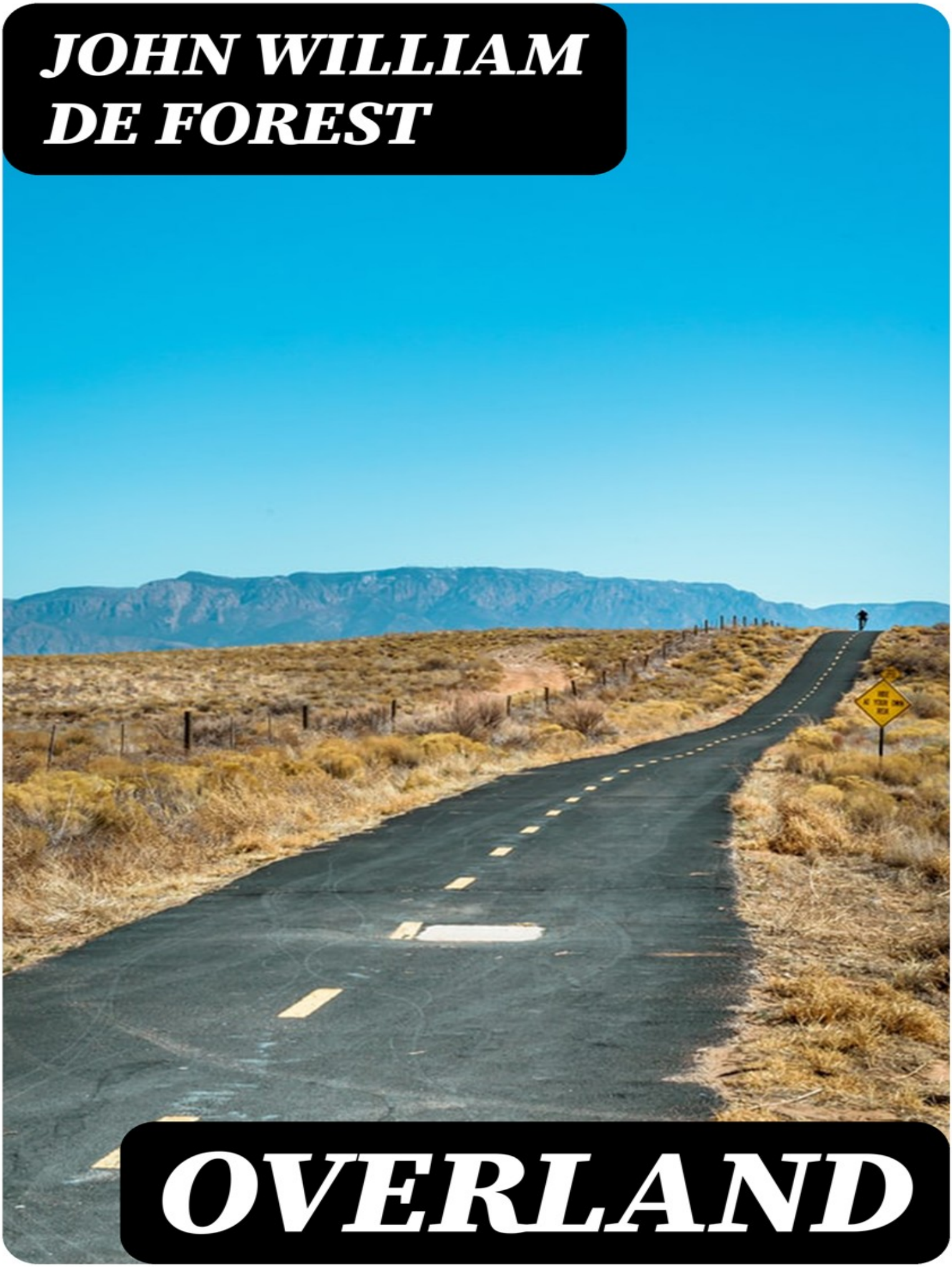
JOHN WILLIAM DE FOREST



OVERLAND

John William De Forest

Overland

A Novel

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CHAPTER I.

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In those days, Santa Fé, New Mexico, was an undergrown, decrepit, out-at-elbows ancient hidalgo of a town, with not a scintillation of prosperity or grandeur about it, except the name of capital.

It was two hundred and seventy years old; and it had less than five thousand inhabitants. It was the metropolis of a vast extent of country, not destitute of natural wealth; and it consisted of a few narrow, irregular streets, lined by one-story houses built of sun-baked bricks. Owing to the fine climate, it was difficult to die there; but owing to many things not fine, it was almost equally difficult to live.

