

Chapter 15

The Córdova Rebellion

October of 1838 found me in Gonzales, Texas, or rather at the McKinney farmstead a few miles outside Gonzales. Rose, as Mrs McKinney now insisted that I call her, had been corresponding regularly with me since our brief encounter during the Runaway Scrape, and for the longest time, she had been urging me to come spend a few weeks with her. With Ester away, she was unbearably lonely on that isolated farm. She saw her husband only at mealtimes and after dark, when he came in from the fields. Chores filled a large part of her day, and reading, whenever she could lay her hands on books or magazines, occupied the remainder of her time, but she yearned for friendly human interaction.

I was flattered by her interest in me and in no way displeased by her attention. I had not previously imagined that she and I might ever become close friends, and yet through letters, which became more frequent with every passing month, I came to know her well. And knowing her well, I loved her, for she was an amazing woman. She had experienced things that I had never even dreamed of. At age thirteen, for instance, she had crossed the ocean from Ireland, where she had been born and where she had spent her childhood.

Oh, what vivid images of that green land, so incredibly different from Texas, did she conjure for me with the magic of her written words! She made me familiar too with New York City, Boston, and Richmond, Virginia. I, in turn, told her of life amongst the Lipans and how, passing myself off as a boy, I had participated in the war. I think that she was as smitten with me and my strangeness as I was with her. She even addressed me now as *Kóshkeya*, which name to her ears was exotic and exciting.

As had long been my habit, I practiced every day with my revolvers. Rose went out with me, of course, and I offered her the opportunity to shoot as well. I was surprised by how skilled she already was. From the very start, she was hitting three out of five stationary targets. Moving targets, however,

defeated her, and forget about shooting from horseback. Under my patient tutelage, however, she soon became almost as excellent a marksman as was I.

At the risk of sounding like a fool for saying so, I wonder whether women's natural grace and sense of rhythm and balance might not give us a certain advantage over men in the mastery of arms. Perhaps, it is Nature's way of compensating us for the disadvantage we suffer in size and strength.

With two of us sharing the chores that Rose, otherwise, had to do by herself, we tended to finish quite early. Then, we could devote the remainder of the day to whatever pleasurable activity suited us. Late one morning, we packed a cold lunch, and with each of us bearing half the weight of the heavy hamper, we set out afoot to an idyllic little lea a quarter mile distant from the house. We had been here before, for this was where we often chose to practice our marksmanship. Insomuch as we were not yet hungry, we decided to go wading before spreading out our picnic on a quilt in the shade of some cottonwoods that lined the little stream that defined the western border of this meadow.

Barefoot, our skirts lifted above our knees, laughing and splashing about like children, we were unaware of an approaching Tehuacana raiding party until the mounted warriors were practically upon us. Rose shrieked and dashed for the bank where our shoes and weapons lay. I attempted to follow, but was swept up and flung face down across the withers of my captor's horse. Reaching out a hand, I managed to grab a tree branch to which I clung fiercely. I was dragged from the moving horse, unseating my captor as well. I landed hard but scrambled to my feet and ran to retrieve my revolvers. Rose, I noticed, had been lifted from the ground just as I had been, but was viciously clawing and biting her captor as he attempted to turn her across the withers of his horse.

I shot that warrior against whom Rose was struggling. For a crack marksman like myself, it was not a particularly risky shot. In any event, the man tumbled from the far side of his mount, and Rose dropped to the ground on the side nearer to me. She immediately got to her feet and came running toward me. She was still ten or twelve feet away when I tossed her one of the revolvers. Then, we both turned our attention on the enemies that remained.

Opening fire, we killed all four of them in a matter of seconds. *God bless Samuel Colt!*

We stripped the fallen warriors of all weapons. None was carrying a firearm, but bows and arrows, knives, war clubs, and even lances might be useful in some future battle. The five horses we rounded up and herded into the McKinneys' corral with our own. Then, we barricaded ourselves inside the house. Most likely, all danger was past. But in case other Tehuacanas showed up looking for their friends, we wanted to be prepared. Every firearm in the house was loaded and laid out within easy reach.