

**SUN**  
*in their*  
**EYES**

MONTE BARRETT

**\* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.**

*Title:* Sun in Their Eyes: A Novel of Texas in 1812

*Date of first publication:* 1944

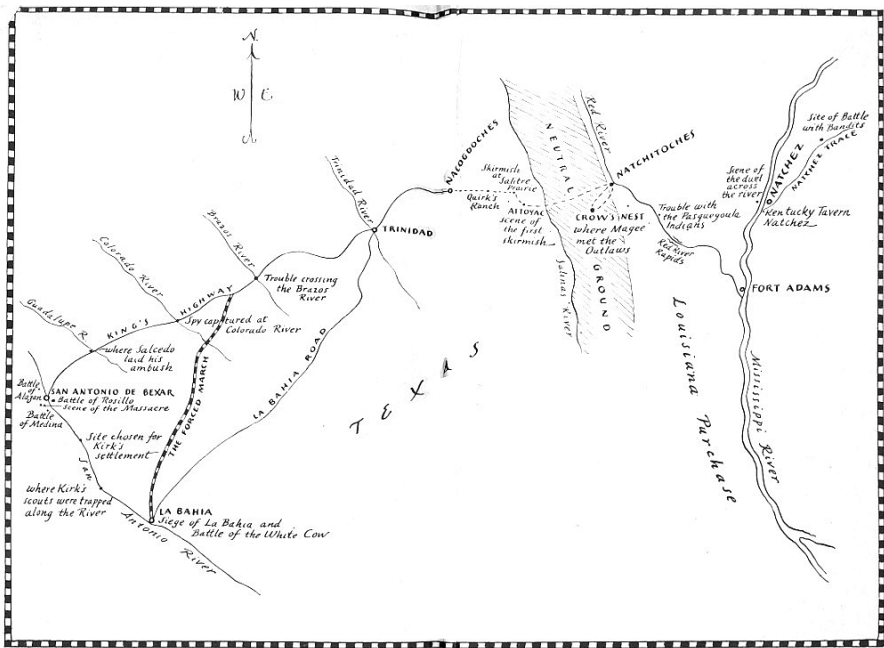
*Author:* Monte Barrett

*Date first posted:* Apr. 9, 2021

*Date last updated:* Apr. 9, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210420

This eBook was produced by: Stephen Hutcheson, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>



[Endpaper: Click on map for an enlargement]

# Sun in Their Eyes

*A NOVEL OF TEXAS IN 1812*

By

MONTE BARRETT



THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

*Publishers*

INDIANAPOLIS

NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT, 1944, BY THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY  
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES

TO THE AMERICAN PIONEER—

*who had the courage to back  
dreams that dazzled him.*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

SOME confusion may arise from the similarity of the names Natchitoches and Nacogdoches. Both were derived from the same Indian tribe. Natchitoches, in Louisiana, was naturally the French version; its pronunciation was corrupted to Năk'-ă-tōsh, with heavy accent on the first syllable and the others somewhat slurred. Nacogdoches is the way the Spaniard spelled it, and it is pronounced Năk-ă-dōsh'-es. The two towns are about a hundred miles apart.

The generous co-operation of Mrs. Edith Wyatt Moore, of Natchez, which contributed greatly to the reconstruction of that city's background, and the volunteered research of Colonel Martin L. Crimmins, U. S. A., retired, which materially assisted in clearing up a number of obscure historical points, is gratefully acknowledged.

# CONTENTS

## *Volume One*

### DAWN

1. [ON NATCHEZ TRACE](#)
2. [A CUT OF THE CARDS](#)
3. [REBUFF](#)
4. [INVITATION](#)
5. [THE GOLDEN ONE](#)
6. [A CHALLENGE](#)
7. [DON MIGUEL LIFTS A CURTAIN](#)
8. [THE DUEL](#)
9. [ALL EYES TURN WEST](#)
10. [DEATH AT THE TAVERN](#)
11. [INDIAN TROUBLE](#)
12. [SHOW-DOWN AT CROW'S NEST](#)
13. [FIRST BLOOD](#)
14. [REUNION](#)
15. [FORCED MARCH](#)
16. [A RED BLADE](#)



17. [THE BATTLE OF THE WHITE COW](#)
18. [CONQUEST](#)

*Volume Two*

DUSK

1. [SALAZAR SHOWS THE WAY](#)
2. [MASSACRE](#)
3. [AFTERMATH](#)
4. [DON MIGUEL EXPOSES HIS HAND](#)
5. [A DELAYING ACTION](#)
6. [APPROACHING DECISION](#)
7. [THE BATTLE OF ALAZAN](#)
8. [CHECKMATE](#)
9. [INVASION ENDS AN IDYL](#)
10. [THINNING RANKS](#)
11. [THE RAPE OF SAN ANTONIO](#)
12. [IN RUTHLESS HANDS](#)
13. [CHANGING MASTERS](#)
14. [AT LA QUINTA](#)

# VOLUME ONE

*Dawn*

# Chapter 1

## *On Natchez Trace*

“WAKE up, Mist’ Jonty. That’s some kind o’ trouble,” the Negro was saying. “Wake up, wake up.”

Jonathan Kirk, lingering on the hazy border of sleep, burrowed deeper into the warmth of his blanket and tried to ignore the uneasy voice. It was the spatter of distant rifle fire which roused him. Alert now, he groped for his boots. The blaze had turned to glowing ashes and in the thinning gloom, men stirred busily among the horses.

“What is it?” he demanded.

“Somebody’s in plenty of trouble up ahead.” Sam Kemper’s deep voice rumbled like a drum in his throat. “Probably a wagon train, attacked by outlaws. We’ll have to move fast.”

Another flurry of shots emphasized the need for haste while the saddles were being cinched. Kemper, working harder than either of the Negroes, talked as he worked. His mind was busy on the problem ahead.

“Magee and I will take the lead,” he said. “Everybody keep close, and mind, no racket. There aren’t many of us. Our best bet is to take ’em by surprise.”

As they left the camp the Trace was still black where shadows tangled under the spreading trees. The men quickened their pace to a brisk canter as it grew lighter. The musketry ahead continued sporadically and had grown much closer when Kemper drew rein in a small clearing.

“Sounds as if they had ’em surrounded,” Magee suggested. “They’re probably waiting for broad daylight to make the final rush.”

Kemper handed his reins to Gabe. “We’ll leave the horses here with the servants and see if we can’t take a hand in this. Stick close together and don’t anybody start shootin’ till we know what we’re doing. You’d best reprime your guns before we start.”

A sound in the bushes to their right caused them all to whirl, guns ready. Motioning the others to wait, Kemper slipped forward to investigate. He was a towering man, six feet six and burly in proportion, but despite his great bulk he had the feline stealth of the woodsman. He vanished silently into the

screen of greenery that outlined the copse. Almost immediately, he reappeared, beckoning the others to follow him.

They had stumbled upon the spot where the outlaws had tethered their horses. There were twenty of them. Apparently confident of their freedom of action in this lonely waste, they had left the animals unguarded.

It was only a few rods back to the spot where their own animals had been left and Kemper ordered the two herds united, instructing the servants to move them all to a new hiding place, several hundred yards on the other side of the trail and to the rear.

“We’ll make it as hard for ’em as possible, if any try to escape,” he observed tersely.

When they resumed the advance, Kemper and Magee were again in the lead. They were close enough now to hear the whine of an occasional bullet through the leaves above. Jonathan’s mouth felt dry. His palms were moist, and he wiped them on his shirt, the better to grip his rifle.

Kemper called another halt. “Wait here,” he ordered. “Magee and I will see what’s going on.”

“Wait?” Jonathan’s voice rasped with impatience. “This is no time for waiting. What’s going to happen to those people up ahead while we dawdle around here?”

Kemper eyed his little following briefly. There were only six in the party now that the servants were left behind. All were fidgety, impatient for action.

“Keep your powder dry, boys,” he advised quietly. “We’ve got to know which side we’re fightin’ on and how the land lays. You can depend on it,” he added, “we won’t waste time.”

Then, motioning to Magee, he left them. The two men quickly were lost to view in the forest. Ahead, bullets were spitting viciously, and a few droned around them, like singing insects. Jonathan had never been under fire before, but he recognized the menace of the sound. He regretted the impulse that had caused him to question the older man’s judgment. Kemper was a legend on this frontier. All during the long ride from Nashville, he had listened to the stories told of him. Kitchens, the wealthy planter, thought of his exploits as brawls.

“The man’s a trouble maker,” he had exclaimed one evening as they lounged about the campfire. Kemper’s cold blue eyes usually discouraged such discussion, but tonight he was absent on watch.

It was Magee who told of the West Florida revolt, headed by the Kemper brothers, and their unsuccessful effort to capture the Spanish governor.

“They’d have pulled it off, too,” he concluded, “if only the people had risen to help them.”

There were other tales. The Kempers had been kidnaped once and turned over to the Spanish for execution. The story of their escape and the revenge they exacted upon their betrayers was repeated for Jonathan's benefit.

"It's a wonder he hasn't dragged us into a war with Spain before this," Kitchens averred. It was obvious he did not agree with the general appraisal of these exploits.

"Then it's a pity he hasn't succeeded," Lieutenant Magee retorted. "What's wrong with that? By God, sir, I'm sick of twiddling my thumbs on the frontier. If the Spaniards are looking for trouble, we can oblige them."

"One war at a time," the planter replied soberly. "According to the prints, we'll be fighting England again before the year is out. And Lord knows, Napoleon's given us just as much cause. He's seized ten million dollars' worth of American shipping in French ports."

"And what has Madison done about it?" The lieutenant scowled into the flames. "What in God's name will it take to make us fight? What have we got in Washington, anyway? A pack of old women?"

"If you're aching to spill some blood, you'll get your wish." Kitchens picked his words with deliberation. "The Congress of 1812 is controlled by young men as impatient as you. Imagine, electing Henry Clay speaker on his first day in the House! He's packed the important committees with youngsters who see eye to eye with him, men like John Calhoun and Felix Grundy. Youth in the saddle! There will be war."

Jonathan respected Kemper, and his confidence in Lieutenant Augustus Magee was almost as great. The young officer, only three years out of West Point, was nearer his age and they had quickly become fast friends. Magee had spent his entire service on the unruly Spanish border and had acquired the habit of quick command which would have been forbidding but for the generous warmth of his smile. A man of only medium build, he had a trick of drawing himself erect as he spoke that often made him seem larger. His skin was fair and, where exposed to the sun, weathered red instead of tanning. Eager eyes, quick with expression, were the dominant feature of his face, and his dark hair, worn short in the new fashion, tumbled across his forehead in unruly locks.

Jonathan was fingering his rifle impatiently when his friends returned.

"They're bandits all right," Kemper commented briefly. "This party is putting up a good fight but we didn't arrive any too soon."

The men stirred restlessly, eager to move forward, but Magee halted them with a gesture.

“Spread out at ten-yard intervals,” he instructed. “We’ll swing around to the right—” he indicated his plan with a sweep of the arm—“and catch them in the rear.”

Clampit, the gambler, snorted with irritation. “What’s going to happen up yonder while we’re going through all these fancy maneuvers?” he objected. “Let’s get in there and help them.” He stepped forward, his long rifle at the alert, disregarding the lieutenant’s instructions.

It was Kemper who put an end to the dissension. “The lieutenant’s right.” His voice rumbled angrily. “Damnation! These folks have taken care of themselves for thirty minutes; they’ll manage for another one or two. If we follow this plan we’ve a damn good chance to wipe out these vermin.”

Kemper’s judgment commanded respect. The protests were stilled, and they silently spread out at the indicated intervals before moving forward. Kemper took his position on the extreme right of the line. Jonathan was on the left, next to Magee.

“Hold your fire as long as possible,” were the lieutenant’s final instructions. “Let’s wait until every man has a target lined up. I’ll give the signal.”

Cautiously they crept forward. The forest was fairly open here and Jonathan several times glimpsed an outlaw shifting his position from tree to tree. The defending party had been camped near a small stream and had taken cover in the undergrowth which crowded its bank. The bandits were gradually converging on this point, maintaining a steady fire to cover their movement. Jonathan kept Magee in view and was watching him, impatient for the signal. The lieutenant, however, was giving Kemper’s end of the line time to swing into position; it had the greater distance to go. They were close enough to see the situation clearly now. A large coach stood in a clearing near the embers of a dying campfire. Near it was spilled a man, his inert limbs grotesque. Some distance beyond, a number of horses, excited by the gunfire, were pulling at their picket lines.

Somewhere off to the right there was an angry shout, blurred by the snarl of bullets. The fire increased in intensity; pungent smoke drifted in lazy layers. Only an occasional shot replied from the defenders. Jonathan’s stealthy progress had brought him only a few yards behind two outlaws who faced the clearing ahead. Again he glanced uneasily toward Magee for a signal but the lieutenant did not notice.

The two brigands were alternating their shots, one loading rapidly while the other aimed. Then, while Jonathan stared, fascinated, they emerged from their cover and, crouching as much as possible, darted swiftly toward the coach. Their plan was apparent. The bandits were advancing here while their

prey was being held under cover by the heavy musketry. Jonathan's grip tightened on his rifle.

Then he was startled by a scream. Evidently a woman had taken refuge in the vehicle when the attack began. He caught only the white blur of her face at the window. The approaching outlaws, taking advantage of her presence, had so maneuvered that the coach was between them and the defenders along the stream. She was directly in the line of fire.

Jonathan waited no longer. Taking quick aim at the first of the bobbing figures, he fired. Then, without pausing, he dashed forward with a shout, brandishing his empty rifle. He knew a fleeting satisfaction as he saw the first of the running bandits go down. The second, caught by surprise, hesitated uncertainly and glanced back. Jonathan's rush had carried him into the clearing and now, as the bandit took careful aim at him, he realized his folly in charging with an unloaded weapon. It was too late to turn back. Swinging his clubbed gun, he hurled it toward his adversary with all his strength. It was a desperate chance and it failed. The weapon hurtled harmlessly over the man's head.

Somewhere along the line Jonathan's charge had been observed. A bullet snarled past. Another droned into the turf beneath his speeding feet.

Then, to his surprise, he saw the man in front of him drop his leveled weapon. He was close enough to glimpse the look of incredulity on the outlaw's face as his knees folded under him. The youth had never watched a man die before and his slow wilting astonished him. It was only after his antagonist had fallen that Jonathan became aware of the rifle fire behind him when his companions swung into action. Stooping swiftly, he retrieved the loaded weapon of the dead man. But when he turned to join his comrades in the melee it was already too late. The fight was over. The attack in the rear had taken their opponents completely by surprise. Those who hadn't fallen in the first volley had fled. Magee and Clampit were the first men he encountered.

"Come on back with me, you two," Magee ordered brusquely.

"Back?" Jonathan remonstrated. "Let's follow 'em."

"They'll try to get back to their horses," Magee explained, starting off at a brisk trot. "If you value that darky of yours, you'd better hurry."

Jonathan fell into step behind him without further objection.

Magee posted them about the picket line, carefully preparing an ambush for any stragglers who might make their way back here. In the distance could be heard a few shots as Kemper and the others maintained the pursuit, but soon even this died away. Evidently the rout had been complete, for although they maintained their vigil there for more than an hour, no one returned. It was only after he was convinced of this that Magee permitted

them to mount and, driving the captured horses before them, proceed to the camp.