Even the fact that Santa Fé had been for a period under the fostering wings of the American eagle did not make it grow much. Westward-ho emigrants halted there to refit and buy cattle and provisions; but always started resolutely on again, westward-hoing across the continent. Nobody seemed to want to stay in Santa Fé, except the aforesaid less than five thousand inhabitants, who were able to endure the place because they had never seen any other, and who had become a part of its gray, dirty, lazy lifelessness and despondency.

For a wonder, this old atom of a metropolis had lately had an increase of population, which was nearly as great a wonder as Sarah having a son when she was "well stricken in years." A couple of new-comers—not a man nor woman less than a couple—now stood on the flat roof of one of the largest of the sun-baked brick houses. By great good luck,

moreover, these two were, I humbly trust, worthy of attention. The one was interesting because she was the handsomest girl in Santa Fé, and would have been considered a handsome girl anywhere; the other was interesting because she was a remarkable woman, and even, as Mr. Jefferson Brick might have phrased it, "one of the most remarkable women in our country, sir." At least so she judged, and judged it too with very considerable confidence, being one of those persons who say, "If I know myself, and I think I do."

The beauty was of a mixed type. She combined the blonde and the brunette fashions of loveliness. You might guess at the first glance that she had in her the blood of both the Teutonic and the Latin races. While her skin was clear and rosy, and her curling hair was of a light and bright chestnut, her long, shadowy eyelashes were almost black, and her eyes were of a deep hazel, nearly allied to blackness. Her form had the height of the usual American girl, and the round plumpness of the usual Spanish girl. Even in her bearing and expression you could discover more or less of this union of different races. There was shyness and frankness; there was mistrust and confidence; there was sentimentality and gayety. In short, Clara Muñoz Garcia Van Diemen was a handsome and interesting young lady.

Now for the remarkable woman. Sturdy and prominent old character, obviously. Forty-seven years old, or thereabouts; lots of curling iron-gray hair twisted about her round forehead; a few wrinkles, and not all of the newest. Round face, round and earnest eyes, short, self-confident nose, chin sticking out in search of its own way, mouth

trembling with unuttered ideas. Good figure—what Lord Dundreary would call "dem robust," but not so sumptuous as to be merely ornamental; tolerably convenient figure to get about in. Walks up and down, man-fashion, with her hands behind her back—also man-fashion. Such is Mrs. Maria Stanley, the sister of Clara Van Diemen's father, and best known to Clara as Aunt Maria.

"And so this is Santa Fé?" said Aunt Maria, rolling her spectacles over the little wilted city. "Founded in 1581; two hundred and seventy years old. Well, if this is all that man can do in that time, he had better leave colonization to woman."

Clara smiled with an innocent air of half wonder and half amusement, such as you may see on the face of a child when it is shown some new and rather awe-striking marvel of the universe, whether a jack-in-a-box or a comet. She had only known Aunt Maria for the last four years, and she had not yet got used to her rough-and-ready mannish ways, nor learned to see any sense in her philosophizings. Looking upon her as a comical character, and supposing that she talked mainly for the fun of the thing, she was disposed to laugh at her doings and sayings, though mostly meant in solemn earnest.

"But about your affairs, my child," continued Aunt Maria, suddenly gripping a fresh subject after her quick and startling fashion. "I don't understand them. How is it possible? Here is a great fortune gone; gone in a moment; gone incomprehensibly. What does it mean? Some rascality here. Some man at the bottom of this."

"I presume my relative, Garcia, must be right," commenced Clara.

"No, he isn't," interrupted Aunt Maria. "He is wrong. Of course he's wrong. I never knew a man yet but what he was wrong."

"You make me laugh in spite of my troubles," said Clara, laughing, however, only through her eyes, which had great faculties for sparkling out meanings. "But see here," she added, turning grave again, and putting up her hand to ask attention. "Mr. Garcia tells a straight story, and gives reasons enough. There was the war," and here she began to count on her fingers, "That destroyed a great deal. I know when my father could scarcely send on money to pay my bills in New York. And then there was the signature for Señor Pedraez. And then there were the Apaches who burnt the hacienda and drove off the cattle. And then he—"

Her voice faltered and she stopped; she could not say, "He died."

"My poor, dear child!" sighed Aunt Maria, walking up to the girl and caressing her with a tenderness which was all womanly.

"That seems enough," continued Clara, when she could speak again. "I suppose that what Garcia and the lawyers tell us is true. I suppose I am not worth a thousand dollars."

"Will a thousand dollars support you here?"

"I don't know. I don't think it will."

"Then if I can't set this thing straight, if I can't make somebody disgorge your property, I must take you back with me."

