

HER MARRIAGE GIFT.

It was Phil Barrada's wedding-day, and the girl he was to have married had jilted him—gone off with another man at the last moment.

That was not all. John Pommery, the banker, was deeply in debt to Barrada, and it had been the tacit understanding that this marriage was to cancel all obligations.

Not that there had been the slightest approach to a bargain, even in thought—Phil loved, and supposed himself loved again—but naturally, he had been more easy in money-matters with the man whose son-in-law he expected to be, than he would have been with a stranger.

Phil staggered under the blow, but the banker seemed crushed.

He sat in his elegant library, his hands hanging limp from the arms of his chair, his fine form shrunken into such a pitiable heap of shame and dismay that few would have known him.

Barrada stood by the mantelpiece, his handsome face white, his hands clenched. It was rage that shook his soul.

The manner in which he had been cheated was maddening. To have been deluded until this last supreme moment, and then forsaken for the creature Rose Pommery had chosen.

"See here, Pommery!" he said to the overwhelmed banker bitterly. "Rouse up, man! I want to talk to you. I came here to be married, and I must have my wife!"

John Pommery stared at him helplessly, with dropped jaw.

"Good heavens, man, don't look at me that way!" exclaimed Barrada, impatiently. "You have other daughters. Let us have a wedding in spite of Rose. Will you do it? I mean it—yes. Decide quickly; there is no time to lose."

The banker straightened himself, and tried to look a little more rational.

"Which—which?" he gasped.

At that moment a young girl, perhaps fifteen, ran into the library.

"Papa, are you ill?" she cried in a scared voice, flinging her arms around his neck.

She was Lil Pommery, the youngest of Mr. Pommery's daughters, and possessed the least claims to beauty.

She was in white, of course, which made her gipsy skin seem even darker by contrast. But she had splendid big black eyes, which turned in luminous wonder now on Phil Barrada, as he exclaimed, coming forward and taking her hand in his:

"Lil, you are sorry for me. You like me a little, I know. Will you put on the bridal-veil your sister has discarded, and come with me and be married to-morrow? I will never let you regret it."

Lil's very lips turned white and stiff.

Her father put his arm around her.

"She is such a child, Barrada," he said faintly.

"All the better," Phil answered sternly, keeping fast hold of the little quivering hand. "She is more likely to be honest and true. Neither you nor she shall ever regret it, if you give her to me, sir. What do you say, Lil?"

"Papa?" questioned the girl timidly, turning her little, dark, startled face towards him.

"My child!"

"Shall I, papa? Would you like it?"

Mr. Pommery drew a long anxious breath. Such a marriage would keep money matters on the old footing, and to pay Barrada now would break him. It did not take him long to decide.

"Yes," he said, "it would gratify me very much, and save us all—your mother and sisters—from great humiliation."

"Then I will," said Lil.

Her father went himself with her to her sisters and mother, and explained briefly.

There was not time to get excited, and by the next day all was ready, and the ceremony was over, almost before anyone had discovered that the bride was Lil, instead of Rose.

It was a nine days' wonder, and then was succeeded by some other eccentric corruscation in the fashionable heavens.

Four years went by.

Lil had spent them at school, Phil Barrada in traveling.

Rose Pommery Stratton was home again, a lovely and interesting widow, who had long ago wished she had known when she was well off, and married a rich man while she could get him.

She was entirely dependent on her father, and not too welcome in his house. She almost hated Lil, in her envy of her, as the mistress of Barrada's splendid home.

Phil had kept his word, and tried his best that no regrets should follow that hasty and seemingly ill-judged marriage.

He was the master of large means, and he had helped Mr. Pommery lavishly, while he had poured out gifts on Lil, and stayed abroad purposely to leave her unembarrassed.

They had corresponded freely and constantly, and seemed, neither of them, to have repented.

He was coming home now; was expected daily, hourly almost.

"Shall certainly be with you by the tenth," he wrote Lil, "and bring with me a marriage-gift for my wife—something worthy a princess's acceptance."

Barrada's main income was derived from a mining enterprise called the "Grand Golden Mining Company," in which he was a large shareholder.

Mrs. Stratton heard, with feelings of envy that cannot be described.

"It's a great pity you are not a handsome woman, Lil," she would say to her sister simperingly. "Phil Barrada thinks so much of beauty in a woman. I am not sure I ought to risk seeing him after all that has happened. What would you do if he fell in love with me over again?"