They were greeted with scrupulous punctilio by a Spaniard short of stature and wearing a rotund paunch below several extra chins. This made his low bow a surprising flourish. His teeth gleamed whitely between a waxed mustache and a small, pointed beard, which gave him the appearance of a fat Mephistopheles. His long black cape was tossed back over one shoulder, revealing its scarlet lining, and was caught at the throat with a gold chain. His high black boots were fashioned of leather soft as doeskin. He had turned from Kemper to greet the newcomers.

“Don José Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara at your service, gentlemen.” He spoke in flawless English. “Minister to the United States from the New Philippines.”

Magee looked puzzled. “A minister from the New Philippines?”

“He’s been telling me they’ve had a revolution in Mexico,” Kemper explained, “headed by a man named Hidalgo. This gentleman was sent to the States to represent the new republican government.”

“We heard about it down on the border—” Magee turned to the stranger —“but our news was that the rebellion had been crushed.”

“Unfortunately that is true.” Don Bernardo shrugged. “Hidalgo has been slain, but the idea of liberty, that cannot be erased from the minds of men. . . . But I forget myself, gentlemen.” He turned to his companion. “Allow me to present Don Miguel Salazar, my friend and traveling companion. We are both greatly in your debt. You arrived just in time.”

Don Miguel Salazar, from the white ruffles at his throat to the silver buckles of his shoes, was turned out as if for a formal occasion. His coat was of black brocade, handsomely laced at the cuffs. His breeches were of black satin and his hose, of the same color, were silk. His dark hair was sleekly brushed and tied in a queue. He was a man of middle years, whose face was slightly pocked, and this was revealed more clearly when he smiled. As evidence of the part he had so recently played against the outlaws, there was a smudge of gunpowder across his cheek.

“We were glad of your help,” Don Miguel acknowledged, “but we would have defeated them in the end. I was sure of it once we beat off their initial attack.”

“They were just getting ready to rush you when we came in,” said Jonathan.

Don Miguel smiled but his eyes remained cold. He, too, wore a waxed mustache but no beard. “We were expecting them,” was his terse reply. “That’s why we were holding our fire.”

“How many men did you lose?” It was Magee who asked.



Don Bernardo glanced appraisingly at his party. In addition to the companion he had just introduced, there were a lank, bearded woodsman clad in buckskins, obviously an American guide, and three Mexican servants, all of them armed. "One of our servants was killed in the first volley," he continued, "and my secretary, Pedro Andrada, fell later. There seems to be another missing."

Salazar grunted as he too surveyed the group. "That Luiz!" His voice was contemptuous. Then he clapped his hands sharply and called "Luiz" in a loud voice. When this had no result he turned to another of the servants and spoke in a sharp rattle of Spanish. It was the first time Jonathan had heard the tongue and he did not think it pretty the way this man spoke it.

"I know Luiz," Salazar turned to explain. "Fernando will find him."

Salazar was proved right. Presently Fernando returned followed by the missing Luiz, an obese fellow, whose oily skin now betrayed his mental anguish.

"*Cobarde!*" Salazar's voice was a lash.

The man protested in voluble Spanish to which Salazar finally brought an abrupt end by slapping him across the mouth.

The fight had proved disastrous for the outlaws. The twenty captured horses gave evidence of their number. Of these, three had fallen to the Spaniards' fire before Jonathan's premature charge. Five more had been killed by the rescue party and the man shot by Jonathan had been wounded in the shoulder and made prisoner.

"We'd have bagged the whole lot if you hadn't lost your head." Magee turned to Jonathan, his voice severe.

The youth looked at him in astonishment. "Lost my head? They were charging the coach. I heard a woman scream."

Magee's eyes were stormy. "It was agreed you weren't to fire until I gave the order," he retorted. "Had you waited, not a damn one would have escaped. And besides," he accused, "you charged with an empty gun."

The criticism came as a surprise to Jonathan. His initial battle had left him with a feeling of exhilaration. During the period of waiting he had been nervous, haunted by the fear that he might not measure up to the accepted pattern of bravery. Once the fighting had started, that had passed. He had become so engrossed in the duties of the moment that there had been no time for self-searching. Only after the action was ended had he had time to realize that his doubts had been groundless. He had been secretly pleased that this had been so.

Perhaps the lieutenant guessed his feeling. It hadn't been too long since his own first experience under fire. At any rate he robbed the criticism of some of its sting now with a ready smile and a hearty clap on the shoulder.

“But it was a grand charge. You’ll make a good fighting man if you ever learn to obey orders.”

Magee questioned the prisoner, a saturnine fellow with several days’ growth of beard obscuring the harsh lines of a cruel mouth. His brows were shaggy and from beneath them small, close-set eyes glittered beadily. His hands were bound behind him and he had been propped against a tree while Pedro, Don Bernardo’s manservant, dressed his shoulder wound with clumsy care. The man refused to answer any questions.

“Let me handle him,” Salazar interposed. “I can make him talk.”

Magee shook his head. “I could handle him myself if he weren’t wounded,” he said. “No matter, we’ll take him into Natchez and let the authorities there hang him.”

The magnificence of the Spaniards’ traveling equipment had attracted the attention of all. There were four well-matched coach horses in addition to several mounts. Don Bernardo Gutierrez rode a handsome gray and Salazar’s horse was a sleek chestnut with light mane and tail. There were several other horses of lesser quality. The coach attracted the most attention of all. It was a thing of beauty in spite of its cumbersome size, shaped somewhat like an inverted bell and slung to the frame by massive straps. There was no driver’s box, only a platform in the rear where the grooms might ride. Evidently the carriage was driven by postilions. Even the red dust of the Trace did not hide its sleek blackness. The mountings were of silver and the owner’s arms, of the same metal, decorated the doors. A quantity of baggage was stoutly strapped on its top. Jonathan had never seen its like, even in Virginia. His curious glances were observed by Don Bernardo.

“But we forget!” the Spaniard exclaimed. “Perhaps Señorita de Lerdo will join us?” The question was directed to Salazar. “I am sure the gentlemen would like to be presented.”

Don Miguel rapped smartly against the shiny panels. A throaty voice answered from within. A curtain had been rigged behind the windows of the coach for privacy. There was a rapid interchange of voluble Spanish before Salazar rejoined them. With a slight bow toward Jonathan, he said, “She will join us presently. I am requested to present El Rubio, the gallant gentleman who charged so bravely to her rescue.” He seemed amused and Jonathan felt himself flushing hotly.

The coach straps creaked uneasily and as the door swung open there emerged, backward and with ponderous effort, a huge woman in black. Her progress was slow. At first there was visible only an enormous expanse of black dress which seemed involved beyond remedy in the doorway. Having eventually extricated herself, the woman turned to face them. She had no

neck, rather a succession of chins which merged into the more than ample proportions of her black-swathed body. Her complexion was swarthy, there was a mole on one fat cheek, and several stray whiskers, grizzled and wiry, adorned the first of her chins. She smirked at them as if conscious that her entrance had been a disappointment.

“So this,” thought Jonathan, “was my lady in distress!”

However, placing a small footstool beneath the high step, she turned expectantly toward the coach, and the youth caught his breath as he glimpsed the girl who peered from the door. Only her head was visible, a small black beaver hat perched pertly on golden hair. When she stepped through the door that had wedged the older woman so tightly, she seemed almost fragile. His first impression had been delightful, but he was even more entranced as she emerged. Her hair had a lustrous sheen, heavy lashes fringed her wide brown eyes and her skin was tawny. There was no other word for it. She wore a green cloak, ornamented with black braid which gave it a military look and emphasized her coloring. She was looking at Jonathan, a smile on her full red lips.

“And this is the gentleman who rescued me. Present him, Miguel.” Her voice was low-pitched, with a soft musical quality.

It was obvious that Salazar had forgotten the name. He hesitated. Magee bowed gallantly.

“Mr. Jonty Kirk of Virginia, señorita,” he said.

“This is my ward, Señorita Teresa de Lerdo.” Salazar completed the introduction.

“La del Pelo de Oro,” the fat woman added gutturally. It was as though she had appended a title.

“Jontee—” the girl rolled the word on her tongue—“a very strange name. But nice. I have you to thank, señor, for your gallant charge. Just when we think we are lost—” she shrugged her shoulders daintily toward Salazar—“El Rubio comes to my rescue.” She extended her hand toward Jonathan and with quick impulse he bowed, pressing it to his lips. He straightened up in time to glimpse a knowing leer on the face of the fat serving woman.

After a brief council the two parties decided to merge forces for the remainder of the journey. They were forty miles from Natchez. The outlaws, now afoot, could not be far away and their force was strong enough to cope with either party singly. They might make some effort to recover their horses.

Teresa de Lerdo rode in the coach with her maid Maria. Fernando, one of Salazar's servants, rode postilion on one of the lead horses, while the obese Luiz, whose cowardice had been exposed by Salazar, stood on the box behind with José, a wiry little Mexican of indeterminate age, one of Teresa's servants. The fellow had a queer trick of cocking his head and, because of a pair of badly crossed eyes, always seemed to be looking where he wasn't. He had a rifle propped before him on the roof of the coach and, according to Salazar, had shot straighter than he looked during the recent fracas. Don Bernardo had another servant, Pedro, a rugged, square-built Mexican whose grizzled hair made his weather-beaten face appear even more bronzed. He rode directly behind his master, a rifle across his saddlebow. The last member of their party was Giles Brady, a Kentuckian, whom they had engaged as a guide for the journey. He was a competent woodsman who, with Kemper, Magee and Jonathan Kirk, formed an advance party to guard against surprise. The Negroes herded the captured horses behind the coach and were followed by the others as a rear guard.

The precautions proved adequate and the day was uneventful. Natchez was less than twenty miles away when camp was struck that night.

Jonathan had looked forward all day to continuing his acquaintance with Teresa de Lerdo. He had carried the memory of her loveliness with him through all the dusty hours. But it wasn't to be. It was his turn to mount the first guard, redoubled tonight, and he ate the supper his servant fetched to his solitary post, mocked occasionally by sounds of laughter from the camp.

Journey's end lay only one day away and he looked forward to Natchez. In his saddlebag was a letter from his father to Colonel Winthrop Sargent. The two men had served together in the Revolution, Sargent as a colonel of the Massachusetts Line and Kirk as a captain of Virginia Rifles. "We were good friends and he was ever a man of judgment, Jonty," his father had said. "Now he's been governor of the Mississippi Territory; he'll know better than most the situation there and the value of the land." Jonathan could still remember his mother's anxious face across the table as his father had added, "You've a keen mind if you'll only use it, lad, but you're too often quick on the trigger. I'd like you to be advised by Colonel Sargent."

"Quick on the trigger, is it?" His mother had laughed. "He's your son, Will, with your own red hair. He comes by it naturally."

"And so I know whereof I speak," his father had growled, pressing the yellow Virginia tobacco into the bowl of his pipe with a broad thumb.

Jonathan Kirk, the fourth stalwart son at Redfields, was twenty-one. The stories which drifted up the Trace of the rich plantations at Natchez and of the fertile acres there still in virgin timber, ripe for the taking, had stirred his imagination. There had been many discussions about the projected journey

during the long evenings of the previous winter. His mother first had opposed it. "Is there no more land in Virginia?" she had queried.

"Not virgin land, at frontier prices," Jonty had objected, "and they say this is the richest land in the world, pure silt, like the Nile Delta."

Dark stories of the Trace and of the outlaw bands who made its travel dangerous had filtered eastward, too, but that had only whetted Jonathan's appetite for the adventure, and his father finally had given his consent. Three horses had been provided for the journey: Jonathan's own bay gelding, King, and the black mare Bonnie as an alternate mount and to carry the two round Trace trunks which had been made for the journey; Gabe—for it was decided that Jonty should travel in the dignity befitting his family—was to accompany him as his servant, mounted on a rawboned sorrel. Gabe's hair was grizzled, but the years had not bent his powerful frame. "He's known Jonty all his life," Will Kirk had said. "The boy will come nearer listening to him than anyone else we could send. Gabe might keep him out of trouble sometime."

At Nashville, Jonathan had joined the party Benjamin Kitchens was organizing to ride down the Trace. Kitchens was a wealthy Natchez planter, and was confining his company to horsemen only. Wagons would require three times as long to make the journey. It was roughly five hundred and fifty miles from Nashville to Natchez. Wagon trains made the trip in around forty days, more often more than less, depending upon the weather and circumstances. Horsemen had made it in ten days with a change of mounts and few camps, but this was a pace few could maintain.

There were six in the group who had joined forces for protection against Indians and outlaws. Kitchens had welcomed Jonathan. The fact that he was a Virginia planter's son, traveling with his own manservant, and with a letter of introduction to Colonel Sargent, had been sufficient introduction. Johnny Durst, sandy-haired, rawboned youngster from Texas, had joined them next. He was an agent for the well-known trading firm of Barr and Davenport, in the far-off Spanish country that he persisted in pronouncing Te-has, as though it were spelled with an *h* instead of an *x*. In spite of his youth, he was obviously a man of responsibility.

These, with Kemper and Magee, had made five. The other member of their party was of a different stamp. Had they not spent several fruitless days waiting for additions to the group, he probably would not have been included. None of them liked Dan Clampit, but they were chafing at the delay.

He had approached them in the common room of the tavern as they lingered over supper, a man of slight build, his clothes of somber black but

of rich material. His linen was spotless. Jonathan saw him first and noticed the unwholesome pallor of his thin, expressionless face.

“I understand you gentlemen are making up a party to ride down the Trace,” he began, bowing slightly.

Kitchens studied the man briefly before replying. “We are riding to Natchez,” he acknowledged.

“New Orleans is my destination.” The stranger gave no hint of recognizing the challenge in the older man’s tone.

“We are a group of friends,” Kitchens finally said. “It would be necessary for us to know something about any man whom we invited to join us.”

“I am Dan Clampit,” replied the newcomer. His face remained a stony mask as he added: “I’m a gambler.”

“Eh?” The planter’s blank face betrayed his astonishment.

“A gambler,” Clampit repeated evenly.

“Well, I hardly think . . .” Kitchens began uncertainly.

“Would you have liked me better had I lied about it?” The man’s voice was soft. “I might have told you I was a merchant and none of you would have been the wiser.

“A strong party will be to your advantage; getting to New Orleans will be to mine,” he continued. “I’m well mounted and I’m a good shot. After all, that’s the important thing, isn’t it?”

“Another rifle,” had been Kemper’s terse comment.

Still Kitchens hesitated before voicing his decision. “We leave at dawn. Each man to provide his own provisions and equipment. We’re traveling light. If you care to come, your rifle will be most welcome.” He accented the word rifle, leaving no doubt as to his personal feelings.

Clampit merely shrugged, his face still expressionless. “I’ll be ready,” he said, and walked away.

By the time Durst came to relieve Jonathan at his post, Teresa had already retired to her coach for the night. The men were still awake about their fire, however. The talk was of Texas. It was Lieutenant Magee’s favorite theme, one to which he returned again and again, and tonight he had a new audience. Don Bernardo Gutierrez leaned forward, listening intently.

