Marie Corelli

The Murder of Delicia

Marie Corelli

The Murder of Delicia



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066094317

TABLE OF CONTENTS

┙/	/ D	ᄄ	D	
<u> </u>	<u>۱۲</u>		<u> </u>	

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER XI

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Table of Contents

The following slight and unelaborated sketch of a very commonplace and everyday tragedy will, I am aware, meet with the unqualified disapproval of the 'superior' sex. They will assert, with much indignant emphasis, that the character of 'Lord Carlyon' is an impossible one, and that such a 'cad' as he is shown to be never existed. Anticipating these remarks, I have to say in reply that the two chief personages in my story, namely, 'Lord Carlyon' and his wife, are drawn strictly from the life; and, that though both the originals have some years since departed from this scene of earthly contest and misunderstanding, SO that delineation of their characters can no longer grieve or offend either, the 'murder of Delicia' was consummated at the hands of her husband precisely in the way I have depicted it.

There are thousands of such 'murders' daily happening among us—murders which are not considered 'cruelty' in the eyes of the law. There are any number of women who work night and day with brain and hand to support useless and brainless husbands; women whose love never falters, whose patience never tires, and whose tenderness is often rewarded only by the most callous neglect and ingratitude. I do not speak of the countless cases among the hardworking millions whom we elect to call the 'lower classes,' where the wife, working from six in the morning till ten at

night, has to see her hard earnings snatched from her by her 'better' half and spent at the public-house in strong drink, despite the fact that there is no food at home, and that innocent little children are starving. These instances are so frequent that they have almost ceased to awaken our interest, much less our sympathy. In my story I allude principally to the 'upper' ranks, where the lazy noodle of an aristocrat spends his time, first, in accumulating debts, and then in looking about for a woman with money to pay them —a woman upon whose income he can afterwards live comfortably for the rest of his worthless life. To put it bluntly and plainly, a great majority of the men of the present day want women to keep them. It is not a manly or noble desire; but as the kind of men I mean have neither the courage nor the intelligence to fight the world for themselves, it is, I suppose, natural to such inefficient weaklings that they should,—seeing the fierce heat and contest of competition in every branch of modern labour,—gladly sneak behind a woman's petticoats to escape the general fray. But the point to which I particularly wish to call the attention of the more thoughtful of my readers is that these very sort of men (when they have secured the ignoble end of their ambition, namely, the rich woman to live upon, under matrimonial sufferance) are the first to run down women's work, women's privileges, women's attainments and women's honour. The man who owes his dinner to his wife's unremitting toil is often to be heard speaking of the 'uselessness' of women, their frivolity and general incapacity. And in cases where the woman's intellectual ability is brought into play, and where the financial results of

her brain work are such that they enable the husband to live as he likes, surrounded with every ease and comfort, then it is that at the clubs, or in any other place where he can give himself sublime airs of independence, he will frequently express regret, in grandiloquent terms, that there should be any women who 'want to be clever'; they are always 'unsexed.' This word 'unsexed' is always cast at brilliant women by every little halfpenny ragamuffin of the press that can get a newspaper corner in which to hide himself for the convenience of throwing stones. The woman who paints a great picture is 'unsexed'; the woman who writes a great book is 'unsexed': in fact, whatever woman does that is higher and more ambitious than the mere act of flinging herself down at the feet of man and allowing him to walk over her, makes her in man's opinion unworthy of his consideration as woman; and he fits the appellation 'unsexed' to her with an easy callousness, which is as unmanly as it is despicable.

Now, to turn to the other side of the medal; let us see what are the occupations man graciously permits to woman without affronting her by this opprobrious epithet. In the first place, he is chiefly willing to see her on the stage. And he generally prefers the music-hall stage as the best one fitted to her 'poor' abilities. It is no particular 'fun' to him to see her rise to the histrionic height of a Rachel or a Sarah Bernhardt—the sublimity of tragedy in her eyes does not specially move him—the simulation of heartbreak in her face may possibly awake in him a curious emotion, divided between pity and astonishment,—but it does not amuse him. Nor does the exquisite grace of the finished

