

THE GITANA

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THE GITANA.

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

XIV.

THE MULATTO WOMAN.

Our readers will remember that on leaving Don José and his daughter Tancred de Najac fell into a fit of musing on the extraordinary loveliness of the merchant's daughter, and concluded by wisely resolving to think no more of one so far above him.

Unfortunately such resolutions are too seldom adhered to. When a man makes up his mind to think no more of a woman he continually finds his thoughts straying towards her. Tancred was no exception to the rule. Annuziata's charming figure was before him day and night, and before three days had elapsed he imagined that he was over head and ears in love with her. This, however, proved to be a mere fancy, as we shall very shortly see.

Two days after that on which occurred the scene between Carmen, Morales and Quirino, the Frenchman on his return from a long walk found the worthy Dame Yvonne Sandric in an extraordinary state of agitation. It was evident that she was possessed of a secret which she hesitated to impart to him, though she was apparently burning to do so.

"Well, Dame Yvonne," asked the Frenchman, "what is the matter?"

"What is the matter, Monsieur Tancred? Ah! mercy on us! It's not myself that will tell you," cried the Bretonne.

"And why not, pray?"

"Because, Monsieur, by the aid of Heaven I have reached the age of fifty-seven without having worked for the perdition of any soul—thanks to my patron the great St. Yves and the good St. Anne of Auray—and I'm not going to begin with yours, please God."

"Ah, pshaw!" cried Tancred, disappointed, "is my salvation in question then?"

"Indeed it is," said the dame piously crossing herself.

"Then this secret you are so unwilling to tell me concerns me?"

"And whom should it concern but you? Elol Sandric, thank Heaven, is not of an age to go gallivanting about with young girls, and even when he was young I had a sharp eye and firm hand, and I kept him in."

"You are quite right, my good dame," returned Tancred laughing, "to watch closely everything that concerned your good husband. But I am a bachelor, and quite old enough to know how to behave. So as you confess to having a secret which concerns me I must beg you to let me hear it without further delay."

"Oh, Monsieur Tancred, I beg you don't ask me."

"But I do ask you."

"But my conscience—"

"Your conscience, my worthy hostess, has nothing to do with my private affairs."

"Then you insist upon it?"

"I do."

"Well, then— But don't forget that it is you who compel me to speak, and I shall not be



"MADAM, I BESECH YOU TO BELIEVE THAT MY RESPECT FOR YOU EQUALS MY ADMIRATION."

gully or responsible if what I tell you leads you into temptation and endangers your soul."

"That is perfectly understood."

"But, Monsieur Tancred, as sure as I have always lived in the fear of God it would be better for you to take no notice of this."

"I beg you to remark, Dame Yvonne, that you are keeping me waiting rather a long time."

Thus driven the Bretonne was compelled to comply.

"Well," she said, hanging her head, "some one was asking for you just now."

"Who was it?"

"A woman." Madame Sandric pronounced the word with manifest repugnance.

"A woman! Was she young?"

"No. It would have been better if she had been young."

"Why so?"

"Oh, I know these half-breeds. They are the curse, the ruin, the abomination of Havana."

"It was a colored woman then?"

"Yes, a mulatto—a *Cabresse* in short, one of those cursed *métisses*!"

"What did she want?"

"She wanted to speak to you, the wretch."

"What did she say to you?"

"She asked me no end of questions about you. She wanted to know about your family too; if your relations in France were great and rich people."

"And what did you say?"

"Well, you understand, Monsieur Tancred, that fellow-countrymen should always stand by one another. So I replied that your family was as noble as the king's and rich enough to buy the whole island of Cuba."

Tancred smiled.

"God forgive you for such an innocent untruth," he said. "As to nobility, blood, I have nothing to say. I come of as good a family as the Montmorencies, the Crequis and the Ro-

hans. But as to fortune it is another story. If I were to buy the island of Cuba it would have to be sold at a very low price."

"Still," continued Dame Yvonne, "you will admit that this did not concern that woman."

"Certainly. But when she had obtained this slightly apocryphal information, what did she do?"

"She went off."

"Without saying anything?"

"She said she would come back again. But don't you be afraid, Monsieur Tancred, she won't trouble you. My husband will put her out. I'll tell him about it."

"Do not do anything of the kind, I beg."

"Why!" cried Dame Yvonne, "you don't mean to say that you will see her?"

"Certainly I will see her."

"What for?"

"To find out what she wants."

"It is easy enough to guess what she wants. I could tell you that myself at once."

"What is it, then?"

"She is charged to propose a rendez-vous with some of these women who have neither honor nor virtue, of whom there are so many in Havana, who neither fear God, nor respect their marriage vow."

"We will see about that," said Tancred laughing.

"You don't mean to say that you would go?"

"Why not?"

"It would be throwing yourself head first into the clutches of Satan."

"Not at all. It is only a question of studying some of the customs of the country."

"Nice customs indeed! And besides, you would run the risk of never coming back again, or at least of returning with a stab between your ribs, and that would hardly suit you, my gentleman."

"Bah! I do not believe there is any danger."

"You are wrong. In this country of scoundrels and copper-faces, every rendez-vous conceals a trap."

"Indeed. Do they assassinate as much as that?"

"More than I could tell you. But you know something about it yourself, Monsieur Tancred; it is not so long ago that you had a lucky escape."

"That is true. But in my case it was different. I was attacked by robbers."

"Well, I assure you that—"

"Enough, Dame Yvonne, I am the best judge of my own actions. So when the mulatto returns be good enough to send her to me at once."

"So be it, Monsieur le Chevalier," said the Bretonne, shaking her head. "You are your own master, and are not obliged to take anyone's advice unless you like. I wash my hands of the whole affair. If Satan himself comes I will send him to you."

"You could not be more obliging, I am sure," said Tancred laughing. "But I doubt whether his Satanic majesty would think it worth while to leave his domains for a poor gentleman like me."

"One cannot tell," murmured Dame

Yvonne. "The rector of my parish used to say that it was useless to try to dissuade a fool from his folly. He knew what he was talking about, the good man." Then she continued aloud, "I shall not say another word on the subject, Monsieur le Chevalier, for I don't want to vex you. But take care."

"Do not be alarmed, Dame Yvonne, I shall manage perfectly well, and whatever happens I thank you for your goodwill towards me."

After this interview Tancred went to his rooms on the first story of the house. Opening the windows which looked out on the busy wharves, he leaned on the sill and spent several hours in watching from behind the closed venetians the motley crowd that passed and repassed before him. Until sundown he watched in vain for the mysterious mulatto.

"What a fool I was," he exclaimed rising at last, "to go out this morning. If I had stayed at home I should not have missed her."

As the last rays of the sun disappeared he made his way to the eating-house where he was accustomed to take his evening meal. But food was distasteful to him, so he left his supper almost untouched and strolled homewards and bedwards. The only acquaintance he had in the city was Don José and it was too late to dream of paying a visit in the *Caña de Obispo*. Of gambling houses he had already had enough.

He had not gone far in the direction of the harbor when he felt a hand laid on his shoulder, and a woman's voice whispered in his ear,

"Are you the Chevalier Tancred de Najac, senior?"

Tancred started. She had come at last.

"Yes," he said, "I am."

"In that case, follow me, senior, keeping a little distance behind me."

"Whither are you going to take me?"

"Not far from here. To the promenade of the Lameda."