“There’s something about the Texas country that gets into your blood,” Magee said. His eyes gleamed across the flickering blaze. “It isn’t just one kind of country, it’s every kind: rolling hills, fertile valleys, great forests and open plains that stretch out beyond the horizon. It gives you the feeling that there’s no limit to its space.” He brushed the tumbled locks back from his

forehead with an impatient gesture. "Damn it, I didn't aim to make a speech. The trouble is, you don't get the feeling of it until you see it. Today, Texas is just a name that most people haven't even read on a map. Someday it will be an empire."

"Empire?" queried Kitchens.

The young officer nodded. "Empire," he repeated. "Those rich valleys will be dotted with farms. And there will be towns surging with people." He paused, and then added, "Americans, Anglo-Saxon Americans."

"That's very reminiscent of the way Aaron Burr spoke three or four years ago," remarked Benjamin Kitchens gravely. "I don't like this talk of empire. It has an unpleasant ring in American ears. In Burr's case, it brought disaster to a brilliant career."

"Burr had a vision," replied Magee soberly. "Someday it will come true. Perhaps he used the wrong means; that may have been his mistake. But time will prove he was right about the destiny of our frontiers."

"We still have plenty of room in Louisiana and Mississippi Territory," the planter declared. "We've thousands of miles of undeveloped frontier country. We don't have to encroach on Spanish territory."

"You haven't seen the Texas country," retorted Magee.

"You are right, Lieutenant." The firelight fell on Don Bernardo's eager face. His eyes were two glowing coals of light. "Texas has a great future. And it is nearer than you think."

Magee turned slowly. "Maybe I think it is pretty damn close," he retorted.

The two men exchanged glances in which there was more question than challenge. That seemed to end the conversation. It was late. Dusty miles stretched ahead on the morrow. Soon they were all rolled in their blankets and the camp was silent.

Three fires smoldered ruddily in the darkness. Around one were stretched the sleeping forms of Jonathan Kirk's party; Don Bernardo Gutierrez and Salazar slept at the second with the coach drawn up near by; the third had been for cooking and here the servants of both outfits shared the warmth. Between it and the picket line where the horses foraged quietly, sat the prisoner, bound to a small tree, the firelight reflected in his glittering eyes. The two sentries on watch were posted some distance away, one on either side of the camp. All was quiet save for the uneasy movement among the horses, a subdued background of normal sound.

In the glow of the third fire only one figure moved. It rolled deep into the surrounding shadows and then was still. Presently it stirred again. A twig snapped and once more it was motionless. There was a longer interval of waiting this time. Luiz, crawling now, backed more deeply into the gloom.

From time to time his head swayed back and forth like a turtle's as he scanned the motionless camp. He had reached the prisoner now. The outlaw's beady eyes had never wavered from this stealthy shadow. Luiz crouched beside him.

"How much did you say, señor?" he whispered.

"Three hundred dollars—gold."

Luiz shrugged. Even in the dark, he tried to conceal the avaricious gleam in his eyes under drooping lids. "It is still only a promise, señor. Where will I find it?"

"It's in a money belt around my waist."

With fat trembling fingers Luiz found the belt. Crouching there in the darkness he felt first of the money.

The prisoner waited expectantly but nothing happened. "Well?" he asked finally.

"I was just thinking, señor, if I untie you now, how easy it would be for you to cut my throat and take back your money." Luiz still was enjoying the touch of the coins against his pudgy palm.

"If you don't untie me now I'll tell your master. When he finds the gold on you he'll have you flogged within an inch of your life." The prisoner's voice grated coldly.

"Patience, señor," Luiz temporized craftily. "I'll earn the gold."

Cautiously Salazar's servant once more crept toward the blaze. He did not resume his place in the circle, however. Instead, while still a safe distance from its glow, he scooped out a small hole in the loose loam into which he thrust the money belt. This he recovered and marked the spot with his shabby boot. Then, silently still, he crept back to the prisoner. A knife blade glinted against the prisoner's thongs.

Luiz watched, still gripping his knife fearfully, until the prisoner melted into the blackness of the forest. Then he returned to his precious cache. There he fastened the belt against his body, smiling through lips still bruised from Miguel Salazar's blow earlier that day.



# Chapter 2

## *A Cut of the Cards*

THE escape of the prisoner caused much speculation the next morning. Luiz seemed more concerned than the others by the incident. His eyes rolled in his round face as he confessed his dismay. “If the outlaws can steal into our camp to free their friend, we are lucky not to have our throats slit in our sleep,” he complained to Pedro.

That was the accepted version of what had happened and with this apparent evidence that the outlaws were still in their vicinity, the same precautions were followed as on the previous day.

Jonathan was astir early, his eyes alert for some sign of movement within the coach. The direction of his restless gaze had not escaped the eyes of the observant Maria.

“El Rubio has an eye for beauty, Teté,” she remarked with a cunning leer. “He sits with his eyes on our bedroom door.”

The knowledge brought a sparkle to the girl’s eyes, but she said, “Perhaps it is you, Maria. You are the only one who has shown herself this morning.”

“*Por Dios!*” the serving woman lamented. “There is too much of me. He wouldn’t have to look twice. No,” she added, “I’m afraid he likes them more delicate.”

“We all have our points,” her mistress observed. “Yours are just blunted by too much padding, Greaseball. La, you’d be an oven on a cold night.”

Maria’s bosom quivered when she chuckled. In spite of her bulk, she was deft in her service, smoothing a blanket on a low hummock for her mistress’s comfort before bustling off to fetch her breakfast from the fire. It was the opportunity Jonathan had been anticipating, and Teresa watched his approach with a smile.

“*Buenos dias, señor,*” she responded to his good morning, adding, “You speak Spanish, no?”

“I know only one phrase in Spanish,” Jonathan replied. “I think it’s beautiful.”

“Oh?” Her head was tilted back and Jonathan found the curve of her throat provocative. “Perhaps you learned it from a woman, señor, if it’s so beautiful.”

“It took a woman to make it beautiful.” His voice was not quite steady; his eyes were on that arched throat still.

Red lips were drawn into a pout. “I’m not sure I like that, Señor Jontee. What is this so beautiful phrase?”

“La del Pelo de Oro.” His voice was a caress.

The lips turned warm and inviting as she moved to make room for him on the blanket.

“Señor Rubio is both brave and gallant.” She let her hand fall to the blanket beside her. It seemed a careless gesture. His fingers tingled to the fleeting caress. “I like the Spanish you have learned, Jontee. I hope you will learn to say more.”

They were interrupted by the arrival of Miguel Salazar, and Luiz trailing him with a steaming breakfast tray. His bow to Jonathan was stiff.

“I’m so sorry, señor. Had I but known you were here, Luiz could have brought breakfast for three.”

There was nothing for the young Virginian to do but yield his place. He had breakfasted an hour before and now that the Spanish party was stirring it was time for him to take his assigned place with the advance guard.

“I’m going to learn more Spanish,” he managed to promise Teresa before he left and was rewarded with a smile.

Magee greeted him with lifted eyebrows when he took his place in the vanguard tardily. “You must have had an extra appetite this morning,” he observed, “or was it the filly with the yellow mane who detained you?” He clucked admiringly and shook his head. “I’ve traveled this Trace a lot, but I’ve never run into anything like that before. She’s a fetchin’ little witch, isn’t she?”

Jonathan nodded, silently wishing his friend would change the subject. The lieutenant noticed his quiet.

“See here, Jonty, this girl is Don Miguel’s ward,” he said abruptly. “I’m sure you know what you’re doing, but I’d be careful if I were you.”

“What does it matter whose ward she is?” the young Virginian rejoined stiffly. “I’ve seen beautiful girls before; I’m quite capable of handling my own affairs.”

Magee’s eyes kindled momentarily, then cooled just as swiftly, and he smiled. “I never doubted it, my friend,” he replied. “I merely wanted to make sure you understood.”

He spurred ahead to join one of the Spaniards, leaving Jonathan to puzzle over the meaning of his remark, but glad to be alone. He wanted

nothing to interrupt his memory of the girl with amber eyes.

Teresa had a conversation with Maria while the servants were breaking camp.

“What do they say of El Rubio, Maria?”

The servant shrugged her fat shoulders expressively. “The best horses are his, Teté. He rides two a day, and the big black man is his *mozo*. He travels from a far place and—” her smile was a knowing one—“he is brave and handsome, but I have heard nothing else of him.”

Teresa bit her lip, a trick she had when thinking. “Send José to me,” she ordered presently.

The mistress was familiar with the affliction of her weazened little servant. The little brown man had once been punished for staring off into space beyond her left shoulder as she gave him instructions. That was before she realized that the better of the poor man’s crossed eyes was fixed upon her intently. His devotion to her interest was of greater importance than his appearance, however, and she had forgotten her prejudice.

José did not ride in his customary place on the coach that day. Instead he traveled with the two Negroes, ostensibly to help them with the horses. He rode most of the time beside Gabe and he was full of questions. “You have come a long way?” José began as he jogged along the trail beside the Negro.

“Long way? We’s come such a far piece I’s s’prised if even de good Lawd hisself got his eye on us now.” Gabe shook his head solemnly. “I reckon mos’ folks jes’ nat’rally don’t know how much land they is.”

José shrugged politely. “But why? What is there here to bring the young señor so far? A girl perhaps?”

The Negro snorted contemptuously. “Shucks, I reckon dey’s plenty o’ gals in Virginny. Mist’ Jonty can pick and choose if’n dat’s what he wants.”

The conversation was interrupted while Gabe herded a recalcitrant horse back on the trail. Presently the Mexican began a new tack. “Señor Jonty is a ver’ brave man, eh?”

“Brave?” Once more the Negro revealed his contempt for such a question. “I reckon de Kirks is jes’ ’bout de bravest folks dey is. Mist’ Jonty, he jes’ come by it nat’ral. Why, his pappy fit in de Rev’lution. Huh, I reckon you’ve heard o’ Cap’n Kirk—mos’ ev’r’body knows *him*.”

The Mexican rolled his swivel eyes, properly registering astonishment.

“*Por Dios!* He must be ver’ rich then?”

“Rich?” Gabe registered openmouthed amazement. “Didn’t you know? Why, that ain’t nobody richer’n de Kirks. We’s from Redfields. Dat’s whar Mist’ Jonty’s pappy an’ mammy live. Law, I reckon a body could stand on de gall’ry dar an’ far as he could see wouldn’t be nuthin’ but Redfields land.

An' a body could ride an' ride widout meetin' no folks but Redfields niggahs."

Gabe rode on in frowning silence, searching for some standard of comparison by which he might impress his companion. "I reckon Redfields mus' be 'bout de bigges' house in all Virginny, too," he added with a note of finality. "Huh! I reckon Mist' Jonty hisself don' rightly know how many windows dey got."

The glint of the sun upon the coach some distance ahead caught his eye. This inspired him anew. "Dat coach yondah. Huh! You ought to sot eyes on dis boy's mammy when she rides out in her coach. Six white horses an'—an'—" he remembered the silver mountings which had so recently impressed him—"an' no silber on it. No suh, no silber, nuthin' but pure gold, dat's what de Kirks uses." Gabe glanced suspiciously at his companion for some sign of skepticism but José's face was expressionless.

Don Bernardo Gutierrez and Lieutenant Magee were riding together. The subject, as was so often the case with Magee, was Texas.

"You are right, Lieutenant," declared the Spaniard. "Someday it will be a prosperous and happy place. Only one thing can prevent it."

"Nothing can prevent it." The lieutenant was positive.

Don Bernardo shrugged. "Can serfs build this empire of your dreams? Ah no, my friend, such a land as that is the creation of a free and intelligent people." He glanced shrewdly at his companion, watching for his reaction. "Mine is an unhappy land. The Spanish crown milks it of its riches and sends despots to govern it. Our natural leaders are either dead or fugitives in foreign lands." He shrugged and tapped himself upon the breast. "Even as I am."

Magee smiled. "This was Spanish country not many years ago. Today it's peopled by free men who are developing it. What happened here can happen there."

Don Bernardo shook his head. "Spain has learned its lesson. It doesn't like republican ideas. The border of the New Philippines is closed to immigration now. That is our tragedy," he continued. "The Hidalgo Revolution believed in the same republican ideals that inspired your great country but our leaders are either dead or hunted. Where can we turn for support if the door is closed to Americans?"

"But the people," the young officer interjected, "surely they want to better their lot."

Gutierrez once more studied his companion before replying. "For the most part their spirit has been crushed, but there is hope, señor, in the

outlying provinces, the frontiers where the spirit of adventure is not dead. There they only await the right leader and the proper weapons. . . . Texas is such a place,” he added, as if it were an afterthought.

“The right leader, the proper weapons,” echoed Magee.

When the two men parted each was more than ordinarily thoughtful.

When the noonday halt was called Jonathan had hoped to renew his conversation with Teresa, but when he rode in Miguel Salazar, as if anticipating this, was seated on the blanket beside her. There was an amused glint in Salazar’s sharp eyes as he read the disappointment on the Virginian’s face. Teresa had talked with José when the halt was called, and the information he carried had brought a pleased smile to her lips. Now she was petulant. Nothing Miguel said seemed to please her. Her eyes followed Jonathan, guardedly.

Her teeth gleamed in a smile as Jonathan came toward them, and even before he stopped she began searching her lap and the blanket around her as if in dismay at some sudden loss. “My handkerchief, Miguel. Have you seen it?”

Her companion shrugged impatiently. “If you’ve lost it, send for another.”

“Thank you, Miguel. Will you get it for me?”

Salazar glanced at her sharply.

“Maria,” he called, clapping his hands imperiously for the servant.

“No, she is busy, Miguel,” Teresa protested with a solicitude new to her.

“If I can be of service, ma’am,” Jonathan bowed hopefully.

Teresa smiled up at him as if she were just discovering his presence.

“Of course—” Salazar’s voice was mocking—“you would know exactly where to find her handkerchief.”

“But I will show him,” Teresa exclaimed, extending her hands to Jonathan for assistance in arising. “You are very kind, señor.”

As Salazar watched them walk away together his eyes were clouded with anger.

In the pleasant midday sun Teresa had discarded her cloak. Her Empire dress had a low-cut bodice; its clinging green material molded her body softly. Previously Jonathan had seen her only in the stiff braided cloak. She had seemed beautiful but remote. Now that was ended. As they reached the coach, she leaned against him almost imperceptibly. It was a fleeting contact, but Jonathan was warmly aware of it. With quick discernment, the girl watched the color burn his temples and was pleased.

The open door hid them from Salazar’s’ View and his lips tightened in a bloodless line.

“The little chest, Jontee.” Teresa pointed out a brass-bound box in the coach’s interior.

Jonathan’s fingers suddenly were clumsy. He didn’t notice that the clasp of the box was open. As he lifted it by the lid, the chest fell open, cascading lacy garments upon the turf at their feet.

He glanced down with dismay, vaguely recognizing the intimate nature of the filmy apparel. The blood was hot in his face at the thought of his awkwardness. Teresa’s first impatience fled at the sight of him. With one impulse they both bent swiftly to retrieve the garments, bumped heads and sat down abruptly upon the grass. Then with one accord they burst into peals of laughter which rang in the ears of the man who watched from a distance.

