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THE GITANA.

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

XVI.

A CLEVER ACTRESS.—(Continued.)

The young Frenchman and the mulatto had hardly quitted the room in which the interview had taken place, when a complete change came over Carmen. The expression of terror disappeared as if by magic from her face, and her sobs gave way to a joyous laugh as she broke into a fanciful fandango, snapping her fingers in time with the rhythm of the dance.

Just then the door opened and Morales appeared.

"Ah!" cried Carmen, stopping short, "here is my terrible brother! Here comes the ferocious tyrant whose dreaded approach puts my lover to flight!"

Then once more assuming a terrified look she threw herself with a supplicating air at her brother's feet, and cried in a voice broken by convulsive sobs:

"Oh, brother! my brother, have mercy on me! have mercy on your unhappy but innocent sister! Do not condemn me without having heard me! See, I am on my knees before you! Do not look so vengefully angry! I am too young to die yet! I have not dishonored our name! Oh, brother, in the name of our sainted mother who is looking down on us, do not misjudge me! Let me live! My only crime is having given away my heart, but I never forgot what I owe to the illustrious house of which you are head: The man I love is noble, generous and brave. He is in every way worthy of us. I could not help loving him. Do not be pitiless! You forgive me, do you not? Say that you forgive me!"

Morales, who had been listening to this outburst with a smile, applauded vehemently as it concluded.

"Bravo, sister! A moment more and I should have been touched. I was beginning to take the thing seriously, and was on the point of shedding tears. Do you know to look at you kneeling there with outstretched hands and streaming eyes one could swear that all you have been saying is gospel truth, that you are really to be pitied and I am to be feared. Upon my honor you remind me of the heroines in the tragico-comedies of our countrymen Calderon and Lope de Vega."

"Yes," returned Carmen rising, "I think I could play my part very well on the stage."

"And the audience would not have hands enough to applaud with."

"Well, it would be a resource to fall back on if we had no other strings to our bow."

"But we have," returned Morales triumphantly. "One or two, eh? We shall be people of quality, not actors."

"Were you there just now?"

"Yes, behind the hangings there," said the Gitano, pointing to the door by which he had entered.

"Then you heard everything?"

"Every word."

"You are satisfied with me then, I suppose, and with the way in which I sustained my role."

"Admirable! I am in a state of perfect enthusiasm over it."

"So you think my chevalier's heart is stormed and his head turned?"

"How could it be otherwise, poor fellow?"

"Consequently you believe we shall succeed?"

"If I believe it, caramba! My faith is so strong that I do not regret my thousand dollars any more. In fact I am so well satisfied that I should not begrudge another five hundred, if it were absolutely necessary."

"Well," said Carmen laughing, "that is an incontestable proof of your satisfaction. It is evident that you are sure of the ten thousand dollars I promised you."

"And I shall have earned them, my good sister. That you cannot deny. You are a first class comedian I grant you, but I am a sufficiently clever stage manager I think. I managed to rent this house, already furnished in a manner that fully endorses your story of your position and your wealth; I engaged the mulatto, Berenice, the most adroit and most expert creature in Havana where clandestine messages and intrigues are concerned; I started a volante and a discreet calesero; in a word I neglected nothing that could in any way contribute to the success of your project."



"THE DOOR OPENED AND MORALES APPEARED."

"It is true. You managed very cleverly, and without any stint."

"Yes. And I am sufficiently acquainted with your goodness of heart and your sisterly love, my dear Carmen, to be easy for the future, for I am sure that you will not forget me when you are rich and great."

"What wonderful disinterestedness!" exclaimed Carmen sarcastically.

"What would you have? Everyone looks to his own little interests in this world. I too am ambitious."

"And I," returned Carmen, "am both ambitious and hungry. It is two in the morning. Let us go to supper."

"A capital idea! Will Madam de Najac allow me respectfully to offer her my arm?"

Carmen took her brother's arm and was led with much ceremony into the dining room where a magnificent cold repast was laid out, and the two sat down opposite each other.

