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HOW LARA DIED

By CLARA MULHOLLAND

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The party was breaking up; the party was fast dispersing. And although the sweet strains of the "Blue Danube" were still floating through the rooms, the dancers were few, and the couples who had energy left for waltz or polka were reveling in the delightful parqu岸, over which they could now glide swiftly and lightly without colliding with their neighbors.

"This is decidedly the time to dance," said a tall, slight man, with dark eyes and hair turning a little gray about the temples. "Do you care, Alma?"

"Yes. It is perfectly delightful," replied his partner, a pretty fair girl in a simple frock of soft white chiton. "But we must stop now. I am sure mother is worn out."

"One more turn," he pleaded. "Just one!"

"Very well," laughing, "but you are really insatiable to-night."

"I plead guilty. With you for my partner, I could go on for ever."

"I am afraid I could not, even with you. So stop now. I'm breathless."

"I'm sorry for that," coming to a standstill. "I feel as though," drawing her arm within his own, "the night were only beginning."

"It has passed very quickly," with a soft sigh. "All too quickly."

"My darling," he whispered, as they found themselves in a quiet gallery beyond the ballroom, "you do love me?"

"Yes," she trembled, and drawing herself away from his encircling arm, leant against the wall. "You know I do. But hush! Here comes my mother."

He bowed and turned to greet an elderly lady in rich velvet and lace, and wearing a necklace of magnificent diamonds, who came hurrying towards them.

"At last!" she cried gleefully. "Really, Alma, you might be a little more thoughtful. I am weary to death. It is absurd to stay to such an hour. Mr. Gunning, with a cold and haughty glance, "will you oblige me by asking for my carriage?"

"With pleasure," he answered, surprised at her manner. And offering his arm he led her downstairs to the cloak-room.

"I am more annoyed than I can say, Alma," said Mrs. Malcolm, as she and her daughter drove home together through the silent streets. "It is wrong to make yourself remarkable in the way you do with that man. You can never marry him. I beg you will dance less with him. Keep him at a distance."

Alma crimsoned over throat and brow.

"I mean to marry him," she said firmly. "He is poor, but—"

"If it were only a question of fortune-hunting—"

"Mother, pray—I love Charles. Don't—"

"Love him? Mrs. Malcolm twitched her skirts, and bit her lip. "He makes love, but cannot marry. Confess now. Has he asked you to be his wife?"

"No, but—"

"Listen, Alma. I must warn you—tell you what I have heard. There are strange rumors going about this man. He comes from no one knows exactly where, and some say—it is an awful thing to think of, seeing how he behaves—but they say he has a wife already."

Alma uttered a cry of horror, and the color forsok her cheeks.

"Oh mother! How can you repeat such a calumny? Charles was married, but his wife died years ago."

"Ask him where—how—when. I don't like the man, and don't trust him."

"Mother, you wrong him."

"For your sake I hope so. But till I am convinced that his wife is dead, and I am proved that beyond a doubt you do not meet with him or speak to him when you meet."

"But I must tell him why—explain. He comes to see me to-morrow—"

"A sob choked her utterance."

"Then ask him straightforwardly. Tell him—or shall I?"

"No, no. I'll see him and then send for you."

Very well. And remember, dear, I do this for your good. Better suffer a little now than more hereafter. This matter must be settled once and for all."

"Yes, mother, Charles will do that to-morrow. And holding her head very high Alma stepped out of the carriage, and bidding her mother "good night" went upstairs to her room.

But next morning Charles Gunning did not appear as he had promised, and Alma spent miserably the day. In the evening came a telegram saying that he had been unexpectedly called out of town on business which would probably detain him for some time. A week passed and nothing more was heard. He neither came nor wrote.

"He must be back for the Montevro's ball," Alma told herself. "I am sure he would not miss it." And she tried to look careless and indifferent, though her heart was breaking.

To the Montevro ball Alma went with an aunt and two young cousins, her mother being somewhat indisposed. This, the girl felt, was the best thing that could have happened. She would be free to talk the matter over with Charles Gunning, if Mrs. Malcolm were absent, and might count upon staying longer at the dance, as Hetty and Kate invariably danced on to the last, and their mother never bade them go till they were quite willing to do so.

But almost poor Alma's disappointment was bitter. Her seat was not at the ball, and she had great difficulty in restraining her tears, when after hours of watching and waiting she told herself he would not come; that something extraordinary must have happened to keep him away from this dance, at which he knew he would surely meet her.