“How long will you be in Natchez?” Jonathan asked. It was as if they had bridged the period of casual acquaintance to arrive at surer friendship. “I want to see you there.”

“And I—” the pressure of her hand was soft—“will look forward to seeing you too, Jontee.” The smile on her lips was a promise. “After all, if it had not been for you we never would have reached Natchez.” She sighed. “Those terrible *banditos!*”

His courage grew. “Eat with me,” he invited. “Gabe will spread a blanket under the trees for us.”

Teresa hesitated, aware of Miguel’s irritation, but this ingenuous redhead diverted her.

“There is so much to learn about you,” he continued. “Where you are going, why you are here, and—” he noticed how her eyes wavered toward her recent companion—“who is Don Miguel? Why should he object to our friendship?”

Her amber eyes widened. He read innocent surprise into her glance. It made him feel his questions had been impertinent. “Was it wrong to ask? It’s only that I’m eager to know more about you.”

“Why not? Don Miguel is my guardian. You see I have no family. He is fine and generous. He could not be kinder if I were his own daughter.”

“I thought he seemed unfriendly,” he admitted, “and objected to our being alone together.”

This amused her. Her laugh was merry. “But of course, señor. In my country, a girl is never alone with a young man, even when they are betrothed. It is the proper way. And when one has no mother, there is more need of prudence. Perhaps that is why Don Miguel is so careful of me.”

He had not understood Magee’s warning that morning but it had left an uneasy echo in his mind which this ready explanation dispelled. “What harm can there be in picnicking together?” he urged. “Your guardian can keep his vigilant eye on us—from a distance.”

Teresa decided to assert her independence. “Perhaps it will improve Miguel’s manners,” she thought, as she followed Jonathan across the glade.

The gaiety of their laughter mocked Miguel Salazar. He wandered over to watch Clampit. His manner appeared casual. The gambler sat apart, cross-legged on his blanket, cards fluttering through deft fingers. The Spaniard did not sit down.

“You’ve been away from New Orleans a long time,” was his greeting.

“Your purse should be the better for it, Don Miguel.” The gambler did not raise his eyes. He seemed still intent upon his cards.

There had been no previous hint of recognition between them. Until this moment each might have been unaware of the other’s existence. Now they might have been resuming a conversation only recently interrupted.

Salazar shrugged. “I never complain about money losses.” His deliberate gaze strayed toward the spot where Teresa and Jonathan sat. Clampit glanced up for the first time and read the expression on the Spaniard’s face. Then he silently resumed his interminable shuffling of the cards.

“And now you are going back?” Salazar began again. “Is it safe?”

There was no humor in the gambler’s twisted smile. “Memories are short. Particularly,” he added, “if the man who has most cause to remember has been buried.”

“It wasn’t what you did but how you did it.” Don Miguel shrugged. “You should have called the fellow out. There’s no such stir when a man is killed in a duel.”

“I have my own way in these matters,” retorted the gambler briefly.

“And a very efficient one in proper circumstances.”

For the first time the cards were forgotten. Clampit balanced a knife in his palm, staring at its keen blade speculatively. With a nod of his head he indicated a near-by tree. “See that lichen on the bark?” He indicated a gray patch on the trunk no larger than a man’s head.

His arm moved swiftly. The knife flashed through the air, the sun quivering on its blade, and thumped into the tree in the precise center of the spot he had marked.

“Excellent. Your hand has not lost its cunning,” Salazar exclaimed. But his eyes were no longer upon the knife.

“I never miss,” Clampit declared quietly. “I can’t afford to.” His alert gaze followed the direction of the Spaniards eyes.

Miguel shrugged, staring at the knife again. “There are times I wish I could do that.”

The gambler nodded. “That’s why I learned it. But it takes time and a certain—willingness.”

The two men stared at each other in silence. This time it was Clampit who turned to glance at Jonathan.

“You know whom I have in mind?” Miguel inquired.

Clampit retrieved his knife before replying. Then he nodded. “Yes, I’ve noticed.”

“It’s a thing I might do easily if I had your skill,” Salazar remarked.

“And willingness,” the other added.

Finally the Spaniard sat down, smiling for the first time and looking at the cards strewn across the blanket. He assembled them with fingers that trembled ever so slightly. “I’ll bet you five hundred dollars on the turn of a card,” he offered finally.

Clampit shook his head. “I thought we were playing for higher stakes,” he said.

Miguel started shuffling the dog-eared deck.

“If we’re going to play for real stakes, let’s make it two thousand dollars.” The gambler’s voice was smooth. “That isn’t too high for you, not in this game.”

Salazar was thoughtful only for a moment. “I haven’t that sum with me. I’ll have to give you an order on my New Orleans banker—” he paused—“if you win.”

“I know I’ll be paid,” was the laconic rejoinder.

Miguel tossed the deck across the blanket. “Do you want to shuffle them again?” he asked. “I’m cutting for the queen of hearts.”

The cards whispered softly as the gambler fluttered them between his lean fingers only once before handing them back. Miguel never even looked at them; instead his eyes were upon Clampit as he cut the deck. “The queen of hearts,” he declared before exposing the card he had picked. It was the five of clubs.

He laughed as he arose. “I was just thinking,” he explained, “how amusing it would have been if it had turned out to be the queen of hearts.”

“Don’t forget to leave the order at your banker’s,” Clampit reminded him as he turned away.

Don Bernardo Gutierrez’ position as emissary of a lost cause, together with the state in which he was traveling, had made an impression upon his new acquaintances. Natchez was only a few hours distant and as they were concluding their meal Kitchens invited the Spaniard and his party to be his guests while there.

“You are very kind.” Don Bernardo bowed deeply. “We are greatly honored but we already have accepted the invitation of Don Stephen Minor



at Concord. I trust, however,” he concluded, “that we may give ourselves the honor of calling upon you during our stay.”

The question of where they were to stay became general. Kitchens was coming home but for most of the others it was only a temporary halt. Kitchens also invited Jonathan to make Pleasant Hill his home during his visit.

“I would rather not impose on you, sir,” the youth replied. “If I’m to look at land I’ll be in and out a great deal. Besides,” he added smilingly, “I have a letter to Colonel Sargent. He might take offense if I made any arrangement without first consulting him. For the time being I plan to put up at Connelly’s Tavern.”

“I’m afraid you’ll find that impossible,” Johnny Durst interposed. “That’s the residence of Judge Brooks now. You’d better plan to stay at the Kentucky Tavern with Magee and me.”

“I’m surprised you haven’t heard the story about Connelly’s old place,” Kitchens observed. “After Connelly’s death Judge Samuel Brooks, our first American mayor, bought the place for a residence. The trouble all started because of conditions down Under the Hill. It was getting to be a resort for a pretty rough element, even for a frontier, and Natchez isn’t that any longer. The judge had a good deal to say about it publicly.

“There was considerable resentment down Under the Hill and one night a mob marched uptown and stoned Brooks’s house. He wasn’t at home himself but his wife was, and she was killed by one of the bricks that came through the windows.”

The entire circle had grown quiet.

“Well,” Kitchens continued, “the judge didn’t say anything publicly but when his friends received notices of the funeral they found a deuce of spades printed on the back as a reminder of what had happened.”

He glanced at Jonathan. “The deuce of spades, in case you don’t know, is the death card.

“Mrs. Brooks was buried and the judge’s friends came from miles around to attend the funeral. They say there wasn’t a word spoken about that deuce of spades but everyone knew its meaning right enough, and from the funeral those men marched in a body down into Natchez Under the Hill. They were wearing pistols under their long coats and when the smoke had cleared away, it was a different sort of place.

“It had taken a woman’s death to do it, but things Under the Hill had been cleaned up. There were a lot of dead gamblers down there and a great many more were run out of the country.”

“Good,” said Jonathan impulsively as the planter concluded his story. “That was the way to handle it. The gamblers had it coming to them.”

“You think so?” Dan Clampit’s voice was challenging.

He had lived so much within himself, apart from the easy fellowship of the others, that the young Virginian had forgotten his presence. There was no avoiding the issue now. He met the gambler’s bleak stare.

“Yes,” said Jonathan. “I think so.”

“Fifteen men died Under the Hill that day. Men who had no part in the stoning of Brooks’s house.” Clampit seemed to force the words out slowly through lips stiff with anger. “Gamblers!” He spit the word out. “Not men, just gamblers! Have you ever seen a gambler’s blood? It’s red the same as yours.”

Jonathan’s words had merely been impulsive. Had Clampit’s manner been less heated he might have offered an explanation, but not now.

“I said only what I thought, Mr. Clampit,” he retorted hotly.

He was in a strange world and unfamiliar with its many codes, almost as various as the men who peopled it. He did not see the knife until he caught the gleam of its blade balanced in the gambler’s palm.

# Chapter 3

## *Rebuff*

IN VIRGINIA the knife was not a weapon employed among gentlemen. Clampit's arm flexed and the blade was glittering in the air before Jonathan realized what had happened.

There was no outcry. Most of the company had been caught equally by surprise. They were tense with awareness of the situation but its deadly action was too swift for them. The flying blade was on its way before Teresa screamed.

But it was Clampit who groaned as the knife flew above their heads in a harmless arc. His wrist was broken. Experienced in border warfare, Kemper had been the first to realize his intention. He was sitting nearest Jonathan's assailant and, unable to reach him in time any other way, he had lashed out viciously with his foot, catching him on the wrist just before the deadly blade had been released. Kemper then felled Clampit with a sweep of his powerful fist.

"Murder." His deep voice rumbled angrily. "Cold-blooded murder." He shook the dazed gambler, as a terrier might worry a rabbit.

"You've broken my wrist," muttered the gambler, nursing the injured member gingerly. He shook his head as if to clear it, as he glanced from Kemper to Jonathan and back again. "Why didn't you stay out of this? It wasn't your quarrel."

"And see murder done? A fair fight is one thing and murder is another."

Kemper appropriated the knife, the silver-mounted rifle and a pistol which he found in the gambler's saddlebag. "You'll get them back when we reach Natchez," he promised. "In the meantime it will be safer this way. We want no more trouble." He had made it clear that the quarrel was no longer entirely a personal one. "And moreover," he added, "if I even hear of any knife play in the future, I'll make it my personal business to settle accounts with you."

Clampit made no reply. He rode in silence throughout the afternoon, his blank face giving no hint of his turbulent thoughts.

Jonathan, his initial surprise over, was angrily determined to challenge the man but was dissuaded by both Kemper and Magee.

“You can’t challenge a man who isn’t a gentleman,” the lieutenant reminded him.

“And there’s no such thing as a fair fight with his sort,” Kemper added. “Drop it, but keep your eyes open. The fellow’s full of mischief.”

As they approached Natchez there was less need for precaution and Jonathan, relieved of the necessity of riding in advance, hoped to enjoy Teresa’s company. But when he drew rein beside the coach it was to discover that Miguel Salazar had elected to ride there that afternoon. His taciturnity did not invite conversation. There was no opportunity for a word alone with her, no chance to arrange a future meeting. The gate to Concord, the great white hall looming indistinct behind it in the twilight shadows, was reached before he realized parting was so near. Don Bernardo Gutierrez again expressed his gratitude for their timely intervention in the battle with the bandits. Jonathan had dismounted but as he bent over the white hand extended from the coach he was uncomfortably conscious of Miguel’s dark, sardonic eyes fixed upon him.

“La del Pelo de Oro,” he murmured. There was no time for more. A whip cracked and he stepped hastily back as the great coach turned through the gate.

There was another brief leave-taking when they reached the town. Kitchens departed for his home after expressing hospitable hope of seeing his companions during their stay there. Clampit, his weapons restored to him with another warning from Kemper, rode away silently. Johnny Durst and Jonathan decided to stop at the Kentucky Tavern on Silver Street, just Under the Hill, with Kemper and Magee. The other three wanted a short rest before taking the trail again and Jonathan wanted time to make himself presentable before taking his letter to Colonel Sargent. There were the captured horses to think of, too. It was agreed that they should be sold and the proceeds divided among them.

The Kentucky Tavern faced the main road which led from the teeming river port up the bluff to the aristocratic town of the plantation owners. It was a large structure, the first story of brick, the second of cypress with projecting galleries overhanging the street. Jonathan was surprised both by its size and the quality of its accommodations, superior to anything he had encountered since leaving home. Between the tavern and the stables a second building, this one frame, was provided for servants. Here Gabe was housed, the stairs at the rear giving easy access to his master’s quarters. It

was their first night under a roof in weeks and the common room seemed luxurious to the four travelers who met there for dinner. They saw Clampit, seated across the smoke-dimmed room with a group of his friends, tight-faced men like himself. He made no sign of recognition.

“I don’t like the look of that fellow,” Magee remarked. “You’ll do well to watch out for him as long as you’re here.”

“He won’t catch me napping again,” Jonathan promised, a little impatient of the continued warnings.

They had grown accustomed to life in the open and the combination of the heavy meal and the close, hot room made them drowsy. Their parting was brief.

In his room Jonathan found Gabe waiting. The old Negro was squatted on his haunches against the wall, a favorite pose, awaiting his master’s arrival. Jonathan eyed him in surprise. “What are you doing here?” he demanded.

“It’s dat gambler man, Mist’ Jonty,” he replied. Worry was written on his black face. “Gabe’ll jes’ res’ right hyar tonight whar he can keep his eyes on you.”

“Nonsense,” retorted his master. “You’ll do nothing of the kind. Go on to bed and get some sleep.”

The Negro shook his head. “What yore pappy and yore mammy goin’ say t’ Gabe if’n he come home ’thout’n thar boy?” he protested. “No suh, Mist’ Jonty, I’s goin’ sot right hyar.”

In Jonathan’s sleepy condition it was easier to accede than to argue, a procedure which he knew from experience would be endless where Gabe was involved.

Jonathan awoke to find the sun streaming through his windows and Gabe humming a song as he busied himself about the room. The stained trousers and muddy boots Jonathan had worn down the Trace had mysteriously vanished. Gabe had unpacked the trunks, and draped across a near-by chair was his best buff broadcloth coat with the green facings. A ruffled linen shirt was laid out on the chest, and a steaming kettle waited on the hearth where a fire already was crackling.

“What’s going on here, Gabe?” the boy asked.

“We’s back ’mong de gentry, Mist’ Jonty,” the old man explained. “You got to put yo’ bes’ foot foremos’ hyar.” He nodded toward a big envelope he had propped upon the mantel. “Yo’ mammy wouldn’t lak it if’n I didn’ spruce you up when you go callin’ on de Cunnel.”

However, Jonathan did not call on Colonel Sargent to deliver his letter that morning. Instead, conscious of the change for the better in his appearance now that he was arrayed in his best, he rode up the hill and explored the town with what patience he could summon while he awaited a more reasonable hour to call on Teresa. Natchez was a pleasant surprise to him. The row of brick buildings on the square might have been in Alexandria or Charlottesville. Both the Spanish and the French had left their mark here but the new buildings, and there were a number of them, were undoubtedly American in their architecture.

