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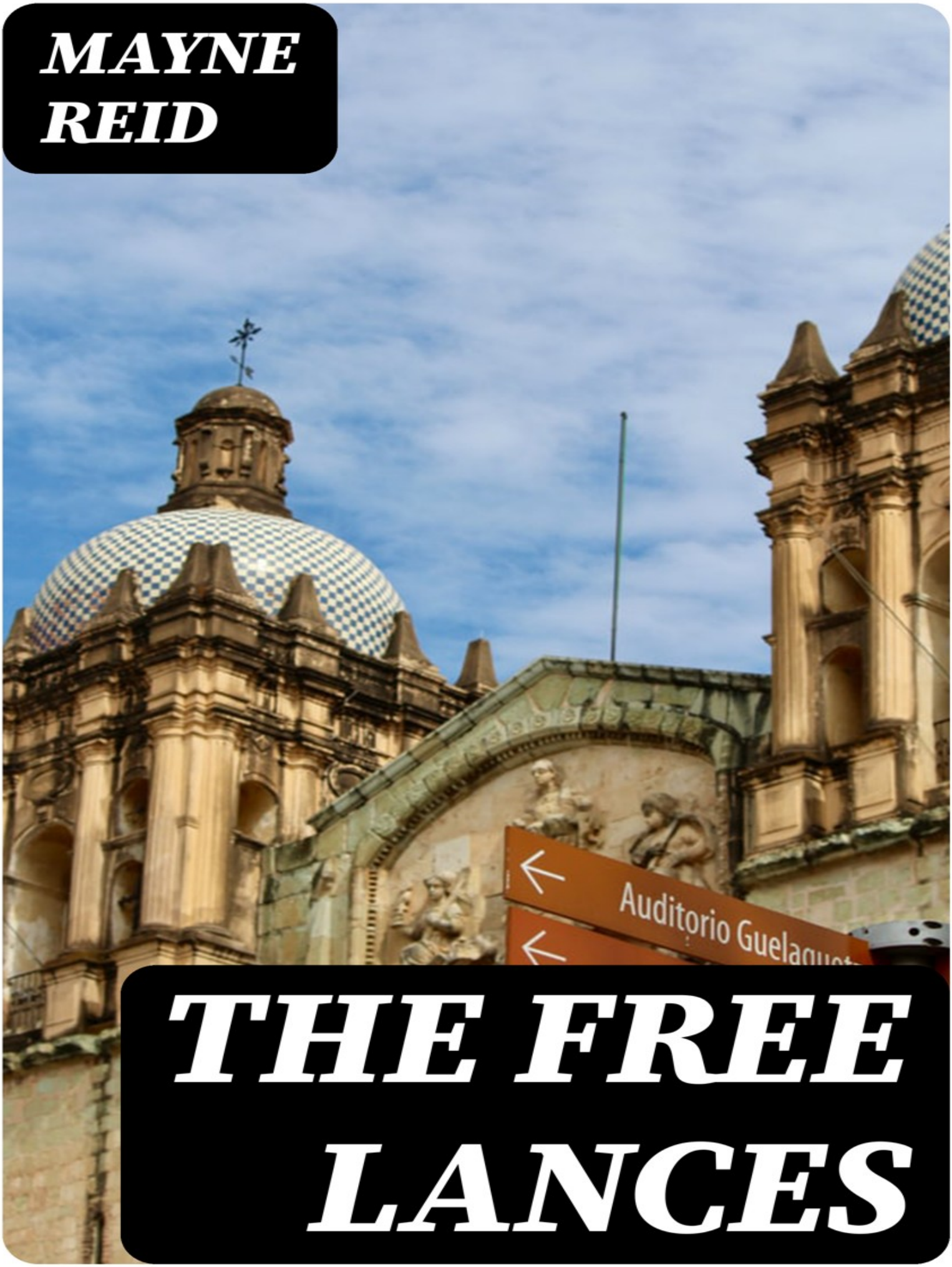

THE FREE LANCES

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The Free Lances

A Romance of the Mexican Valley

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Chapter One.

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Volunteers for Texas.

“I’ll go!”

This laconism came from the lips of a young man who was walking along the Levee of New Orleans. Just before giving utterance to it he had made a sudden stop, facing a dead wall, enlivened, however, by a large poster, on which were printed, in conspicuous letters, the words—

“Volunteers for Texas!”

Underneath, in smaller type, was a proclamation, setting forth the treachery of Santa Anna and the whole Mexican nation, recalling in strong terms the Massacre of Fanning, the butchery of Alamo, and other like atrocities; ending in an appeal to all patriots and lovers of freedom to arm, take the field, and fight against the tyrant of Mexico and his myrmidons.

