

THE GITANA

VOL. II.—No. 24.

MONTREAL, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1873.

PRICE : FIVE CENTS.

THE GITANA.

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

XXXIV.

THE WEDDING DAY.

Oliver was right. The young girl's dazzling beauty electrified him. He would have been easier had she been less beautiful.

Only those who are capable of feeling or at least of understanding a love that through its own intensity becomes almost immaterial will be able to account for the infinite delicacy of such a feeling. Others will pass on with a smile of pity or a sneer of unbelief.

Compelled by circumstances to sacrifice the dreams of his life to the fulfilment his father's promise to a dying man and an orphan, Oliver was ready to make Don José's daughter his wife.

He was about to bestow his name upon Annunziata, or rather upon Carmen, but it was beyond his power to give her his heart, for it was no longer his own. Through an excessive sentiment of honor he resigned himself to break the pledge he had made to Dinorah, but he could have wished that the breach of his faith were more disagreeable, more painful, and harder to hear.

Oliver knew perfectly well how weak is the will even of the most resolute of men. He knew too the seductive power of a supremely beautiful and attractive woman. He distrusted himself and encountered with profound terror and anticipated remorse the possibilities of the future. He could not hide from himself that perhaps at some future hour a single heart's infidelity would accuse him in his own eyes and cause him to deceive Dinorah.

Such were the young man's thoughts. But there was no help for him. The situation must be accepted as it was, with all its perils.

One hope only remained. Perhaps the stranger would conceive no stronger affection for him than that of a sister for a brother. She might even be the first to oppose Philip Le Vaillant's cherished project of a union between his son and his friend's daughter.

If it only were so, thought Oliver, how he could love her! How dear a sister she would be to him, how loving a brother he to her! What a pleasure it would be to him to lavish his fortune on her, that she might aspire to a noble marriage.

How Fate delights in playing with her victims. A single word from Oliver would have settled the matter, and left him free to fulfil his promise to Dinorah. For the Gitana would have jumped at the offer of the fortune minus the husband, and Oliver was in earnest.

But before long the young man's sole hope faded away. Carmen had not been many days at Havre when in the course of her long conversations with the old merchant she took care to let drop a few unmistakable expressions of affection for his son.

Philip Le Vaillant, who was completely under the glamor of the Gitana's beauty and assumed affection, was charmed, and hastened to communicate the good news to Oliver.

"You are a lucky man, my boy. The most adorable creature in the world is in love with you. When does the marriage take place?"

Henceforth the young man's manner underwent a complete change. His last hope was gone, so he assumed a tone of gaiety that was very far from real. The somewhat forced politeness he had hitherto exhibited in Carmen's presence gave way to gallantry. And as though he were in a hurry to consummate his happiness he set about hastening the preparations for the wedding.

The day previous to the ceremony had come. The marriage contract was read in the family circle with all due solemnity. A fortune of two millions was settled on Don José's daughter. Oliver affixed his signature to the document with an air of complete happiness. Then he withdrew to his own room and gave way to the full bitterness of his feelings. We draw a veil over the young man's grief. It can better be imagined than described.

When the first paroxysm had passed away he sat down at his writing table and composed a last farewell to his beloved.

Here is the text of his letter:—

"My Own Beloved Dinorah,
Do not blame me, do not curse me—pity me! I am the most miserable of men. My heart is



"THE VISITOR WAS A TALL MAN, FRIGHTFULLY LEAN, AND OF A MOST UNPREPOSSESSING APPEARANCE."

broken, my very reason totters. Inexorable fate compels me to give you up—you, my hope, my life!

"You swore to wait for me. Wait for me no longer, Dinorah, for unless by a miracle I shall never return.

"I return you the promise you gave me. I can not do otherwise for I must break the pledge which binds me to you. You are free—may you be happy. This is the only wish I have, the only favor I can henceforth ask of God. Forget the unhappy man who can never forget you, forget your love for him who will always love you.

"Farewell, Dinorah! farewell to my dream of happiness. How hard the word is to pronounce, after our hopes of a long life of happiness together.

