

AGAINST THE LAW.

A NOVEL.

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CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

"Very well; and your address is?"

"I still do not see why I should give you my address, Mr. Bingley."

"I may have reason to write to you about these notes," said Mr. Bingley. "You had better give me your address—better make a friend of me." And again Mr. Bingley gave a little laugh.

"My mother lives at a village they call Seaton-by-the-Sea," said Miss Keane after a moment's thought. "A letter addressed to 'Miss Keane, Seaton-by-the-Sea, Southlandshire,' will reach me."

Mr. Bingley took down the address very carefully.

"Thank you," he said, after he had finished. "Well," he continued, looking at the pretty agitated girl before him, "and how do you and my sister get on?"

"Oh, very well, I think," replied the governess.

"That means, I suppose, young lady, that you are forced to put up with her?" laughed the widower. "She's not, and never was, an over-amiably person, my sister Maria. She was a pretty girl, but she's got fat and coarse now, and thinks with her money and her carriages she can ride over every one, but she's mistaken."

Mr. Bingley, having thus frankly stated his opinion of his sister, told up the three five pound notes which Miss Keane had brought with her into the shop, and prepared to lock them away in his desk. But the governess made another effort to get them back.

"If it does not make any matter to you, Mr. Bingley," she said, "if you will wait, I would much rather, please, have those notes again, and pay your account when I come back."

"But I would much rather keep them, please," said Mr. Bingley. "All right, young lady—don't you be afraid; I won't do anything about them without giving you due notice. There, they are safe now!" And Mr. Bingley locked his desk, in which he had placed the notes, and which also contained the paper which he had referred to when he first saw them.

Miss Keane gave something between a gasp and a sigh when she heard the lock turn.

"Then you will let me know," she said, "if you hear anything about those notes, and not speak to any one else till you have told me?"

"Exactly!" answered Bingley. "I'll let you know first; in the meantime, you can trust me; and now good-morning." And he boldly held out his large, red, coarse hand.

For a moment the poor young governess hesitated, and then timidly put her hand into his.

"Good morning," she said; "I hope you will find the notes all right."

Once more Bingley laughed.

"I hope so," he said. "But take my advice, young lady; if you have any more from the same source, don't you attempt to pass them, or you'll get into trouble!"

And having said this, Mr. Bingley opened the door of his private office for Miss Keane to pass out; and with the man's last words ringing in her ears, the poor girl walked through the shop, and a minute later was in the street.

She was trembling and visibly agitated, and as she was hurrying on, a gentleman suddenly overtook her.

"How fast you are walking!" he said, smilingly. "I'm glad I've seen you! I wanted to wish you a happy Christmas before you go away, and may I give you a small Christmas-box?"

He was a good-looking man who said these words, tall and well-made. He was William Glyndford, junior (as he was called in business-transactions), the nephew of William Glyndford, senior, of Bridgenorth House; and he was in business with his uncle, having shares in some of his collieries; and he also, as well as William Glyndford, senior, was supposed to be a rich man.

He was unmarried, but many a good-looking girl in Farnham would not have said him nay if he had asked her. But somehow or other he had never asked any one. His friends joked him about this, but William Glyndford always declared that he had still plenty of time before him.

He was, however, thirty-three, and his uncle used to advise him to remain unwedded.

"You take my advice, Willie," the old William Glyndford would say to the younger one. "I've tried it on twice, and the result of my experience has been that I wouldn't do it a third time!"

Mr. Glyndford often told his nephew this, and the young man knew that his uncle really meant it. It had not been a happy marriage, this second one that Mr. Glyndford, senior, had made with the tradesman's daughter, for Bingley's shop had descended from father to son.

It was not her social position, however, which worried the old man. It was the vulgarity of her mind. Mr. Glyndford despised her small

affections, and her efforts at gentility at once amused and annoyed him. He had a shrewd, kindly vein of humour in his composition, and his nephew, William, had also some share of this quality.