"I'll ask aunt to take me home," she cried, wringing her hands. "I cannot talk and dance whilst I am so miserably unhappy. And yet—"

"Alma, do not do that," said her aunt, and feeling it impossible to exert herself in any way, Alma took refuge in a little alcove, screened from the ballroom by a heavy curtain. Here she sat for some time unnoticed, her heart sinking lower every moment, as the hours passed and the possibility of her seeing Charles Gunning that night became more and more remote. Then just as she had made up her mind that it was useless to remain any longer he entered the room, looking anxiously over the surging crowd. Alma's heart gave a great bound, and, springing to her feet, she stepped forth from her hiding place. In a moment he saw her and hurried to her side.

"I was afraid you had gone," he caught her hand. "I am late. And you look pale, Alma—distressed."

"Do I? Oh! take me out of this," she cried. And without a word he led her out of the room, and to a broad, and she refused to see, deserted balcony. She sank down upon a low seat, and motioned him to a chair by her side.

"Alma," he said in a voice full of emo-

tion. "You are troubled? You have heard?"

"But it is not true. You will explain—"

"Yes, I will. And his eyes rested upon her for an instant, then wandered silently upwards.

"It was almost day. Little streaks of red and gold were already visible in the summer sky. The street below with its string of waiting carriages, the tall, high houses opposite, looked weird and dreary in the dawn, whilst the girl in her white evening dress, a spray of somewhat faded flowers upon her breast, and fair hair ruffled, her sweet face full of sadness and distress, appeared to have grown suddenly worn and haggard, when seen by early morning light.

But the man at her side saw no change in her. The freshness of her dress, the neatness of her hair mattered nothing to him. He loved her. And as he gazed into her pure, true eyes, the wasted years of his past life rose up black and hateful before him, and with all his soul he wished that he could wipe them out and become worthy of the love and admiration of this trusting child.

But alas! he could not claim her now. An unexpected blow had fallen upon him. His sins pursued him. His folly had found him out. And he must, just as he saw the gates of a paradise on earth opening before him, pay the price of his mispent youth."

"Alma," he said, gently touching the little hand that lay cold and inert upon the girl's lap, "I have never deceived you—willingly. I have told you everything. Told you that I was poor—that I had gambled away my patrimony—"

"Yes, yes," she flushed and grew pale again. "But that matters little. I have a good fortune, you are working well, getting on as well as justice to any of them. He was told—but as he looked at one beautiful face, he was filled with terror. It bore a most extraordinary resemblance to his wife. But convinced that she was dead, reassured by his lady friend's repeated declaration, that the photograph was not a good one, not really like the people there represented, he laughed at his sudden fear, and tried to forget it."

"But the idea haunted him. And he frequently thought of writing to tell me of his doubts, but shrank from doing so, and put it off, thinking he would tell me of them when we met. But we did not meet, and I went my way in total ignorance, without the faintest suspicion of the awful sword that hung over my head. But the blow has fallen. I know the worst now. The woman we believed dead lives. My life, my hopes, are ruined!"

"Are you—sure?"

"Alas—only too sure. I have seen her—spoken to her—"

Alma started, and raised her eyes full of anguish to his face.

"Oh, God! Where?"

"At a little theater in the East End—this very night. That is why I was late coming here; that is why I now see—speak to you for the last time."

He paused for a moment overcome with emotion, his eyes full of tears, as if with an effort he continued:

"At the Variety Theater, Palmer told me the name of De Lara she acts, but gives out openly that she is my wife—has done so for some time. She was a great actress, and the last to hear it, she has been ruining my reputation, making me appear a lying, black-hearted villain. Oh heavens! she clenched his fist and the veins stood out, throbbing upon his forehead, "I longed to smite her to the ground as she stood before me like a beautiful devil, mocking and laughing, boasting of the easy way in which she had deceived me, and the woman's likeness to herself and the inconvenience and worry she had escaped by her supposed death."

"It was all arranged for me in a marvelous manner," she said, twisting a magnificent diamond ring round her finger. "I was up to my eyes in debt and I knew not how to get money. Every penny was gone. In the town where I was staying was a young woman with whom I had made friends. To her I sold a dress, a brooch and some half dozen handkerchiefs. With this money I went to the gaming tables and won. Delighted, I played on and missed the last train to X—. The next day I saw that I was supposed to have been killed, and that Mr. Maurice Palmer had kindly undertaken to bury me. So I was well off now. I would keep my money and remain dead. I came back to London and met an old friend, the manager of the Variety. Encouraged by him I went on the stage. I have succeeded beyond all my expectations and here I am doing all the leading parts and making quite a fortune."

