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# DONA FLOR AND HER TWO HUSBANDS

A moral and amorous tale

**JORGE AMADO**

Acclaimed author of *Showdown*

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IT IS FULL OF UNEXPECTED DELIGHTS... EVERYTHING  
A MODERN NOVEL SHOULD BE!" *Denver Post*

TRANSLATED BY HARRIET DE ONÍS



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**JORGE AMADO** was born in 1912 in Ilhéus, the provincial capital of the state of Bahia, whose society he portrays in such acclaimed novels as *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon*; *DONA FLOR AND HER TWO HUSBANDS*; and *Tereza Batista: Home from the Wars*. His father was a cocoa planter, and his first novel, *Cacau*, published when he was nineteen, is a plea for social justice for the workers on the cocoa estates south of Bahia. The theme of class struggle continues to dominate in his novels of the thirties and forties, but with the fifties and *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon* (1958), the political emphasis gives way to a lighter, more novelistic approach. It was in that novel, published in the United States when Amado was fifty and enthusiastically received in some fourteen countries, that he first explored the rich literary vein pursued in *DONA FLOR AND HER TWO HUSBANDS*. A highly successful film version of *DONA FLOR* was produced in Brazil in 1976.

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*For Zélia, in the quiet afternoon of garden and cats, in the tender warmth of this April; for João and Paloma, in the morning of their first books and dreams.*

*For my comadre Norma dos Guimarães Sampaio, who happens to be one of the characters, and whose presence honors and enlivens these pallid pages. For Beatriz Costa, whom Vadinho sincerely admired. For Eneida, who had the privilege of hearing the National Anthem played on the bassoon by Dr. Teodoro Madureira. For Giovanna Bonino, who owns a painting by the painter José de Dome—a portrait in ochres and yellows of Dona Flor as a girl. Four friends linked here in the affection of the author.*

*For Diaulas Riedel and Luiz Monteiro.*



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*"God is fat"*

REVELATION BY VADINHO ON HIS RETURN

*"The earth is blue"*

AFFIRMED BY GAGARIN AFTER THE FIRST SPACE FLIGHT

*"A place for everything  
and everything in its place"*

SIGN ON THE WALL OF DR. TEODORO MADUREIRA'S PHARMACY

*"Ay"*

SIGNED DONA FLOR



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Dear Friend Jorge Amado,

The fact of the matter is that I do not really have a recipe for the corn cake I bake. Dona Alda, the wife of Mr. Renato of the Museum, told me how to do it, and in that way I learned, racking my brains until I got it right. (Was it not by loving that I learned to love? Was it not by living that I learned to live?)

Twenty individual muffins, or more, depending on the number you want. I would advise Dona Zélia to make a big cake to start off, for everybody likes it and asks for a second helping. (Even those two, so different, were in agreement only on this: both of them were crazy about corn or manioc cake. About another thing, too? You let me alone, Mr. Jorge; don't tease me or talk about that.) Sugar, salt, grated cheese, butter, coconut milk, the thick and the thin, both are called for. (Would you who write for the newspapers tell me why one always needs two loves, why one alone does not satisfy the heart?) The proportions depending on the taste; each person has his preference—some like things sweeter, some saltier, isn't that so? And the batter very thin. A quick oven.

I hope I have satisfied you, Mr. Jorge, with this recipe which is hardly a recipe, barely an outline. Taste the cake I am sending with this, and if you like it let me know. How is your family? We are all well. We have bought another share of the drugstore, and are taking a house for the summer in Itaparica, very nice. As for the rest, as you well know, that which is crooked cannot be made straight. I don't want to tell you what goes on with me in the morning hours; it would be a lack of respect. But the truth of the matter is that the person who sets the day aglow as it rises from the sea is your faithful servant,

Florípedes Paiva Madureira—Dona Flor dos Guimarães

*(A recent note from Dona Flor to the novelist)*



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## **DONA FLOR AND HER TWO HUSBANDS**

*The strange and moving account of the experiences of Dona Flor,  
professor emeritus of the culinary art, and her two husbands,  
the first known as Vadinho; the second, Dr. Teodoro Madureira  
by name, pharmacist by profession,*

*or*

**THE FEARSOME BATTLE BETWEEN SPIRIT AND MATTER**

*Narrated by Jorge Amado,  
public scrivener located in the Rio Vermelho quarter of the city  
of Salvador da Bahia de Todos os Santos, in the neighborhood  
of Largo de Sant' Ana, where Yemanjá,  
Our Lady of the Waters, dwells.*