"Oh! if you would!" implored Clara, all the tender helplessness of Spanish girlhood appealing from her eyes.

"Of course I will," said Aunt Maria, with a benevolent energy which was almost terrific.

"I would try to do something. I don't know. Couldn't I teach Spanish?"

"You *shan't*" decided Aunt Maria. "Yes, you *shall*. You shall be professor of foreign languages in a Female College which I mean to have founded."

Clara stared with astonishment, and then burst into a hearty fit of laughter, the two finishing the drying of her tears. She was so far from wishing to be a strong-minded person of either gender, that she did not comprehend that her aunt could wish it for her, or could herself seriously claim to be one. The talk about a professorship was in her estimation the wayward, humorous whim of an eccentric who was fond of solemn joking. Mrs. Stanley, meanwhile, could not see why her utterance should not be taken in earnest, and opened her eyes at Clara's merriment.

We must say a word or two concerning the past of this young lady. Twenty-five years previous a New Yorker named Augustus Van Diemen, the brother of that Maria Jane Van Diemen now known to the world as Mrs. Stanley, had migrated to California, set up in the hide business, and married by stealth the daughter of a wealthy Mexican named Pedro Muñoz. Muñoz got into a Spanish Catholic rage at having a Yankee Protestant son-in-law, disowned and formally disinherited his child, and worried her husband into quitting the country. Van Diemen returned to the United States, but his wife soon became homesick for her native

land, and, like a good husband as he was, he went once more to Mexico. This time he settled in Santa Fé, where he accumulated a handsome fortune, lived in the best house in the city, and owned haciendas.

Clara's mother dying when the girl was fourteen years old, Van Diemen felt free to give her, his only child, an American education, and sent her to New York, where she went through four years of schooling. During this period came the war between the United States and Mexico. Foreign residents were ill-treated; Van Diemen was sometimes a prisoner, sometimes a fugitive; in one way or another his fortune went to pieces. Four months previous to the opening of this story he died in a state little better than insolvency. Clara, returning to Santa Fé under the care of her energetic and affectionate relative, found that the deluge of debt would cover town house and haciendas, leaving her barely a thousand dollars. She was handsome and accomplished, but she was an orphan and poor. The main chance with her seemed to lie in the likelihood that she would find a mother (or a father) in Aunt Maria.

Yes, there was another sustaining possibility, and of a more poetic nature. There was a young American officer named Thurstane, a second lieutenant acting as quartermaster of the department, who had met her heretofore in New York, who had seemed delighted to welcome her to Santa Fé, and who now called on her nearly every day. Might it not be that Lieutenant Thurstane would want to make her Mrs. Thurstane, and would have power granted him to induce her to consent to the arrangement? Clara was sufficiently a woman, and sufficiently a Spanish

woman especially, to believe in marriage. She did not mean particularly to be Mrs. Thurstane, but she did mean generally to be Mrs. Somebody. And why not Thurstane? Well, that was for him to decide, at least to a considerable extent. In the mean time she did not love him; she only disliked the thought of leaving him.

While these two women had been talking and thinking, a lazy Indian servant had been lounging up the stairway. Arrived on the roof, he advanced to La Señorita Clara, and handed her a letter. The girl opened it, glanced through it with a flushing face, and cried out delightedly, "It is from my grandfather. How wonderful! O holy Maria, thanks! His heart has been softened. He invites me to come and live with him in San Francisco. *O Madre de Dios!*"

Although Clara spoke English perfectly, and although she was in faith quite as much of a Protestant as a Catholic, yet in her moments of strong excitement she sometimes fell back into the language and ideas of her childhood.

"Child, what are you jabbering about?" asked Aunt Maria.

"There it is. See! Pedro Muñoz! It is his own signature. I have seen letters of his. Pedro Muñoz! Read it. Oh! you don't read Spanish."

Then she translated the letter aloud. Aunt Maria listened with a firm and almost stern aspect, like one who sees some justice done, but not enough.

"He doesn't beg your pardon," she said at the close of the reading.

Clara, supposing that she was expected to laugh, and not seeing the point of the joke, stared in amazement.

"But probably he is in a meeker mood now," continued Aunt Maria. "By this time it is to be hoped that he sees his past conduct in a proper light. The letter was written three months ago."

"Three months ago," repeated Clara. "Yes, it has taken all that time to come. How long will it take me to go there? How shall I go?"

"We will see," said Aunt Maria, with the air of one who holds the fates in her hand, and doesn't mean to open it till she gets ready. She was by no means satisfied as yet that this grandfather Muñoz was a proper person to be intrusted with the destinies of a young lady. In refusing to let his daughter select her own husband, he had shown a very squinting and incomplete perception of the rights of woman.