“I’ll go!” said the young man, after a glance given to the printed statement; then, more deliberately re-reading it, he repeated the words with an emphasis that told of his being in earnest.

The poster also gave intimation of a meeting to be held the same evening at a certain *rendezvous* in Poydras Street.

He who read only lingered to make note of the address, which was the name of a noted *café*. Having done this, he was turning to continue his walk when his path was barred by a specimen of humanity, who stood full six foot six in a

pair of alligator leather boots, on the *banquette* by his side, “So ye’re goin’, air ye?” was the half-interrogative speech that proceeded from the individual thus confronting him.

“What’s that to you?” bluntly demanded the young fellow, his temper a little ruffled by what appeared an impertinent obstruction on the part of some swaggering bully.

“More’n you may think for, young ’un,” answered the booted Colossus, still standing square in the way; “more’n you may think for, seein’ it’s through me that bit o’ paper’s been put up on that ’ere wall.”

“You’re a bill-sticker, I suppose?” sneeringly retorted the “young ’un.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the giant, with a cachinnation that resembled the neighing of a horse. “A bill-sticker, eh! Wal; I likes that. An’ I likes yur grit, too, young feller, for all ye are so sassy. But ye needn’t git riled, an’ I reckon ye won’t, when I tell ye who I am.”

“And who are you; pray?”

“Maybe ye mount a hearn o’ Cris Rock?”

“What! Cris Rock of Texas? He who at Fanning’s—”

“At Fannin’s massacree war shot dead, and kim alive agin.”

“Yes,” said the interrogator, whose interrogatory referred to the almost miraculous escape of one of the betrayed victims of the Goliad butchery.

“Jess so, young feller. An’ since ye ’pear to know somethin’ ’bout me, I needn’t tell ye I ain’t no *bill-sticker*, nor why I ’peared to show impartinence by putting in my jaw when I heern ye sing out, ‘I’ll go.’ I thort it wouldn’t need

much introduxshun to one as I mout soon hope to call kumarade. Yer comin’ to the rendyvoo the night, ain’t ye?”

“Yes; I intend doing so.”

“Wal, I’ll be there myself; an’ if ye’ll only look high enough, I reck’n ye kin sight me ’mong the crowd. ’Tain’t like to be the shortest thar,” he added, with a smile that bespoke pride in his superior stature, “tho’ ye’ll see some tall ’uns too. Anyhow, jest look out for Cris Rock; and, when foun’, that chile may be of some sarvice to ye.”

“I shall do so,” rejoined the other, whose good humour had become quite restored.

About to bid good-bye, Rock held out a hand, broad as the blade of a canoe-paddle. It was freely taken by the stranger, who, while shaking it, saw that he was being examined from head to foot.

“Look hyar!” pursued the Colossus, as if struck by some thought which a closer scrutiny of the young man’s person had suggested; “hev ye ever did any sogerin’? Ye’ve got the look o’ it.”

“I was educated in a military school—that’s all.”

“Where? In the States?”

“No. I am from the other side of the Atlantic.”

“Oh! A Britisher. Wal, that don’t make no difference in Texas. Thar’s all sorts thar. English, ain’t ye?”

“No,” promptly answered the stranger, with a slight scornful curling of the lip: “I’m an Irishman, and not one of those who deny it.”

“All the better for that. Thar’s a bit of the same blood somewhar in my own veins, out o’ a grandmother, I b’lieve, as kim over the mountains into Kaintuck, ’long wi’ Dan

Boone an’ his lot. So ye’ve been eddycated at a milintary school, then? D’ye unnerstan’ anything about the trainin’ o’ sogers?”

“Certainly I do.”

“Dog-goned, ef you ain’t the man we want! How’d ye like to be an officer? I reck’n ye’re best fit for that.”

“Of course I should like it; but as a stranger among you, I shouldn’t stand much chance of being elected. You choose your officers, don’t you?”

“Sartin, we eelect ’em; an’ we’re goin’ to hold the eelections this very night. Lookee hyar, young fellur; I like yer looks, an’ I’ve seed proof ye’ve got the stuff in ye. Now, I want to tell ye somethin’ ye oughter to know. I belong to this company that’s jest a formin’, and thar’s a fellur settin’ hisself up to be its capting. He’s a sort o’ half Spanish, half French-Creole, o’ Noo-Orleans hyar, an’ we old Texans don’t think much o’ him. But thar’s only a few o’ us; while ’mong the Orleans city fellurs as are goin’ out to, he’s got a big pop’larity by standin’ no eend o’ drinks. He ain’t a bad lookin’ sort for sogerin’, and has seen milintary sarvice, they say. F’r all that, thar’s a hangdog glint ’bout his eyes this chile don’t like; neither do some o’ the others. So, young un, if you’ll come down to the rendyvoo in good time, an’ make a speech—you kin speechify, can’t ye?”

