

HIS LEGAL WIFE

BY MARY E. BRYAN

(Continued)
CHAPTER XVIII
Nina de Vasco was not the woman to break her heart for a faithless lover. She had too much pride and too much good sense. She did not pine and weep her dark eyes sore. She put vain regrets behind her and looked courageously ahead.

She had health and youth. She had five thousand dollars and her little Indian River Farm. And she had her own good brains and young hands. She felt herself to be abundantly rich.

But though she grieved neither at her lost fortune nor her recent lover, there was a sore spot in her heart: there was a face she could not forget, a night she would remember while life lasted.

But like many another disappointed woman, she found a flange for her sore heart in work. She began a new story. She set three or four strong armed darkeys to clearing up fresh land for planting oranges and pineapples. It was hard, tedious work, this grubbing up of the great palmetto and live oak trees, but the negroes went at it lustily. They struck camp and in the intervals of work they hunted and fished and got out cysters and roasted them. She could see their camp fire glancing through the trees at night, and hear them singing the quaint nonsensical rhymes strange together by some native genius and set to a tune weird and melancholy as the sigh of the wind in the pine trees.

Sitting at the window of her upper room, she listened to them as they sang. "I'm gwine down 'narket the log-leaf pine. And I won't be back till summer time."

It filled her with a strange longing—a kind of homesick feeling—that brought tears to her eyes. These would shake her head impatiently and turn again to her writing.

She rose early, and usually went down to the water's edge, and standing on the jutting equina rocks, underneath which the sea water gurgled and sobbed, she watched the white-winged gulls or the flocks of wilding ducks.

If she found herself growing too dreary she turned to more practical lines. Preceded by her little darkey maid carrying a garden hose, she took herself to her "truck patch," which was one sheet of green, with its rows of tender lettuce, tomatoes, beans and cucumbers.

Here, one day, she was surprised by an unlooked-for visitor. She was tired of work, and with both hands resting on the top of her little rack, she leaned against a palm-tree, whose great plummy leaves sheltered her from the sun. She had thrown off her palm-tree hat and the breeze cooled her flushed cheeks and stirred the little curls upon her forehead.

A quick step behind her roused her from the reverie she had fallen into. The step came nearer. She thought it was her dog.

"So, Hector, you have found me," she said aloud, reaching back her hand, expecting to have the pretty scotter thrust his nose in her palm.

His face growing dark with anger, "I know now that it was he you loved, and not the man you married—married out of pique and revenge. If I had known this before I could have told you it was your money he was after from the first and not you. I was sure of that when we were both suitors for your favor. To test it I got a man—a friend of mine—to hint to him that your hold on your uncle's fortune was not secure; that you would have to yield to the right heir if he should prove to be alive—which was more than likely. This gave the scoundrel a scare and he made a pretext to quarrel with you and have you break off the engagement just before you were to be married."

"Is this true?"
She was pale to the lips but her look was steady and searching.

"It is true. Here is a letter from the man I commissioned to give the hint about the other heir to Grafton, telling me he had done so. After the cursed fortune-hunter had been sent adrift by Miss Glynn he came again to my friend and wanted to know something about this other heir to the De Vasco estate. My friend laughed and told him it was all a hoax. So he went back to you with a trumped-up story and you believed him and took him back into your favor. I heard this from my friend when I came back from South America where I had gone Nina to get the proofs that would enable me to claim the De Vasco millions and humble the woman whose marriage to another had made me mad for revenge. Your marriage to Lee had taken me completely by surprise. I thought Grafton was my only rival, but when I went to you with the proof of his perfidy, you told me you were married to Henry Lee. After I returned I set myself to finding out the secret of this sudden marriage. I discovered that it was a mere legal form, and that you had dissolved it by a divorce. You were here in Florida, and so was Grafton. It was easy to guess why you had freed yourself by divorce. But I set out to seek you at once, for I believed that Grafton would desert you when he knew you had no money. I judged him rightly, as I found when I got to Rockledge a few hours ago. He had left the hotel in company with a rich widow and her daughter; he was to marry the daughter—so report said. He had turned from the woman who loved him as soon as her fortune vanished—base cur that he is! But I am stabbing you needlessly, Nina. You love this man, and when a De Vasco loves or hates, it is with the whole heart and forever."

"A De Vasco ceases to love when esteem is turned into contempt. I no longer care for Floyd Grafton."

"Do you say that, Nina? The saints be praised! Then tell me why is there no hope for me? You are heart-free—you must be, for you had not love for the man you married, through spite, as I know. It was a marriage in name only. You are still the Nina of old—my beautiful, maiden love. Nina, you are alone—as I am—without kindred or congenial friends. With all your proud self-reliance, you are sure to suffer from heartloneliness, and lack of sympathy. Come to me, Nina. No one will love and cherish you as I will. The fortune you have given back to me is done without you. Come, my heart's love, my dearest."

