

**OVERLAND.
A NOVEL.**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649382101

Overland. A novel. by J. W. De Forest

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

J. W. DE FOREST

**OVERLAND.
A NOVEL.**



J. W. De FOREST,
(Author of "Overland," etc.)

2733

O V E R L A N D .

A NOVEL.

BY

John William
J. W. DE FOREST, 1876-1906

AUTHOR OF "KATE BEAUMONT" "MISS RAVENEL'S CONVERSION," &c.



NEW YORK:
SHELDON AND COMPANY,
677 BROADWAY, AND 214 & 216 MERCER ST.



Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1871, by
SHELDON AND COMPANY,
In the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

OVERLAND.

BY J. W. DE FOREST, Author of "Kate Beaumont," etc.

CHAPTER I.

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 García 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, García, 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. García 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, unsuspecting 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. Check bones