Lil scarcely heard her. She was a good deal more anxious as to what her

husband would think about her than she was concerning his falling in love over again with Rose.

She was so little self-conscious that she did not know the plain, dark-skinned child had become one of the most beautiful women to be found anywhere.

The time seemed very long to her. The tenth came and went, and still no Barrada. She began to be very anxious.

The morning papers of the eleventh brought disastrous news.

The Grand Consolidated Golden Mining Company had gone by the board—burst like a pricked bubble.

It was told at the breakfast-table, and every one turned white but Rose, who burst into an exultant laugh.

"That is what keeps him," she sneered. "It is to be hoped your present is safe, Lil."

"Rose," said John Pommery almost fiercely, "another speech like that will cost you the slight welcome you at present have under my roof. Mind it!"

Lil sat like one turned to stone.

Presently she rose, and went out of the room, motioning the others back when they would have followed her.

"I want to be alone," she said simply.

The next moment a note was brought to the banker, signed "Phil Barrada," and saying:

"I am in the library. Come to me, without letting Lil know."

Smothering an exclamation, Pommery left the room.

The two men met agitatedly.

"How does she take it?" demanded Phil eagerly. "Shall I go and shoot myself, or will you get her a divorce? You can, I dare say," he said, in a jesting tone, that jarred fearfully on his father-in-law's already shaken nerves.

There was a small bay-windowed alcove opening from the library, across which a curtain swung at pleasure.

Neither of the men had noticed that at the first tone of Barrada's voice, this curtain had lifted, and shown Lil, just as she had fled there from the dining-room.

As those dreadful words fell from her husband's lips, she moved towards him.

He turned suddenly and saw her, and, notwithstanding the wonderful transformation in her, knew her.

The next moment she was in his arms. Pommery stole quietly out of the room.

"Let them settle it themselves," he muttered.

"Why, how is this?" asked Barrada at last, looking fondly down into the radiant, blushing face upon his bosom.

"You don't mean to say you love me, Lil?"

A happy, sweet laugh, and closer-clinging arms answered him.

"But have you heard? Do you know that misfortunes have overtaken me?"

"Of course I have heard! Do you suppose I care, so long as I have got you?"

And then, to his amazement, Lil burst into tears.

"Oh, Phil!" she said; "promise me you will never again say such dreadful things as you said just now to papa."

"I promise," he answered, laughing.

"I was only jesting, anyway, you little goose! My money is not gone. I sold out of the mine over a year ago. Lucky, wasn't it? Oh, Lil!" holding her off to look at her—"oh, my darling! How beautiful you are!"

"Am I, indeed? Do I really seem so to you?" cried Lil joyfully.

"I have not seen so lovely a face in all my travels," he answered enthusiastically.

"I am so glad!" she said, nestling down into his arms again.

It had been almost on her lips to ask if she was as handsome as he once thought Rose. But even the memory of that doubt died now.

Not for worlds would she have mentioned her sister.

"But all the same," said Phil presently, "I have brought you a marriage-gift. Wait till you see that. Oh, you needn't look?" he added, laughing. "I haven't got it about me. It wasn't exactly a convenient article to put in my pocket."

The gift in question proved to be a jewel-casket of most costly description, enriched with diamond, ruby, and pearl treasures, such as would have turned the head of almost any woman, but did not Lil's.

To find herself beautiful in her husband's eyes, and dearly beloved in his heart, dazzled her sweet true soul more than the glitter of gems from a queen's diadem could have done.

A Mean Trick.

The subject of actors' vanity might yield endless stories. Everybody knows that it is a failing that runs down from the highest in the profession to the lowest "supe." Pardon me for an illustration from the lowest round. It was in one of Lawrence Barrett's Boston engagements, and the hero was the useful actor whose duty it is to come on and say to Barrett, "Forgive me, master, I slew your horse," whereupon Barrett strikes him down. The heroic Lucullus was one day chiding a friend for not coming to see his performance. "Why, me boy, it's the great hit of me life," said he. "My fall last night took the house right off its feet; it was simply immense. They was bound to have me before the curtain, but just as I was going on Barrett shoved me out of the way and took the call himself. It was a d-d mean trick."—*Cor. Minneapolis Tribune.*

A few days ago, in the course of some excavations at the Acropolis, Athens, near the Erechtheum, three statues of women, in an excellent state of preservation, half as large again as life, with large heads, and completely colored, were discovered. They belong to the period before Phidias, are delicately finished, and are of an archaic art, admirably preserved.

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