'comedienne' delight him entirely,—her pretty airs and graces, and her ringing laugh, are fascinating in a way, but in the huge amount of amour-propre, which swells the head of the smallest masculine noodle about town, he has an uncomfortable, lurking suspicion that she may all the while, under her charming stage-feigning, be really laughing at him and the whole of his sex generally. No! Neither the height of tragedy nor comedy in the woman on the stage really satisfy men so much as the happy medium,—the particular 'no-man's-land' of art, where nothing is demanded of her but—Body and Grin. A beautiful Body, trained to walk and look well—an affable Grin, expanding at the sight of champagne and other mundane delicacies,—these are all that is necessary. Now, if this beautiful Body be well-nigh stripped to man's gaze night after night on the boards, he will never call the woman who so exposes herself 'unsexed,' nor will he apply the word to her if she drinks too much wine and brandy. But if another woman, with guite as beautiful a body, instead of exhibiting herself half nude on the musichall stage, prefers to keep her woman's modesty, and execute some great work of art which shall be as good and even better than anything man can accomplish, she will be dubbed 'unsexed' instantly. And I ask—Why is it that man elects to compass woman's degradation rather than her uplifting and sanctification? It is a wrong course to adopt,—an evil course: and one that carries with it a terrible retribution in the lives of the coming generation.

I think, as I write, of a certain individual, living at the present moment in one of the most fashionable quarters of London,—a man who is generally looked upon with a

considerable amount of respect by the monied and titled classes. Some years ago he married a bright little American woman for her money, and since that time he has made her life an hourly misery. She loved him,—more's the pity!—and though he does not scruple to insult her before others with an insolent brutality which is as shameful as it is disgusting, —though he will upbraid her before his servants and his guests at dinner with the harshness one might expect of a slave-driver, she endures his cruelty with patience—and why? For her children's sake. Her womanly idea is, that they should respect their father, and to that end she puts her own injuries aside and does her best and bravest to keep the household straight. Her money it is that pays for all the costly dinners and entertainments with which her husband glorifies himself before his acquaintances each London 'season,' pushing her into the background at every turn, and hanging on to the skirts of the newest fashionable demimondaine instead; and through her and her constant bounty alone he has attained the social position he holds. This is only one instance out of many where men, indebted to women for every honour and advancement they possess, turn and rend their 'good angels,' or torture them by every conceivable means of private malice and wickedness, which cannot come under the jurisdiction of the law. And love is so much the best part of a good woman's nature, that when she once truly gives her whole heart and soul away to a man, she finds it difficult, nay, almost impossible, to uproot that deep affection and understand that it has been, or is wasted upon him. This was the trouble and incurable wound of 'Delicia'; it is the trouble and incurable wound of thousands of women to-day.

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to touch on another grievous and ignoble phase of modern manhood which is constantly exhibited among us at the present time, namely, the miserable position voluntarily held by certain 'noblemen' who, because they have placed themselves in unbecoming condition of owing unnatural and everything to their wives' money, permit those wives to play fast and loose with their honour and good name, and apparently shut their eyes to the shameless infidelities which make them the by-word and contempt of all selfrespecting 'commoners.' It would be a wholesome and refreshing stimulus to society if such 'blue-blooded' lacqueys could awake to the fact that manhood is better than money, and would by their own free will and choice go out to hard labour in the gold-fields or elsewhere and earn their own livelihood bravely and independently, instead of lounging and frittering their days away, the silent and inactive spectators of their wives' open and wanton degradation.

I have purposely selected the case of 'Delicia' from several more or less similar ones as a type of the fate frequently meted out by men to the women who have by their own intellectual attainments succeeded in winning fame and fortune. There are three radical errors chiefly made by the 'superior' sex in their hasty estimation of what are called 'clever' women;—the first on the question of heart; the second in the matter of permanence; and the third on the always momentous consideration of good looks.