“Oh, I suppose I could say something.”

“Wal, you stump it, an’ I’ll put in a word or two, an’ then we’ll perpose ye for capting; an’ who knows we mayent git the majority arter all? You’er willin’ to try, ain’t ye?”

“Quite willing,” answered the Irishman, with an emphasis which showed how much the proposal was to his mind. “But

why, Mr Rock, are you not a candidate yourself? You have seen service, and would make a good officer, I should say."

"Me kandydate for officer! Wal, I'm big enough, thet's true, and ef you like, ugly enuf. But I ain't no ambeeshum thet way. Besides, this chile knows nothin' 'bout *drill*; an' that's what's wanted bad. Ye see, we ain't had much reg'lar sogerin' in Texas. Thar's whar the Mexikins hev the advantage o' us, an' thar's whar you'll hev the same if you'll consent to stan'. You say you will?"

"I will, if you wish it."

"All square then," returned the Texan, once more taking his *protégé* by the hand, and giving it a squeeze like the grip of a grizzly bear. "I'll be on the lookout for ye. Meanwhile, thar's six hours to the good yet afore it git sundown. So go and purpar' yur speech, while I slide roun' among the fellurs, an' do a leetle for ye in the line o' canvassin'."

After a final bruin-like pressure of the hand the giant had commenced striding away, when he came again to a halt, uttering a loud "Hiloo!"

"What is it?" inquired the young Irishman.

"It seems that Cris Rock air 'bout one o' the biggest nummorskulls in all Noo-Orleans. Only to think! I was about startin' to take the stump for a kandydate 'ithout knowin' the first letter o' his name. How wur ye crissened, young fellur?"

"Kearney—Florence Kearney."

"Florence, ye say? Ain't that a woman's name?"

"True; but in Ireland many men bear it."

"Wal, it do seem a little kewrious; but it'll do right slick, and the Kearney part soun's well. I've hern speak o' Kate

Kearney; thar’s a song ’bout the gurl. Mout ye be any connexshun o’ hern?”

“No, Mr Rock; not that I’m aware of. She was a Killarney woman. I was born a little further north on the green island.”

“Wal, no matter what part o’ it, yur are welkim to Texas, I reck’n, or the States eyther. Kearney—I like the name. It hev a good ring, an’ it’ll soun’ all the better wi’ ‘Capting’ for a handle to ’t—the which it shall hev afore ten o’clock this night, if Cris Rock ain’t astray in his reck’nin’. But see as ye kum early to the rendyvoo, so as to hev time for a talk wi’ the boys. Thar’s a somethin’ in that; an’ if ye’ve got a ten dollar bill to spare, spend it on drinks all round. Thar’s a good deal in that too.”

So saying, the Texan strode off, leaving Florence Kearney to reflect upon the counsel so opportunely extended.

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A Lady in the Case.

Who Florence Kearney was, and what his motive for becoming a “filibuster,” the reader shall be told without much tediousness of detail.

Some six months before the encounter described, he had landed from a Liverpool cotton ship on the Levee of New Orleans. A gentleman by birth and a soldier-scholar by education, he had gone to the New World with the design to complete his boyhood’s training by a course of travel, and prepare himself for the enacting the *métier* of a man. That

this travel should be westward, over fresh untrodden fields, instead of along the hackneyed highways of the European tourist, was partly due to the counsels of a tutor—who had himself visited the New World—and partly to his own natural inclinations.

In the course of his college studies he had read the romantic history of Cortez's conquest, and his mind had become deeply imbued with the picturesqueness of Mexican scenes; so that among the fancies of his youthful life one of the pleasantest was that of some day visiting the land of Anahuac, and its ancient capital, Tenochtitlan. After leaving college the dream had grown into a determination, and was now in the act of being realised. In New Orleans he was so far on his way. He came thither expecting to obtain passage in a coasting vessel to some Mexican seaport—Tampico or Vera Cruz.

Why he had not at once continued his journey thither was due to no difficulty in finding such a vessel. There were schooners sailing every week to either of the above ports that would have accommodated him, yet still he lingered in New Orleans. His reason for thus delaying was one far from uncommon—this being a lady with whom he had fallen in love.