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I

**THE DEATH OF VADINHO  
THE FIRST HUSBAND  
OF DONA FLOR,  
HIS WAKE AND BURIAL**

*(To the guitar accompaniment of the incomparable  
Carlinhos Mascarenhas)*



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COOKING SCHOOL  
OF SAVOR AND ART

WHEN AND WHAT TO SERVE AT A WAKE

*(Dona Flor's answer to a pupil)*

Not because it is a confused day of grief, sadness, and weeping is this any excuse for a wake not to be held with due ceremony. If the mistress of the house, sobbing and fainting, beside herself, or dead in the coffin, cannot assume the duties herself, then some relative or friend should take charge of the rite, for one is not going to turn out into the dawn, at times in the winter cold, the devoted friends who have spent the night with the deceased, without eating or drinking.

For a wake to have life, and really honor the demised for whom it is held and lighten his first and confused night of death, it must be carried out with all solicitude, giving thought to the morale and the appetite.

When should refreshments be served?

All night long, from the beginning to the end. Coffee is indispensable, continually, that is to say, plain coffee. A complete breakfast, coffee with milk, bread, butter, cheese, crackers, couscous with poached eggs, is served only in the morning and to those who have spent the whole night there.

The best thing is to keep the kettle on the boil all the time so there will be no lack of coffee, for people will be coming in continually. Cookies and crackers to go with the coffee; from time to time a tray of cold cuts, sandwiches of cheese, ham, sausage, simple things, for the deceased is sufficient cause for worry and concern.

If, however, the wake is more sumptuous, one of those where money flows like water, then a cup of chocolate at midnight is called for, thick and hot, or a tasty chicken broth. And codfish balls, croquettes of different kinds, assorted sweets, dried fruit.

When the family is well-to-do, in addition to the coffee, beer may be served, or wine, just one glass to accompany the broth and the croquettes. Never champagne; that is not considered in good taste.

But whether a rich or a poor wake, what is *indispensable* is a

steady supply of good rum; everything else may be lacking, even coffee, but not rum. Without the comfort it lends there is no wake worth mentioning. A wake without rum shows a lack of respect for the dead, implies indifference and disaffection.

Vadinho, Dona Flor's first husband, died one Sunday of Carnival, in the morning, when, dressed up like a Bahian woman, he was dancing the samba, with the greatest enthusiasm, in the Dois de Julho Square, not far from his house. He did not belong to the group—he had just joined it, in the company of four of his friends, all masquerading as *bahianas*, and they had come from a bar on Cabeça, where the whiskey flowed like water at the expense of one Moysés Alves, a cacao planter, rich and open-handed.

The group was accompanied by a small, well-rehearsed orchestra of guitars and flutes; the four-string guitar was played by Carlinhos Mascarenhas, a tall, skinny character famous in the whorehouses—ah, a divine player. The men were got up as Gypsies and the girls as Hungarian or Romanian peasants; never, however, had a Hungarian or Romanian, or even a Bulgarian or Slovak, swung her hips the way they did, those brown girls in the flower of their youth and coquetry.

When Vadinho, the liveliest of the lot, saw the group come around the corner and heard the skeleton-like Mascarenhas strumming his sublime four-string guitar, he hurried forward, and chose as his partner a heavily rouged Romanian, a big one, as monumental as a church—the Church of St. Francis, for she was a mass of golden sequins—and announced:

“Here I come, my Russian from Tororó.”

The Gypsy Mascarenhas, who was also bedecked with glass beads and spangles and had gaudy earrings hanging from his ears, pulsed his four-string guitar still more sonorously, the flutes and Spanish guitars groaned, and Vadinho took his place in the samba with that exemplary enthusiasm he brought to everything he did except work. He whirled in the middle of the group, stomped in front of the mulatta, approached her in flourishes and belly-bumps, then suddenly gave a kind of hoarse moan, wobbled, listed to one side, and fell to the ground, a yellow slobber drooling from his mouth

on which the grimace of death could not wholly extinguish the fatuous smile of the complete faker he had always been.

His friends were under the impression that it was the result of the load he had taken aboard: not the whiskeys the planter had treated them to—those four or five doses would have had little effect on the class of drinker Vadinho was—but all the rum imbibed from the evening before until noon when the Carnival was officially inaugurated at the Triumph Bar, in the Municipal Square—all of it hitting him at once and knocking him out. But the big mulatta was not fooled; a nurse by profession, she knew death when she saw it; it was a familiar sight to her in the hospital. Not, however, to the point of giving her belly-bumps, of winking its eye at her, of dancing the samba with her. She bent over Vadinho, laid her hand on his neck, and shuddered, a chill running through her stomach and up her spine: “Dear God, he’s dead.”