"Old reprobate!" thought Aunt Maria. "Probably he has got gouty with his vices, and wants to be nursed. I fancy I see him getting Clara without going on his sore marrow-bones and begging pardon of gods and women."

"Of course I must go," continued Clara, unsuspicious of her aunt's reflections. "At all events he will support me. Besides, he is now the head of my family."

"Head of the family!" frowned Aunt Maria. "Because he is a man? So much the more reason for his being the tail of it. My dear, you are your own head."

"Ah—well. What is the use of all *that*?" asked Clara, smiling away those views. "I have no money, and he has."

"Well, we will see," persisted Aunt Maria. "I just told you so. We will see."

The two women had scarcely left the roof of the house and got themselves down to the large, breezy, sparsely

furnished parlor, ere the lazy, dawdling Indian servant announced Lieutenant Thurstane.

Lieutenant Ralph Thurstane was a tall, full-chested, finely-limbed gladiator of perhaps four and twenty. Broad forehead; nose straight and high enough; lower part of the face oval; on the whole a good physiognomy. Cheek bones rather strongly marked; a hint of Scandinavian ancestry supported by his name. Thurstane is evidently Thor's stone or altar; forefathers priests of the god of thunder. His complexion was so reddened and darkened by sunburn that his untanned forehead looked unnaturally white and delicate. His yellow, one might almost call it golden hair, was wavy enough to be handsome. Eyes quite remarkable; blue, but of a very dark blue, like the coloring which is sometimes given to steel; so dark indeed that one's first impression was that they were black. Their natural expression seemed to be gentle, pathetic, and almost imploring; but authority, responsibility, hardship, and danger had given them an ability to be stern. In his whole face, young as he was, there was already the look of the veteran, that calm reminiscence of trials endured, that preparedness for trials to come. In fine, taking figure, physiognomy, and demeanor together, he was attractive.

He saluted the ladies as if they were his superior officers. It was a kindly address, but ceremonious; it was almost humble, and yet it was self-respectful.

"I have some great news," he presently said, in the full masculine tone of one who has done much drilling. "That is, it is great to me. I change station."

"How is that?" asked Clara eagerly. She was not troubled at the thought of losing a beau; we must not be so hard upon her as to make that supposition; but here was a trustworthy friend going away just when she wanted counsel and perhaps aid.

"I have been promoted first lieutenant of Company I, Fifth Regiment, and I must join my company."

"Promoted! I am glad," said Clara.

"You ought to be pleased," put in Aunt Maria, staring at the grave face of the young man with no approving expression. "I thought men were always pleased with such things."

"So I am," returned Thurstane. "Of course I am pleased with the step. But I must leave Santa Fé. And I have found Santa Fé very pleasant."

There was so much meaning obvious in these last words that Clara's face colored like a sunset.

"I thought soldiers never indulged in such feelings," continued the unmollified Aunt Maria.

"Soldiers are but men," observed Thurstane, flushing through his sunburn.

"And men are weak creatures."

Thurstane grew still redder. This old lady (old in his young eyes) was always at him about his manship, as if it were a crime and disgrace. He wanted to give her one, but out of respect for Clara he did not, and merely moved uneasily in his seat, as men are apt to do when they are set down hard.

"How soon must you go? Where?" demanded Clara.

"As soon as I can close my accounts here and turn over my stores to my successor. Company I is at Fort Yuma on

the Colorado. It is the first post in California."

"California!" And Clara could not help brightening up in cheeks and eyes with fine tints and flashes. "Why, I am going to California."

"We will see," said Aunt Maria, still holding the fates in her fist.

Then came the story of Grandfather Muñoz's letter, with a hint or two concerning the decay of the Van Diemen fortune, for Clara was not worldly wise enough to hide her poverty.

Thurstane's face turned as red with pleasure as if it had been dipped in the sun. If this young lady was going to California, he might perhaps be her knight-errant across the desert, guard her from privations and hardships, and crown himself with her smiles. If she was poor, he might—well, he would not speculate upon that; it was too dizzying.

We must say a word as to his history in order to show why he was so shy and sensitive. He had been through West Point, confined himself while there closely to his studies, gone very soon into active service, and so seen little society. The discipline of the Academy and three years in the regular army had ground into him the soldier's respect for superiors. He revered his field officers; he received a communication from the War Department as a sort of superhuman revelation; he would have blown himself sky-high at the command of General Scott. This habit of subordination, coupled with a natural fund of reverence, led him to feel that many persons were better than himself, and to be humble in their presence. All women were his superior officers, and the highest in rank was Clara Van Diemen.