At first the detention had been due to a more sensible cause. Not speaking the Spanish language, which is also that of Mexico, he knew that while travelling through the latter country he would have to go as one dumb. In New Orleans he might easily obtain a teacher; and having sought soon found one, in the person of Don Ignacio Valverde,—a refugee Mexican gentleman, a victim of the tyrant Santa

Anna, who, banished from his country, had been for several years resident in the States as an exile. And an exile in straitened circumstances, one of the hardest conditions of life. Once, in his own country, a wealthy landowner, Don Ignacio was now compelled to give lessons in Spanish to such stray pupils as might chance to present themselves. Among the rest, by chance came Florence Kearney, to whom he had commenced teaching it.

But while the latter was making himself master of the Andalusian tongue, he also learnt to love one who spoke it as purely, and far more sweetly, than Don Ignacio. This was Don Ignacio's daughter.

After parting with Cris Rock, the young Irishman advanced along the Levee, his head bowed forward, with eyes to the ground, as if examining the oyster-shells that thickly bestrewed the path; anon giving his glance to the river, as though stirred by its majestic movement. But he was thinking neither of the empty bivalves, nor the flow of the mighty stream. Nor yet of the speech he had promised to make that same night at the *rendezvous* of filibusters. Instead he was reflecting upon that affair of the heart, from which he had been for some time suffering.

To make known his feelings it is necessary to repeat what passed through his mind after he had separated from the Texan.

"There's something odd in all this," soliloquised he, as he strode on. "Here am I going to fight for a country I care nothing about, and against one with which I have no cause of quarrel. On the contrary, I have come four thousand miles to visit the latter, as a peaceful friendly traveller. Now I

propose making entry into it, sword in hand, as an enemy and invader! The native land, too, of her who has taken possession of my heart! Ah! therein lies the very reason: *I have not got hers*. I fear—nay, I am certain of that, from what I saw this morning. Bah! What's the use of thinking about it, or about her? Luisa Valverde cares no more for me than the half-score of others—these young Creole 'bloods,' as they call themselves—who flit like butterflies around her. She's a sweet flower from which all of them wish to sip. Only one will succeed, and that's Carlos Santander. I hate the very sight of the man. I believe him to be a cheat and a scoundrel. No matter to her. The cheat she won't understand; and, if report speak true of her country and race, the scoundrel would scarcely qualify him either. Merciful heavens! to think I should love this Mexican girl, warned as I've been about her countrywomen! 'Tis a fascination, and the sooner I get away from it and her presence, the better it may be for me. Now, this Texan business offers a chance of escaping the peril. If I find she cares not for me, it will be a sort of satisfaction to think that in fighting against her country I may in a way humiliate herself. Ah, Texas! If you find in me a defender, it will not be from any patriotic love of you, but to bury bitter thoughts in oblivion."

The chain of his reflections, momentarily interrupted was after a time continued: "My word," he exclaimed, "there's surely something ominous in my encounter with this Cris Rock! Destiny seems to direct me. Here am I scheming to escape from a thraldom of a siren's smiles, and, to do so, ready to throw myself into the ranks of a filibustering band!

On the instant a friend is found—a patron who promises to make me their leader! Shall I refuse the favour, which fortune herself seems to offer? Why should I? It is fate, not chance; and this night at their meeting I shall know whether it is meant in earnest. So, canvass your best for me, Cris Rock; and I shall do my best to make a suitable speech. If our united efforts prove successful, then Texas shall gain a friend, and Luisa Valverde lose *one* of her lovers."

At the conclusion of this speech—half boastful, half bitter—Florence Kearney had reached the hotel where he was stopping—the celebrated "Saint Charles," and entering its grand saloon, sat down to reflect further on the step he was about to take.

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Officering the Filibusters.

The volunteer *rendezvous* was in a tavern, better known by the name of "Coffee House," in the street called Poydras. The room which had been chartered for the occasion was of ample dimensions, capable of containing three hundred men. Drawn together by the printed proclamation that had attracted the attention of the young Irishman in his afternoon stroll, two-thirds of the above number had collected, and of these at least one-half were determined upon proceeding to Texas.

It was a crowd composed of heterogeneous elements—such as has ever been, and ever will be, the men who

volunteer for a military, more especially a filibustering expedition.