"You might have let me know, and spared my name," she said.

"She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, and laughed.

"The name was in itself useful. It gives me a certain standing. You are getting on in your profession and in society. As to letting you know, that was not my business. I am well known, much admired, and always here to be seen."

"In this out of the way place—who sees you?"

"It is not so far removed from civilization as you suppose," she answered, complacently. "And our little theater is the fashion just now. It is not for me to say who or what attracts them, but we have many earls—ay, and dukes in our stalls from time to time. So when I saw you there to-night I was not surprised. My fame has reached him at last. I thought of 'Fame,' I cried, and my fury choked me so that I could say no more."

"Yes—fame. Little as you think of it—or care. I am famous. I am envied. I have many friends, many admirers. But her eyes flashed as though she glared in the thought, "I have enemies, too. The more successful I am, the more jealous and disagreeable they become."

"I am sure that you have driven men to crime before now."

"She looked at me curiously. Then a sudden expression of terror flashed into her eyes.

"I am not afraid of the jealous ones. But there is one man I am in deadly dread of. You remember Weston, my brother?"

"No. I never saw him. He was in America when—"

"You and I were young. Of course, and I wish he had stayed there. But to my grief he has returned and has found me out. He is wild and strange—and pester me for money—which I cannot—will not give. Then he threatens me, and I go in terror of my life."

"Poor thing," murmured Alma. "She is not very happy, then."

"'Tis hard to say. Her moods vary. In a moment she changed and seemed to forget her fears, as she told me that she was soon leaving the Variety and coming to the West End to act at the Wellington."

"I expect to have a great triumph there," she cried gaily, "and hope to see you often in the stalls. Till then, 'au revoir.' That is a signal that I am wanted. And making me a low, mocking bow, which I did not return, she hurried away."

He leant heavily against the rail of the balcony and looked at Alma as though expecting her to speak. But she remained silent, her eyes downcast, her sweet face full of grief, her hands clasped. Gunning drew his hand across his brow, and a sob escaped him.

"I dashed out of the theater," he continued after a time, "into the night, careless of where I went or what I did—despairing. Then I thought of you, of your goodness, your purity, your love. And I vowed to do nothing unworthy, nothing that would make you blush or feel ashamed that you had known me. 'In all the world,' I said, 'what is there to equal the love of a good woman? It surpasses everything. I have injured Alma, and she suffers. But she will forgive me. I will place my future life and actions in her hands. What she bids me do I will do.'

"He went back to her side and looked sadly down upon the pretty bowed head. "Have I hoped too much, Alma? Have I—"

"Oh no, no," she caught his hand and held it for a moment between her trembling palms. "You are not to blame," she said, white to the lips. "There is nothing to forgive. This blow which has fallen upon us was as unexpected by you as by me. God bless you and keep you. Whilst your wife lives, our lives must be divided. But let me hear good of you—always. Work hard at your profession—that will save you—and keep a brave heart. And now good-bye. I see my aunt coming to look for me. Good-bye!"

She dropped his hand and went quickly along the balcony. Meeting her aunt at one of the windows, she took her arm and drew back into the house.

A few days later the call for Mrs. Darmer's carriage rang up the street, and very soon Gunning saw Alma, as white as the swansdown round her throat, follow her aunt and cousins down the hall doorsteps, and enter the landau.

"So vanishes hope and joy and love from my life and hers," he moaned, as the carriage disappeared. "But how brave the child is! How brave and true! God help her! And he left the house and went sadly home through the deserted streets."

Three weeks passed, and Gunning and Alma Malcolm did not meet again. He followed her advice to the letter, and threw himself body and soul into his work. The Malcolms, he knew, spent most of their time abroad, coming but seldom to London. Alma's health was not what it had been, and very little tired her. She did not complain, was sweet and gentle to all around her, but her spirits drooped. From the night of the Montevro's ball she was a changed being. She was silent and subdued, and in spite of care of every kind, she grew pale and thin, and shrank from amusement, and became weary and dejected in any place of entertainment.

"She is not fit for society," the doctor said. "Take her abroad, and give her plenty of change of air and scene. But do not to allow her to exert herself unduly."

Her mother sighed heavily. A roving life was not what she cared for. But her daughter's health and happiness were a matter of vital importance to her, and so she followed the doctor's advice with loving and unselfish exactitude.