Well, hurrah! he was to march under her to California! and the thought made him half wild. He would protect her; he would kill all the Indians in the desert for her sake; he would feed her on his own blood, if necessary.

As he considered these proper and feasible projects, the audacious thought which he had just tried to expel from his mind forced its way back into it. If the Van Diemen estate were insolvent, if this semi-divine Clara were as poor as himself, there was a call on him to double his devotion to her, and there was a hope that his worship might some day be rewarded.

How he would slave and serve for her; how he would earn promotion for her sake; how he would fight her battle in life! But would she let him do it? Ah, it seemed too much to hope. Poor though she was, she was still a heaven or so above him; she was so beautiful and had so many perfections!

Oh, the purity, the self-abnegation, the humility of love! It makes a man scarcely lower than the angels, and quite superior to not a few reverenced saints.

CHAPTER II.

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"I must say," observed Thurstane—"I beg your pardon for advising—but I think you had better accept your grandfather's invitation."

He said it with a pang at his heart, for if this adorable girl went to her grandfather, the old fellow would be sure to love her and leave her his property, in which case there would be no chance for a proud and poor lieutenant. He gave his advice under a grim sense that it was his duty to give it, because the following of it would be best for Miss Van Diemen.

"So I think," nodded Clara, fortified by this opinion to resist Aunt Maria, and the more fortified because it was the opinion of a man.

After a certain amount of discussion the elder lady was persuaded to loosen her mighty grip and give the destinies a little liberty.

"Well, it *may* be best," she said, pursing her mouth as if she tasted the bitter of some half-suspected and disagreeable future. "I don't know. I won't undertake positively to decide. But, if you do go," and here she became authentic and despotic—"if you do go, I shall go with you and see you safe there."

"Oh! *will* you?" exclaimed Clara, all Spanish and all emotion in an instant. "How sweet and good and beautiful of you! You are my guardian angel. Do you know? I thought you would offer to go. I said to myself, She came on to

Santa Fé for my sake, and she will go to California. But oh, it is too much for me to ask. How shall I ever pay you?"

"I will pay myself," returned Aunt Maria. "I have plans for California."

It was as if she had said, "Go to, we will make California in our own image."

The young lady was satisfied. Her strong-minded relative was a mighty mystery to her, just as men were mighty mysteries. Whatever she or they said could be done and should be done, why of course it would be done, and that shortly.

By the time that Aunt Maria had announced her decision, another visitor was on the point of entrance. Carlos Maria Muñoz Garcia de Coronado was a nephew of Manuel Garcia, who was a cousin of Clara's grandfather; only, as Garcia was merely his uncle by marriage, Coronado and Clara were not related by blood, though calling each other cousin. He was a man of medium stature, slender in build, agile and graceful in movement, complexion very dark, features high and aristocratic, short black hair and small black moustache, eyes black also, but veiled and dusky. He was about twenty-eight, but he seemed at least four years older, partly because of a deep wrinkle which slashed down each cheek, and partly because he was so perfectly self-possessed and elaborately courteous. His intellect was apparently as alert and adroit as his physical action. A few words from Clara enabled him to seize the situation.

"Go at once," he decided without a moment's hesitation. "My dear cousin, it will be the happy turning point of your fortunes. I fancy you already inheriting the hoards, city lots,

haciendas, mines, and cattle of our excellent relative Muñoz—long may he live to enjoy them! Certainly. Don't whisper an objection. Muñoz owes you that reparation. His conduct has been—we will not describe it—we will hope that he means to make amends for it. Unquestionably he will. My dear cousin, nothing can resist you. You will enchant your grandfather. It will all end, like the tales of the Arabian Nights, in your living in a palace. How delightful to think of this long family quarrel at last coming to a close! But how do you go?"

"If Miss Van Diemen goes overland, I can do something toward protecting her and making her comfortable," suggested Thurstane. "I am ordered to Fort Yuma."

Coronado glanced at the young officer, noted the guilty blush which peeped out of his tanned cheek, and came to a decision on the instant.

"Overland!" he exclaimed, lifting both his hands. "Take her overland! My God! my God!"

Thurstane reddened at the insinuation that he had given bad advice to Miss Van Diemen; but though he wanted to fight the Mexican, he controlled himself, and did not even argue. Like all sensitive and at the same time self-respectful persons, he was exceedingly considerate of the feelings of others, and was a very lamb in conversation.

"It is a desert," continued Coronado in a kind of scream of horror. "It is a waterless desert, without a blade of grass, and haunted from end to end by Apaches. My little cousin would die of thirst and hunger. She would be hunted and scalped. O my God! overland!"