Present in the hall were representatives of almost every civilised nation upon earth. Even some that could scarce boast of civilisation; for among the faces seen around the room were many so covered with beards, and so browned with sun, as to tell of long sojourn in savage parts, if not association with the savages themselves. In obedience to the counsels of the Texan, Florence Kearney—a candidate for command over this motley crew—made early appearance in their midst. Not so early as to find that, on entering the room, he was a stranger to its occupants. Cris Rock had been there before him, along with a half-score of his *confrères*—old Texans of the pure breed—who having taken part in most of the struggles of the young Republic, had strayed back to New Orleans, partly for a spree, and partly to recruit fresh comrades to aid them in propagating that principle which had first taken them to Texas—the "Monroe Doctrine."

To these the young Irishman was at once confidentially introduced, and "stood drinks" freely. He would have done so without care of what was to come of it; since it was but the habit of his generous nation. Nor would this of itself have given him any great advantage, for not long after entering the room, he discovered that not only drinks, but dollars, were distributed freely by the opposition party, who seemed earnestly bent upon making a captain of their candidate.

As yet Kearney had not looked upon his competitor, and was even ignorant of his name. Soon, however, it was

communicated to him, just as the man himself, escorted by a number of friends, made his appearance in the room. The surprise of the young Irishman may be imagined; when he saw before him one already known, and too well-known,—his rival in the affections of Luisa Valverde!

Yes; Carlos Santander was also a candidate for the command of the filibusters.

To Kearney the thing was a surprise, and something besides. He knew Santander to be on terms of very friendly and intimate relationship not only with Don Ignacio, but other Mexicans he had met at the exile's house. Strange, that the Creole should be aspiring to the leadership of a band about to invade their country! For it was *invasion* the Texans now talked of, in retaliation for a late raid of the Mexicans to their capital, San Antonio. But these banished Mexicans being enemies of Santa Anna it was after all not so unnatural. By humiliating the Dictator, they would be aiding their own party to get back into power—even though the help came from their hereditary foemen, the squatters of Texas.

All this passed through the mind of the young Irishman, though not altogether to satisfy him. The presence of Santander there, as aspirant for leadership, seemed strange notwithstanding.

But he had no opportunity for indulging in conjectures—only time to exchange frowns at his rival and competitor, when a man in undress uniform—a Texan colonel—who acted as chairman of the meeting, mounting upon a table, cried "Silence!" and, after a short pithy speech, proposed that the election of officers should at once proceed. The

proposal was seconded, no one objecting; and, without further parley, the “balloting” began.

There was neither noise nor confusion. Indeed, the assembly was one of the quietest, and without any street crowd outside. There were reasons for observing a certain secrecy in the proceedings; for, although the movement was highly popular all over the States, there were some compromising points of International law, and there had been talk of Government interference.

The election was conducted in the most primitive and simple fashion. The names of the candidates were written upon slips of paper, and distributed throughout the room—only the members who had formed the organisation having the right to vote. Each of them chose the slip bearing the name of him he intended to vote for, and dropped it into a hat carried round for the purpose. The other he threw away, or slipped if to his pocket.

When all had deposited their ballots, the hat was capsized, and the bits of paper shaken out upon the table. The chairman, assisted by two other men, examined the votes and counted them. Then ensued a short interval of silence, broken only by an occasional word of direction from the chairman, with the murmuring hum of the examiners, and at length came in a clear loud voice—that of the Texan colonel—“*The votes are in favour of Kearney! Florence Kearney elected Captain by a majority of thirty-three*!”

A cheer greeted the announcement, in which something like a screech from Cris Rock could be heard above all voices; while the giant himself was seen rushing through the

crowd to clasp the hand of his *protégé*, whom he had voluntarily assisted in promoting to a rank above himself.

During the excitement, the defeated candidate was observed to skulk out of the room. Those who saw him go could tell by his look of sullen disappointment he had no intention of returning; and that the filibustering cohort was not likely to have the name, “Carlos Santander,” any longer on its roll-call.

He and his were soon forgotten. The lieutenants were yet to be chosen. One after another—first, second, and *brevet*—was proposed, balloted for, and elected in the same way as the captain.

Then there was a choice of sergeants and corporals, till the organisation was pronounced complete. In fine, fell a shower of congratulations, with “drinks all round,” and for several successive rounds. Patriotic speeches also, in the true “spread-eagle” style, with applauding cheers, and jokes about Santa Anna and his *cork-leg*; when the company at length separated, after singing the “Star-Spangled Banner.”

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An Invitation to Supper.

Florence Kearney, parting from his new friends, the filibusters, sauntered forth upon the street.

On reaching the nearest corner he came to a stop, as if undecided which way to turn.

Not because he had lost his way. His hotel was but three blocks off; and he had, during his short sojourn in the Crescent City, become acquainted with almost every part of it. It was not ignorance of the locality, therefore, which was causing him to hesitate; but something very different, as the train of his thoughts will tell.