William Glyndford, junior, admired the young governess at Bridgenorth House. He had first seen her at the children's party there, when the poor girl had worn the dress from Bingley's shop which was now threatening to bring her so much trouble.

He saw a fair delicate-looking girl, with small features, and a trustful expression; and as she was exceedingly well dressed, in white cashmere and white silk, he supposed her to be one of his aunt's guests.

"Who is your new beauty?" he said, going up smilingly to the stout, florid-looking woman who could never forget that she had once been pretty, and never liked to hear another woman called so.

"That girl?" she answered, with a shrug of her substantial shoulders, upon her nephew indicating that he alluded to Miss Keane. "Do you really call her pretty? She is my governess, but I certainly do not think anything of her looks."

"Perhaps not," answered William Glyndford, still smiling. "After a second glance, I agree with you—she is not pretty!"

Mrs. Glyndford felt relieved. She would have been disgusted if one of her relations had really admired a poor girl who was earning her own bread.

"Where did you pick her up?" continued William Glyndford.

"Oh, Mrs. Snowdon recommended her," answered his aunt. "She had known her father, who was a doctor at Seaton-by-the-Sea; but, between ourselves, I would not have taken this girl if I had known as much about her as I do now. I am told that her mother drinks; and Miss Keane, I believe, sends all her money to this debased creature! It's very shocking, isn't it?"

"Miss Keane sending her money to her mother?" inquired Mr. William Glyndford.

"Altogether, I mean—such a connection!" said Mrs. Glyndford.

"Yet she is very well dressed, isn't she, if she sends all her money away?" said William Glyndford, musingly, his look fixed on the governess.

"She's well dressed to-night," answered Mrs. Glyndford, sharply; "too well dressed for her position, I think. I must inquire about this dress. I hope she hasn't got it on credit."

"Ladies never do that kind of thing, you know!" laughed William Glyndford, Mrs. Glyndford's extravagance in dress being notorious.

"I am not speaking of ladies, William," said Mrs. Glyndford, in a slightly injured tone.

"Ladies have their position in society to keep up, and must be well and expensively dressed; but governesses and that sort of people ought, in my opinion, to be neatly clothed—that is sufficient."

"No doubt you are right," answered William Glyndford.

And he turned away; but during the evening contrived to make the acquaintance of his aunt's pretty governess.

He did this very simply—handed her a heavy music-book that she was endeavouring to lift from beneath a pile of other music.

"Allow me to do that for you!" he said; and then stood and talked to her for a few minutes. But only for a few minutes. He knew his aunt too well to make his attentions in the slightest degree remarkable. But when he met her a day or two afterwards with his little cousins, he stopped, and had a very agreeable conversation with his aunt's governess.

And he had had many conversations since. He admired this girl; was beginning (sometimes he thought) to do more than this, and often caught himself wondering if he would meet Miss Keane when he started for a country walk, and admitted to himself (sometimes also) that he felt very much disappointed when he did not.

And the pretty governess—what did she think of this good-looking, well-bred, and well-endowed gentleman, who met her so often? She thought, perhaps, too much of him, that he was pleasant to her sight, and his voice agreeable to her ear.

So, when he met—or, rather, overtook—her returning from her painful visit to Bingley's shop, she started violently when he addressed her, and asked her if he might buy her a Christmas-box.

"I—I did not see you until you spoke," she said.

"No," he answered, kindly. "Well, now, when you have seen me, may I repeat my question?"

"What question?" asked Miss Keane, shyly glancing up at Mr. Glyndford.

"May I give you a Christmas-box?"

William Glyndford asked this question in the

sharp, frank manner which was natural to him.

He was a very straightforward man. He liked this girl, and meant to show her that he liked her. He had a frank look also, as well as a frank manner, and pleasant clear blue eyes, which at this moment were fixed with a smiling expression on the young governess.

"You are very good," she answered; and she also smiled. "Yes, I think I should like a Christmas-box. It is so long since I had one."