"Emigrant parties are going all the while," ventured Thurstane, very angry at such extravagant opposition, but merely looking a little stiff.

"Certainly. You are right, Lieutenant," bowed Coronado. "They do go. But how many perish on the way? They march between the unburied and withered corpses of their predecessors. And what a journey for a woman—for a lady accustomed to luxury—for my little cousin! I beg your pardon, my dear Lieutenant Thurstane, for disagreeing with you. My advice is—the isthmus."

"I have, of course, nothing, to say," admitted the officer, returning Coronado's bow. "The family must decide."

"Certainly, the isthmus, the steamers," went on the fluent Mexican. "You sail to Panama. You have an easy and safe land trip of a few days. Then steamers again. Poff! you are there. By all means, the isthmus."

We must allot a few more words of description to this Don Carlos Coronado. Let no one expect a stage Spaniard, with the air of a matador or a guerrillero, who wears only picturesque and outlandish costumes, and speaks only magniloquent Castilian. Coronado was dressed, on this spring morning, precisely as American dandies then dressed for summer promenades on Broadway. His hat was a fine panama with a broad black ribbon; his frock-coat was of thin cloth, plain, dark, and altogether civilized; his light trousers were cut gaiter-fashion, and strapped under the instep; his small boots were patent-leather, and of the ordinary type. There was nothing poetic about his attire except a reasonably wide Byron collar and a rather dashing crimson neck-tie, well suited to his dark complexion.

His manner was sometimes excitable, as we have seen above; but usually he was like what gentlemen with us desire to be. Perhaps he bowed lower and smiled oftener and gestured more gracefully than Americans are apt to do. But there was in general nothing Oriental about him, no assumption of barbaric pompousness, no extravagance of bearing. His prevailing deportment was calm, grave, and deliciously courteous. If you had met him, no matter how or where, you would probably have been pleased with him. He would have made conversation for you, and put you at ease in a moment; you would have believed that he liked you, and you would therefore have been disposed to like him. In short, he was agreeable to most people, and to some people fascinating.

And then his English! It was wonderful to hear him talk it. No American could say that he spoke better English than Coronado, and no American surely ever spoke it so fluently. It rolled off his lips in a torrent, undefiled by a mispronunciation or a foreign idiom. And yet he had begun to learn the language after reaching the age of manhood, and had acquired it mainly during three years of exile and teaching of Spanish in the United States. His linguistic cleverness was a fair specimen of his general quickness of intellect.

Mrs. Stanley had liked him at first sight—that is, liked him for a man. He knew it; he had seen that she was a person worth conciliating; he had addressed himself to her, let off his bows at her, made her the centre of conversation. In ten minutes from the entrance of Coronado Mrs. Stanley was of opinion that Clara ought to go to California by way of the

isthmus, although she had previously taken the overland route for granted. In another ten minutes the matter was settled: the ladies were to go by way of New Orleans, Panama, and the Pacific.

Shortly afterward, Coronado and Thurstane took their leave; the Mexican affable, sociable, smiling, smoking; the American civil, but taciturn and grave.

"Aha! I have disappointed the young gentleman," thought Coronado as they parted, the one going to his quartermaster's office and the other to Garcia's house.

Coronado, although he had spent great part of his life in courting women, was a bachelor. He had been engaged once in New Mexico and two or three times in New York, but had always, as he could tell you with a smile, been disappointed. He now lived with his uncle, that Señor Manuel Garcia whom Clara has mentioned, a trader with California, an owner of vast estates and much cattle, and reputed to be one of the richest men in New Mexico. The two often quarrelled, and the elder had once turned the younger out of doors, so lively were their dispositions. But as Garcia had lost one by one all his children, he had at last taken his nephew into permanent favor, and would, it was said, leave him his property.

The house, a hollow square built of *adobe* bricks in one story, covered a vast deal of ground, had spacious rooms and a court big enough to bivouac a regiment. It was, in fact, not only a dwelling, but a magazine where Garcia stored his merchandise, and a caravansary where he parked his wagons. As Coronado lounged into the main doorway he

was run against by a short, pursy old gentleman who was rushing out.

"Ah! there you are!" exclaimed the old gentleman, in Spanish. "O you pig! you dog! you never are here. O Madre de Dios! how I have needed you! There is no time to lose. Enter at once."

A dyspeptic, worn with work and anxieties, his nervous system shattered, Garcia was subject to fits of petulance which were ludicrous. In these rages he called everybody who would bear it pigs, dogs, and other more unsavory nicknames. Coronado bore it because thus he got his living, and got it without much labor.