Others touched the body, too, felt his pulse, raised his head with its fair hair, listened to his heart. It was useless, a waste of time. Vadinho had taken leave of the Carnival of Bahia for good.

## 2

There was a hubbub in the group of dancers and in the street, a rush through the neighborhood, a God-be-with-us sending a shiver through the merry-makers—and on top of everything Anete, a romantic and hysterically inclined young teacher, took advantage of the occasion to have an attack of nerves, with squeals and the threat of fainting. All that act for the benefit of the vain Carlinhos Mascarenhas, for whom that affected creature sighed, always on the verge of swooning, describing herself as hypersensitive, twitching like a cat having its hair rubbed the wrong way when he strummed the guitar. A guitar that was now mute, hanging uselessly from the hands of its player, as though Vadinho had carried off its final notes with him to the other world.

People came running from every direction; after the news had circulated through the environs, it reached São Pedro, Avenida Sete, Campo Grande, rounding up the curious. A small crowd had gathered around the corpse, jogging one

another, overflowing with comments. A doctor who lived in Sodré was commandeered; a traffic policeman took out his whistle and blew it uninterruptedly, as though informing the whole city, the entire Carnival, of Vadinho's end.

"Why, it's Vadinho, the poor thing!" remarked one of the disguised revelers, his mask slipping off, his gaiety gone. All recognized the dead man; he enjoyed great popularity, with his sparkling joyousness, his hairline mustache, his profligate's pride, especially well-liked in places where drinking, gambling, and carousing were the order of the day; and there, so near his home, everyone knew him.

Another masked man, this one dressed in burlap and wearing a bear's head, pushed his way through the tight group and managed to approach close enough to get a good look. He pulled off his mask revealing a doleful face, with drooping mustache and bald scalp, and murmured: "Vadinho, my brother, what have they done to you?"

"What happened to him, what did he die of?" people asked one another, and someone answered: "Rum." This was far too simple an explanation of such an untimely death. A stooped old woman gazed at him for a long time and remarked: "Still so young. Why did he have to die so early?"

There was a crossfire of questions and answers, while the doctor laid his ear on Vadinho's breast. His report was definitive and extinguished all hope.

"He was dancing the samba, having a wonderful time, and without a word to anyone he fell over completely dead," explained one of his four friends, sobered up as though by magic, and deeply touched. He stood there looking somewhat foolish in his drag, his cheeks red with rouge, his eyes deeply shadowed with burned cork.

The fact that they were wearing the typical dress of Bahian women should not give rise to any doubts about the five friends' masculinity. They had dressed up in that fashion the better to fool around, to enjoy themselves and have fun, not because of any deviant inclinations laying them open to suspicion. There was not a faggot in the whole lot, praise be to God. Vadinho had even tied under his white starched petticoat a huge cassava tuber, and at every step he raised his skirts and displayed the outsized, pornographic trophy, causing the women to cover their faces with their hands and let out malicious giggles. Now the tuber hung over his bared

hip and elicited no laughter. One of his friends noticed it and untied it from Vadinho's waist. But not even so did the dead man look decent and modest; he was a Carnival casualty; yet, he did not even show the blood of a bullet wound or a dagger thrust running down his breast, which would have redeemed him from his air of masquerader.

Dona Flor, preceded, naturally, by Dona Norma issuing orders and clearing a path, arrived almost at the same moment as the police. When she came around the corner, resting on the supporting arms of her friends, everyone divined that she was the widow, for she was sighing and moaning, not even attempting to control her sobs, a cataract of tears. Moreover, she was wearing a rumpled house dress, which she used when she was cleaning, had on felt bedroom slippers, and had not yet combed her hair. Even so she was pretty, pleasant to look at; small and plump, but not fat; bronze of color; her straight hair so black that it looked bluish; voluptuous eyes; and full lips slightly parted over white teeth. A tasty morsel, as Vadinho himself was in the habit of calling her in his outbursts of tenderness, rare, but for that very reason unforgettable. Perhaps it was owing to his wife's culinary activities that in those idyllic moments Vadinho referred to her as "my little corn fritter, my fried bean cake, my fat little pullet," and these gastronomic metaphors gave a clear idea of a certain housewifely, sensual charm in Dona Flor hidden beneath a calm, easy-going nature. Vadinho knew her weaknesses, brought them out in the open: that banked-down desire of the timid person, that restraint which turned violent and positively unbounded when given free rein in bed. When Vadinho was in the mood, there was no one more charming, nor could any woman resist him. Dona Flor was never able to hold out against his fascination, not even when she had made up her mind to do so, boiling with indignation and recent affronts. Time and again she had even come to hate him and to curse the day when she had linked her fate to that wastrel.

