

AGAINST THE LAW.

A NOVEL.

BY DORA RUSSELL.

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

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN PURSUIT.

It is almost impossible to describe the scene that followed the discovery of Laura's disappearance.

Bingley's rage and consternation were fearful to witness.

"You must know something of this," he said to his sister, furiously. "It is a trick. I have been cheated and deceived amongst you!"

"I swear I know nothing, Richard!" said Mrs. Glynford, beginning to cry.

"Then, do you, sir?" said Bingley, turning to Mr. Glynford.

"No," answered Mr. Glynford, emphatically. "But my belief is that, between you, you have driven this poor lass to her death."

"You think—" said Bingley, turning pale again and shuddering.

"I think," said Mr. Glynford, sternly, "that this unnatural marriage into which you were about to force her—yes, force her—has upset the poor girl's brain, and that most likely we shall find her at the bottom of the fish-pond or in the mud of the river."

Bingley did not speak for a moment or two. He staggered to a seat and sat down, staring blankly at the white wedding-dress hanging opposite to him.

Then suddenly he started to his feet again, and went to the toilet-table and opened the purse that was lying there.

"What money had she?" he said. "Maria, did you give her any of that which you had from me on her account?"

Mrs. Glynford flushed a little at this question.

"Yes," she answered, after a moment's thought. "I gave her ten pounds yesterday morning."

Then Bingley counted out the gold in the purse, and with almost a groan laid it down upon the table.

"How much is there?" said Mr. Glynford, eagerly, now approaching the toilet-table.

"Ten pounds," faltered Bingley.

"In that case," said Mr. Glynford, in a recalcitrant tone, "we may have some hope that this poor girl has not put an untimely end to herself; for I know that she had more than ten pounds in her possession. Yesterday morning, in fact, I enclosed twenty pounds in an envelope—her half-year's salary—and sent it up to her, as I did not like her to leave my house without a little pocket-money of her own."

"Then," said Bingley, "dashing his hand down on the table before him, "I consider that, in doing that, you acted in a most interfering, most improper manner. What business had you with her pocket-money? Dye think I'd have let her go without pocket-money after she was my wife?"

"I do not require to be taught by you how to regulate my actions," answered Mr. Glynford. "But the fact remains the same—I gave her that money, and if it has disappeared, she, probably, has fled from a marriage which was evidently hateful to her, with it in her possession."

"I'll hunt her out, then," said Bingley, vindictively. "If she's above ground I'll find her, and make her pay heavily for what she has done this day."

And, as he spoke, he seized the shining new hat which he had purchased for his wedding.

"She'll find friends ready to defend her," retorted Mr. Glynford, significantly.

"No friend can defend her," said Bingley, savagely. "Neither friends nor money can defend her. I have her fast."

"Wait till you find her," said Mr. Glynford.

And, the next moment, with a curse on his lips, Bingley had left the attic; and, after hurrying down the staircase, he threw himself into his grand new carriage; and, with his features distorted with rage, shouted to the coachman to drive him back to Farnham, and to the railway station there.

After he had left the attic, Mr. and Mrs. Glynford looked at each other.

"What could he mean?" said Mrs. Glynford.

"What power could he have over her?"

"Now listen to me, Maria," said Mr. Glynford, emphatically. "Though that man is your brother, he enters this house no more; and, another thing, I'll do my best, and so, I am sure, will William, to discover where this poor girl has hidden. And when we have found her, we'll find means to defend her from Bingley, scoundrel that he is, so to persecute that innocent girl!"

Mrs. Glynford fired up at this.

"I don't think you need call him that," she said, "for offering to marry a girl without a penny, and behaving in the handsome manner that he has done! Look at that!" continued Mrs. Glynford, pointing tragically to her wed-

ding-dress, "Do you know how much the lace on it cost a yard?"

"Hang the lace!" said Mr. Glynford, completely losing his temper. "All I know is that you and Bingley between you have driven a nice, and, I believe, a good girl, perhaps to destruction. But I'll not waste my time talking to you. I'll go into the town, and see William at once; and surely between us we shall hit upon something."

After saying this, Mr. Glynford also quitted the attic, and Mrs. Glynford was left with the misery she so much admired. This she carefully collected before descending to her own room. She also took charge of Laura's purse and all the ornaments which Bingley had given the unhappy girl. And while doing this, Mrs. Glynford became further convinced that Laura had not committed, nor contemplated, self-destruction; but had merely run away to escape a marriage which her husband had truly said must be hateful to her.

She had two reasons for coming to this conclusion, and these were that the locket which her nephew, William Glynford, had given Laura was not among the jewels lying scattered about; and also that Laura's ordinary hat and jacket had disappeared.

"She has run away," decided Mrs. Glynford. "I have thought her very strange lately, and believe now that she has gone quite out of her mind. She must have locked the attic door behind her, and taken away the key, so as to get more time. Well, from first to last, this has been the most extraordinary affair I ever knew."

Meanwhile, Bingley was making the most minute and particular inquiries at the railway station if any one at all answering the description of Laura had gone in any of the early morning trains.

