wish that he had not come to Seaton-by-the-Sea.

CHAPTER VII.

ABOUT THE NOTES.

The next morning things appeared to William Glynnford in a very different light indeed.

At all events, he had promised to meet Laura

Keane on the sands at eleven o'clock, and was bound in honour to keep his word.

And when he did meet her—when he saw the fair and gentle girl whom he admired so much looking a little pale, a little nervous and anxious,—great pity and tenderness for her seemed suddenly to flood his heart.

William Glynnford was a generous, large-minded man; and when he looked at the young girl, and thought of her sorrowful fate and care-hardened home, he remembered, with no small satisfaction, that he was in a position to offer her a very different one.

So he spoke very kindly to her, and Laura brightened under the influence of his pleasant words.

"And, Mr. Glynnford," she said presently, smiling, and looking up, "I have not thanked you yet for your beautiful Christmas-box." And she put her hand as she spoke to her throat, where the gold locket he had given her lay hidden beneath her collar. "It—it was so kind of you, but it was far too good for a Christmas-box."

"I am glad that you liked it," said William Glynnford.

"I could not help liking it," answered Laura, softly; "and," she added, a moment later, "no one, I do assure you, has given me a Christmas-box since my poor father died until now!"

"He was a great loss to you?" said William Glynnford, looking at her inquiringly.

Laura's lips quivered.

"I—I cannot speak of it even yet," she said.

"It was indeed a heavy affliction to us!"

"And your young sister," continued William Glynnford; "it must be very sad for her, your going from home!"

"All her life is sad!" said Laura, mournfully; "and she is so clever, and so sensitive, and feels everything so deeply; and—and the sad accident which happened to her when she was a child makes her so unhappy!"

"Then she was not born with this defect?" asked Mr. Glynnford.

"No; she fell from my mother's arms," answered Laura, with unconscious bitterness.

"Poor girl!" said Mr. Glynnford. "But I am sure she has one friend," he added, looking at Laura; "one friend who will, and does, try to lighten her burdens. I am sure you are always kind to her!"

"I try to be," said Laura; "but—but I can do very little!"

"You must hope for better times," said William Glynnford, cheerfully. "Some day you may be able to do a great deal to help this young sister in every way, and I am sure that you will do it!"

Laura felt that she blushed, and that her heart was beating very fast.

"For the present," went on Mr. Glynnford, in his kind way, "is there anything that I can do for her?"

Laura blushed still more deeply, and hesitated.

She knew what was the poor child's dream; what was her passionate hope. She desired to be famous; would not accept the common lot of her sisterhood, and live and die as do most women.

The restless spirit in the stunted frame aspired to take its place among the great ones of the earth, and was ready to enter the arena, even before she had tried her strength.

"She writes," began Laura—"spends all her time in writing; and, of course, is very anxious to have her works published. Would you be so very kind, Mr. Glynnford, as to read over some of her little pieces, and if you should think that they are good for anything—"

Mr. Glynnford smiled kindly as Laura paused.

"Of course, I will gladly do this," he said, "though I am not much of a judge. But if Miss Maud will entrust some of her writings to me, I will read them, and I know a publisher in town that I think I could manage to make arrangements with about having them published."

"Oh, how good you are!" said Laura.

And the girl's voice faltered and broke, and her tears were ready to flow.

"If you knew," she continued, "all the joy that you are giving her, all the joy you are affording me—"

William Glynnford was greatly moved, and put out his hand, and took Laura's.

"What nonsense!" he said, rather huskily. "Think not of it. Some day, Laura, I—I hope to see much more of you. Some day—"

As the words were actually trembling on his lips to ask her to be his wife, William Glynnford, glancing nervously along the sands before them, perceived a figure approaching—the figure of a person he recognized—of a Farnham man—of, in fact, Mr. Bingley, the draper, in Front street, and the brother of his uncle's wife.

"Why, confound him! here's Bingley, from Farnham!" muttered Mr. Glynnford, in a changed and annoyed voice.

And Laura, blushing, trembling, agitated, started violently when she heard that hateful name.

Yes; there he came walking towards them, with a sort of sneer curling round the corners of his coarse mouth, and a knowing and not very pleasant look in his shrewd, small eyes. He also felt very much amazed at finding a Farnham man on the sands of Seaton-by-the-Sea.

He had come to the village on a little private business of his own, and did not care that Mr. William Glynnford should know anything about it.

But there was no help for it.

Though in a different social position, the two Farnham men were, of course, acquainted with