"My fate is inflexible! Once more I repeat the fatal word, Farewell, wishing that I could die as I write it. But Heaven is pitiless, it condemns me to life."

Oliver folded the letter, sealed it with black, and directed it:

Miss Dinorah de Kerven
St. Nazaire
Brittany.

"Happy letter!" he murmured, pressing it to his lips. "You are going to her whom I shall never see again."

The wedding-day at last. The ceremony was to take place at noon with unusual pomp in the principal church of Havre.

Among the people of the city, where Philip Le Vaillant occupied the foremost rank, the marriage of his son was an event of the highest importance and was regarded as an occasion for public rejoicings.

The young man was born and had grown up in the midst of them. All the old people remembered having held him in their arms; all the young people were his friends; all the poor had

found a helper and comforter in him. Besides he was the sole heir to the old merchant's immense fortune.

Every one too was acquainted with the story of the friendship that had existed between Philip Le Vaillant and José Rovero, and all agreed that the union of the two children was all that could have been wished.

The few who had been introduced to Oliver's betrothed were loud in their praises of the young lady's extraordinary beauty. Public curiosity was raised to the highest pitch and it was only evident that the church would be too small to accommodate the crowd of eager sight-seers that would assemble on the occasion.

Already the embryo poets of the town had put the last touches to their epithalamiums, and the various guilds and corporations had prepared their bouquets and their complimentary addresses. For that day business was entirely suspended.

For the first time since her arrival Don José's daughter was to discard her mourning robes.

The feminine portion of the population could talk of nothing but the sumptuous trousseau of the bride; the gorgeous wedding dress, the skirt of which entirely disappeared under a heavy trimming of Alençon point, that alone was valued at 150,000 livres, set off with diamond loops. A pearl necklace, worth 200,000 livres, was to circle the bride's lovely neck, and diamond bracelets, worthy of a place among the crown jewels, were to enclose her well rounded arms. Each of the diamond pins that were to fasten the wedding wreath had cost 25,000 livres at Böhmer's, the most famous jeweler in Paris.

Lace and jewels had cost more than six hundred thousand livres. And two millions more had been settled on the young bride. Philip Le Vaillant certainly did things on a royal scale of magnificence.

Let us take a peep into Carmen's room.

It was just nine o'clock. The former dancing girl was seated before a huge toilet-glass that was shrouded in lace. Two hand-maidens were weaving her hair into long and heavy plaits, for Carmen was justly proud of her magnificent tresses, and refused to submit to the barbarous usage which required that they should disappear under a heavy coating of powder.

In one corner of the room the wedding dress was spread out in all its glory on a chair.

The Gitana was buried in thought. Her eyes were fixed on the pile of diamonds and pearls strewn on the table before her, but she saw them without heeding them.

Just then her thoughts were wandering far away from Havre, and from the ceremony for which she was preparing. Her former life was passing in review before her. Once more she saw her childhood's days passed in misery and wretchedness on the streets and squares of Madrid, Granada and Seville; the sudden flight, with the reasons for which we are already acquainted; the arrival in Havana with her brother; her songs and dances in the streets of the Cuban capital; Tancred and Quirino, her marriage, the flight from Havana, the news of her widowhood, the voyage, the shipwreck, the death of Annunziata, and the point from which she began the infamous part which had succeeded so well—one scene rapidly followed another in her mind.

"At last," she thought, "my dreams are realized, far more than realized. In a few hours I shall be rich! the possessor for the present of two millions, and in the future of a princely fortune. With the power that such a fortune gives I can aim at anything. In my hands my husband will be but a puppet, the instrument whereby I can accomplish my ambitious schemes; for I am too beautiful not to be loved, and too clever not to rule the man who loves me. Can it be true? Is it possible? Am I not the subject of a strange hallucination?"

To convince herself of the reality of her situation she seized a handful of jewels from the table, and flashed the brilliants before the glass, bruising her delicate fingers with the rich settings.

Suddenly she started as a knock was heard at the door. One of the attendants went to see what was the matter.

"What is it?" asked Carmen eagerly, as the girl returned.