But he could gain no satisfactory information. One or two women had taken tickets; but no one at the station seemed to have taken much notice of them. One man remembered a young girl in black passing him; but he had not looked at her, he said.

While Bingley was still pursuing his inquiries, William Glynford and his uncle also arrived at the station.

Bingley glared at William Glynford; and when William proceeded to take a ticket for the South express, which was shortly expected to pass through, Bingley's exasperation broke all bounds.

He went up to the two Glynfords, and rudely addressing William, asked him for what purpose he was starting on a journey. "For if it's anything to do with Miss Keane," continued Bingley, "I may as well tell you at once it's no good."

William made no answer. He stared at Bingley; and, taking the arm of his uncle, drew him away.

"Has it anything to do with Miss Keane?" said the draper, following them and speaking so loudly that several people looked round. "Perhaps you know where she has gone? Perhaps this is a plan between you? But if it is, she'll rue the day. I've only to give information to lodge her in the common gaol!"

"What?" said William Glynford, looking round sharply.

"Yes," said Bingley, beside himself with passion: "I could lodge her in a common gaol, and I've paid hundreds to keep her out of one; and this is her gratitude!"

William Glynford turned very pale, and threw a look of contempt on Bingley. "So this was how you forced her to promise to marry you?" he said. "You knew something that this poor girl had innocently done—for I am sure that she committed no crime; but you found out something about her, I suppose, and so compelled her to promise that which has almost broken her heart?"

"I'll quite break her heart before I have done with her!" said Bingley, clenching his hand.

At this moment the South express steamed into the station.

Bingley had no ticket, and William Glynford had. Bingley, therefore, ran to get one; and then the two men were separated.

When Bingley returned, panting, to the platform, he could see nothing of the Glynfords. He therefore jumped into the train, without knowing whether William had started in it or not. He had not, having at the last moment changed his mind.

"I will go first to Seaton-by-the-Sea," he had said to his uncle. "Her mother may know something—may be able to give me some clue."

"Then keep out of Bingley's way," said his uncle. "Come round here." And William followed him, and from the refreshment-room windows they saw Bingley start in the South express.

CHAPTER XIX.

STILL LOST.

William Glynford arrived at Seaton-by-the-Sea in the evening, and made his way to the old gray house where Mrs. Keane and her young daughter lived.

He asked to see Maud; and presently, flushed and excited, she came—almost running into the room.

"It is you, then!" she said. "I was so surprised when I saw your card! You have come about—my book?"

"No, Miss Maud," said William, taking her hand very gravely and kindly. "I have come about your sister."

"About Laura! Why, this is her wedding-day! She is married now, I suppose!" said Maud.

"No," answered he; and proceeded to tell the astonished girl how Laura had disappeared. Before his story was finished he saw that Maud knew nothing about her sister.

The poor young girl, indeed, was greatly overcome.

"It is all that horrid man!" she said—"that horrid Bingley! When she wrote and said she was going to marry him I thought she must have gone mad. We have not heard from her since, but he has written to our mother, and made all sorts of fine offers. But where can she have gone? You don't think she has done anything to herself, do you? Oh, no, no! And yet I have sometimes been tempted in my misery to end it all—before you helped me about my book!"

"We can but hope that she is safe!" said William, with quivering lips. "But you must help me to find her, Maud. Can I see your mother to-night?"

Maud hesitated and coloured.

"I—I do not know!" she said, looking towards the door.

"Well, to-morrow, then!" he said, understanding the poor girl's embarrassment.

And the next morning he did see Mrs. Keane.

He found her in a pitiable state of excitement and alarm, for Maud had broken to her the news of Laura's disappearance.

"Oh, what can have happened to her, Mr. Glynford?" she said. "Why did she run away? I—I cannot understand it!"

"We must try to find her," said William. "The most likely place in which to discover her is, I think, London. Now, why I wished so much to see you this morning was to propose that you and your daughter should accompany me thither, so that together we might search for Laura."

"I—I do not know how to manage it," said Mrs. Keane. "The truth is, Mr. Glynford, I have no money to go with."

"Oh, I would supply that!" said William, eagerly. "It will cost you nothing. I will take rooms for you, and I pay all your expenses."

Still Mrs. Keane hesitated.

"Is there still a reason to prevent you going?" said William.

"How can I," she said, sobbing. "Tell you, a stranger! But—but I cannot go, because we owe money here, and the tradespeople would think we were running away from our debts."

William Glynford was rich and generous, and, moreover, he cared very deeply for the young girl, whom he now believed had loved him too truly to marry another man. With a smile, therefore, he held out his hand to the woman, whose sense of shame, at least, was not completely lost.

"Mrs. Keane," he said, "please do not distress yourself. Will you give me a list of what you owe here, and I will settle all your accounts; or, will you tell me the amount, and I will give you a check! Please allow me to do this. It will be a pleasure to me to think that I am of use to—Laura's mother."

His voice faltered as he said the last few words, and his unexpected kindness quite overcame Mrs. Keane.

"How—how can I thank you?" she said. "Ah, Mr. Glynford, did you, then, care for my darling girl?"

"Yes," answered William, and turned away his head.