“Don Ignacio, at least, will expect me—wish me to come, whether she do or not. I accepted his invitation, and cannot well—oh! had I known what I do now—seen what I saw this morning— Bah! I shall return to the hotel and never more go near her!”

But he did not return to his hotel; instead, still stood irresolute, as if the thing were worth further considering.

What made the young man act thus? Simply a belief that Luisa Valverde did not love him, and, therefore, would not care to have him as a companion at supper; for it was to supper her father had asked him. On the day before he had received the invitation, and signified acceptance of it. But he had seen something since which had made him half repent having done so; a man, Carlos Santander, standing beside the woman he loved, bending over her till his lips almost touched her forehead, whispering words that were heard, and, to all appearance, heeded. What the words were Florence Kearney knew not, but could easily guess their nature. They could only be of love; for he saw the carmine on her cheeks as she listened to them.

He had no right to call the young lady to an account. During all his intercourse with Don Ignacio, he had seen the daughter scarce half a score times; then only while passing out and in—to or from his lessons. Now and then a few

snatches of conversation had occurred between them upon any chance theme—the weather, the study he was prosecuting (how he wished *she* had been his teacher), and the peculiarities of the New Orleans life, to which they were both strangers. And only once had she appeared to take more than an ordinary interest in his speech. This, when he talked of Mexico, and having come from his own far land, “Irlandesa,” with an enthusiastic desire to visit hers, telling her of his intention to do so. On this occasion he had ventured to speak of what he had heard about Mexican banditti; still more of the beauty of the Mexican ladies—naïvely adding that he would no doubt be in less danger of losing his life than his heart.

To this he thought she had listened, or seemed to listen, with more than ordinary attention, looking pensive as she made reply.

“Yes, Don Florencio! you will see much in Mexico likely to give you gratification. ’Tis true, indeed, that many of my countrywomen are fair—some very fair. Among them you will soon forget—”

Kearney’s heart beat wildly, hoping he would hear the monosyllable “me.” But the word was not spoken. In its place the phrase “us poor exiles,” with which somewhat commonplace remark the young Mexican concluded her speech.

And still there was something in what she had said, but more in her manner of saying it, which made pleasant impression upon him—something in her tone that touched a chord already making music in his heart. If it did not give

him surety of her love, it, for the time, hindered him from despairing of it.

All this had occurred at an interview he had with her only the day before; and, since, sweet thoughts and hopes were his. But on the same morning they were shattered—crushed out by the spectacle he had witnessed, and the interpretation of those whispered words he had failed to hear. It had chased all hope out of his heart, and sent him in wild, aimless strides along the street, just in the right frame of mind for being caught by that call which had attracted his eyes on the poster—

“Volunteers for Texas.” And just so had he been caught; and, as described, entered among the filibustering band to be chosen its chief. To the young Irishman it was a day of strange experiences, varying as the changes of a kaleidoscope; more like a dream than reality; and after reflecting upon it all, he thus interrogated himself—

“Shall I see her again, or not? Why not? If she’s lost, she cannot be worse lost by my having another interview with her. Nor could I feel worse than I do now. Ah! with this laurel fresh placed upon my brow! What if I tell her of it—tell her I am about to enter her native land as an invader? If she care for her country, that would spite her; and if I find she cares not for me, her spite would give me pleasure.”

It was not an amiable mood for a lover contemplating a visit to his sweetheart. Still, natural enough under the circumstances; and Florence Kearney, wavering no longer, turned his steps towards that part of the city where dwelt Don Ignacio Valverde.

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A Studied Insult.

In a small house of the third Municipality, in the street called Casa Calvo, dwelt Don Ignacio Valverde. It was a wooden structure—a frame dwelling—of French-Creole fashion, consisting of but a single story, with casement windows that opened on a verandah, in the Southern States termed *piazza*; this being but little elevated above the level of the outside street. Besides Don Ignacio and his daughter, but one other individual occupied the house—their only servant, a young girl of Mexican nativity and mixed blood, half white, half Indian—in short, a *mestiza*. The straitened circumstances of the exile forbade a more expensive establishment. Still, the insignia within were not those of pinched poverty. The sitting-room, if small, was tastefully furnished, while, among other chattels speaking of refinement, were several volumes of books, a harp and a guitar, with accompaniment of sheets of music. The strings of these instruments Luisa Valverde knew how to touch with the skill of a professional, both being common in her own country.

