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THE GITANA.

Expressly translated for the FAVORITE from the French of Xavier de Montepin.

III.

THE MAN IN THE RED COAT.

Before the Frenchman had recovered from his surprise the dancing girl had passed on. She was now standing in front of a man of a most uninviting aspect, who had watched her with a frown of displeasure as she kissed her benefactor's hand. He was almost a giant in height and alarmingly thin, and, withal, so fearfully and wonderfully ugly that by his side the one-eyed musician almost seemed handsome. His head was disproportionately small to the length of his body, and terminated in a chin at once square and pointed, over which bristled the ends of a long well-waxed black moustache. The face bore an unmistakable stamp of villainy, the effect of which was considerably heightened by the expression of ferocity imparted to it by the moustache.

This strange being was dressed in a semi-military costume. Some remains of tarnished gold lacing still clung in desperation to his faded red coat, and his dirty white breeches and black gaiters bore evident signs of long wear and hard usage. At his side hung a rapier of prodigious length. As the girl stopped before him the man in the red coat took her by the hand. "Well, my angel," he said with a disagreeable smile, "I have something to propose—something better than a pitiful contribution." "What is it?" returned the girl without any show of discomposure. "An exchange, my dear." "Well, what is it?" "You kissed the hand of the gentleman who gave you three onzas just now." "Yes. What then?" "Well, I'll give you a hundred dollars for a kiss on the cheek." The girl shook her head. "You won't, eh? Perhaps you think I have not got a hundred dollars to give. Look here." And from a pocket of his greasy breeches he pulled a handful of shining Mexican onzas and Spanish quadruples. "What do ye think of it now?" he asked. "I will not do it," said the girl. "No? Why not?" "Because I do not sell my kisses." "If you don't sell them you give them for nothing." "Perhaps so, but what of that?" "A good deal, my dear, because I am going to have for nothing what I was willing to pay for." And the hideous being stretched out his bony arms to seize her. With a scream the girl started back to avoid the unwelcome salute, and in so doing dropped



"THE SERVANT BENT OVER THE INSENSIBLE FRENCHMAN AND HELD THE STRONG SALTS TO HIS NOSTRILS."

her tin bowl and its contents which rolled in every direction under the tables and chairs. The ill-favored gallant was not to be balked, and stepping forward he seized the girl by the waist amid the laughter and applause of those present. In vain the girl cried, "Help me, my brother, help." In vain she struggled and fought. The amorous ogre had it all his own way, while the musician, instead of healing his sister, whom he evidently thought was in no very great danger, was fully employed. When the bowl containing the contributions of the audience fell from the girl's hands he had immediately set to collecting the contents; and now in the moment of his sister's need he was scrambling on all fours about the room picking up the scattered coin. "Oh, caramba!" he murmured in a piteous voice as he hunted in the angles and recesses of the room, "they are scattered all over the place. Oh, misery, what a fool that Carmen is; to go and misere a hundred dollars all at a stroke—and lose three ounces of gold—without counting the reels too, oh! caramba!" The dancing girl, whom her brother had called Carmen, was all but conquered. Her delicate cheeks flushed crimson as the ogre raised her veil, which in the struggle has fallen over her face. "Let this be a lesson to you," he cried. "When people won't either sell me or give me a thing I've a fancy to take it."

"Not always," said a hoarse voice in his ear. The ogre turned. The speaker was the young Frenchman, whose hand was laid on the red-coat's shoulder. "What's the matter with you?" gruffly asked the latter, looking down on his diminutive adversary. "Senor," returned the Frenchman, "it is only the coward who uses force with women. Let this be a lesson to you, to use your own words. Let the girl go." "An order, by Heaven—to me, I believe it was an order?" he muttered with an air of amusement and contempt. "An order? Certainly." "D'ye know to whom you're speaking?" "I know I am speaking to a knave whom I am going to chastise just now if he does not obey me this instant." "I am Don Ramirez Mazatlan, colonel in the Mexican army." "If you were Don the Devil himself I would still say to you 'Let the girl go!'" "And suppose I refuse?" "I will run my sword through you, that is all. You see I mean business." As he spoke the Frenchman drew from its sheath the little court rapier that hung at his side. "Look ye here, young man," said the other as he surveyed with an air of sovereign contempt the preparations of the bellicose French-

man, "put up that knitting-needle of yours and bear in mind that a Mexican colonel would only make a mouthful of you." "Look to yourself, senor colonel. The knitting needle is sharp, and though you are at best but lean game, you may find yourself spitted on it before you know where you are. For the third and last time I bid you let the girl go." The ogre replied with a sneer. "Once!—twice!—thrice! You will not, eh? Very well." In an instant the little rapier whistled through the air, ripped a small hole in the pretended colonel's scarlet coat and grazed his fleshless, shaggy breast. With a scream of rage and a horrible blasphemy the ogre dropped the girl and tore his immense sword from its scabbard. "Recommend your soul to the devil," he yelled. "You are a dead man." "Permit me to doubt it, just yet, senor Ramirez Mazatlan, colonel in the Mexican army," returned the other in a bantering tone as he put himself on guard. On recovering her liberty Carmen, with a shriek of terror, had fled from the house followed by her brother, who had at last succeeded in finding the three gold onzas. In the excitement caused by the prospect of a fight monte and the loteria were alike forgotten. The gamblers left their cards and the croupiers their desks—the latter after having taken good care to lock their money safely away. A circle was formed around the combatants, those in the rear mounting on tables and chairs to obtain a better view. On seeing the Frenchman fall on guard with a facility and precision that can only be acquired by an experienced swordsman the Mexican made a step backwards. He evidently had miscalculated his adversary's courage and ability. But a glance from his thirty inches of steel to the "knitting needle" in the Frenchman's hand completely reassured him. Brandishing over his head, with the air of a captain leading his men to battle, his huge claymore, the blade of which was spotted with rust, and stamping his foot on the ground, he yelled: "Come on, if you dare!" "I am waiting for you, senor the Mexican colonel." "That means to say that you are afraid." "Not at all. On the contrary. Don't you see that I am coming." As he uttered these last words the young man bounded forward, his body slightly bent, passed swift as a flash under the threatening blade of his opponent and with a sudden lunge pierced, this time not only the red coat, but the flesh beneath, inflicting a painful though not very deep wound. Astonished and frightened, the Mexican beat a retreat, tripped in so doing against a table which stood behind him, lost his balance, and ignominiously bit the dust. A burst of Homeric

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