It was a bright blue morning; the spring sun was warm and dogwood still was white in the young green of the trees which pressed close around the town and invaded its streets, dappling its walks with friendly shadows. He turned his horse toward Concord and, halting under a spreading tree where he was secure from observation, he dismounted. Here, with the aid of a towel he had stuffed into his saddlebag for just such a purpose, he carefully flicked the dust from his coat and rubbed his shoes vigorously in final preparation for his call.

Concord, originally the home of Spanish governors, was a large manor house surrounded on all four sides by white porticoes. Its appearance from any direction would have been almost identical except for the sweeping curve of the entrance stairs, ascending to the second floor on either side of a wide door below. Jonathan had reined in for a better look when the lower doors were thrown open and, to his surprise, what at first glance appeared to be a cavalcade came trotting smartly right out of the house. As the procession unfolded, however, he discovered it was an outrider followed by a coach and four. He was dressed in yellow satin, in startling contrast to his ebony face. Even his silk stockings were yellow. He rode a light bay which matched perfectly the four horses that drew the coach. As he passed Jonathan he cried, "Make way, make way for the Yellow Duchess!"

The young Virginian edged his horse back to the border of the drive and watched in amazement as the coach swept past. There were two postilions astride the horses and two lackeys on the box behind, all dressed like the outrider in saffron livery. The coach was yellow with bronze mountings, even the buff harness matching the bizarre color scheme. As the vehicle rolled by he glimpsed its occupant, a woman in her middle years but still beautiful. She was clad in a dress of yellow and on her head was a small turban fringed in gold. The interior of the coach glowed with rich yellow upholstery.

As he turned to look after the extraordinary equipage he heard the groom crying again, "Make way, make way for the Yellow Duchess!"

Jonathan stared in new wonder at the house. He had never before seen one with a drive through what normally would be the front door. He caught a glimpse of brick paving before the doors swung shut again. He now thought he understood the circling stairs mounting to the second floor, and after securing his horse to the near-by rail he mounted them, and, with eager anticipation, sounded the heavy knocker.

The black servant to whom he explained his errand invited him into the white paneled hall, gleaming with polished mahogany. He might have been back in Virginia. Both in architecture and furnishings the place was reminiscent of the manor houses along the James. "Except," Jonathan thought, "for that driveway through the house."

The wait was long. Possibly his early call had found Teresa unprepared. He upbraided himself for his impatience as he conjured up a picture of the girl in delightful confusion scurrying about busy with last-minute preparations. There was a footfall in the hall. Jonathan leaped to his feet, facing the door, his heart thumping with expectation.

But it wasn't Teresa. Instead the oily Luiz stood there, clad in livery now, bowing obsequiously. In this position his queue was upthrust like a pig's tail above the fat folds of his neck.

"So sorry, señor." Don Miguel Salazar's servant straightened up. "So sorry, la señorita cannot see you."

"She isn't home?" Jonathan's heart sank.

"Oh *si*, señor. She is home." Luiz shrugged, his eyes rolling in his round face.

It was an experience new to the young man and he was slow to comprehend. "You mean it is too early," he began, then checked himself, glancing sharply at Luiz. "Did she send a message?"

The servant bowed again. "*Si*, señor. There was a message." Once more he shrugged. "I am to tell you she is not at home, not today, not any time the señor calls."

The servant, who noted the slow clenching of the young man's fists, stepped back toward the door warily. He had no cause for alarm. In that blurred moment Jonathan's vision was entirely inward. Searching the sudden sharp pain of his consciousness for some explanation, he could recall nothing that might interpret the surprising situation unless it was his scene with Clampit. Possibly that was it and yet, as he turned to go, this answer did not satisfy him. He walked toward the door in a daze, brushing Luiz aside blindly. It was as though a part of him were numb. His reactions were purely mechanical and yet another part of him, watching in detachment, registered each detail with cruel clarity. It noted how the motes danced in the nimbus of sunlight streaming through the window and how a table gleamed

red. It marked, too, the derision on Luiz' face as he closed the door behind him. Afterward Jonathan was surprised that he could recall these details. At the time they had not pricked his consciousness.

Miguel Salazar watched the young man's slow progress down the front steps from behind his curtained windows. When Luiz returned no word passed between servant and master, but Miguel's teeth flashed in a brief smile. He flipped a coin across the room.

Dan Clampit's appraisal of the newcomer had been shrewd. The man had seen better days. His mulberry coat laced at the cuffs, though faded and neatly mended, still marked him a gentleman. His face matched his coat. The weak mouth was shadowed by a bulbous red beak. His eyes were pale and watery with puffy sacs beneath. His thinning hair was brushed straight back and hung like a shaggy mane behind. Clampit recognized the symbols. Many derelicts journeyed down the Trace in hope of mending their fortunes on a new frontier. Usually there was gold in their belts realized from the sale of their remaining effects, cash to finance their new ventures all too meagerly.

"A nice day, sir." Clampit's smile, though rare, could be agreeable.

The stranger's quick glance took in the gambler's immaculate linen and the quality of his carefully brushed clothes. "A very nice day," he replied.

"Are you going far or is Natchez your destination?" Clampit sounded very casual.

"You must be well acquainted around here if you can recognize all the strangers." The man's manner was a trifle guarded. "I'm just looking around at present. As a matter of fact I'm undecided whether to remain here or push on to New Orleans."

"There are great opportunities here if you're interested in land." Clampit's usual reserve had thawed into geniality. "As a matter of fact I am rather well acquainted here. It's been seven years since I first came down the Trace and I still manage to visit Natchez several times a year." He shrewdly appraised the fellow's bloated nose. "A man can't shut himself off from civilization forever, you know. A plantation is a wonderful place to make money but it can be lonesome. This is where I come to spend it." He shrugged. "Oh, not in a big way, of course. The enjoyment of human companionship over a friendly glass is the important thing. That's about all it amounts to."

There was a momentary gleam in the stranger's eye. "Naturally," he observed.



“If it’s land you’re looking for, perhaps I may be of some assistance,” Clampit then suggested.

“I wouldn’t want to impose on you, sir.” The man was cautious.

The gambler shrugged. “I was just recalling my own experience when I first came,” he said. “It would have been a big help had I known someone to show me around. It’s possible I could be of considerable service to you. If so, don’t hesitate to call upon me.”

“You’re very kind.” The stranger hesitated.

“Not at all,” Clampit assured him. “I’m looking for congenial companionship. If, in return, I can render you some little service I will be only too happy. How about a drink, sir? A friendly glass serves as an excellent introduction. I am Dan Clampit.”

“And I am Benjamin Marsten.” He bowed in acknowledgment. “I’d enjoy your company, sir, but—”

“Oh, come, come, Mr. Marsten,” the gambler protested. “You won’t deprive me of the privilege. After all I’ve had no one to talk to for months out on the plantation.”

Still Marsten hesitated. “We-ell.” He glanced about uneasily. The gleam had returned to his eye. “One slight libation never harmed a man. But only one, mind you. I have—ahem—affairs awaiting my attention. But one glass.” He took his new-found companion by the arm and headed for the tavern door. “One glass, *pro salute animae*.”

Jonathan was not in the mood for companionship when he met Magee. He was returning morosely to his room when encountered by his friend.

“I was just looking for you,” declared the lieutenant. “I’m bound for Concord to visit Don Bernardo Gutierrez and I thought you might like to accompany me. If I’m not mistaken you like the rustle of a certain petticoat out there.”

“No thanks.” Jonathan was tempted to push by his friend without further explanation but his pride prevented that. He didn’t want Magee to suspect the true reason for his refusal.

The lieutenant grinned. “You have the makings of a cavalryman,” he said. “Kiss at a gallop and skittish of a halter. Well, I can’t say I’m sorry to see you shying off. Play the field, that’s my motto. The good races aren’t won in a single heat.”

Jonathan muttered as an excuse something about his letter to Colonel Sargent. “Business before pleasure,” he added. “I never was much of a hand with the ladies anyway.”

In spite of his effort to conceal his true state of mind there was a hint of bitterness in his tone which did not escape the lieutenant. Magee had the good sense to drop the subject after a quick glance. "Oh well," he remarked, "I'm early for my appointment yet. How about some refreshment?"

Together they entered the common room. It was a large brick-paved room, spreading the width of the tavern, with a great fireplace yawning across one end. Opposite, stairs ascended to the upper level and beneath these a small bar was located. It was latticed in with a wooden screen, and through its small wicket the tankards were thrust. Tables crowded the space, but they were practically deserted at this hour. The only light filtered feebly through windows high in the front wall. After the outdoor sunlight it took a few minutes before their eyes were adjusted to the gloom and they did not observe Dan Clampit and his new friend. The gambler frowned at their appearance. A word from either of these new arrivals, neither of whom bore him friendship, might easily spoil his play at a stage when the game was as good as won. His intended victim was already fuzzy with drink and not apt to leave of his own accord. Feeling secure in this, the gambler chose discretion as his best course and slipped quietly from the room. Any attempt to take Marsten with him in his present condition would attract too much attention. He was confident that the interruption would be brief.

Benjamin Marsten was in mellow mood. Finding himself alone, he peered around for companionship. His watery eyes fell upon the only other table which was occupied. His capacity was greater than Clampit had guessed, for his progress across the room was accomplished with some dignity. Halting before the two young men, he achieved a bow of noble proportions.

"*Absit invidia.*" He rolled the phrase over his tongue caressingly. "Benjamin Marsten, gentlemen, at your service." Aside from his manner of exaggerated courtliness, he gave no hint of his condition. "It is my indubitable loss that I have not had the honor of your previous acquaintance. I have come to repair this egregious error."

Puzzled, Magee arose, returned the bow and gave his name and Jonathan's. Both of the young men remained standing, uncertain of their visitor's errand.

"Pray be seated, gentlemen." Marsten might have been inviting them to share his own table. "The prospect of congenial company is solace to a weary traveler whose soul is parched for it. Such an auspicious occasion, in fact, should be memorialized suitably, with the flowing bowl. *Dum vivimus, vivamus.* While we live, let us live." Drawing a chair up to the table, he thumped the board peremptorily, to attract the waiter.

The lieutenant glanced at Jonathan, his eyes dancing with amusement. Their visitor's state was no longer a mystery to him.

"I regret exceedingly—" his bow matched Marsten's for courtliness—"that I cannot remain and enjoy such company, but I have an engagement. However, I leave you in the best of hands. Mr. Kirk, here, is noted for his conviviality."

Jonathan's black mood was anything but expansive. He had met Magee's conversational attempts with cryptic monosyllables. Now the lieutenant was exacting a harmless revenge by abandoning him to the fellowship of the garrulous stranger. "There's just one trouble with him," the young officer went on, chuckling: "he's too talkative. You won't have a chance to get a word in edgeways."

Jonathan grinned wryly and stared at his self-invited guest. Disappointment was so keen in him, there was no corner of his mind left free for speculation. Nor was the stranger's good opinion of any concern. He felt only indifference.

Benjamin Marsten solemnly focused rheumy eyes on his remaining companion and waited with an air of profound attention. Nothing happened. "Your friend—" he finally broke the lengthening silence—"must have spoken in jest. Your conversational qualifications are either greatly overrated, sir, or—" and here he again pounded the table for service—"your tongue wants oiling. I have the same unhappy failing," he confessed. "*Aqua vitae!* That's what's needed. Spirits! Even a frog can't croak with a parched throat."

In spite of his morose mood, Jonathan discovered a growing interest in this stranger. The shadows of the room were friendly to the ravaged face, softening the lines that revealed too much. Here he looked more the man he might have been. Too, his magniloquence, so liberally interlarded with Latin phrases, was entertaining. The youth fell to wondering about the author of such bombast and, in doing so, forgot, at least for the moment, his own bitterness of spirit. By what devious path had Marsten arrived at this sorry stage? His speech betrayed a happier past.

"But you aren't drinking, Mr. Kirk," Marsten protested. "Come. My favorite toast: *Dum vivimus, vivamus.*" He drained his glass and rapped for more before again turning a sympathetic eye on his companion. "My years are rich with experience—" his voice rolled sonorously—"experience that is at the service of my friends. *Alter ipse amicus.* You grasp my meaning, I trust?"

Jonathan confessed that he didn't.

"A friend is another self," Marsten translated and paused to drain his glass before continuing. "I have long since discovered that I take recourse to

the Latin when giving expression to the verities of life. And so, my friend, where were we?"

"The verities of life," murmured the youth, not quite sure himself.

The older man stared at him solemnly. "It was your sober condishun that brought forth this discoursh. An' in my superior experience, I have discovered that money . . . money is the root of all unhappiness." He fumbled under his coat and, to Jonathan's astonishment, produced a money belt which he dropped upon the table before him. "An' so, my boy, if I can be of any assishtance—"

Jonathan thrust the belt back into the man's hands. "I'm not in need of any help, Mr. Marsten," he assured him hastily. "You'd better put that money away. It isn't wise to show it publicly."

But Marsten was too fuddled to understand. "Assishtance," he muttered thickly.

The Virginian glanced hastily about the room. Several tables now were occupied. Some distance away he recognized Clampit, whom he had not noticed before, sitting alone.

"This is a pretty pickle," the boy thought. "If I leave him here like this, he'll wake up without any money, as sure as shooting, and I've no idea where he belongs."

In order not to attract undue attention, he slid the money belt from the table into his side pocket. It was bulky, but not very heavy. Evidently the poor fellow hadn't much to lose but that was all the more indication that he could ill afford the loss. Impatient of the situation but feeling its responsibility, Jonathan left his now drowsy companion to make inquiry concerning him at the tavern. No man by such a name was known to the proprietor. He returned to the common room with the rather hopeless feeling that Marsten himself, who was in no condition to do so, was the only one who could supply the information.

He stopped in the door. Dan Clampit had moved to his vacated chair and was attempting to engage the now thoroughly befuddled man in talk. It was not a situation to Jonathan's liking but the money belt was bulky in his pocket and the man himself an obligation he had reluctantly accepted.

As he approached the table, Clampit looked up, his face as expressionless as ever. Jonathan waited. Their parting had not been friendly.

"Marsten's a little the worse for his liquor." The gambler spoke first.

"Oh, you know him?"

"We're old friends."

"Then perhaps you can tell me where he lives," suggested Jonathan. "I've been inquiring, but no one here at the tavern seems to know."

“Why don’t you leave that to me?” Clampit replied. “I’ll take care of him.”

The youth hesitated. He had lost what small taste he’d had for the chore with the knowledge that Marsten was a friend of the gambler’s. Hadn’t Clampit called him by name? On the other hand, what about the money belt? He couldn’t very well turn that over to anyone else.

“No,” he decided, aloud. “I’ll take care of him. Thanks just the same.”

Clampit started to protest but thought better of it. If there were a hue and cry later, it would be better if the man were seen to leave here in the young Virginian’s company.

Jonathan had some difficulty in getting Marsten to his feet, but once started, their progress wasn’t too bad. To overcome his charge’s unsteadiness, he gripped him firmly by the elbow in such a way that he could act both as guide and support. He was hopeful that once out in the fresh air, Marsten would at least partially revive.

Their uncertain course down Silver Street was halted before they had covered fifty yards. An extremely angry girl blocked their path. Hands on hips, brows knit over stormy blue eyes, she watched their erratic approach.

“Well?”

Jonathan was uncomfortably conscious of her critical inspection which swept him from head to toe.