If a woman does anything out of the common in the way of art or literature, she is immediately judged by men as being probably without tenderness, without permanence in her work, and certainly without personal beauty. Now, as far as tenderness goes, a woman who thinks, who has read much and has studied human life in its various wonderful and often sad aspects, is far more able to realise the rareness and the worth of true love than the woman who has never thought or studied at all. She,—the woman thinker, understands with full pathos the real necessity there is for being kind, patient and forbearing one with the other, since at any moment Death may sever the closest ties and put an end to the happiest dreams; and in her love—if she does love—there must needs be far more force, truth and passion than in the light emotion of the woman who lives for society alone, and flits from pleasure to pleasure like a kind of moth whose existence and feeling are but for a day. On the guestion of permanence in her work, she is the equal of man, as permanence in both ambition and attainment depends chiefly on temperament. A man's work or fame may be as unstable as that of any weak woman if he himself is unstable in nature. But put man and woman together, start them both equally with a firm will and a resoluteness of endeavour, the woman's intellect will frequently outstrip the man's. The reason of this is that she has a quicker instinct and finer impulses. And lastly, on the subject of good looks,—it is not a *sine qua non* that a clever woman must be old and must be ugly. It sometimes happens so, but it is not always so. She may be young and she may be lovely; nevertheless, men prefer to run after the newest

barmaid or music-hall dancer, who is probably painted up to the eyes, and whose figure is chiefly the result of the corsetmaker's art, under the impression that in such specimens alone of our sex will they find true beauty. Were they told that a certain artist who painted a certain great picture was a young and beautiful woman, they would never believe it; if someone volunteered the information that the sculptor whose massive marble group of classic figures adorns one of the galleries in Rome was a woman whose smile was ravishing and whose figure was a model for Psyche, they would shrug their shoulders incredulously. 'No, no!' they would say, 'Clever women are always 'unsexed,'—give me shop-girl—the barmaid—the dancer—the picture'—the aerial gymnast—give me anything rather than a pure, finely-cultured, noble-natured woman to be the mother of my sons!'

Thus things drift; badly for England, if we are to believe all we are told by scientific physiologists,—and whether these wiseacres and doom-prophets are wrong or right in their prognostications, it is certain that the true intention of Woman's destiny has not yet been carried out. She is fighting towards it,—but, if I may venture to say so, she is using her weapons wildly and in various wrong directions. It is not by opposing herself to man that she can be his real helpmeet,—neither is it by supporting him on her money, whether such money be earned or inherited. She will never make a true man of him that way. And it is not by adopting his pastimes or apeing his manners. It is by cultivating and cherishing to the utmost every sweet and sacred sentiment of womanhood,—every grace, every refinement, every

beauty; by taking her share in the world's intellectual work with force, as well as with modesty, and by showing a faultless example of gentle reserve and delicate chastity. When she is like this, it is of course highly probable that she will be 'murdered' often as 'Delicia' was;—but the death of many martyrs is necessary to the establishment of a new creed.

When man begins to understand that woman is not meant to be a toy or a drudge, but a comrade,—the closest, best and truest that God has given him,—then the clouds will clear; and marriage will be a blessing instead of (as it too often proves) a curse,—and there will be few, if any, 'Delicias' to be slain, inasmuch as there will be few, if any men left, so unworthy of their manhood as to play coward and traitor to the women who trust them.

MARIE CORELLI.

July 6th, 1896.

The Murder of Delicia

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

A flood of warm spring sunshine poured its full radiance from the south through the large, square lattice-window of Delicia's study, flashing a golden smile of recognition on Delicia herself and on all the objects surrounding her. Gleaming into the yellow cups of a cluster of daffodils which stood up, proudly erect, out of a quaint, brown vase from Egypt, it flickered across a pearl-inlaid mandoline that hung against the wall, as though it were playing an unheard melody in delicate tremolo on the strings; then, setting a crown of light on Delicia's hair, it flung an arrowy beam at the head of Hadrian's 'Antinous,' whose curved marble lips, parted in an inscrutable, half-mocking smile, seemed about to utter a satire on the ways of women. Delicia had purchased this particular copy of the original bust in the British Museum because she imagined it was like her husband. No one else thought it in the least like him—but she did.