But her anguish as she approached Vadinho, so unexpectedly cut down, left Dona Flor in a complete daze, empty of thought, recalling neither those moments of intense tenderness, nor, still less, those cruel days of suffering and loneliness, as though death had divested her husband of all his

shortcomings, or as though he had not been guilty of them during his "brief journey through this vale of tears."

"Brief journey through this vale of tears" was the phrase of the respectable Professor Epaminondas Souza Pinto, touched and confused as he came forward to greet the widow, to express his condolence, even before she had reached her husband's body. Dona Gisa, a teacher, too, and also respectable up to a point, restrained the haste of her colleague and also her laughter. If it was true that the journey of Vadinho through this life had been brief—he had just rounded out thirty-one years—Dona Gisa knew very well that the world had not been a vale of tears for him, but rather a front seat for all the pranks, merrymaking, lies, and sins in sight. Some of them painful and troubling, undoubtedly, putting his heart to severe tests and trials: debts that had to be paid, notes that fell due, cosigners who had to be won over, obligations assumed, payments that could not be put off, complaints, threats of being hauled into court, banks, money-lenders, frowning faces, friends turning their backs on him, not to mention the physical and moral sufferings of Dona Flor. Because, thought Dona Gisa in her garbled Portuguese—she was vaguely North American, had become a Brazilian citizen, and felt herself a Brazilian, but that devilish language, she never could master it!—such tears as there had been during Vadinho's brief span of life had been shed by Dona Flor, and plenty of them, enough for both.

But in the face of his sudden death, Dona Gisa thought of Vadinho only with sadness and regret: he had been agreeable, in spite of everything, had had his pleasant, attractive side. Nevertheless, not because he was lying there, stretched out in the street in Dois de Julho Square, dead, masquerading as a Bahian woman, was she going to twist the truth, invent another Vadinho out of the whole cloth. She said so to Dona Norma, her neighbor and close friend, but did not receive the assent she had expected. Dona Norma had time and again told Vadinho just what she thought of him, had quarreled with him, preached him sermons that would have touched a heart of stone, one day even threatened him with the police. But at that sad and final hour, she did not want to comment on the outstanding and unpleasant facets of the late lamented; she wanted only to praise his good qualities, his innate good manners, his invariable sympathy, always quick

to manifest itself, his loyalty to his friends, his unquestionable generosity (especially at somebody else's expense), his care-free and boundless *joie de vivre*. Moreover, she was so taken up with helping and looking after Dona Flor that she was not even listening to Dona Gisa's harsh truths. Dona Gisa was like that: the truth above everything else, at times to the point of making her seem unfeeling and callous. Possibly this was a defense mechanism of her own trusting nature, for she was credulous beyond belief and had faith in everybody. No, she was not recalling Vadinho's misdeeds to criticize him or blame him; she had liked him and they often had had long conversations together, Dona Gisa interested in acquainting her self with the psychology of the underworld in which Vadinho moved and had his being, he in telling her tall tales and peeping down the front of her dress at the curve of her full, freckled breasts. Possibly Dona Gisa understood him better than Dona Norma; but quite the opposite of her, she was not going to scant a single one of his defects, she was not going to lie just because he had died. Dona Gisa did not lie even to herself, unless there was no other way out. And that was clearly not the situation in this case.

Dona Flor made her way through the crowd in the wake of Dona Norma, who went clearing a path for her with her elbows and her great popularity: "Come, step aside, folks, let the poor thing get by . . ."

There lay Vadinho on the mosaic paving blocks, a smile on his lips, blond and fair, the image of peace and innocence. Dona Flor stood for a moment, looking at him as though she had trouble recognizing her husband, or perhaps, and this was more probable, in accepting the fact, now indisputable, of his death. But only for an instant. With a scream that came from the very depths of her being, she threw herself upon Vadinho, clasping his motionless body to her, kissing his hair, his rouged face, his open eyes, his jaunty mustache, his dead mouth, forever dead.

### 3

It was Carnival Sunday, and who did not have an automobile parade in which to participate that night, a celebration at

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