

HIS LEGAL WIFE

BY MARY E. BRYAN

(Continued)

She stopped with a quick catch of her breath, vexed at herself. She must not give this man a glimpse into her heart. With a woman's quick ingenuity she gave a different turn to her sentence.

"It would be better if I told you as much about myself as will be necessary, since you must not seem to be ignorant of my antecedents. I will do this another time. You have enough to think of tonight. I will say good-bye. Stop—let me ring for James to show you out. I must use a little discretion. Gossip as often emanates from the kitchen now as in Thackeray's time."

She rang the bell twice before James, who had fallen asleep in the hall, after vainly listening at the key-hole, responded to the summons. He saw, to his amazement, his mistress holding out her white, ungloved hand to the street tramp.

"Good-night, Mr. Lee," she said, with emphasis. "When you come again, it will be in your own proper person. You can't blame me for not recognizing you at once in this disguise. It was quite wicked of you to play such a joke upon us."

The young man smiled as he bent over her hand, marvelling at the quick-wittedness of the woman. James opened his eyes.

CHAPTER II

Harry Lee ran down the broad marble steps of the house in which he had his amazing adventure, and walked slowly down the almost deserted avenue under the now cloudless midnight moon. He was dazed at the strangeness and suddenness of what had happened in the last hour.

What had he done? Given his word of honor to become the husband—the legal husband—of a woman he had never seen until an hour ago—a woman who had told him she despised love. She wanted only a lawful protector and a shield from gossip. But what then? This marriage, though but a form, must cling to him, must shape all his future life, must bar him out from the sweetest freedom of his heart. He must sacrifice freedom, happiness, love. He must give up the hope of calling Lucille his own!

His own! He laughed in bitter self-mockery. Why, if he remained free, it was the same. The woman he loved could never be his own. She was lost to him. Poverty stood grimly between. She was not one who could bear poverty, or make sacrifices. This beautiful one, with her dainty tastes fostered by indulgence. She was lost to him. He recalled how far off she had seemed to him tonight, as she stood before him, her lovely eyes flashing through tears, and laughed to scorn the poverty of their surroundings and the idea of their marriage. How she put out her little foot in its shabby boot, held up to him the worn sleeve of her frock, shivered beside the meager fire at which his old father was patiently warming his long, thin hands. She had seemed to blame him for their changed fortunes and his inability to retrieve them. She had declared her intention of signing at once the contract with Maraschino, the route manager of a travelling dramatic troupe, step which he knew meant ruin to a creature so beautiful and so passionately fond of admiration as Lucille.

This must not be. No, no. He would sacrifice himself first. This strange girl's marvelous proposal tonight was a direct interposition of Providence, which gave him the means to save Lucille.

If only she would forego that threatened purpose! If she would refuse to see Maraschino and consent to bear their lot awhile longer, to give him a chance to better their fortunes! He had hope of obtaining a position. If she would only wait. Perhaps she would wait. Then, in spite of his promise, this contract he had made tonight should never be carried out. He would write to Miss de Vasco at once and withdraw his promise.

He quickened his steps as he neared the dingy street on which he lived. He unlocked the door, and ascended, with as little noise as possible, the three flights of narrow stairs to the small, poor flat on the fourth floor, crept through the narrow passage, just wide enough to walk along, pausing an instant to listen at his father's door, and knowing by his regular breathing that the old man slept. He could see over the transom that there was a light in the front room—Lucille's room—the largest and best of the tiny suite, and used by her as a sitting-room as well as a bedchamber. He heard a man's voice speaking low. Filled with anger, he thought:

"Can it be Maraschino? Is it possible he has come here to see Lucille after the theatre performance? He could not wait until tomorrow to have her sign that cursed contract to travel with his troupe."

He pushed open the door that was slightly ajar. The two persons who in were too much preoccupied to

hear the little noise he made. Lucille had apparently signed the contract; lay on the table, and Maraschino's hand rested upon it, as he looked down at the lovely creature—so strangely, exquisitely beautiful—the beauty of a fairy and a woman in one. She wore the little black gown with the frayed sleeves; but its shabbiness was thrown out of sight by the perfect shape—by the flower-like grace of the small head set on a throat like a lily's—the low, child-like forehead sunned over with tiny, nut-brown curls; the dark, rich eyes, in which all the violets of spring seemed to have lost their souls. Those lovely eyes were lifted smilingly to the dark, handsome, sensual face of Maraschino, the Italian manager of a dramatic variety company. He was saying:

"Now you have signed to contract, my charming Miss Lucille, I will take much interest in you. I will come every day to teach you to leech dance I told you about. I will see after your costumes myself. They shall be ravissants. We will have all done and ready by the last of the month. Ten we shall start out on our tour. I shall be so happy to have you with us. Ah! wit me."

