

Chapter 2

Agustina De León

My recovery was not nearly so rapid as Colonel Bowie had predicted. No doubt, my being undernourished and in a state of complete exhaustion complicated the healing process. I had lost a significant amount of weight during my captivity, having been fed barely enough to keep me alive. And of course, my body had been badly abused. Even so, I was up and about in just over a week. Mind you, I still felt too weak to go back on the trail. I took two long naps every day, one in the late morning, another in mid-afternoon, and by early evening I was eager for dinner to be out of the way so I could turn in for the night.

I found the De Leóns to be gracious hosts. *Don* Martín, a big man with an imposing presence and a truly magnificent mustache, was kind and gentle and ever so sensitive to the feelings of others. He treated me almost as another daughter. *Doña* Patricia, although more reserved and somewhat less warm, would have considered it graceless (or even boorish) not to make any guest in her home comfortable and at ease, for such was the code of these “old-world aristocrats,” as my grandfather had so recently described them to me. *If only he could see me now!* I thought.

Incidentally, their so-called “old world,” was actually the Canary Islands, for that is where Béxar’s first European settlers had come from. The De Leóns were direct descendants of Canarian immigrants.

Sixteen-year-old Agustina, from the very first, embraced me as a friend, and we grew closer every day. Although a year younger than she, I was slightly taller. Agustina’s two sisters still at home, followed her lead and accepted me as well, María del Refugio with cordiality only slightly strained and Francisca with a heart as open and as loving as Agustina’s own. María del Refugio, usually just called *Refugio*, was Agustina’s senior by only two years, but her demeanor was that of an elderly maiden aunt. She reminded me, in fact, of my own two aunts Carmen and Luz. Francisca, on the other hand, four years younger than Agustina, seemed to me no more mature than a small child. Seven older siblings

(four brothers and three more sisters) were already married and living elsewhere in households of their own. I met some of them during my stay and eventually became acquainted with the others as well, but I was never close to any of them.

The nightgowns and later the dresses and shoes that I was given to wear were Agustina's. She had an enormous wardrobe, and she was generous by nature. She seemed delighted to be able to provide me with clothes. Francisca added combs and brushes, jewelry, *mantillas*, and an assortment of fashion accessories from her own wardrobe. Feeling rather like a doll that the two of them were dressing up and playing with, I tried on everything and posed for them to admire. To tell the truth, I enjoyed the game as much as they did.