"I want you," gasped Garcia, seizing the young man by the arm and dragging him into a private room. "I want to speak to you in confidence—in confidence, mind you, in confidence—about Muñoz."

"I have heard of it," said Coronado, as the old man stopped to catch his breath.

"Heard of it!" exclaimed Garcia, in such consternation that he turned yellow, which was his way of turning pale. "Has the news got here? O Madre de Dios!"

"Yes, I was at our little cousin's this evening. It is an ugly affair."

"And *she* knows it?" groaned the old man. "O Madre de Dios!"

"She told me of it. She is going there. I did the best I could. She was about to go overland, in charge of the American, Thurstane. I broke that up. I persuaded her to go by the isthmus."

"It is of little use," said Garcia, his eyes filmy with despair, as if he were dying. "She will get there. The property will be hers."

"Not necessarily. He has simply invited her to live with him. She may not suit."

"How?" demanded Garcia, open-eyed and open-mouthed with anxiety.

"He has simply invited her to live with him," repeated Coronado. "I saw the letter."

"What! you don't know, then?"

"Know what?"

"Muñoz is dead."

Coronado threw out, first a stare of surprise, and then a shout of laughter.

"And here they have just got a letter from him," he said presently; "and I have been persuading her to go to him by the isthmus!"

"May the journey take her to him!" muttered Garcia. "How old was this letter?"

"Nearly three months. It came by sea, first to New York, and then here."

"My news is a month later. It came overland by special messenger. Listen to me, Carlos. This affair is worse than you know. Do you know what Muñoz has done? Oh, the pig! the dog! the villainous pig! He has left everything to his granddaughter."

Coronado, dumb with astonishment and dismay, mechanically slapped his boot with his cane and stared at Garcia.

"I am ruined," cried the old man. "The pig of hell has ruined me. He has left me, his cousin, his only male relative, to ruin. Not a doubloon to save me.'

"Is there *no* chance?" asked Coronado, after a long silence.

"None! Oh—yes—one. A little one, a miserable little one. If she dies without issue and without a will, I am heir. And you, Carlos" (changing here to a wheedling tone), "you are mine."

The look which accompanied these last words was a terrible mingling of cunning, cruelty, hope, and despair.

Coronado glanced at Garcia with a shocking comprehension, and immediately dropped his dusky eyes upon the floor.

"You know I have made my will," resumed the old man, "and left you everything."

"Which is nothing," returned Coronado, aware that his uncle was insolvent in reality, and that his estate when settled would not show the residuum of a dollar.

"If the fortune of Muñoz comes to me, I shall be very rich."

"When you get it."

"Listen to me, Carlos. Is there no way of getting it?"

As the two men stared at each other they were horrible. The uncle was always horrible; he was one of the very ugliest of Spaniards; he was a brutal caricature of the national type. He had a low forehead, round face, bulbous nose, shaking fat cheeks, insignificant chin, and only one eye, a black and sleepy orb, which seemed to crawl like a snake. His exceedingly dark skin was made darker by a

singular bluish tinge which resulted from heavy doses of nitrate of silver, taken as a remedy for epilepsy. His face was, moreover, mottled with dusky spots, so that he reminded the spectator of a frog or a toad. Just now he looked nothing less than poisonous; the hungriest of cannibals would not have dared eat him.

"I am ruined," he went on groaning. "The war, the Yankees, the Apaches, the devil—I am completely ruined. In another year I shall be sold out. Then, my dear Carlos, you will have no home."

"*Sangre de Dios!*" growled Coronado. "Do you want to drive me to the devil?

"O God! to force an old man to such an extremity!" continued Garcia. "It is more than an old man is fitted to strive with. An old man—an old, sick, worn-out man!"

"You are sure about the will?" demanded the nephew.

"I have a copy of it," said Garcia, eagerly. "Here it is. Read it. O Madre de Dios! there is no doubt about it. I can trust my lawyer. It all goes to her. It only comes to me if she dies childless and intestate."

"This is a horrible dilemma to force us into," observed Coronado, after he had read the paper.

"So it is," assented Garcia, looking at him with indescribable anxiety. "So it is; so it is. What is to be done?"

"Suppose I should marry her?"

The old man's countenance fell; he wanted to call his nephew a pig, a dog, and everything else that is villainous; but he restrained himself and merely whimpered, "It would be better than nothing. You could help me."

"There is little chance of it," said Coronado, seeing that the proposition was not approved. "She likes the American lieutenant much, and does not like me at all."

"Then—" began Garcia, and stopped there, trembling all over.

"Then what?"

The venomous old toad made a supreme effort and whispered, "Suppose she should die?"