As the impassioned Spaniard made his fervid plea he had leaned nearer to her, his dark eyes pouring their fire into hers. Suddenly he drew her to him; his bearded mouth was close to her glowing lips, when he met the look of cold rebuke in her eyes, and abruptly released her. He stood away from her, his face darkened.

"I can not move you; you are as cold as a statue. You will never love me!" he said with pain and anger in his tone.

"No, Alvera, I can never love you—as you ask. As for marriage, I will never marry again. I have ordered my life otherwise."

He did not speak for a moment. He stood looking away toward the shimmering river, the anger fading out of his eyes, leaving only the pain. Presently he turned to her in his abrupt way.

"So be it," he said. "I give up the dearest hope of my life. Some day you may repent this—then a word will bring me to you. As for the money, I don't want it without you. You must take it back, Nina. I have no use for it. I shall go back to South America. There is always fighting there, and my sword will win me all I need."

CHAPTER XIX
"With all your proud self-reliance you will suffer from heartloneliness and lack of sympathy."

These words of Alvera's often came back to Nina in the long days and weeks that followed her cousin's visit in spite of her courage, her strong will, and busy energy. She grew restless as the tedious summer days drew on. Her step lost its buoyancy; her mind lost its clearness and force.

"I must try a change," she said at last; and she left for her Florida home in the green flowery but fervid June, and went to the mountains of North Georgia, finding lodgings in the little brown cottage of a kindly farmer and his wife, who lived in a picturesque valley, through which ran a mountain stream.

Here, in the shadow of the great gray peaks, strength came back to her, and she wrote steadily on the story upon which she had expended so much thought and imagination. For weeks she lived in a world of her own creation. If memories and regrets, connected with the outside world, intruded themselves, she fought them back.

At last the story was finished and sent to the publisher. Then there came a reaction. The enthusiasm of work died out and a season of depression succeeded. Nina's heart was shaken with rebellious longings. She had heard nothing from Harry Lee—she had heard not a word about him since the wedding cards had reached her. There was not even an acknowledgment of the wedding present she had sent—the forty-thousand-dollar check. Well, had she not possibly forestalled this and all other communications by saying in her letter that she was about to start on a long tour, and must bid them goodbye for an indefinite time? The loss of her money and the breaking of her marriage had come away with the expected tour; but did Harry know of this? What matter if he did not? It was best as it was—best she did not hear of him at all. Why should she wish to hear of him? Their paths would never cross again, and she would be sure to the end. Best, so she decided. And yet the longing to see his face, to hear his voice, was strong within her.

She had struggled against it one day until her nerves were all aquiver, and shutting her cottage piano with a movement of impatience, she snatched her broad hat, and in spite of the hot sun, she climbed the shaggy side of the mountain nearest to the cottage.

She came back weary and foot-sore, but with the restlessness partly subdued. It would come again though, she knew. Oh, for some occupation that would absorb both hand and brain!

As she reached the cottage gate, the young daughter of the house-keeper, on her pony, and handed her a letter and some papers she had brought from the post-office. The letter was from her publisher, containing a liberal check, and a few words of praise that would have brought a glow to her heart, in some other mood.

She turned to the papers. She was deeply interested in the trouble that was now shrouding the gay little Florida city of Jacksonville in a pall of gloom. Yellow fever had appeared in the middle of the splendid summer, and was making fearful ravages among the people. The first thing to catch her eye as she unfolded the paper was the black headlines at the top of the column, telling of the fearful ravages in Jacksonville, and making an urgent appeal for nurses, professional or other, to care for the sick who were dying for the want of attention. In many instances there was not a hand to give the sufferer a cup of water or a spoonful of medicine.

As she read, a swift conviction came to Nina. Here was the field of action and absorbing interest which she had longed for. She felt herself called to go and help these suffering people. She had been exposed to the yellow fever in Cuba, when a child, and had not taken it. There was a chance that her young, strong constitution and stronger will might resist the dread disease. If not, she was alone in the world; there was none to miss her if she died.

But she did not stop to reason; she acted at once on the conviction that had taken hold of her. In two days she was in the fever smitten, panic-stricken city. Desolate, indeed, it looked. The hot sun glared down upon the sandy streets; many of the houses were deserted; grass grew in the walks; gaunt cats and hungry-looking dogs prowled among the rich neglected shrubbery. Behind the closed shutters many of the inhabited houses could be heard the groans of pain or the shrieks of delirium.

Nina was fortunate enough to get lodging with a woman of her own country—a kindly, cheerful little widow, who, with her father, lived in a cottage half hidden among orange trees. They were "immunes"—that is, they had genuine yellow fever in Cuba, and were not afraid to stay in the midst of it now.

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Is Growing Smaller Every Day.