It was impossible that Lee should listen any longer to what mortified and maddened him. He strode into the room and up to the table, seized the contract, and tore it to pieces, before Maraschino could recover from his surprise.

"Out of this room—this instant!" he exclaimed, pointing to the door. His eyes blazed, his voice had the tremor of controlled rage, as well as the ring of command.

The manager obeyed him without a word, only casting back a vindictive glance at the door, and muttering something under his breath.

When Henry Lee heard him going downstairs, he turned to Lucille. He had expected to see her white with rage. He had nerved himself to have her eyes transfixed him with their indignant looks. Instead of this, she was gazing at him with admiration. She glowed in seeing him master the Italian.

"You are superb!" she cried. "What an actor you would make! You looked like a king—a king in a coat with shiny elbows. Oh, what a pity you are poor, my Harry. If you had money—what a grand fellow you would be!"

Then her face changed suddenly. She stooped to pick up the fragments of the torn contract.

"All the same, I shall sign an agreement with Maraschino. I shall sign it tomorrow," she said, "I shall become one of his company. He offers me a good salary, and all my expenses paid. I am tired of struggling and starving in this miserable coop."

A sharp pang went to his heart. He knew now she would not wait. He must sacrifice his cherished hope, his love, to save her.

"Lucille, listen to me," he said gently. "He took both her little hands and held them tightly. At first she struggled to draw them away; then, looking at him, she saw something in his face that made her stop and stand quietly before him.

"My sweet," he said, almost solemnly, "you have been saved from that great danger which you would close your eyes to. You are not going with Maraschino, nor will you suffer any more for lack of money. We shall have plenty."

She looked at him earnestly, her blue-black eyes, wide with amazement, touched with incredulity. But she had never known Harry Lee to deceive her, and she had known him half her life. Her eyes kindled joyously.

"Some good luck has come to us!" she cried; "something has happened. Your rich old grand-uncle in England has died and left you his money. How much is it?"

He smiled at her child-like eagerness. He would not undeceive her yet. He could not tell her the truth, at least, not now.

"It is no big fortune," he said, "but it is enough to give you a better home, nicer food, and prettier clothes, my darling, and to keep these little hands from contact with the kitchen pots and pans."

"Oh, I am so glad!" she pulled her hands out of his grasp and threw her arms around his neck; her rippled lips were pressed to his. The kiss, thrillingly sweet as it was, brought to him a keen pain, a sense of guilt. Could he honestly receive these kisses from this beloved one when he had become the husband of another woman, even though that woman was only his legal wife?

And Miss de Vasco? She did not repent of her bargain with the stranger she had asked to marry her. Repentance might come later; it probably would; but tonight she was possessed by only one feeling—a passionate longing to revenge herself as best she might on the man she had loved, the man who had wounded her to the heart, and had humbled her pride.

He should not humiliate her publicly, he should not triumph over her before the world. Her marriage tomorrow would falsify that cruel

pointed. I am afraid the wedding dress will not be ready."

Then she recollected that the dress had been brought to her room only a few minutes after she had read those cruel paragraphs in the newspapers.

She had thrown the box aside without opening it. Where was it? "I must see it, since I am to be married in it, after all," said Nina, still in that mood of wild self-mockery.

She found the large pasteboard box, tugged a moment at the string that tied it, then, stooping impatiently, but the cord in two with her little white strong teeth, and removed the lid from the box.

The wedding dress lay there, enveloped in white tissue paper, a mass of snowy silk, soft lace, and pearl embroidery.

She lifted it from the box, and shook out its long, lustrous folds. Then she thought occurred to her: "I will put it on, and go tell the Child that I am to be married to-day. I wonder what she will say."

She had half a dozen pet names for her chaperon, Mrs. Beatrice Child. She was fond of the plump, skittish, sentimental little woman, whose sympathies were always overflowing. Sometimes the pet name was Bee, again, it was Trixy, and then the Child, or the Guardian Angel.