She had all sorts of fancies about this husband of hers—fancies both pretty and passionate—though she had none about herself. She was only a worker; one whom certain distinguished noodles on the Press were accustomed to sneer at from their unintellectual and impecunious standpoint as 'a lady novelist' not meriting the name of 'author,' and who, despite sneers and coarse jesting, was one of the most celebrated women of her time, as well as

one of the wealthiest. The house she lived in, built from her own designs, furnished with every luxury and filled with valuable pictures, curios and art-treasures, was one of the material results of her brilliant brain-work; the perfectly*ménage*, the admirably-trained servants. the famous 'table' at which many of London's most fastidious gourmets had sat and gorged themselves to repletion, were all owing to her incessant and unwearying labour. She did everything; she paid everything, from the taxes down to the wages of the scullery-maid; she managed everything, from the advantageous disposal of her own manuscripts down to the smallest detail of taste and elegance connected with the daily serving of her husband's dinner. She was never idle, and in all her literary efforts had never yet failed to score a triumph above her compeers.

As a writer, she stood quite apart from the rank and file of modern fictionists. Something of the spirit of the Immortals was in her blood—the spirit that moved Shakespeare, Shelley and Byron to proclaim truths in the face of a world of lies—some sense of the responsibility and worth of Literature—and with these emotions existed also the passionate desire to rouse and exalt her readers to the perception of the things she herself knew and instinctively felt to be right and just for all time. The public responded to her voice and clamoured for her work, and, as a natural result of this, all ambitious and aspiring publishers were her suppliants. Whatsoever munificent humble glittering 'terms' are dreamed of by authors in their wildest conceptions of a literary El Dorado, were hers to command; and yet she was neither vain nor greedy. She was, strange to say, though an author and a 'celebrity,' still an unspoilt, womanly woman.

Just when the sunshine crowned her, as the sunshine had a way of doing at that particular hour of the morning, she was very busy finishing the last chapter of a book which had occupied all her energies during the past four months. She wrote rapidly, and the small, well-shaped, white hand that guided the pen held that dangerous intellectual weapon firmly, with a close and somewhat defiant grip, suggestive of the manner of a youthful warrior grasping a light spear and about to hurl it in the face of a foe. Her very attitude in writing indicated mental force and health; no 'literary stoop' disfigured her supple back and shoulders, no sign of 'fag' or 'brain-muddle' clouded the thoughtful yet animated expression of her features. Her eyes were bright, her cheeks delicately flushed. She had no idea of her own poetic and unique loveliness, which was utterly unlike all the various admitted types of beauty in woman. She scarcely knew that her eyes were of that divinely rare, dark violet colour which in certain lights looks almost black, that her skin was white as a snowdrop, or that her hair, in its long, glistening masses of brown-gold, was a wonder and an envy to countless numbers of her sex who presented themselves to the shrewdly-grinning gaze of the world with dyed 'fronts' and false 'back coils.' She truly never thought of these things. She had grown to understand, from current 'smart' newspaper talk, that all authoresses, without exception, were bound to be judged as elderly and plain, even hideous, matter of looks, according to the accepted conventional standard of 'press' ethics, and though she was

perfectly aware that she was young, and not as repulsive in her personal appearance as she ought to be for the profession of letters, she took very little trouble to assert herself, and made no attempt whatever to 'show off her points,' as the slang parlance hath it, though those 'points' outnumbered in variety and charm the usual attractions of attractive women. Admirers of her genius were too dazzled by that genius to see anything but the glow of the spiritual fire burning about her like the Delphic flames around Apollo's priestess, and the dainty trifles of personality, which are ordinarily all a woman has to boast of, were in her case lost sight of. Compliments and flatteries, however, were distasteful to her, except when on rare occasions she received them from her husband. Then her sweet soul kindled within her into a warm glow of rapture and gratitude, and she wondered what she had done to deserve praise from so lordly and perfect a being.

There was something very touching as well as beautiful in the way Delicia bent her proud intellect and prouder spirit to the will of her chosen mate. For him, and for him only, she strove to add fresh glory to the lustre of her name; for him she studied the art of dressing perfectly, loving best to drape herself in soft white stuffs that clung in close, artistic folds round her light and lissom figure, and made her look like a Greuze or a Romney picture; for him she took pains to twist the rich treasure of her hair in cunning braids and lovelocks manifold, arranging it in a soft cluster on her fair forehead after the fashion of the ancient Greeks, and scattering here and there one or two delicate rings about her finely-veined temples, as golden suggestions of kisses

to be pressed thereon. For him she cased her little feet in fascinating *brodequins* of deftest Paris make; for him she moved like a sylph and smiled like an angel; for him she sang, when the evenings fell, old tender songs of love and home, in her rich, soft contralto; for him indeed she lived, breathed and—worked. She was the hiving bee—he the luxurious drone that ate the honey. And it never occurred to him to consider the position as at all unnatural.