After this confession their arrangements were soon made.

Never before had Mrs. Keane had such an amount of ready money as she possessed on the following day.

She went from tradesman to tradesman, and, with a rather lofty air, paid all her accounts. They supposed that her pretty daughter was married, and to a rich man, and, therefore, she was treated with the utmost politeness.

But the same afternoon, to the surprise of the whole village, the old gray stone house, where the Keanes had lived so long, was found to be shut up, and the mother and daughter, the gossips learned before long, had started together for London.

This was all their young handmaiden knew. Mrs. Keane had paid her her wages and discharged her, and had given no hint as to when they intended to return to Seaton-by-the-Sea.

So, little by little, their neighbours ceased to talk of them.

The old house, with its closed shutters, scarcely looked more desolate than it had done while Mrs. Keane and her young daughter were living in it.

The spring came, and the sun began to shine on it, and the birds twittered about the closed windows, and still the Keanes did not return.

Amid the mighty masses of a great city they were looking for one they could not find.

Laura Keane had disappeared, and neither mother nor lover could discover a trace of her.

CHAPTER XX.

A WAIF.

About two months after Mrs. Keane had left Seaton-by-the-Sea, one hot sunny afternoon in London, a pale, wearied-looking young woman entered a fashionable perfumer's shop in one of the great thoroughfares, carrying a small parcel in her hand.

She had a thick gauze veil, and her languid movements gave you the impression that she was suffering from great bodily fatigue. She went into the perfumer's shop also with a faltering step, and, approaching the counter, asked the well-dressed, self-satisfied-looking woman standing behind it if they bought fans painted by ladies.

"Never!" answered this person, without one glance of pity at the drooping form of the applicant.

"Would—would you look at one?" said the young woman; and as she spoke she unfolded her parcel and held out a white silk fan, very delicately painted, for the person behind the counter to inspect.

She just glanced at it, and that was all. "We never buy such things," she said. "Ladies paint their own fans very often now-a-days, and paint them tolerably well, too. No; it would be of no use to us."

With a sigh she could not suppress, the owner of the fan replaced it in its former cover. "Then you—you ever give anything out to be painted?" she asked, timidly.

"We have regular people who do our work," replied the substantial lady behind the counter. "Come, young woman, if that is all your business, you may as well move off, for we have nothing for you."

Such was the answer she got; and this was the third shop to which this poor, tired girl had carried her fan the same afternoon. She had paid twelve shillings for the fan before she had painted it, and had drawn design after design before touching her fan.

Then she had painted it delicately and well, while half-faded, weary, and heart-sore. But, when she had finished it, she was sure it was good, and she carried it out to sell.

It was five o'clock now, and she had been out in the sun since three. She had eaten nothing all day but a penny bun, and was faint and weary. She had reckoned upon selling her fan to pay for her lodging and to buy something to eat, and had reckoned upon receiving orders for more fans—perhaps expecting pleasant words and compliments upon her industry and skill.

Alas! she had got nothing. No money—no orders—no compliments!

She left the perfumer's shop, and with faltering steps proceeded down the hot streets.

Everyone seemed busy and hurrying on with some fixed purpose. But the poor, tired girl, with her rejected fan, knew not where to turn.

The landlady of the miserable little room in an obscure street in the neighbourhood of Chelsea, where for the last few weeks she had lived and toiled, had that morning demanded her week's rent from her young lodger, who had promised to pay it in the afternoon, and had gone out hopefully, to return filled with despair. "What shall I do?" she thought; and a moment later had put her hand up to her slender throat, and, with a bitter sigh, had clutched at a large gold locket suspended there.

It was her one treasure! Through all her wanderings, in all her troubles, this locket had never left her throat night nor day. For it was the locket which William Glynford had given to Laura Keane on the very day that had commenced her miserable entanglement with Bingley.

And, with a moan, she now remembered that it was the only article of any value that she had left!

The sun came burning down on her aching head, and the rush of carriages went past her and, faint and dizzy, she stumbled on.

She must part with her locket—part with the inanimate token of a love that she felt would never change!

It was cruel—too cruel! Tears rolled down her pale cheeks as she walked on. Then suddenly she thought of the river, the dark, cold river, sweeping beneath the bridges, from which many a poor, weary spirit had taken flight!

But as this gloomy temptation passed through her mind, she looked up, and was attracted by a pawnbroker's shop on the opposite side of the street. Then, she reflected that, perhaps, she could pawn her locket, and redeem it some day when fortune was a little more kind to her; and, after hesitating a moment or two, she endeavoured to cross the crowded thoroughfare.

But she was faint and giddy, and there was a rush of carriages; and somehow, in a moment, she felt that she was struck, and, blinded and terrified, she fell, while a heavy crushing wheel passed over her arm.

She was caught up and dragged from beneath the carriage by the sturdy arm of a policeman. He pulled her to a cab-rest, and a little crowd gathered around her. But the poor girl neither saw nor heard anything of this. She lay like one dead in the big policeman's arms who had rescued her, and the report got about that a young woman had been killed in the streets.

But she was not killed. When sense and memory returned to her she found herself lying