“My dear,” mumbled the old man, trying to straighten up, without much success.

“I suppose you’ve no better way to occupy your time than to tempt helpless old men.” Her voice dripped scorn. “I suppose it was all very gay and very funny, at his expense. You must feel very proud of your work.”

“As a matter of fact, ma’am . . .” Jonathan was staring unhappily into the blue eyes which he discovered were perilously close to tears. “As a matter of fact . . .” Again he groped for words.

The girl might have been considered pretty if she weren’t so angry, he thought, although there were freckles sprinkled across her nose and he didn’t care for freckles on a girl. Her hair was nice, though, brown, and curling softly around her face in funny little tendrils. “As a matter of fact . . .” he began again.

“You do him an injustice, Cissy,” mumbled Marsten. “This is my friend. It is my honor to present—” here he essayed a bow and would have fallen had not Jonathan caught him—“my daughter Cissy.”

“Oh, he’s your father!” exclaimed Jonathan.

“Let me have him.” Her tone was icy. She took the old man’s arm.

“But I want to help you,” the youth protested.

“Don’t you think you’ve done enough?” she cried indignantly. “Don’t touch him.”

“Are you sure you can handle him alone?”

“And don’t speak to me.” She ignored his offer. “Just let us alone. That’s all I ask. Let us alone.” She lashed the words at him in her fury.

Rid of his unwelcome burden, Jonathan watched them go. She was talking to her father now, and her anger seemed to have melted. He could hear her voice, low-pitched, soothing, addressing him as if he were a child, as she supported him in his shambling way. Marsten, spurred by her encouragement, was making a feeble effort to straighten his stride.

Well, it served him right for trying to play the Good Samaritan, Jonathan thought. He should have turned the fellow over to Clampit. Confound him! If he hadn’t left his money belt on the table, this wouldn’t have happened.

At thought of the money belt, he grabbed at his pocket, where it still bulged, bulkily.

“Miss Marsten!” he called. The girl gave no sign of hearing. “Miss Marsten,” he called again, and hurried in pursuit when it became apparent that she had no intention of stopping.

But she had to wait when he halted in front of her.

“I told you not to speak to me,” she reminded him bitterly. “Can’t you go away and let us alone? Can’t you tell when you’re unwelcome?”

He thrust the money belt into her hand. “Your father’s,” he said. “Don’t worry. I won’t bother you again.”

As he walked rapidly away, Cissy Marsten turned puzzled eyes from the money belt in her hand to look after him.

# Chapter 4

## *Invitation*

COLONEL WINTHROP SARGENT read Jonathan's letter deliberately. The crisp autumn years were kind to the old gentleman. He clung to the fashions of younger times. His hair was powdered, lace edged his cuffs, and silver buckles glinted in the morning sun.

"I remember your father well," he said. His fingers drummed the chair arm as he gazed reflectively into space. "We met at Saratoga under the most favorable of conditions, for that was a turning point as far as we were concerned. We'd been retreating ever since Ticonderoga and it had been a sorry business. That day we gave the Redcoats a taste of their own medicine."

They were seated in the library at Gloucester.

"And so you've come to have a look at Natchez." The colonel wrenched his thoughts from the past. "Good! We need young men of your background. This is new country and the opportunities are almost unlimited. If I can be of any service, particularly in the selection of land, don't hesitate to call upon me. Of course we shall expect you to be our guest here until such time as you are permanently settled." Hospitably he brushed aside the young man's protest. "I'll send the coach to pick up your things."

The mistress of Gloucester was equally gracious. "After all 'twill be more convenient to have you lodged here," she assured him, a twinkle in her eye. "Your father has asked us to keep a friendly eye upon you and the Kentucky Tavern is too far away for that. We'll put you up in the *garçonnière* where you may go and come as you please and we may still have the pleasure of your company."

And so it had been arranged. Jonathan, who never before had heard of a *garçonnière*, discovered that it was a separate building adjacent to the manor and a distinctive feature of many estates in this section. It was a residence for the older sons of a family where they enjoyed the freedom of a separate establishment while still living at home. Here it was a comfortable structure whose several rooms had been occupied by sons now absent. It stood in a line with the main house some thirty yards distant. Directly behind it was

another brick structure known as the “summer kitchen,” where house servants were quartered. Here Gabe was housed.

Gloucester was an interesting establishment. It was built in the same tradition as the manor houses of the Piedmont in Virginia, with an English basement on the ground floor and classic columns across its front. Colonel Sargent had bought it some years after his term as territorial governor and had enlarged it considerably with the result that its interior arrangement varied from the usual pattern. Instead of the customary center hall it had two graceful entrances, each opening into a separate stair hall. These were connected by a third hall, behind which was the library. The drawing room was at one end of the house, the dining room at the other. Both had gracious proportions. The ingenuity with which the conveniences had been contrived in frontier construction fascinated Jonathan. The laundry in the basement had an open cistern in its center from which the slaves dipped their water. A dumb-waiter connected the spacious dining hall with the winter kitchen below. The colonel took particular pride in showing Jonathan the stairway in the “new” hall, a replica of one in his family home in Massachusetts. He had brought workmen from Gloucester to build it.

This was not the only establishment where living was of noble proportions. In company with Colonel Sargent, Jonathan visited a number where the pattern, while not always on the same scale, was similar. In the more remote sections the young Virginian also visited estates which were in the toilsome process of building, where the heavy timber was being felled and fields readied for crops. It gave him an interesting insight into the background of the plantations. They were as much a product of labor and sweat as were the humbler clearings he had passed at intervals up the Trace. Here, however, there was a vision and a tradition behind the men who toiled which had a different flowering. Of course the richness of this land made it possible.

It was an atmosphere Jonathan understood and liked. This, he thought, was the country for him. The crops stood deep in fertility where the new fields were planted. On the virgin land magnificent trees everywhere attested the same good abundance of the soil. The massive live oaks were objects of special curiosity. The wide-spreading arms of these gnarled veterans often touched the ground for a hundred feet around the time-twisted trunks. There were a variety of other hardwoods but these were the monarchs. Here, too, he met the dripping Spanish moss, gay festoons, swinging silver in the breeze. Dogwood was snowy in the glades, adding its fragrance to air already rich with scents of earth’s fecundity.

Jonathan stopped his horse at the crest of a gently mounded hill. “Yes,” he thought, “this is the land I came to find.”



It was during his second breakfast at Gloucester that Mrs. Sargent told him of the invitation to the ball at Concord. Don Stephen Minor was entertaining for his distinguished Spanish guests. Jonathan's face fell. Memory of his rebuff was poignantly fresh in his mind. He had sought in many ways to explain it without success. Teresa's loveliness haunted him. The sound of her laughter, the soft touch of her hand, the redness of her lips were memories which persisted in spite of his resentment. He had tried to hope there had been some error, but there could be no mistaking the finality of her message. "I am to tell you she is not at home any time the señor calls." With bitterness he remembered her exquisite coloring, the golden hair, the amber eyes, the tawny skin. "La del Pelo de Oro," he thought harshly. "The Golden One. Well, she's properly named. She's just as hard as metal too." He tried to convince himself, but it wasn't easy to do. Try as he would, he could not shut her picture from his mind.

His hesitation at mention of the ball did not escape the colonel's observation.

"Perhaps Mr. Kirk has another interest," he chuckled. "There's many a pretty face in Natchez. I'd lose my heart a dozen times a day had it not been captured so securely by you, my dear."

"La." Mrs. Sargent glanced at him with mock severity. "It probably isn't your wife that stops you, sir; it's your years." She turned to Jonathan, smiling. "If it is a question of a young lady," she said, "that will present no difficulties. It will be a large ball and she's probably already invited. If she isn't, I can arrange it for you. Her name shall be included on the guest list."

In spite of his determination to put Teresa from his thoughts, the prospect of seeing her again was tempting. It irritated him that he should so thirst for the sight of her. Once he had ridden past Concord, tantalized by the hope of seeing her. He had been angered at his own weakness, but in his present state of mind he was like a parched traveler staring upon a mirage, realizing it was born of his despair but unable to tear his eyes away.

He had learned much of the establishment where she was stopping. That had not been hard to do. Both the house and its occupants were colorful. Its mistress, Don Stephen Minor's wife, the Yellow Duchess, was an almost fabulous creature about whom legends clustered.

That same day he saw Teresa. She was with the Yellow Duchess. The yellow coach caught his eye, halted before the door of Joseph Murray's shop on Main Street. It wasn't the great lady's custom to enter a store. Mr. Murray, standing bareheaded at the curb, was displaying a bolt of cloth for her imperious inspection. A small group of idlers dawdled in the spring sun to watch the spectacle from a respectful distance. In spite of his efforts to

convince himself of indifference, Jonathan felt a twinge of envy when he saw two young men at the opposite door of the coach. A yellow-liveried groom held their horses. He slowed his gait, not wishing to pass the party but still less disposed to change his course on her account.

Teresa, for her part, had observed Jonathan. The young men standing by her side blinked at the spontaneity of her laughter and wondered fleetingly how they had managed to say things so witty. They couldn't for the life of them remember what they had said but her gay spirit was giddily infectious. They didn't realize that the laugh had been intended for the ears of a redheaded young Virginian. Teresa was provoked with Jonathan. She had fully expected to find him on her doorstep the first morning in Natchez, and had thought of whimsies which might prolong his suspense. She was not accustomed to neglect and was unaware of the sharp message which had rebuffed his effort to see her. Consequently she was determined upon a course of coolness. The two young men who squired her she found dull, but now she was grateful for their presence and quickened her gaiety.

Jonathan was so engrossed in the scene that he did not notice Cecily Marsten until she was right in front of him. She registered first only as a familiar figure which offered him a way out of his dilemma. He lifted his hat and bowed with a swift smile of recognition before he realized that this was the outspoken girl who had asked him never to bother her again.

Cecily Marsten had marked his approach with misgiving. Her step had slowed. She had decided to apologize for her sharpness at their first meeting and was wrestling with her pride. She did not know how to begin until his bow paved the way for her unpleasant chore.

"I did you an injustice the other day and I'm sorry." She tumbled the words out swiftly. "Later I realized that you had only been trying to help my father. My first thought was—" she hesitated—"something else."

Her penitence, so foreign to his memory of her, took Jonathan by surprise. When he had thought of her at all he remembered the sharpness of her tongue and the independence of her spirit. It was this direct quality he liked in her, he discovered now. The guileless candor which admitted a fault as readily as it had been quick with blunt censure pleased him and matched his mood. At least you knew where you stood with such a girl, he reflected, his thoughts slanting acidly off to Teresa. The knowledge that the girl in the yellow coach might be watching made him display his most cordial manner to Cecily.

"Please think nothing of it," he urged.

"When you returned the money belt," Cecily explained, "I realized how wrong I had been."

The laughter from the coach had stopped now and Jonathan stifled the impulse to make sure that the amber eyes were watching him. He hoped so. He wanted them to see that there were other girls who welcomed his company. As he fell into step beside Cecily he surveyed her critically, liking what he saw. Of course she lacked Teresa's beauty and she had the tongue of a little shrew when vexed, but he liked the directness of her blue gaze. Her wide mouth was friendly and, he thought, the brown curls softened her face until she was almost pretty in spite of the freckles on her nose.

His confusion at the encounter with Teresa was ended and its easy solution suggested a new course of action. If he could appear at the Concord ball with another girl on his arm he would show Teresa his indifference. The only other girl he knew was the one beside him. He recalled Mrs. Sargent's assurance that she would procure an invitation for any girl in whom he might be interested. Why not?

"Our introduction the other evening was rather vague," he said. "I know you are Miss Marsten and I am Jonathan Kirk. Are you planning to attend the ball at Concord tomorrow night?"

The girl's mouth, a trifle too wide for beauty, gave her smile a boyish quality. "No, we are strangers here just passing through," she explained.

"Oh, I had the impression you lived here." He hesitated only momentarily. "Wouldn't you like to go?"

She looked at him in surprise. The humiliation of their first meeting was very real in her mind and in her scrutiny there was something of a challenge. "I'm afraid I don't share your acquaintance with the hostess at Concord," she replied, and then forced herself to add, "and I'm afraid our introduction wasn't exactly of a social nature."

"You will receive the invitation," Jonathan promised eagerly. Now that he had decided upon a plan he was determined to see it through. "It will be delivered today."

He was interrupted by a hearty thump on the back. Johnny Durst wore a smile on his brown face.

"Jonty," he cried in happy recognition. "I see you already know Cissy Marsten. You do get around, don't you?"

So Johnny knew this girl. Jonathan enlisted his aid.

"She was just objecting that our first meeting wasn't sufficiently formal," he explained. "Help me out, Johnny."

Durst's expression was quizzical but he complied with grace. "Miss Cecily Marsten, may I have the honor of presenting Mr. Jonathan Kirk of Virginia, better known as Jonty? I don't know how he does it but he always manages to scrape up an acquaintance with the most attractive girls. The last time it was a beautiful Spanish blonde and this time it's you."

Jonathan was quick to press the advantage of Durst's friendship. "Is that introduction sufficiently formal, Miss Marsten?" he queried. "Or must I find someone else to recommend me? I'm still determined that you shall be my partner at the ball."

Still Cecily hesitated. A ball was alluring after months of loneliness but there were other considerations which she was reluctant to admit, even to herself. Jonathan Kirk, his buff broadcloth cut in the latest fashion, was so obviously of the quality. Her sensitive pride was more aware of their difference in station now because it had not always been so. This was in her mind when she replied, "You may walk home with me if you like." Her smile was reserved and her eyes did not share in it. "You'll have to know where to send the invitation. If you haven't changed your mind by then, I'd enjoy going to the ball."

The remark had no meaning for Jonathan at the time. It was gay spring in a strange place, and the three of them enjoyed the walk down the long hill into the lower town. There was a curious blending of peoples in Natchez Under the Hill. Behind they left a sedate town where prim brick houses marched in rows and on its fringe manor houses crowded back the forest. Down along the river was a different world, a river port, bustling while the town above drowsed. The two worlds rubbed shoulders here. Shiny coaches from the upper level jostled through narrow streets where rivermen, loggers and frontiersmen in fringed leather shirts mingled. There was more homespun here than fine linen, once the Kentucky Tavern was passed. There was evidence, too, of another life whose dawn came at evening by yellow candlelight: gamblers whose white faces seldom saw the sun and women who laughed too readily, clad in silks not cut in a fashion seen above the hill.

Jonathan never thought to wonder about their destination until the meanest of the lodgings had been passed. Ahead lay only the river. Johnny Durst was unperturbed; he seemed to be on familiar ground. They were almost at water's level now. The yellow Mississippi eddied about the rafts and flatboats moored along its shores. They were of every type. Logs crudely lashed together jostled solidly built arks, some of them boasting cabins.

They came to a halt at one of these, where a rough plank spanned the river's muddy shore, and were greeted by a boy in his teens who smilingly hailed them from its deck. "Hi, Johnny."

"Hello, Cris!"

"This is my brother Crispin." Cecily turned speculative eyes upon Jonathan as she made the introduction. "You've met my father," she added as the old gentleman appeared in the doorway of the cabin.