We may remark in passing that Morales was so

completely metamorphosed, thanks to Carmen's precautions, as to be hardly recognisable. He no longer wore the black bandage which gave him such a fantastical appearance. His linen was immaculately white and exquisitely scented with the choicest perfumes, and his dark clothes, of an irreproachable though somewhat severe cut, concealed the extreme leanness of his person. Of course his bony, fleshless face still retained its singular expression, but in the circumstances in which he was now situated this singularity partook somewhat of distinction. A careless observer might have found something majestic in his hooked nose, and would perhaps have seen something solemn and diplomatic in his thin, retreating lips. A sword with a steel hilt, a very gentleman's sword, hung at his side in the place of the formidable rapier that had slain the Mexican Colonel, Don Ramirez de Mazatlan.

Thus be-costumed, Morales could have passed for a gentleman equally well as for a bandit, for

do not many Spanish noblemen resemble bandits as much as gentlemen?

When the brother and sister had taken the edge off their appetites the conversation recommenced.

"So," said Carmen, "my dreams are about to be accomplished. To-morrow night, without any further delay I shall be the wife of a gentleman."

"It seems to me, sister," returned Morales, "that you are going too fast."

"Why too fast? Explain yourself."

"I will. In former days, when we were living in Spain, I used sometimes to while away my leisure hours by angling in the Mancañares—that is, when there was enough water in the Mancañares to angle in—"

"What are you talking about?" cried the girl. "I do not understand what that has to do with—"

"With your marriage with the Chevalier Tancer de Najac? It has everything to do with it, as you will see just now. As I was saying, I used to angle. Sometimes, but not often, I got a bite from some poor stray fish. If I was in a hurry to land it and drew in my line a—once, ten to once the fish got off. But if I waited until he was safely hooked I was sure of him. Now do you understand?"

"You want me to wait until my chevalier is safely hooked?"

"Precisely. The Chevalier de Najac left here crazed with love. Let three or four days pass without his receiving any news of you, and the poor gentleman will lose the little sense he has left. So when the decisive moment comes he will no longer have sharpness enough to penetrate the snare, prudence enough to avoid it, or even the desire, for that matter. He will play his part in our little comedy with the best faith in the world, and will insist that he is the happiest of men."

"And will he not be so?" cried Carmen, whose pride was wounded by her brother's words.

"He will, of course. But he might perhaps refuse the happiness that awaits him, if we did not make him jump at it."

"You are right. And though I find the delay in-supportable I will wait."

"Wonderful!" cried Morales enthusiastically. "For the first time in my life I hear common sense come from a woman's mouth!"

"I am obliged to you for the compliment," returned his sister.

After a moment's silence she spoke again. "I should like to know one thing," she said musingly.

"What is that?"

"I should like to know what has become of Quirino, what he said on not finding us, and if he still nurses his schemes of revenge."

Morales turned deadly pale and looked anxiously around the room, as though he expected to see the bronzed figure of the Indian lurking in a corner.

"For mercy's sake, my sister," he exclaimed anxiously, "why do you mention that accursed name? You are filling my cup of joy with bitterness. The very thought of Quirino's threats has the effect of a horrible nightmare upon me; it spoils the happiness of my life; it breaks my night's rest; it presents to me the future in red and black, the colors of blood and mourning!"

"Coward!"

"That is easily said. Yes, caramba! I am a coward. And who would not be when it is a question of such a formidable danger which nothing can avert if Quirino happens to fall on our tracks?"

"Then you think he is looking for us?"

"I am as certain of it as I am that I see that flask of wine there."

"He will not find us."

"Alas! What astonishes me is that he has not already found us. These semi-savages, these half-civilized Indians are cleverer than bloodhounds at tracking one."

"Your fright makes you exaggerate."

"No, I see things as they are, and the proof of it is that if anyone could show me a lonely place where Quirino would pass at early dawn I would set myself in ambush and put a ball into him with the greatest comfort in the world."