On that night, when the election of the filibustering officers was being held in Poydras Street, her father, alone with her in the same sitting-room, asked her to play the harp to the accompaniment of a song. Seating herself to the instrument, she obeyed, singing one of those *romanzas* in which the language of Cervantes is so rich. It was, in fact, the old song “El Travador,” from which has been filched the

music set to Mrs Norton's beautiful lay, "Love not." But on this night the spirit of the Mexican señorita was not with her song. Soon as it was finished, and her father had become otherwise engaged, she stepped out of the room, and, standing in the piazza, glanced through the trellised lattice-work that screened it from the street. She evidently expected some one to come that way. And as her father had invited Florence Kearney to supper, and she knew of it, it would look as if he were the expected one.

If so, she was disappointed for a time, though a visitor made his appearance. The door bell, pulled from the outside, soon after summoned Pepita, the Mexican servant, to the front, and presently a heavy footfall on the wooden steps of the porch, told of a man stepping upon the piazza.

Meanwhile the young lady had returned within the room; but the night being warm, the hinged casement stood ajar, and she could see through it the man thus entering. An air of disappointment, almost chagrin, came over her countenance, as the moonlight disclosed to her view the dark visage of Carlos Santander.

"*Pasa V. adientro, Señor Don Carlos*," said her father also recognising their visitor through the casement; and in a moment after the Creole stepped into the room, Pepita placing a chair for him.

"Though," continued Don Ignacio, "we did not expect to have the honour of your company this evening, you are always welcome."

Notwithstanding this polite speech, there was a certain constraint or hesitancy in the way it was spoken, that told of some insincerity. It was evident that on that night at least

Don Carlos' host looked upon him in the light of an intruder. Evidence of the same was still more marked on the countenance, as in the behaviour of Don Ignacio's daughter. Instead of a smile to greet the new-comer, something like a frown sat upon her beautiful brow, while every now and then a half-angry flash from her large liquid eyes, directed towards him, might have told him he was aught but welcome. Clearly it was not for him she had several times during the same night passed out into the piazza and looked through its lattice-work.

In truth, both father and daughter seemed disturbed by Santander's presence, both expecting one whom, for different reasons, they did not desire him to meet. If the Creole noticed their repugnance, he betrayed no sign of it. Don Carlos Santander, besides being physically handsome, was a man of rare intellectual strength, with many accomplishments, among others the power of concealing his thoughts under a mask of imperturbable coolness. Still, on this night his demeanour was different from its wont. He looked flurried and excited, his eyes scintillating as with anger at some affront lately offered him, and the sting of which still rankled in his bosom. Don Ignacio noticed this, but said nothing. Indeed, he seemed to stand in awe of his guest, as though under some mysterious influence. So was he, and here it may as well be told. Santander, though by birth an American and a native of New Orleans, was of Mexican parentage, and still regarded himself as a citizen of the country of his ancestors. Only to his very intimates was it known that he held a very high place in the confidence of Mexico's Dictator. But Don Ignacio knew this, and rested

certain hopes upon it. More than once had Santander, for motives that will presently appear, hinted to him the possibility of a return to his own land, with restoration of the estates he had forfeited. And the exiled patriot, wearied with long waiting, was at length willing to lend an ear to conditions, which, in other days, he might have spurned as humiliating if not actually dishonourable.

It was to talk of these Santander had now presented himself; and his host suspecting it, gave the young lady a side look, as much as to say, “Leave the room, Luisita.”

She was but too glad to obey. Just then she preferred a turn upon the piazza; and into this she silently glided, leaving her father alone with the guest who had so inopportunely intruded.

It is not necessary to repeat what passed between the two men. Their business was to bring to a conclusion a compact they had already talked of, though only in general terms. It had reference to the restitution of Don Ignacio’s confiscated estates, with, of course, also the ban of exile being removed from him. The price of all this, the hand of his daughter given to Carlos Santander. It was the Creole who proposed these terms, and insisted upon them, even to the humiliation of himself. Madly in love with Luisa Valverde, he suspected that on her side there was no reciprocity of the passion. But he would have her hand if he could not her heart.

On that night the bargain was not destined to reach a conclusion, their conference being interrupted by the tread of booted feet, just ascending the front steps, and crossing the floor of the piazza. This followed by an exchange of

salutations, in which the voice of Luisa Valverde was heard mingling with that of a man.

Don Ignacio looked more troubled than surprised. He knew who was there. But when the words spoken outside reached the ears of Carlos Santander, first, in openly exchanged salutations and then whispers seemingly secret and confidential, he could no longer keep his seat, but springing up, exclaimed—

"*Carrai*! It's that dog of an *Irlandes*!"