“Yes, indeed.” Jonathan tried to make his voice sound casual. Secretly he was dismayed. His invitation had resulted from a sudden impulse. Now it occurred to him that a girl clad in the poor finery that these humble resources offered would scarcely excite Teresa’s concern. But much more disquieting than this was his uneasiness over the false position in which he had placed Cecily Marsten. He pictured her in some simple frock, abashed amid the luxury of Concord, aware of the adverse contrast and humiliated by it. He had a feeling of savage impatience with himself. It was his own impulsiveness which had trapped them both. He recalled Cecily’s hesitation when he invited her and how she had qualified her acceptance until he had accompanied her home. With quick perception he recognized the reason for this, the sensitive pride which had prompted her course, and hoped fervently that she might not be hurt by any action of his. Her eyes were on him now. She was waiting, he knew.

His smile was quick. His only irritation was directed at himself and his only thought one of consideration for her. “I’ll deliver that invitation this afternoon in person,” he promised and was glad that he said it as he watched her eyes brighten.

On the flatboat, the cabin which had been home to the Marstens for weeks was a scene of considerable excitement. It was a surprisingly comfortable room, dominated by two pieces of furniture to which Cissy had clung—a large chest whose drawers now stood open in confusion and a table with fluted Sheraton legs. They were relics of easier days, which she had insisted on carrying to the new frontier. Sometimes it was hard for her to recall the picture of her father as he had been in those happier times, when his eyes were clear and his eloquence had been reserved for the courtroom. She had watched the image blur, witnessed its slow distortion. Now the likeness had been out of focus for so long, its past aspect had grown elusive; it was the present sorry outline that had become familiar.

Fuddled loquacity and careless dress had first betrayed the gradual decay. In the beginning—after her mother’s death—she had ascribed it to his grief, which she could understand so well because she shared it. But this became more difficult as his disintegration progressed. Even the once comfortable house grew bleak, stripped of its pleasant possessions.

She had been bewildered by his steady decay but her endurance had not faltered. Then, passing the tavern one day, she had heard the jeers which greeted her father’s maudlin oratory. Derision was a cruelty against which she had no defense. Her humiliation had remained bearable only as long as

she could hug it to her in secrecy. When this was no longer possible, the wound to her pride was intolerable.

There had been a time when her anger against her father had been flaming and swift. That had passed. She regarded him now with the tolerant compassion one tenders to the ill, realizing his frailty, understanding some of its helplessness. In his sober moments Ben Marsten was pitifully eager to pledge amends for the future. But the promises wilted before the first temptation; the stamina to support them had long since been sapped.

Cecily Marsten was only twenty. Her desperate blue eyes had searched the Tennessee horizon hopelessly. With the unconsciously cruel laughter of the village tavern haunting her memory, she avoided the town. Then had been born the determination to seek a frontier where, cut off from the past, they might start again. She clung to a small hope that her father in new surroundings might somehow find his courage. Her faith in this was faint, but added to it was the resolution that there should be an opportunity for her younger brother Cris, only sixteen, and for herself too, in a fresh scene. The house and most of the remaining possessions had netted a small hoard of gold from which the houseboat had been built. Only the chest and the table had been saved.

It had been an unexpectedly happy journey. Cut off from his old surroundings, always under the vigilant eye of one or the other of his children, Ben Marsten had remained sober. There had even been kindly times in the dusk of evening when he had seemed to recapture something of the man he once had been. As the slow voyage stretched into weeks, hope had kindled bright in Cissy's heart. That was before they reached Natchez, and her father, eluding Cris's vigilance, had wandered into town alone. She had found him later, with Jonathan, after hours of anxious search.

It had been a long time since Cissy had attended a dance. In a chest drawer she found her mother's wedding dress, a filmy thing of white muslin with short sleeves and cut low at the neck. With it were wrapped the slippers of white satin brocade, the ones with the tiny heels which always had fascinated her as a child. They were the first she had ever seen then. The slippers had yellowed to a rich cream that had not marred their beauty. The dress was rumpled but an iron would soon fix that. Cissy hummed a little tune under her breath as she held it up for inspection.

# Chapter 5

## *The Golden One*

TERESA de Lerdo sat before the long gilt mirror and smiled at the contours of her figure in the glass as Maria patiently brushed her hair. The late afternoon sun flooding through the windows was captured in the burnished tresses. The fat servant smiled as she watched the light shimmer there. “Oro,” she murmured, and then added softly, “La del Pelo de Oro.” It was a blending of honest admiration and flattery. She was devoted to her mistress and took an almost sensual satisfaction from her beauty, and this found voice frequently in the phrase she knew pleased the girl most. “The Golden One,” she repeated.

Teresa stretched her slender arms, extending one into the beam of light, admiring its tawny color in the glow. “*Por Dios!*” she thought. “It is entrancing,” for she loved beauty, her own most of all.

This was one of the hours she enjoyed best. The scented bath was over, the room heavy with its fragrance, and Maria was busy about the pleasant chores of preparing her for the coming evening. Her wide topaz eyes now smiled at the seductive figure mirrored before her. She stretched a silk-covered leg also into the sunlight admiringly, and smiled as she saw in the mirror that Maria was watching.

“There is no other like it, Teté,” the serving woman said.

“My dress must be gorgeous, Maria, to make up for the enchantment it hides.” Her eyes reflected approval as they still surveyed the trim ankle. “The wench who invented skirts must have had pipestems for legs.”

The old woman made clucking noises in her throat. “You want to drive the men mad, little sweetheart? So much loveliness causes even an old woman to blush.” Teresa rewarded her servant with a smile. She never tired of such compliments. She drew the silken robe more tightly about her, admiring the way it outlined her figure. Truly, she was delectable, and where was the man who could resist her?

Jonathan Kirk! The pleasure faded from her face. What had happened to him? He had been completely at her feet. It had been fun to tantalize him.

And more serious possibilities had occurred to her. He had position and wealth.

She glanced again into the mirror and frowned. Had he forgotten? Impossible! She hoped he would be at the ball. On the Trace he had amused her. There had been a little madness in her heart, too, but for her it was not a new experience. It might easily have passed. But not now. Indifference was a taunt she could not take.

“What is it, Teté?” Maria was quick to sense her mood.

“Nothing.”

“But you were frowning in the mirror. There is only beauty there, little sweetheart. It would bring delight to any lover’s face.” Maria’s eyes puckered slyly. “Is it the young Americano?”

“I haven’t seen him since we arrived here.”

The servant sighed. “He doesn’t deserve his luck but I can arrange it, Teté. It will be very discreet. José can carry a message. . . .”

Teresa shook her head. “I’m no common trollop, to be won so cheaply.”

“Then what is it you want, Teté? Luxury you have. Jewels—silks—you take them for granted.”

Teresa’s words tinkled with mockery. “You know me better than that, Maria. We don’t have many secrets from each other. You know I’ve seen poverty such as you have never suffered.” A boasting note entered her voice. “Silks? I remember their first touch. I’ve come a long way up and I’ll go higher.”

She shrugged off the robe and stared appraisingly at her body. “I was as naked as this and a man wrapped his cloak about me. When I felt the caress of its lining against my skin, I knew I’d never go back to rags again. I never will, Maria. I never will.”

A long way up. . . . She stared with eyes grown moody into a past she wished it were possible to forget. Gone was the luxury of the room, vanished the silken robe, half-forgotten the servant who brushed her hair with patient care and nodded as Teresa’s words evoked picture after picture. She looked back into the single street of a squalid village in central Mexico named Motin, so called because of a mutiny that had occurred there many years before. The year was 1796, only sixteen years ago, but it seemed a lifetime. Dust swirled lazily between twin rows of adobe huts as a horde of half-clad children ran shouting down the street. The barking of half a hundred curs added to the din. They were a swarthy, sun-baked lot, their faces gleaming in the midday heat.

“*La Guera!*” shouted the leader and the pack at his heels took up the derisive cry. “*La Guera! La Guera!*” Ahead of the tumult raced a child of nine, her weedy body weaving to dodge the missiles, a sob choked back in



her throat. A red welt on one white shoulder marked where a stone had struck. Tears had streaked their course on her pinched face, all eyes now in her panic. Pale, sun-bleached hair streamed raggedly behind her.

“*La Guera! La Guera!*” The hated cry dinned closer behind her. “The Pale one! The pale one!”

Not far away, hidden from the town’s dirty face behind a screen of kindly trees, a brook danced. Here the village women knelt, their laundry swimming whitely in the water. They were a sturdy lot, square-built for toil, with only here and there a pair of shoulders still slender with youth. All had been cast in the same mold, eyes as black as their hair, skin dark and cheekbones high.

The pale fugitive, still pursued by the uproar, darted down the bank seeking refuge among these women. A chorus of protest arose from the stream and its angry sound checked the riot. The ragtag mob of urchins retreated in search of other sport.

Chica Dominguez patted the tousled yellow head with a tender hand and the sounds in her throat were gentle. She was sorry about the child. The wan skin and colorless hair had set her apart always. Chica had felt a pleasant sort of pride in the curiosity the pale niña had aroused at first. The unconscious cruelty of children toward one set apart from them had not begun until later. Ana was as different from the others as daylight from dark, her lack of color as much a deformity in their eyes as if she had been a hunchback.

Ana was Chica’s first child. There were plenty of others now. Often she watched the pale one, a baffled look in her dark eyes, kindness in her heart but a slight resentment, too. Why had she been so different?

Once, when Chica was young and before toil had thickened her figure, the wind had whispered softly down the mountain, its breath scented with the fragrance of native flowers that sprinkled the high places still. Chica had been like an untamed nymph and graceful as one then, watching as the young Spaniard came riding up the valley. They both were as young as the season, with the April breeze quick in their veins. That was long ago and she had not seen him since. Even his memory was only a vagrant thing now which sometimes whispered across the years on an April night. Ana was the child of a lush spring breeze. . . .

“*Pobre niña!*” Maria was staring into the past, too, the hairbrush idle in her hand, her chore forgotten.

But Teresa did not notice. She went on.

Ana was four years older now and taller. The pale hair, which she so resented, matched the cream of her skin gleaming where it peeked through the ragged frock. She sat on a rock warm in the sun and watched goats browsing on the hillside below. A bell echoed from the distant village and she started uneasily. It wasn't a friendly sound to her. The solitude of the mountain was her refuge. Here there were no taunts. The goats were friendly, color-blind perhaps, for they appeared not to notice her yellow hair. She liked being a goatherd.

Pancho saw the goats first. He swayed with the burro's gait, his eyes wandering idly over the flock until they came to rest upon the figure of the girl, motionless on her rock. He knew *la Guera* well. She was only three years younger than he. He had thrown rocks at the strange one but that had ended now. There had come a time when the girl, grown strong, had turned on her tormentors. No match for the pack in full cry at her heels, she had grown cunning like a beast, stalking her enemies singly. Sometimes she had lain motionless for hours until one wandered unwarily into her ambush. Her revenge was merciless. She fought with tooth and claw and the victims of her wrath bore the marks of her fury for days. This set her more apart than ever but it ended some of the torment. There came a time when she no longer fled from the pack. Fear of her revenge forced a truce but won her no friends.

The sun burnishing the still figure on the hillside attracted Pancho's interest. He did not think her pretty. She had too long been an object of derision for him to question a verdict so well established. He only noticed the way her skin gleamed in the light. Winter was gone. Once more the blood coursed warm in his veins. And she was a girl.

His smile was amiable as he slid from the burro and ambled toward her. She did not run. She had no fear of him but she was alert, her muscles poised, like some shy creature startled in its haunt. Pancho's smile surprised her but did not soften her guard. Perhaps the new cloak of friendliness he wore did not fit well and his thoughts peeped through. "It is only *la Guera*," he was thinking. "What does it matter?"

"The sun is pretty on your legs," he said, for want of a better start. He was not even sure he really thought so. "And the sun is bright in your hair. It shines like the gold Madonna on the church altar."

The tensed girl relaxed. She had never heard anyone talk like this. "Like the gold of the Madonna!" That pleased her. Except for the sunset behind the mountains the Madonna was the prettiest thing she knew.

Then Pancho touched her. His voice was still tender but his hands were rough and she fought fiercely, angered by her momentary softness. She thought she understood. His tender words had been only a trap to lure her

within reach, just as she had so often waited patiently in a covert until an unwary victim passed. She kicked and scratched.

It was only after she realized the difference in her antagonist's attack that his intention dawned upon her. He did not hit back. His thick arms wrapped about her, he shielded his face from her blows and tried to bear her down with his weight. Her fury increased. Her fingers twined in his thick black hair and tugged at it in a frenzy as she felt his weight grow heavy. She fought silently. It did not occur to her to scream. There was no one to hear.

She raked his face furiously, her fingernails tracing red trails in his flesh. Momentarily he relaxed his grip, and as she writhed away her hand fell upon a rock. When he reached for her again she brought it down against his head with all her strength. The blow echoed sharply in the thin air and Pancho grunted. Again his hold loosened and this time she wriggled free, leaving her torn garment clutched in his outstretched hand. Without a backward glance she sped down the mountain. Only the goats watched her go, raising their heads in curious solemnity as her bare limbs flashed past, golden in the sun.

Teresa stretched with feline grace. Her eyes kindled from their somberness in appreciation of her reflection.

"You'd better put your robe back on," Maria scolded. "Tsk-tsk-tsk—a child running naked in the mountains."

"I was no longer a child."

Maria chuckled throatily. "All the more reason you needed something to cover you. What happened to Pancho? Was he dead?"

"I never knew. I wondered, sometimes, but I had no regret." Teresa continued with her story.

Ana was not bothered by the loss of her dress until evening. She lay under the trees while the sun was warm. From time to time her wary eyes watched the hill above, but Pancho did not move. She thought of returning for her dress but feared a trap. Perhaps that was his plan, to grab her when she came slipping back for her garment. Ana thought of that because it was the sort of trick she might have planned herself. She was very cunning and patient in those days. The wind lost its friendliness after sunset. She decided to slip back to the village. She was seldom seen on these nocturnal visits; she had the quiet of a wild thing from her years alone on the mountain.

She saw the campfire from afar and set her course by it. Travel wasn't heavy along the road which wound through the little valley. The occasional

travelers who choked in its white dust had long been objects of interest for her. Motin offered no accommodations for itinerants and they camped along the road wherever night found them. They were a strange breed to her, these men who rode horses, with silver spurs bright at their heels. Occasionally there were grandees among them. One had worn a velvet cloak with scarlet lining. Ana had never spoken to any of them but, unseen, had lingered in the shadows, her eyes drinking in each detail. It had never occurred to her to make her presence known, for she had remained too long an outcast. But she came to look forward to these visits and often had haunted a party through the waning hours of its day's journey. Then, when night masked her movements, she would creep close and feed her curiosity.

Unmindful of the evening chill now, she slipped cautiously toward the fire. There were four men in the party and one of them wore a velvet cloak. But this was not the reason her eyes grew round and her lips were parted in astonishment. It wasn't the man's cloak that fascinated her, but his hair, which was pale like her own. It amazed her that this should be so. She had come to accept her strange coloring as a deformity peculiar to herself. And, strangest of all, his swarthy companions seemed to find nothing queer in his appearance. He was evidently the master and they the servants.