"Do me the honour of accepting this, then," said William Glyndford, drawing a small parcel out of his coat-pocket, and placing it in Miss Keane's hand. "Don't open it until Christmas Day, though."

"Oh, that is asking too much of any woman!" said Miss Keane, with a little laugh.

"Very well; open it when you please. And you go to-day! By what train?"

"In the two train. I shall reach Seaton about nine."

"Well, I hope you'll have a pleasant Christmas; and I hope also that you won't forget all your Farnham friends while you are away."

His manner expressed more than his words, and the young governess blushed deeply.

"I will not forget them," she said.

"And there was something else I was going to say," continued Mr. Glyndford, with a slightly embarrassed air. "Oh, yes; I shall in all probability be in the neighbourhood of Seaton-by-the-Sea before the month is over. If so, will you allow me to call upon you?"

Miss Keane blushed more deeply still at this request, and smiled brightly and gladly.

"I—I shall be very pleased to see you," she said.

"Thank you. Well, I must not detain you now, I suppose? Good-bye, Miss Keane; it will not be long, I hope, before I see you again."

He held her hand in his firm, strong clasp as he said this. He liked her, and was sorry to part with her, and by that subtle instinct with which one human heart fathoms another's feelings, the governess knew this.

And this knowledge was very pleasant to her. Her step grew lighter as she walked on to Bridgenorth House after this brief interview with William Glyndford, and no sooner did she arrive there than she proceeded quickly to open the small parcel containing his Christmas box.

A jeweller's leather case first appeared, and when she undid the clasp of this, she found a large, plain, dull gold locket, with a valuable and brilliant diamond in the centre, sparkling like a star.

She gave a half cry of joy.

It was so beautiful; but she was not thinking of its intrinsic value. She was thinking

"He must care for me—he never would have given me this, unless he really cared!"

During the next hour she could think of nothing else. She finished packing her boxes, kissed her little pupils, and got into the cab and drove to the station, with this thought still uppermost in her mind.

"He cares for me!" she kept whispering to herself, as she drove along the story streets of Farnham. "He must care for me!" she repeated to herself, as she walked through the station.

She had a few minutes to wait before the train came up, and while standing on the platform was startled by someone touching her arm from behind.

Hastily looking round, to her inexpressible annoyance, she recognized Mr. Bingley, the tradesman.

"Ah, Miss Keane," said he: "I saw you go past in a cab a few minutes since, and thought I would just walk down to the station and repeat emphatically a word of warning in your ear. On no account try to pass any more of those notes—you understand! But here is the train coming up; allow me to hand you in. Be sure you do not forget what I have said. Good-bye!"

Mr. Bingley took off his hat; the train moved on; but the bright day-dreams that the young governess had been indulging in a few minutes before, had now vanished. In their place had risen the grim spectral shadow that men call fear.

And this grim spectre went with the girl all the way to Seaton-by-the-Sea. She was haunted with the memory of Mr. Bingley's words and looks.

"What did he know about these notes?" she kept asking herself, and great fear for the consequences of what she had done took possession of her.

At last she reached the station on the railway nearest to her home. In the summer time quiet people go for a few weeks to Seaton-by-the-Sea, for the bathing season. But in the chill December days the little village has no visitors. Miss Keane was indeed the only passenger who left the train; and as the omnibus, which in summer runs between the station and the village, had also disappeared for the winter, the young governess was forced to walk the distance, and, tired and dispirited, she arrived at home.

It was a gray stone house, standing in a neglected garden, that she now approached. No one was looking out to watch for her, nor to welcome her, and she rang the door-bell twice before she could obtain admittance.

And who admitted her?—a woman, trying her best to look sober!

"Is it you, Sissy?" she said. "Well, how are you? Is the—train in?"

"Oh, mamma!" said Laura Keane—Sissy, as her mother called her.

Yet this woman was not old, and had been handsome. But now over her features had passed that change by which the fatal weakness that she indulged in always betrays itself.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNHAPPY HOME.