CARTER'S LITTLE LIVER PILLS are responsible—they not only give relief—they permanently cure Constipation. Miss Lynn uses them for Bile, Indigestion, Sick Headache, Sallow Skin, Small Pile, Small Bowel, Small Freckle.

Genuine must bear Signature



The old doctor stared in surprise at the youthful, beautiful face and the high-bred refinement of the girl who had come to this plague-poisoned city to nurse sick strangers, and seemed satisfied with her answers. He had seen yellow fever before in its most malignant form, she told him—though it was when she was a child. And she was not unaccustomed to a sick room. She had nursed her father through a long sickness. Her earnestness conquered his scruples; he gave her work to do in one of the improvised hospitals quite near her boarding house.

It has been a dancing hall. The walls that had once echoed sounds of gay music and the heat of merry feet now echoed the groans and delicious shrieks of agonized human beings.

Nina realized the truth of the old physician's warning. "It is the hardest work in the world to nurse a yellow fever case." But she proved herself patient and efficient. All her restlessness and self-pity disappeared in the midst of the fearful suffering she was called upon to witness and soothe.

One day, while she stood beside Dr. Lynn receiving some instructions concerning a patient, a young girl was borne past her in the arms of two of the male attendants. Her long, yellow hair nearly swept the floor; her arms were tossed wildly about as she cried out:

"You shall not bring me here! I am going to my husband! I will go to my husband; you shall not keep me from him!"

"Poor girl!" said Doctor Lynn. "It is a case of relapse," he went on, seeing the look of interest in Nina's eyes. "She was among the first who was attacked with fever. She had an unusually long spell of it, and a tedious convalescence. She worried all the time about getting well enough to go to her husband. This morning she persisted in leaving the boarding house where she has been ill; to-night she has the fever once more, with small chance of recovery. A relapse of yellow fever rarely gets well."

"But who is she?" asked Nina, with repressed excitement.

She had caught a glimpse of the nurse was trying to gather up and confine. The sight of the girl's face startled her. It was a very beautiful face in spite of its emaciation—and it was somehow familiar. She had seen it before—but where?

She could not recall where she had seen it. She listened eagerly as the doctor said:

"The girl is an actress. She was here with a travelling company who played in the city early this summer. She accidentally hurt her knee, and was left here under treatment by the other members of the troupe. She was just able to walk when she was attacked with the fever."

him—perhaps in a moment of anger—tempted by a passion for the stage. She was now repentant of the impulsive act, and longing to return to him. And he—

"Oh! no doubt he is heart-broken over her desertion," thought Nina, "but he will forgive her and take her back. He does not know what has befallen her; he does not know that she is ill in this strange city—all ready to die. No, no, she must not die. She shall be my charge. I will give up all the rest and devote myself to her. With God's help, I will save her for him. I will pay the debt I owe to Harry Lee."

CHAPTER XX
She was true to her resolve. She won over the doctors, and obtained permission to take Lucille away from the crowded fever ward, with its necessarily impure air, and its depressing sights and sound, to her own lodgings a few blocks away. She gave up the best and coolest of her two rooms to the sick girl, a pretty apartment with wide windows shaded by a large lemon tree. Here on the cool white bed, they laid the unconscious girl, who was to fight once more her battle with death, this time with all the odds against her. But faithfully, oh, valiantly, did her unknown, unrecognized nurse aid her in fighting this desperate battle.

Never was nurse more devoted. Day and night Nina was at her post. All the sympathy of her great soul went out to this helpless girl, who had trusted her in the heart of the only man she could ever love. She heard her call for him so pitifully in her delirium.

"Oh, darling, you do love me! You must not desert me. I love no one but you in the world. Think what I have done for you in the past. Forgive my waywardness. Come to me. Oh, come to me, my dearest, my husband."

Thus she would rave, starting up, often struggling to get out of the bed, until exhausted, she would fall back into the arms of her nurse. Bending over her as she lay in her arms, Nina dropped many a tear upon the little face, stamped with the yellow skin of fever, and so pitifully childlike with its delicate small features and curling yellow hair.

"If he could see her, he would forgive her," she thought. "If she dies and he does not see her, he will be haunted with remorse all his life."

Soon after she began to attend upon Lucille, she determined to make Lee aware of his wife's dangerous illness. She did not know his present address, and it was impossible to get it from Lucille. How should she reach him with a telegram? It might be that her axyer would know where to find him, or perhaps the superintendent of the bank on which he had given her that check. She remembered the name of the superintendent and it was to his care that she sent the message:

"Jacksonville, L— Street, No. 18—Lucille very ill. Come at once."

The message was unsigned, and it was sent at a venture, but she felt impressed that it would reach him. Yet, as the 'twelve lengthened in to days, and Lucille grew steadily worse, and no answer came, she began to lose hope. The fear grew on her that her charge must die. Doctor Lynn had said that there was but one chance in a thousand for her recovery.