"Hish!" continued his host. "The Señor Florencio will hear you."

"I wish him to hear me. I repeat the expression, and plainly in his own native tongue. I call him a cur of an Irishman."

Outside was heard a short, sharp ejaculation, as of a man startled by some sudden surprise. It was followed by an appealing speech, this in the softer accents of a woman. Then the casement was drawn abruptly open, showing two faces outside. One, that of Florence Kearney, set in an angry frown; the other, Luisa Valverde's, pale and appealing. An appeal idle and too late, as she herself saw. The air had become charged with the electricity of deadliest anger, and between the two men a collision was inevitable.

Without waiting for a word of invitation, Kearney stepped over the casement sill, and presented himself inside the room. Don Ignacio and the Creole were by this also on their feet; and for a second or so the three formed a strange triangular *tableau*—the Mexican with fear on his face, that of Santander still wearing the expression of insult, as when

he had exclaimed, “Cur of an Irishman!” Kearney confronting him with a look of indignant defiance.

There was an interval of silence, as that of calm preceding storm. It was broken by the guest latest arrived saying a few words to his host, but in calm, dignified tone; an apology for having unceremoniously entered the room.

“No need to apologise,” promptly rejoined Don Ignacio. “You are here by my invitation, Señor Don Florencio, and my humble home is honoured by your presence.”

The Hidalgo blood, pure in Valverde’s veins, had boiled up at seeing a man insulted under his roof.

“Thanks,” said the young Irishman.

“And now, sir,” he continued, turning to Santander and regarding him with a look of recovered coolness, “having made my apology, I require *yours*.”

“For what?” asked Santander, counterfeiting ignorance.

“For using language that belongs to the *bagnios* of New Orleans, where, I doubt not, you spend most part of your time.”

Then, suddenly changing tone and expression of face, he added—

“Cur of a Creole! you must take back your words!”

“Never! It’s not my habit to take, but to give; and to you I give this!”

So saying, he stepped straight up to the Irishman, and spat in his face.

Kearney’s heart was on fire. His hand was already on the butt of his pistol; but, glancing behind, he saw that pale appealing face, and with an effort restrained himself, calmly saying to Santander—

“Calling yourself a gentleman, you will no doubt have a card and address. May I ask you to favour me with it, as to-morrow I shall have occasion to write to you? If a scoundrel such as you can boast of having a friend, you may as well give him notice he will be needed. Your card, sir!”

“Take it!” hissed the Creole, flinging his card on the table. Then glaring around, as if his glance would annihilate all, he clutched hold of his hat, bowed haughtily to Don Ignacio, looked daggers at his daughter, and strode out into the street.

Though to all appearance defeated and humbled, he had in truth succeeded in his design, one he had long planned and cherished to bring about,—a duel with Kearney, in which his antagonist should be challenger. This would give him the choice of weapons, which, as he well knew, would ensure to him both safety and success. Without the certainty of this, Carlos Santander would have been the last man to provoke such an encounter; for, with all his air of *bravache*, he was the veriest of cowards.

Chapter Six.

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“To the Salute!”

The thick “swamp-fog” still hovered above the Crescent City, when a carriage, drawn by two horses, rolled out through one of its suburbs, and on along the Shell Road, and in the direction of Lake Pontchartrain.

It was a close carriage—a hackney—with two men upon the driver's seat, and three inside. Of these last, one was Captain Florence Kearney, and another Lieutenant Francis Crittenden, both officers of the filibustering band, with *titles* not two days old. Now on the way neither to Texas nor Mexico, but to the shore of Lake Pontchartrain, where many an affair of honour has been settled by the spilling of much blood. A stranger in New Orleans, and knowing scarce a soul, Kearney had bethought him of the young fellow who had been elected first-lieutenant, and asked him to act as his second. Crittenden, a Kentuckian, being one of those who could not only stand fire, but *eat* it, if the occasion called, eagerly responded to the appeal; and they were now *en route* along the Shell Road to meet Carlos Santander and whoever he might have with him.

The third individual inside the carriage belonged to that profession, one of whose members usually makes the third in a duel—the doctor. He was a young man who, in the capacity of surgeon, had attached himself to the band of filibusters.

Besides the mahogany box balanced upon his thigh there was another lying on the spare bit of cushion beside him, opposite to where Crittenden sat. It was of a somewhat different shape; and no one who had ever seen a case of duelling pistols could mistake it for aught else—for it was such.

As it had been arranged that swords were to be the weapons, and a pair of these were seen in a corner of the carriage, what could they be wanting with pistols?