

THE FAVORITE

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THE GITANA.

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

I.

THE LOTERIA.

Our story dates
back over a hun-
dred years.

The opening scene
is laid in Cuba, that
wonderful island
which stands like a
giant sentinel at
the mouth of the
Gulf of Mexico, be-
tween the Atlantic
Ocean and the Car-
ibbean Sea.

On a September
evening in the year
1770 towards seven
o'clock three quar-
ters of the popula-
tion of Havana
were gathered on
the quays and the
pier of the port and
the sandy beach
which spread
away on either
side washed by the
still unrippling sea.

During the day
the heat had been
intense. The city,
the surrounding
country, the beach,
and the sea had
been inundated by
a flood of molten
light and scorching
heat; and to this
had succeeded an
evening which in
point of coolness
had but little to re-
commend itself. Al-
though the blazing
King of Day had
disappeared behind
a huge bank of
crimson clouds, the
heated walls of the
houses, the baking
pavements, and the
scorching sand on
the sea-shore gave
out an almost in-
supportable heat.

In vain the
crowds of people
who had left their
close homes in the
hope of inhaling the
fresh evening sea-
breeze pressed for-
ward to the most
exposed positions.
Not a breath of air
was abroad. The
sea, as far as the

eye could reach, was as calm and glassy as a
lake, and in the gardens which surrounded the
city the leaves hung motionless in the still air.

Away out on the horizon a large merchant
vessel flying the Spanish flag had rode at anchor
since morning waiting a chance of making the
port. Her white sails hung loosely from the yards
like the broken wings of some great seagull.

A dozen small boats, manned by naked ne-
groes had just left the harbor, and were slowly
making their way towards the ship to take off
the passengers; but it was easy to see by the
unwilling manner in which the negro boatmen
pulled their oars, that the trip would take at least
five or six hours.

Among the motley crowd of all shades of color
—from the pink-cheeked Havana belles to the
full-blooded negro—who were eagerly waiting for
the evening breeze, not the least remarkable per-
sonage was a young man of about twenty-four,
of medium height, slightly built, with a pale
spiritual face that bore unmistakable signs of
recent illness. A gentleman evidently, and, the
keen observer would have added, a French-
man—an officer.

Not that his costume was any index to his

rank, for his dress was simplicity itself. A broad
straw hat, an easy jacket and ample trousers of
white drill—there was nothing in this to excite
attention. At his side hung a small rapier,
the hilt of which peeped through an opening in
his coat. In those days, however, side-arms
formed no unusual feature in a gentleman's cos-
tume, and so his rapier caused no remark. On
his feet he wore low shoes with red heels and
large silver buckles, essential particulars in the
dress of a Versailles courtier of the time.

The young man appeared to be completely
isolated in the midst of the crowd which sur-
rounded him. He spoke to no one and gave in-
dubitable signs—among which frequent yawns
were not the least noticeable—of being a perfect
victim to *ennui*. For all that was going on
around him he manifested utter indifference.
But when in the crowded promenade he happen-
ed to be jostled by a negro or a person of color
he elbowed his aggressor aside with a haughty
gesture and a look of supreme contempt. It was
evident that he looked down upon all unfortu-
nate mortals who could not boast of a skin as
white as his own as only one degree removed
from the ape.



"THE GIRL BOUNDED INTO THE CENTRE OF THE CIRCLE, AND RATTLING HER CASTANETS BROKE INTO THE VOLUPTUOUS MOVEMENTS OF THE DANCE."

In vain the bright eyes of the Cuban *senoritas*
glanced from behind their Spanish mantillas
with much curiosity and perhaps not a little in-
terest on the pale face and haughty demeanor
of the young Frenchman; in vain their small
hands, delicately gloved, toyed with the spang-
led fans into the movement of which they
knew how to throw so much grace and coquet-
tish expression. The French officer was com-
pletely unmoved. Nay more; he was bored.

Slowly he continued his stroll, now and then
stopping to wipe his forehead with a fine linen
handkerchief.

Suddenly a murmur as of relief broke from
the multitude. A couple of hundred yards from
the end of the pier lay a small sailing boat at
the mast-head of which hung a small crimson
flag that for half-an-hour past had been eagerly
watched by the panting promenaders. The little
flag was beginning to stir; it finally lifted and
streamed out in the air. The sea-breeze had
come at last. A few moments later the dead
silence which had prevailed gave way to the
murmur of many voices. It was no longer too
hot to talk and everyone—excepting the French-
man—broke into conversation.

attitude. By degrees the expression of infinite
weariness cleared from his face and gave place
to a look of gratification and eager expectancy.
Feeling in his pockets he hastily pushed open
the gate and strode across the garden. Under
the portico which gave egress into the house a
huge negro was gently swaying himself to and
fro in an easy rocking chair, his eyes half shut,
and evidently enjoying to the full the delicious
far niente in which he was indulging. At sight
of the visitor he rose and with a profound bow
threw open the door, revealing two large
rooms in each of which a number of men
were eagerly engaged around several small
tables.

In one of these the game of *loto*, or *loteria*
was in full swing; the other was devoted to
monte. The place was a gambling-hell.

As the visitor entered the former apartment a
game was about terminating. The croupier,
seated on a raised bench and holding in one hand
an embroidered chamois bag was slowly crying
the numbers, repeating thrice in order to avoid
mistake or confusion.

The Frenchman leaned against the wall, and
while waiting for the commencement of a new

In the meantime
the night had
quickly followed
the last rays of the
sun's light. The
silver broke out one
by one on the deep
blue background of
the sky, and the
moon emerged,
round and red like
the shield of one of
Homer's heroes,
from behind the
rocky summit of a
lofty hill.

After an hour's
enjoyment of the
unwonted freshness
the Frenchman
retreated his steps
towards the city.
Passing along the
Lameda Promenade
he entered a long
street known then
as now as the *Caña*
del Obispo, from
which he again
turned abruptly
into a narrow
street or lane
named the *Caña*
du Pasco. There
were very few houses
on the lane, and all
of these bore, for one
reason or another,
but indifferent re-
putations.

The young man
stopped before a
grated gate which
led into a small
garden closely
planted with trees
and shrubs from
which hung a num-
ber of Chinese lan-
terns that threw a
faint and uncertain
light upon the path
leading to the
house beyond.

The house ap-
peared to be good-
sized, though it was
but a single storey
high. Through the
slats of the closed
Venetian blinds
broke a bright light
and the noise of
many voices,
through which one
could from time to
time distinguish
the ring of gold,
broke into the still
evening air. The
voices were loud
and angry, and
curses and oaths
were neither few
nor far between.

For a few mo-
ments the young
man stood at the
gate in a listening