Meanwhile, in London, she was dining with the name of the great actress, Mme. De Lara. She had left the "Variety" for the "Wellington," and was playing Cleopatra, Ophelia and Lady Macbeth before crowded and enthusiastic houses. She was all the fashion; the rage of the moment. Everyone talked about her; everyone went to see her. She was well known to be Charles Gunning's wife, and many and frequent were the congratulations he received upon her marvellous, unprecedented success.

Gunning thanked those who spoke so warmly, but their praise of Lara, her beauty and her acting, gave him no pleasure, and he longed to fly to some distant land, where he should never see her face, or hear her name again.

But Alma's wish that he should work hard at his profession kept him in London, and although he never went anywhere where he was likely to meet the beautiful actress, he found it impossible to escape from or forget her. Her photograph was in every window, on every paper, and in every mouth. On all sides the thought of her haunted and pursued him.

That Lara was anxious to forget and avoid him he never doubted for a moment, and it was, therefore, with feelings of surprise and astonishment that he one day received a note from her, begging him to come and see her at the theater that night.

"I am in grave difficulties," she wrote, "and want your advice. You are a lawyer, and my husband, and in spite of everything, I feel that I can trust you."

"Wants money," he said, shrugging his shoulders and crushing the scented note between his fingers. "The biggest fortune in Europe wouldn't keep Lara out of debt. Well, it's little I can do for her. Still, I can't refuse to go and see what is wrong."

Gunning reached the theater about seven, but was told that Mme. De Lara never arrived before 8 o'clock, as she did not go on the stage till a quarter to 9.

"She will come earlier to-night, to talk over her affairs with me," and stationed himself at the little side door, by which he was to enter the actors and actresses entered the theater.

Quite a crowd soon gathered in the narrow street, and pressed up to the entrance, all eager to get a good place from which to see the reigning favorite, as she stepped out of her carriage. One dark-looking man, his hands hidden in the folds of a long, black cloak, which he wore draped about his shoulders, kept well to the front, and glared fiercely at any one who pushed or jostled him.

"An indistinct-looking ruffian," thought Gunning, as he watched the man's appearance, his hollow face and strange, wild eyes. "He looks mad enough for anything."

At that moment the well-known carriage dashed up and there was a rush for the door. As the beautiful Lara stepped forth the diamonds in her hair and at her throat sparkling and scintillating, her long silken train over her arm, she caught sight of Gunning and greeted him with a radiant smile.

"How more than good of you—"

she began, advancing towards him, then suddenly paused, all white and trembling, as the man in the black cloak barred her passage.

"Will you consent?" he asked, in a husky whisper. "Give me what I ask?"

"No, Weston. No!"

He raised his arm, a wild cry escaped her lips. "I'm stabbed, Oh God!"

She staggered forward, reeled round and then sank to the ground, bleeding and unconscious.

The assassin made no attempt to escape and stood gazing at his victim with dilated eyes. Then, as people near caught hold of him, he raised his dagger once more, and plunging it deep into his heart, fell like a stone by her side and died without a struggle.

Very gently Gunning raised Lara in his arms and carried her into the theater. As he led her upon a low couch she opened her eyes.

"He threatened—"

"My unhappy brother. He has done it—at last. Forgive me, Charles, forgive me. Madness was in my blood. I could not always help myself."

He pressed her hand in speechless emotion. She smiled. A leaden, death-like grey overspread her countenance, and her breath came in quick, short gasps. Then, with a long-drawn sigh, her head fell forward upon her breast, and all was over. Lara was dead.

Some six months later, surrounded by a select party of her nearest and dearest friends, Alma Malcolm, looking very lovely and radiantly happy, was married to Charles Gunning in the English Church in Paris.

HUMOR OF THE DAY.

A Definition.

Life. Willie—What is imagination, papa? Author—It is that which enables us to see things as they ain't and then depict them as they are.

First Forward.

First Tramp—Do yer 'tink de shirt waist has come fer de? Second Doctor—Sure! We'll be wearin' dem ourselves next summer.

Sized Up.

Puck. First Doctor—Wasn't Skinner once a patient of yours? Second Doctor—For a little while. I diagnosed him as a man who wouldn't pay his bills.

Where the Fault Was.

Baltimore American. Markleigh—Your office seems badly messed up. Have you no janitor? Berkeley—No, but since he became a faith curist he has been giving the office "absent treatment."

An Exception.