The crisis came upon one wild night of rain and storm. It was the sixth night that Nina had watched alone beside the sick-bed of Lucille. She was worn out, but excitement and her strong will kept her up. Then she took the best care of herself possible under the circumstances. She ate simple and nourishing food; she drank no liquid, and she ate nothing—not even fruit—that had not undergone a purification by heat. She kept her mind calm, and her faith in an overruling power clear and true. Every night, no matter if it was warm, she kindled a little fire of resinous pine sticks upon the hearth of the sick room, in which she now passed nearly all her time.

Very cheerful and comfortable looked the little pine fire tonight. Its light was carefully screened from the eyes of the sick girl—those bright, wide eyes that would not close in sleep.

"If by midnight she should fall into a natural sleep, it will be a token that the crisis is safely passed. If she does not, it will probably be her last night on earth."

Doctor Lynn had said these words today at the close of his parting instructions to Nina. He had administered a sedative, but it had taken no effect. Sleep seemed far away from those large, unweary eyes.

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tempter, "her husband—the man you love—may be yours."

The thought horrified her; she did her best to rebuke it but in vain. The until flinging herself on her knees, she prayed fervently:

"God strengthen me! God deliver me from temptation!"

She rose from her knees, her soul was at peace. She felt calm and strong.

She bent over Lucille and took the restless little fingers in hers, holding them so while she centered her mind upon this one thought—one command—"Sleep, Lucille; sleep."

Gently removing one of her hands, she began to move it over the brow and the bosom of the girl with light, long strokes, her lips snapping that soft but strong command: "Sleep, sleep."

Half an hour passed before, with a thrill of joy and thankfulness, she saw the blue eyelids begin to droop over the dulling eyes. A few more soft strokes, a moment of silent prayer and waiting—and Lucille slept—the deep, life-saving magnetic sleep.

Then, with a low, quivering sigh, Nina felt the fearful strain upon her relax. Her head fell back against the chair, and large tears forced their way through her lashes and coursed unchecked down her cheeks. A moment later, she too, yielded to the sweet restorer: the first unbroken sleep she had known for five nights and days wrapped her in its embrace.

The early dawn of the short summer night stole into the room and mixed strangely with the pale, sickly light of the watch-lamp. The rain was over; the foliage of the orange trees glittered freshly in the rosy dawn. The twitter of a mocking-bird awoke Nina. She started up and looked at the bed. The face on the pillow had lost the flush of fever. It was so wan and still that the fear seized her. "Lucille is dead!"

Anxiously she bent over the couch, and a single broke over her face as the soft, regular breathing of the sleeper came to her ear.

Lucille's eyes were closed, but she was breathing.

"Oh! it is my husband. Oh—!"

"Hush, dear; you must not get excited. You must be very calm. The gentleman did not give his name. If you will be very good and not talk, I will bring him to you."

"Go, dear nurse; bring him at once. Drawing the curtain still further over her face, Nina went out into the hall to where Lee was standing, and motioned to him to follow her. On the threshold of the sick-room she stopped and holding the door in her hand, she said:

"Be very careful. Don't excite her. Don't let her talk to you."

"I will be careful," he answered, bending his head.

He passed in, and she closed the door behind him, feeling that her presence in the room would be an intrusion.

She felt too, that she could not endure to witness this interview. There was a hard struggle in her breast. The sight of his face, the sound of his voice, had touched the chord in her heart she had been trying hard to deaden. She went to her room and shut the door. To steady herself she lighted her alcohol-lamp and began to prepare some nourishment for Lucille.

"I will get Madame Sylvestre to take it in to her," she said. "I will not see him again. I will not make myself known to them; there is no need of it. Doctor Lynn will send another nurse today, and Lucille will get well now fast, since he is with her. I will go and find some other case that is more needy. Yes, it is much better not to make myself known."

Madame Sylvestre came in presently, a dark thin little woman, with soft black eyes and thick coils of black hair, an ideal Cuban senora, though she had not seen the "Faithful Isle" since she was a child.

GIVE "SYRUP OF FIGS" TO CONSTIPATED CHILD

Delicious "Fruit Laxative" can't harm tender little Stomach, liver and bowels.

Look at the tongue, mother! If coated, your little one's stomach, liver and bowels need cleansing at once. When peevish, cross, listless, doesn't sleep, eat or act naturally, or is feverish, stomach sour, breath bad; has sore throat, diarrhoea, full of cold, give a teaspoonful of "California Syrup of Figs," and in a few hours all the foul, constipated waste, undigested food and sour bile gently moves out of its little bowels without griping, and you have a well, playful child again. Ask your druggist for a 50-cent bottle of "California Syrup of Figs," which contains full directions for babies, children of all ages and for grown-ups.