

## Chapter 10

### The Matamoros Expedition

What a joyous reunion we had! Agustina and I both wept from happiness as we embraced. Pilar and Librada, Agustina's two eldest daughters, were quite alarmed by their mother's tears. Agustina laughed and reassured them, then led me upstairs to the infant nursery to introduce me to the newest addition to her household, Matiana.

Four-year-old Pilar, I noticed, kept staring at me, as though I were the first stranger she had ever met. I wondered whether something might be out of place about my person. Slightly discomfited, I asked Agustina if there was a smudge on my face or if my hair was in disarray.

"No, of course not. You look perfectly beautiful."

The mystery was solved only when Pilar finally got her nerve up to inform me that I did not look at all like a "red Indian." I think she was disappointed.

I whispered to her that I was "in disguise."

She seemed satisfied with that explanation, and we quickly became the very best of pals. She followed me about like a puppy, copied all my mannerisms, and climbed onto my lap whenever I sat down. She would have slept with me had her mother allowed it.

When Pilar asked to see my bow and arrows, I had to confess that I had none. To mitigate Pilar's disappointment, I made her a toy bow and taught her how to use it. Making the arrows—the first I had ever fashioned with my own hands—I became absolutely ill to my stomach and my hands began to tremble as it dawned on me that I was breaking an ancient and sacred taboo. I never imagined that the conditioning I had undergone as a Lipan child could still affect me so powerfully.

Pilar's little sister Librada was as shy as Pilar was forward. She refused ever to have anything to do with me, hiding always behind her mother's skirts.

"Don't you intend to have any boys?" I asked Agustina jokingly.

Before her mother could answer, Pilar piped up, "We don't want any brothers, do we, Librada?"

"No!"

It was the first word I had heard Librada utter since I had arrived, and she said it with such vehemence that I could not help laughing. I wanted to tell both those little girls that boys were not so bad, but I figured that they would eventually discover that for themselves.

Toward the middle of January, I began making plans to return to Béxar, but Agustina begged me so pitifully not to go that I relented. I was in no particular hurry to get back to the inn; I simply wished not to be thought of as the kind of guest one cannot get rid of. In fact, Agustina was desperately lonely. She sincerely wanted my continued company.

Plácido was at Roundtop House only rarely these days. Please do not imagine that he was callously neglecting his wife and children. It was military duty that kept Plácido away. He now had a lieutenant's commission in the regular Texian Army.

Because Agustina had servants to look after the house and care for the children, she and I were free to ride for pleasure as we used to do. She even found me some boy's clothes that fit fairly well, for she knew that I did not like to ride in skirts.

"You look like a man," Pilar told me.

"Thank you," I said.

"It's not a compliment, silly. Ladies aren't supposed to look like men."

"I suppose you'll be telling me next that men aren't supposed to look like ladies."

"Of course not," she declared, the mental image conjured by my words so outrageously absurd that she was seized by a fit of giggling.