Life. "There's one thing about this glorious country—Every man in it has a chance to be President." "Not every man." "Yes, sir!" "No, sir! There's Bryan."

A Test.

Life. Edith (to Ethel, who has just returned from Europe)—Oh, Ethel, were you seasick? Ethel—Seasick! Why, Edith, I went into the steamer and sat down on my best hat—and I didn't care.

Condensed Tragedies.

Washington Star. "What do you think is the saddest word of fiction you ever read?" "The cook book, answered the young woman who has not been married very long. "Not more than one in ten of those pieces come out right."

A Gentle Hint.

Catholic Standard. Borroughs—I'm off for California; got a good job out there. Good-bye, old man! I'll never be able to express to you all I owe you for your many kind attentions. Lenders—Well, if you can't express it, you might try a money order or a check."

The Evidence Was Clear.

Chicago Times-Herald. "Oh, no, you must be mistaken. That man isn't dead." "But I know him—I've known him for years, and as dead as a post. What makes you think he isn't?" "Why, over there's a railroad track and he isn't walking on it."

Ideal Happiness.

Chicago News. She—What was the happiest moment of your life? They—Well, I think it was one evening last week when I entered the parlor of my boarding house and saw a strange sign on the piano. She—Indeed? And the sign? They—"Closed for Repairs."

Not Too Fast.

Cleveland Plain Dealer. The Devotee—Oh, hurry, please! This rubber plant tub has fallen on my husband and I'm afraid he's smashed! Chorus of rescuers as they grasp the tub—Now'll together! The Devoted Wife—Gently, please, gently. Don't lift it too suddenly. It's got a new leaf just coming out!

Riven.

Detroit Journal. This is the story of an army subaltern and a maid. They met great lustrous eyes told him that she would like a second ice he had no alternative to confessing that he was "Ah, a rift in the leat," she cried, trying to be gay and buoyant, albeit she saw that death that their dream of bliss was shattered.

Pathetic.

Chicago Times-Herald. "What's the matter, Pennington? I thought you claimed that it was a man's duty to always look cheerful, no matter what was going on." "It used to be put forward that theory, but I see it's unreasonable. I published a book of poems three weeks ago." "What's the matter?" he had been reading some of the criticisms, eh?" "No, I've been looking for some."

OUT OF THE ORDINARY.

About one-quarter of all the United States pensions go to widows. The miners of the Yukon district, Alaska, only get \$200 a year to receive an average wage of \$1 an hour. The population of India in 1891 amounted to 288,000,000; at a very moderate estimate there may be put down to 390,000,000. Statistics show that in Nebraska only thirty-one persons out of 1,000 cannot read or write. This is the best showing made by any State. The crust of the earth under Japan may be comparatively thin, judging by the number of earthquake shocks in that country. They average 50 a year. The census bulletins confirm the truth of the statements that growing American cities are those where manufacturing can be carried on economically. Property in Milwaukee exempt from the regular form of taxation amounts to \$17,367,782, while the total amount of property taxes in the city is only \$18,748,215. Philadelphia was the largest of American cities at the time the first census was taken, 19 years ago, and New York was second. Boston was third, Charleston fourth and Boston fifth. Every year on June 30 the pensioners of the civil war are counted. In June, 1898, the number on the lists was 928,714. Last year there were about 2,000 less, and this year also there are fewer than in 1898. Only one pensioner who served in the war of 1812 is now living. His name is Hiram Cronk. He is one hundred years old and lives in Oneida county, New York. About 200 widows of 1812 are left on the rolls. At the last general election in Great Britain 8,756,000 votes were cast at an average cost of 82 cents a vote for legitimate expenses in the English counties. The cost of the vote in the boroughs 50 cents. Only one city in Sweden would be classed with our larger cities—Stockholm, which is smaller than smaller than Pittsburg. Göteborg is about as large as Columbus, O., but other cities are little more than towns. Houghton county, Michigan, which is in the heart of the Lake Superior copper mining region, has the highest assessed valuation of property per capita of any county in the United States. The total valuation for the county is \$120,000,000. Flow cattle being exterminated in India, a large number of officials have been sent to the English colonies to superintend the government of a superhuman difficulty by inventing a man plough. The unprecedented spectacle is now witnessed of men yoked to this implement. An examination of the census returns shows that the greater growth in the population of the country has been in the Eastern States, and that the States of the West which have had the largest percentage of increase are in New England. Chinese historians estimate the population of their country in the year 11 after

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