The last years of her husband's life had been darkened, and her young daughter's years overshadowed, by Mrs. Keane's deplorable failing.

Together the mother and daughter entered what had been in Doctor Keane's time the drawing-room of the house; but it could be called a drawing-room no longer. Disorder and discomfort reigned. Nothing, in fact, could excel the dismal and uncared-for appearance of this room; and its one occupant, when Laura and Mrs. Keane entered it, added to its melancholy effect.

This was a young girl, crippled and deformed. When a babe, Maud Keane had fallen from her mother's arms, and had been so seriously injured that she had never recovered.

She grew up repining, the wonderful beauty and intelligence of her countenance being spoiled in general by its discontented and peevish expression.

But at times you saw that gleam of light which flashes only over the countenances of those gifted with strong mental power.

These wonderful rays, trifling though they were, told their own story.

Imaginative and inventive, the beautiful ideal creatures of her mind sometimes made her forget the dismal realities by which she was surrounded.

There she lay, her books, her scraps of paper, her little bottle of ink, her pen, all scattered carelessly around her.

She lifted herself up as her mother and sister entered the room, and a half-glad cry escaped her lips.

"Laura!" she said—"Laura!"

And Laura went up to her, and kissed her.

"How are you, dear Maud?" she said.

For a moment Maud did not answer. She looked wistfully—enviously, perhaps—at her fair sister.

"Fair look well, and seem well, Laura, at least," she said, presently. "I am never well."

Laura put her hand caressingly on her sister's head, and smoothed back the thick, soft, damp, dark hair.

"And how does the writing go on?" she said, smiling kindly. "Have you got lots of new pieces to read to me, Maud?"

"Nothing worth reading—nothing that you would care for," answered the young writer; and then the next moment her features lighted up.

"I have one thing," she said. "It's not finished. But I see it—I hear it! It's about a girl who loved too well—who admired the man she loved—and died when she found the real and ideal were two different souls."

"The old story!" laughed Laura. "Ah, Maud, our ideal and our real men are always totally different!"

"I see no real ones," answered Maud; and again the discontented, envious expression crept over her. "Here I lie, day after day, with no company but that!"

And the young girl pointed as she spoke to their mother, who, by this time, had sunk down on a dilapidated easy chair, and had fallen fast asleep.

"How very shocking it is!" said Laura, in a low tone.

"It's torture!" said the young girl on the sofa, passionately. "And to think—to think that I might have been like you, Laura—fair and tall, like you—about for her!"

"It's very sad!" answered Laura.

And she put her hand softly into her sister's.

But Maud dashed it away.

"Sad!" she repeated. "Yes, it's very sad, isn't it?—and she gave a better laugh. "No youth nor life for me; no one to love me; always to be neglected and alone!"

As the girl ended this speech, the extreme bitterness of her emotion overcame her, and she burst into passionate sobs.

Laura knelt down, and put her arm round her sister's poor thin neck.

"Hush, dear!" And she pillowed the poor cripple's head on her bosom. "Think how clever you are, Maud! Rosy cheeks grow pale and fade, and tall figures get bowed and bent; but a great mind gets greater with age, and beautiful thoughts are fresh when beautiful faces are old and changed."

The weeping girl listened, and apparently was something comforted.

"Do you really think I am clever?" she said, raising her tear-stained visage, and looking eagerly at her sister. "Papa, you—you know, was deformed, and yet he lives still. He will always live!"

"And all the beauties and beaux of his time are utterly forgotten," said Laura, trying to speak lightly, and smiling at her sister. "You see, my dear, you have something far greater and higher than a pretty face."

Maud, with the versatility of her disposition, began to smile.

"I have to prove that yet," she said.

"There is a struggle always at first," answered Laura, kindly. "Some one whom I know at Farnham—Mr. William Glyndford" (and a soft blush stole to her fair cheeks), "told me once of a young cousin of his, who tried to be an author, and how he tried and tried for long in vain."

"And did he succeed at last?" asked Maud, eagerly.