The Child was much attached to her handsome, generous chaperon; but she had constantly a little anxious dread as to what this strange girl might do next—the dread of a motherly hen who has been given the charge of a young partridge.

The pink ball dress was taken off, and Nina arrayed herself in the exquisite bridal robe. Then she softly opened the door of Mrs. Child's room, which communicated with hers. She turned up the gas a little. The widow, who was an ardent coward, always left a glimmer of light in her bedroom—so that the burglars could see what they were about," Nina often said.

By the brightened light Nina could see the round, pink face on the pillow, in all the peace of sleep. "I won't wake her," she said to herself; and she was in the act of leaving the room, when she came in contact with a chair, making a noise.

The blue eyes of the chaperon opened wide in terror; she sprang up in bed.

"Help! murder!" she cried, her voice so husky with fright that it did not reach beyond the room. Nina stepped to the bed.

"Hush, Bee! It's I. I shan't murder anything but sleep."

"You Nina! What on earth are you doing up, and in that dress?" "It's my wedding dress. I tried it on because—this is my wedding day, if you please. I came to tell you."

The poor little chaperon stared at her charge in horror.

"She has lost her senses!" she said to herself. "Her trouble has crazed her! Oh, what shall I do? She will kill herself—she will kill me! I must humor her. I have always heard that crazy people must be humored."

"Yes, yes," she said aloud, "today is your wedding day, my dear. But, see! it is not day yet. It is only a little past midnight. So go to your room and take off your lovely dress before you spoil it; and go to bed, or you'll look pale and bad when you're married. Go now, my sweet, do!"

Her teeth were almost chattering her curl-papers trembling like the proverbial aspen leaf.

"Nina broke into a wild little laugh. "Why, you're out of your wits, you dear old coward!" she said. "You think I am a dangerous maniac!"

"Oh, no!" protested the poor woman, though in her heart she said: "It is the maniac laugh! She is quite mad! Oh, if I could get to the bell to summon James!"

"Come, be comforted, my poor little guardian angel. Don't ruffle your plumes. I am not mad, nor soon shall be. I won't hurt a curl-paper of your silly little head. I've really come to let you know that I am to be married today. It was all arranged an hour ago, while you were talking your beauty-sleep."

Her matter-of-fact tone and look reassured Mrs. Child.

"Oh! then he has been here? You have seen him? You have made up with Grafton?"

"Never speak that traitor's name again in my hearing, Mrs. Child!" she said.

"But—" uttered the poor lady, bewildered. "When then? You said you were to be married."

"So I am; but to an honest man—at least, I trust he is. I am going to marry the man who saved me from a broken head tonight."

"What! not the street tramp?" cried Mrs. Child, wildly.

"The street tramp—as you called him. Perhaps he really is one. I remember, and Goldsmith, and—"

"Oh, Nina, you are ill! For pity's sake, let me send for Doctor Carlyle!"

"So you still think I have lost my senses? No such good luck for me! I am perfectly sane, my dear Trixy. Be quiet now and listen to me. You will find, if I am mad, there is method in my madness. After you went up to your room to-night, this is what happened: The

man—the one who caught me when I fell—returned the money I sent him and also my diamond bracelet. I had dropped it on the pavement. This act made me think he must be rather an uncommon vagabond; so I sent James to bring him to me, and I had a little talk with him in the library."

"Alone in the library! That strange man from the street? Oh, Nina, are you sure he left the house? What if he—"

"Calm yourself, my dear. There's nobody under the bed, and the spoons are safe. He was no burglar."

"How do you know that?" "Because he brought back the diamond bracelet."

"He might have done that for a blind and a pretext to get into the house."

"Also, because he refused forty thousand dollars which I offered him."

"You offered him forty thousand dollars?"

"Yes—if he would marry me to-morrow—I mean, today."

"Oh—"

"There, don't dodge under the bedclothes. I am quite harmless. Just let me tell the story, without interruption. The man had the look of a gentleman—clothes not considered. He was evidently honest. A thought occurred to me, and I followed it out. I made him a proposition, based on mutual benefit. He was not married, and he needed money. I had need of a husband-in-law—a sheep-dog to protect me from the wolves of society—an honest man to care for my interests and look after the lawyers that have them in hand. I offered him this position of husband-in-law with forty thousand dollars bonus, and board and lodging beside."