Coronado wheeled about, walked two or three times up and down the room, returned to where Garcia sat quivering, and murmured, "It must be done quickly."

"Yes, yes," gasped the old man. "She must—it must be childless and intestate."

"She must go off in some natural way," continued the nephew.

The uncle looked up with a vague hope in his one dusky and filmy eye.

"Perhaps the isthmus will do it for her."

Again the old man turned to an image of despair, as he mumbled, "O Madre de Dios! no, no. The isthmus is nothing."

"Is the overland route more dangerous?" asked Coronado.

"It might be made more dangerous. One gets lost in the desert. There are Apaches."

"It is a horrible business," growled Coronado, shaking his head and biting his lips.

"Oh, horrible, horrible!" groaned Garcia. "Muñoz was a pig, and a dog, and a toad, and a snake."

"You old coward! can't you speak out?" hissed Coronado, losing his patience. "Do you want me both to devise and execute, while you take the purses? Tell me at once what your plan is."

"The overland route," whispered Garcia, shaking from head to foot. "You go with her. I pay—I pay everything. You shall have men, horses, mules, wagons, all you want."

"I shall want money, too. I shall need, perhaps, two thousand dollars. Apaches."

"Yes, yes," assented Garcia. "The Apaches make an attack. You shall have money. I can raise it; I will."

"How soon will you have a train ready?"

"Immediately. Any day you want. You must start at once. She must not know of the will. She might remain here, and let the estate be settled for her, and draw on it. She might go back to New York. Anybody would lend her money."

"Yes, events hurry us," muttered Coronado. "Well, get your cursed train ready. I will induce her to take it. I must unsay now all that I said in favor of the isthmus."

"Do be judicious," implored Garcia. "With judgment, with judgment. Lost on the plains. Stolen by Apaches. No killing. No scandals. O my God, how I hate scandals and uproars! I am an old man, Carlos. With judgment, with judgment."

"I comprehend," responded Coronado, adding a long string of Spanish curses, most of them meant for his uncle.

CHAPTER III.

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That very day Coronado made a second call on Clara and her Aunt Maria, to retract, contradict, and disprove all that he had said in favor of the isthmus and against the overland route.

Although his visit was timed early in the evening, he found Lieutenant Thurstane already with the ladies. Instead of scowling at him, or crouching in conscious guilt before him, he made a cordial rush for his hand, smiled sweetly in his face, and offered him incense of gratitude.

"My dear Lieutenant, you are perfectly right," he said, in his fluent English. "The journey by the isthmus is not to be thought of. I have just seen a friend who has made it. Poisonous serpents in myriads. The most deadly climate in the world. Nearly everybody had the *vomito*; one-fifth died of it. You eat a little fruit; down you go on your back—dead in four hours. Then there are constant fights between the emigrants and the sullen, ferocious Indians of the isthmus. My poor friend never slept with his revolver out of his hand. I said to him, 'My dear fellow, it is cruel to rejoice in your misfortunes, but I am heartily glad that I have heard of them. You have saved the life of the most remarkable woman that I ever knew, and of a cousin of mine who is the star of her sex.'"

Here Coronado made one bow to Mrs. Stanley and another to Clara, at the same time kissing his sallow hand enthusiastically to all creation. Aunt Maria tried to look stern at the compliment, but eventually thawed into a smile over

it. Clara acknowledged it with a little wave of the hand, as if, coming from Coronado, it meant nothing more than good-morning, which indeed was just about his measure of it.

"Moreover," continued the Mexican, "overland route? Why, it is overland route both ways. If you go by the isthmus, you must traverse all Texas and Louisiana, at the very least. You might as well go at once to San Diego. In short, the route by the isthmus is not to be thought of."

"And what of the overland route?" asked Mrs. Stanley.

"The overland route is the *other*," laughed Coronado.

"Yes, I know. We must take it, I suppose. But what is the last news about it? You spoke this morning of Indians, I believe. Not that I suppose they are very formidable."

"The overland route does not lead directly through paradise, my dear Mrs. Stanley," admitted Coronado with insinuating candor. "But it is not as bad as has been represented. I have never tried it. I must rely upon the report of others. Well, on learning that the isthmus would not do for you, I rushed off immediately to inquire about the overland. I questioned Garcia's teamsters. I catechized some newly-arrived travellers. I pumped dry every source of information. The result is that the overland route will do. No suffering; absolutely none; not a bit. And no danger worth mentioning. The Apaches are under a cloud. Our American conquerors and fellow-citizens" (here he gently patted Thurstane on the shoulder-strap), "our Romans of the nineteenth century, they tranquillize the Apaches. A child might walk from here to Fort Yuma without risking its little scalp."