

## Chapter II

### The Runaway Scrape

Upon Plácido's return to Roundtop House, I took my leave, intending to return to the mundane life of a tavern wench. I had no intention whatever of going to war again. I had already enjoyed all the adventure I thought I could endure.

At Gonzales, which was this day a bee hive of activity, I encountered a grim-faced Henry, now a captain in command of a company of cavalry scouts. He had just delivered word to General Houston that the Álamo had fallen and that Bowie, Travis, Dimmitt, Crockett, Bonham, and the entire garrison had perished. I was devastated. Somehow, I had not believed that this could happen. Indeed, I had almost imagined my Texian idols to be invincible, so like gods were they in my eyes, often foolish but always mighty and heroic. Later that same day, *tío* Erastus arrived and presented the civilian survivors of the Álamo to Houston in order that they might give him a first-hand account.

In December, Agustina had sent her carriage for me, and when I was ready to return to Béxar, she offered me the use of the same carriage, driver, and outriders. At Gonzales, we could continue no further. The roadway was dogged with settlers fleeing the war zone. If somehow we managed to force our way through the throngs of refugees, we would soon come face to face with Santa Anna's advancing army. I sent the carriage back to Roundtop House, begging a horse and rifle from one of my outriders, suggesting that he might enjoy a leisurely ride home in the carriage. He was gracious about giving up his weapon and his mount, but he refused to even consider stepping into the carriage. He elected, instead, to ride double with one of his *compañeros*. As they turned back to the southeast, I set out to find myself some boy's clothing appropriate for rough riding. I had retrieved my pistols and Bowie knife from my luggage, which stayed with the carriage. As things turned out, I never saw that luggage again; nor any of the beautiful dresses carefully folded therein.

Henry still wore the same buckskins he had arrived from Tennessee wearing. With them he had incongruously added a blue uniform blouse and cap.

He was delighted to have me join him, but he warned that there was little likelihood of our being able to steal even a few moments for intimate pleasure.

"I know," I told him. "Anyway, I'm sure you wouldn't want the men who follow you to see you kissing a fellow scout."

Houston's army was busily preparing to retreat in the direction of San Felipe. The entire town of Gonzales was being evacuated ahead of Santa Anna's anticipated arrival. Henry's orders were to assist the settlers in their hurried escape, then to confiscate for the army any livestock or useful supplies left behind, and finally to burn the town before we too pulled out. This mass evacuation came to be called the *Runaway Scrape*.

During the hectic afternoon, I chanced to run into Rose McKinney, with whom I had shared my captivity a few years earlier. She did not at first recognize me, but when I told her who I was, she seemed genuinely pleased to see me. She introduced me to her husband, who had been part of the posse that had rescued us. At the time I had not met him, but he remembered me. I asked about their daughter, the girl who had so mistrusted me. I could not recall her name, but they reminded me. *Ester* was how she was called. She was married now to a cooper in Brazoria and had an infant son.

"It was really good to see you," I said. "I have wondered a thousand times what became of you."

Rose seized both my hands and pressed them to her lips. "You take care, Manuela. Maybe we'll run into each other again someday. I hope so. Goodbye and good luck."

With that, they were lost in the crowd.