"Forty thousand dollars. What will Mr. Grimm say?"

"My lawyer has nothing to do with it. The money is the legacy my dear father left me. It is in solid cash, deposited in bank, quite separate from the fortune Uncle Juan left me."

"And you offered it to him? He must have fallen on his knees to you."

"On the contrary, he refused it—and me."

"He dared to refuse—"

"It was because he made a mistake," Nina said, with a quick flush. "But he saw his error in a moment, and he begged me to forgive it, with a manly earnestness that I admired. Afterward he accepted the proposition, and—we are to be married—today."

"Today?"

"This evening, at Grace Church—just after Helen Van Dyke's marriage has taken place. You know I am one of Helen's bride-maids."

"Married! Today!" Mrs. Child repeated, looking at Nina in piteous bewilderment, her usually fresh cheeks quite pale. "But what do you know about this man? What does he do for a living?"

"I never asked him."

"Good heavens, Nina, he may be a cab-driver!"

"Possibly."

"He may be an escaped convict."

"Hardly."

"What is his name? You don't know that either."

"Yes; I did think to ask his name when I wrote a check for a small amount that I insisted on giving him. His name is Henry Warrington Lee."

"Oh, I am thankful it was not Tubbs."

"Yes; I would not like to be called Mrs. Tubbs."

"Oh, Nina!" Mrs. Child burst out, as she suddenly realized the prospect. "You can't mean this seriously. It is some wild jest. It is some piece of mad mockery born in your excited brain, or else it is an impulse you will not act upon when you are cool. Don't you know that a marriage sticks to you like a burr? You can't shake off even a legal husband. Will you give up your freedom? Will you bind yourself for life, just to get a protector, a business factotum? Have you not pity for your girlhood, for your woman's heart?"

"Stop, Mrs. Child! Nina's voice was stern and hard. "My heart can never dictate to me again. It is dead. Oh," she went on, "don't you know why I have done this? It is to avenge myself on him. He has crushed my heart; he shall not trail my pride in the dust. My marriage today will put a stop to his boasts. It will turn the jest of his clubs upon himself. It is he who will be regarded as the jilted one. That is balm to my heart. He will not be able to drag me to his chariot wheels when he marries."

"But you, Nina, do you think you will ever be able to feel as a wife to this strange man you are to marry?"

"Wife! Mrs. Child, is it possible you do not understand the proposition I made to Henry Lee? You will see it in writing tomorrow, and witness his signature to the agreement. I am to be no wife to him; not now, or ever. We are to live utterly apart. This house, you know, is really two houses, with separate entrances, on the avenue and on the street. He will occupy one division of the house. He will have his meals served there. He will come and go as he pleases, only he must attend me when I go out, and he must usually be present on the evenings that I receive. Outward courtesy is all he shall offer me. As for sentiment, if he dares speak of

such stuff, that moment our compact is at an end."

"Oh, my poor darling, what a hard, loveless life you have mapped out for yourself. Can you bear it?"

"Yes. Love is the weakest stuff that ever a woman leaned upon. I will find stronger ones. I will fill my life with purposes. I will gather men and women of intellect around me. I will forget that I have a heart; the mind's empire is serene and happier far."

She spoke steadily, bravely—but the unnatural glitter was still in her eyes. They were dry and burning. They had shed no tears since the blow had fallen.

She was still unbowed by the fierce, vengeful feeling that had taken possession of her when she was at last convinced of her lover's treachery.

Mrs. Child saw the look and the wan pallor of the nobly molded face. She put out her motherly arms, and drew the girl's head to her bosom.

"God pity and help you, my poor child!" she prayed.

CHAPTER IV

It was quite eleven o'clock when Nina came down into the breakfast room. She entered, smiling, dressed with care in a graceful house gown of gray-green and cream color.

A cold bath and a dash of tinted powder had helped to remove the traces of anxiety and sleeplessness from the face.

Mrs. Child scrutinized her closely. "She has thought better of it," she said to herself. But nothing was said before the servants.

When they were alone in the little private sitting room, dumpy Mrs. Child in her favorite roaker, and Nina—tall and slim—standing before the swinging bird-cage, feeding the canary with crisp lettuce leaves, the chaperon said, anxiously:

"You have thought better of your rash idea—you have changed your mind since last night, haven't you, dear?"