Certainly Delicia loved her work—of that there could be no doubt. She enjoyed it with every fibre of her being. She relished the keen competition of the literary arena, where her rivals, burning with jealousy, endeavoured vainly to emulate her position; and she valued her fame as the means of bringing her into contact with all the leading men and women of her day. She was amused at the small spites and envies of the malicious and unsuccessful, and maintained her philosophical and classic composure under all the trumpery slights, ignorant censures and poor scandals put upon her by the less gifted of her own sex. Her career was one of triumph, and being sane and healthy, she enjoyed that triumph to the full. But more than triumph, more than fame or the rewards of fame, more indeed than all things in the world ever devised, measured or possessed, she loved her husband,—a strange passion for a woman in these wild days when matrimony is voted 'out of date' by certain theory-mongers, and a 'nobleman' can be found ready to give a money-bribe to any couple of notorietyhunters who will consent to be married in church according to the holy ordinance, and who will afterwards fling a boorish insult in the face of Religion by protesting publicly against the ceremony. Delicia had been married three years, and those three years had passed by like three glittering visions of Paradise, glowing with light, colour, harmony and rapture. Only one grief had clouded the pageant of her perfect joy, and this was the death of her child, a tiny mortal of barely two months old, which had, as it were, dropped out of her arms like a withered blossom slain by sudden frost. Yet, to Delicia's dreamy and sensitive temperament, the sadness of this loss but deepened her adoration for him round whom her brilliant life twined like a luxurious vine full of blossom and fruit—the strong, splendid, bold, athletic, masterful creature who was hers—hers only! For she knew—her own heart told her this—that no other woman shared his tenderness, and that never, never had his faith to her been shaken by so much as one unruly thought!

And thus it was that Delicia often said of herself that she was the happiest woman in the world, and that her blessings were so many and so various that she was ashamed to pray. 'For how can I, how dare I ask God for anything else when I have so much?' she would inwardly reflect. 'Rather let me be constant in the giving of thanks for all the joys so lavishly bestowed upon me, which I so little deserve!' And she would work on with redoubled energy, striving after perfection in all she did, and full of a strange ardour combined with a yet stranger humility. She never looked upon her work as a trouble, and never envied those of her own sex whose absolute emptiness of useful occupation enabled them to fritter away their time in such 'delightful' amusements as bicycling, rinking, skirt-dancing and other methods of man-hunting at present in vogue

among the fair feminine animals whose sole aim of is marriage, and after that—nullity. Her existence temperament was eminently practical as well as idealistic, and in the large amounts of money she annually earned she never lost a penny by rash speculation or foolish expenditure. Lavish in her hospitalities, she was never ostentatious, and though perfect in her dress, she was never guilty of the wild and wicked extravagance to which many women in her position and with her means would have yielded without taking a moment's thought. She carefully considered the needs of the poor, and helped them accordingly, in secret, and without the petty presumption of placarding her charities to the world through the medium of a 'bazaar' or hypocritical 'entertainment at the East End.' She felt the deep truth of the saying, 'Unto whom much is given, even from him shall much be required,' and gave her largesse with liberal tenderness and zeal. On one point alone did she outrun the measure of prudence in the scattering of her wealth, and this was in the consideration of her husband. For him nothing was too good, nothing too luxurious, and any wish he expressed, even by the merest chance, she immediately set herself, with pride and joy, to gratify. As a matter of fact, he had not really a penny to call his own, though his private banking account always showed a conveniently large surplus, thanks to Delicia's unfailing care. Wilfred de Tracy Gifford Carlyon, to give him all his names in full, was an officer in the Guards, the younger son of a nobleman who had, after a career of wild extravagance, died a bankrupt. He had no other profession than the military, and though a man of good blood and distinguished