"Changed my mind?" repeated Nina, without turning round from the bird-cage. "No, Bee; you don't know me. I am not given to changing my mind."

"And you are still determined to marry this strange man?"

"Yes, unless he fails to come, and leaves me to wear the willow—once more," she answered, with a forced laugh.

"I hope to Heaven he may," was the prayer of the chaperon; but she dared not speak it aloud.

"Captain Alvera," Nina read aloud, a frown gathering on her brow.

"I knew he would come today. He was so attentive to you last night," said Mrs. Child. "And you, Nina, you encouraged him."

"Did I?" indifferently.

"Yes; and you did not mean it. You hardly knew what you were doing. I understood, but he didn't, I'm sure."

"Tell him—to please excuse me," Nina said to the servant. James went out; but he came back in a few minutes, and handed his mistress a card with a few words penciled upon it.

"I must see you—I am about to leave the country. I have something of importance to say to you."

She gave the card to Mrs. Child. "Do see him, my dear," pleaded the little lady. "He is not a man one would like to make an enemy of, and he is of your own race—your father's race."

"He's fought with my father in that last ill-fated struggle for Cuba's independence—so he says," mused Nina, twisting the lettuce leaves reflectively in her fingers.

"Show him into the drawing room, James," she said, at length.

Without a glance at the mirror, she went down to see her persistent suitor. He was walking restlessly about the room. When he heard the soft rustle of her gown, he turned and came toward her, bowing so low that the crown of his head came under her level glance, with all its little coils of jet-black hair, so shining and full of life that they seemed so many tiny live snakes.

"Captain—or Count—Alvera, he preferred the military title, was a swarthy, small man, but so perfectly formed, and with such an air of command and self-sufficiency about him that he did not impress you as being undersized. He was about thirty, eminently handsome, but with an expression unpleasant, even sinister, in his brilliant black eyes—an expression made up of haughtiness, subtlety, and suspicion.

His manners were very fascinating, and his voice, with its Spanish accent, was soft as the music of a flute when he willed it to be so.

"Pardon, signora," he said "I have forced myself upon you this morning. I am called away imperatively—first to Chili, then to Cuba. I shall see you again. I could not leave without seeing you."

She drew her hand gently out of his ardent clasp. Her cheek burned guiltily. She was thinking: "I brought this on myself by what I did and permitted last night. God knows I was wild! I cared for nothing except to make believe that I was not a miserable, forsaken woman!"

"Sit down, Captain Alvera," she said, a chill of coldness in her courteous words. "You had something to say to me?"

The sooner it is over the better, she thought.

(To be continued)

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Notice is hereby given that the Assessment list of the Town of Newcastle for the year 1915, remains in my hands as collector and receiver of taxes.

All persons whose taxes remain unpaid after the 26th June, are defaulters, and unless prompt payment is made, steps to enforce the same will be taken without delay.

J. E. T. LINDON,
Town Treasurer.

Synopsis of Canadian Northwest Land Regulations

The sole head of a family, or any male over 18 years old, may homestead a quarter section of available Dominion land in Manitoba, Saskatchewan or Alberta. The applicant must appear in person at the Dominion Lands Agency or Sub-agency for district. Entry by proxy may be made at any Dominion Lands Agency (but not Sub-Agency), on certain conditions.

Duties: Six months' residence upon and cultivation of the land in each of three years. A homesteader may live within nine miles of his homestead on a farm of at least 80 acres, on certain conditions. A habitable house is required except where residence is performed in the vicinity.

In certain districts a homesteader in good standing may pre-empt a quarter section alongside his homestead. Price \$3.00 per acre.

Duties: Six months' residence in each of three years after earning homestead patent; also 50 acres extra cultivation. Pre-emption patent may be obtained as soon as homestead patent, on certain conditions.

A settler who has exhausted his homestead right may take a purchased homestead in certain districts. Price \$3.00 per acre. Duties—Must reside six months in each of three years, cultivate 50 acres and erect a house worth \$300.

The area of cultivation is subject to reduction in case of rough scrubby or stony land. Five stock may be substituted for cultivation under certain conditions.

W. W. CORY, C. M. G.,
Deputy of the Minister of the Interior.

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