She was entranced. Her eyes searched out each detail of his features. It was as if she saw herself in a mirror for the first time. He wore a short beard, trimmed closely, and it, too, was blond. She studied the animation of his face in the firelight. One of his servants was preparing the meal over a heap of coals raked from the fire. Its odor was tantalizing. Another vanished into the night to search for wood, while the third was busy about the horses. These other men were nothing but shadows to the watching girl. She had eyes only for the leader with the pale hair.

In the excitement of discovering that here was another being like herself Ana crept closer to the blaze, her caution dulled by interest. The servant who had been gathering fuel was returning to the camp, his arms loaded, when he saw her crouched just outside the circle of its light, silhouetted clearly against the flames.

He abandoned his burden and, matching her own wariness, approached silently from the darkness. Her first warning was when his arms closed on her and his bellow, almost at her ear, brought his companions running. She struggled briefly but they were too many for her. And, surprisingly, she was no longer afraid as she stood in the firelight before the man whose hair was the color of her own. Here he was master and he was no enemy. They were two alike; it was the rest of the world that differed.

Don Fernando stared in astonishment at the figure before him. The flames gilded her bare limbs; her hair was almost white. She had the wide

eyes of a child but a hint of the beauty to come already was budding in her slight body.

He glanced quickly at his men. Her fair coloring marked her as from his own class. Loosing the chain at his throat, he draped his velvet cloak about her.

She smiled at him, liking the caress of the lining against her skin. She was familiar only with the feel of cotton and wool. Softly she rubbed its smoothness against her, savoring the touch of it.

“Who are you, child? What are you doing here?” Don Fernando demanded.

“I am Ana,” she replied simply, “and I have run away.”

And that was all she would tell him in spite of his many questions. What else was there to say? Her father? She had never heard his name. Or should she say that she was *la Guera* from Motin where her pale body had known little but bruises. Or that she had left Pancho unconscious on a mountainside, her torn dress still clutched in his rough hands? No, just that she was Ana.

She met a man without fear for the first time. Her smile was ready and her amber eyes lost their haunted look. What did it matter if she was the Pale One? She was no longer alone.

Gradually Don Fernando grew less paternal. His manner still was gentle, his laughter frequent. His eyes gleamed in the firelight.

“I will take you home,” he had offered.

“I have no home,” was her reply. “But I will go with you in search of it, if you like.”

Such answers planted thoughts in his head, thoughts which crowded out his first generous impulses. He was never quite sure, either then or later, whether her answers were given in ignorance or invitation. When quiet came to the camp, she was snuggled in his couch, his blanket wrapped warmly about her. She didn't sleep. Her wide eyes stared at the stars sprinkling the sky. Her lips were parted in a smile.

“Hold still, Teté,” Maria interrupted the tale. “The curling irons are ready.”

Teresa straightened up but she didn't stop talking. Maria knew this part of the story for herself but she listened just as eagerly.

In Mexico City Ana became a complication. Don Fernando had grown fond of her. But the maintenance of two establishments was a burden. He had, he felt, set himself too rich a standard when selecting the girl's quarters. Then he had been in the first flush of his ardor and nothing had been too

costly. Also the necessity of deceiving his wife palled on him and he found as time went by that he made fewer and fewer excuses for leaving his own fireside. He was not bothered by moral scruples. He knew that such establishments as the secluded little house where Ana awaited him were the rule rather than the exception among men of his class. He simply grudged the necessary expenditure of vigor and money.

Ana was no longer the savage *la Guera* who had wandered half-clad over the mountains. Her body was growing soft with luxury, familiar with the silks and satins it craved. Her hair, no longer sun-bleached, had ripened to rich gold, and Maria, her maid, who brushed it endlessly, had taught her that it was beautiful.

“La del Pelo de Oro” was Maria’s invention too. Ana loved the name and prompted Don Fernando to use it.

Twice a week she rode out in a coach. She had no place to go, no acquaintances at all except Don Fernando and Maria, but she liked to watch the life of the city around her. And she liked, too, to watch the other women who passed in their coaches. The conviction of her own beauty was growing in her and she basked in it, warming harsh memories in its radiance. At first it had seemed almost beyond belief. She had been too long the poor *la Guera* to realize how voluptuous she might become. It needed the smiles she increasingly encountered to give her assurance. And as her confidence mounted she knew unhappiness again. Don Fernando’s visits were too infrequent and Maria’s open admiration did not suffice. She liked the small glimpses of the world caught fleetingly through her carriage window and longed to be a part of it.

There was one man she passed frequently, his coach drawn by two splendid black horses. He seemed to know everyone. He was forever bowing, flashing his debonair smile at passing acquaintances. He was aware of her, too, she knew, because she saw him turn his head to stare after her. She began to watch for those black horses, and there came a day when she answered his bow with a smile. Don Fernando had been absent for two weeks. She was even more lonely when driving in the carriage, a spectator of the gay scene, not a part of it. And so she had smiled and, riding on, felt warmer for it as though, somehow, she had participated in the life about her.

The next day Maria had bustled into the garden, her black eyes snapping with excitement, a card in her fat paw.

“A gentleman!” There was awe in her whisper. “A gentleman in a carriage. He told me to bring you this.”

Ana gazed blankly at the bit of pasteboard. She had never seen a visiting card before and she could not read then. "Who can it be?" she asked. "What does he want of me?"

She had received him there in the garden, still ignorant of his identity and unaware that the door to her future was swinging wide. It was the man who rode behind the black horses.

"Don Miguel Salazar," he introduced himself, bowing.

Don Miguel thoroughly understood the nature of this establishment. There were few, if any, illusions in his life. But the beauty of the girl, still only a child, intoxicated him. He had inquired about her as soon as he had marked her solitary drives. At first baffled by his inability to find anyone who knew her, later he was encouraged by this fact. Her patron evidently was a man of such discretion that he preferred to remain unknown. To Don Miguel this meant opportunity. It meant a clear field and no unexpected complications.

This was the first of several calls. Starting with admiring circumspection, Don Miguel traveled the road to temptation swiftly, without restraint. His time was well chosen. Don Fernando's absence continued and Ana was almost as alone as in the days when she had watched the goats browsing on the mountain behind Motin. Miguel's visits satisfied her growing vanity, but it was the pictures he painted of the gay outside world, of which she might so easily become a part, that influenced her in the end.

Don Fernando returned one day after his prolonged absence to find the door locked and the house empty. Even Maria had flown. He was a philosopher about it. After the first surge of chagrin he felt mainly relief. His days of subterfuge and debt were ended.

Maria was lighting the candles. There was no further time for speculation on the years spent with Don Miguel which had changed Ana Dominguez, a wide-eyed child, into exotic Teresa de Lerdo. Measured in time the distance wasn't so great, but to the Golden One the path seemed long and the wild little *la Guera* of Motin very remote.

"You will wear the pale lemon dress, Teté, with the topaz stones that match your eyes?" Maria's voice recalled her to the present. Teresa remembered her hostess was called the Yellow Duchess, but she had no such dress as this one, of that Teresa was sure. Nor would she be able to wear it so well. She was not deterred by any compunction. Her consideration was purely a personal one. No woman should preen herself with the thought that she had copied her color.

“Not tonight,” she ordered. “I’ll wear the turquoise blue. It has more life.”

Maria hesitated. “It is considered a bold color in this country, Teté. And no sleeves. It would startle these people, eh?”

“They’ll be startled whatever I wear,” her mistress replied shrewdly. “If it’s a success, every woman present will want to take it away from me.”

“But the men, Teté?” the servant protested. “How about them?”

Teresa laughed. “They will wish the women had their way.”

It was a sheer thing of gossamer silk and fashioned with a short train. The bodice was clasped together with pearl brooches. Maria had dressed her hair with short full curls over the forehead and light ringlets at the neck. The servant stood on a chair to adjust the bandeau of pearls about her head, holding a bird-of-paradise plume in place.

Teresa’s eyes were approving and confident as she surveyed the effect. “My pearl earrings,” she commanded. She thought pearls had a chaste look. They were her stone for tonight.

Miguel was waiting when she was ready at last, and appraised her costume with obvious approval. No flawless detail escaped him. “Always beautiful,” he murmured as he bent to kiss her hand. “You are perfection, my dear.”

As she descended the stairs on his arm Teresa was thinking not of Miguel, but of a young man from Virginia with red hair. Her restless eyes were searching the arriving guests and her mind was busy with plans for the evening.



# Chapter 6

## *A Challenge*

THE night of the ball Colonel Sargent insisted on lending Jonathan the calash, a handsome closed carriage recently arrived from New Orleans. "We will go in the coach," Mrs. Sargent had assured him. "We want you to make the proper impression on your young lady." True to her promise she had earlier procured him an invitation to the ball addressed to Miss Cecily Marsten. The calash was the first carriage of its kind in Natchez, and Gabe sat proudly on the box, his smile almost as illuminating as the candles in its square brass lamps.

Johnny Durst was waiting at the flatboat to see them off. Jonathan thought the young Texan displayed an almost proprietary interest in Cecily. He called her Cissy and seemed to be on terms of easy friendship with her. He had brought her a bouquet of wild flowers for the occasion—blue gentians mixed with a small white flower, fragrant but unidentified, which grew profusely in the woods at this time of year.

"Where on earth did you find them?" asked Jonathan in surprise.

"I picked 'em myself," declared Durst with a laugh. "This is a very special occasion and I wanted Cissy to be the belle of the ball."

"They're beautiful," Cecily assured him. "And just what I needed with my dress."

She was a far different picture from the gloomy vision which had worried Jonathan when he set out that evening. In his foreboding he had even thought of Cecily in an artless dimity frock, overwhelmed by the splendor of the other women and crushed with the realization of it. "It is my fault," he had thought. "I got her into this." He had started with a determination to protect her from any such experience. But remembering her pride, which he liked, he felt he had only a dismal hope of success.

Then he had seen her, a radiant figure, whose lithe young body was charmingly molded in the soft material of the clinging white dress. Its short sleeves and low neck added to its festive look. Her brown hair was parted in the middle, with curls soft at her temples, and her eyes were dancing.

“Why,” thought Jonathan, “we might be back at Redfields and she one of my own cousins come for the holidays!” All his uncertainty fled in that instant.

“Woman,” observed her father admiringly, “thou art *animal disputans*, but contentious or not, you’re lovely to behold.”

Gayly she pirouetted for his admiration. “Be a dear and get me my slipper bag, Cris,” she asked, “while I’m reminding Papa that we haven’t left civilization behind us yet.”

“You ought to see her slippers,” declared her brother proudly. “They’ve got tiny little heels on them, just like that.” He held up a thumb and forefinger to illustrate their size.

“Let me see,” Johnny Durst urged.

She Opened the bag and exhibited the satin slippers.

The Texan whistled softly. “I declare!” he observed. “I wouldn’t trust myself on such teeny little things.” And then turning to Jonathan he asked, “Did you ever see heels on women’s shoes before?”

“Not such pretty ones,” Jonathan assured him.

The mahogany chest had yielded also a mantle of white bombazine lined in pale blue, another cherished garment of her mother’s. Jonathan was proud as he draped it about her shoulders.

They all watched the departure from the deck. Gabe had the calash drawn up as near to the shore as he dared and Jonathan swept Cecily up into his arms and carried her to the carriage, amid much laughter and raillery.

“I wonder he let you come at all, Gabe,” called Durst. “I’m surprised he doesn’t tote her all the way. I’ve never been to a ball, but if that’s how they start I think I’ll have to mend my ways.”

Jonathan’s pride in Cecily continued to grow after they arrived at the ball. She more than held her own, he thought, with the gay throng that crowded Concord. In fact, she was one of the few carrying a bouquet and he wished that it had been his forethought which had provided it. The men were in velvet and broadcloth, their ruffled linen matching their white hose and buckles twinkling on their shoes. Only a few wore swords. The older men had their hair powdered and a few still wore wigs. Lieutenant Magee, who met them just inside the door, wore his hair in the new short style which still looked strange.

The house was ablaze with light. Two crystal chandeliers hung in the drawing room, their prisms dancing in the glow of many candles. From the wide lintels over the doors gleamed rows of tapers. The paneled walls reflected this mellow light. Cecily was breathless at the scene, and Jonathan could remember nothing in Virginia to surpass it.

Don Stephen Minor and his wife were receiving their guests in the hall. She wore a clinging dress of saffron silk, and a gold band about her head secured a plume of the same color. Jonathan and Cecily were just nearing the head of the line when he caught his breath. There was Teresa descending the stairs, beside Don Miguel, her soft lips smiling, her pearls glowing, warm with the tint of her skin. Cecily, glancing up, saw her too and noted the perfection of her costume. The entrance had been well timed. There was an instant's lull in the conversation. Jonathan was thankful to be past the receiving line before Teresa arrived there. It might have been awkward. He guided Cecily into the ballroom.

When Teresa saw Jonathan's red head below, her first feeling of exultation was followed by one of curiosity not unmixed with anger. She felt no jealousy of the girl on his arm. She had too much confidence for that. Her smile did not change and only by a brief narrowing of her eyes did her expression alter. Don Miguel saw the young man too and was alert to note how she took it. In this he was disappointed. He saw nothing.

Jonathan watched Teresa guardedly whenever opportunity presented and did not fail to observe her popularity. After her first dance with Don Miguel she was surrounded by admirers. He tried to tell himself he had no interest in her, but he knew better. His resentment was still very real, but her beauty affected him as it had before.

So well did he pretend indifference that it had an effect upon Teresa. At first she was assured. "Give him time," she thought. "He will come to me and then I'll teach him a lesson." But as the evening wore on and still he did not come she grew first impatient and then angry. More and more she found herself studying him from the corner of her eye. Through her mind raced many plans, each in turn abandoned. He must not guess her interest. It must be more subtle than that, but her determination was growing.

Cecily proved popular too. Hers wasn't a dazzling beauty but she had her own straightforward charm. As she danced away with others it gave Jonathan more opportunity for moody reflection. On one of these occasions he found himself beside Don Bernardo Gutierrez who greeted him warmly. It was the Spaniard who informed him of Teresa's nearing departure.

"I have business in New Orleans," he explained. "We will leave in two more days."

Jonathan told himself that he was glad. Once gone, she would be easier to forget, he tried to assure himself, even while he realized her memory couldn't be thrust aside so easily. Two more days and he would never see her again. It seemed unthinkable.

Cecily and Jonathan had made one corner of the ballroom their trysting place and here they met after each dance which they did not share. They

returned there now. Her cheeks were flushed, her lips red and smiling. "Why," thought he, "didn't I meet a girl like this before I ever saw Teresa?" He liked the sound of her laughter, her vibrant animation, so responsive to the excitement of the ball, and, most of all, the candor of her clear gaze and her utter lack of guile. There would be no dissembling, small chance for misunderstanding. What a contrast to Teresa's duplicity! One day they had parted gaily, the next she had sent him away without explanation. Well, two more days and she'd be gone. He was well rid of her.

And then Teresa stopped by his side.

He recognized her perfume first. It brought back the memory of that day by the coach when he had spilt her lingerie and they had joined laughter so merrily. He fought back an impulse to turn, and tried to concentrate on his conversation with Cecily. But all the time the windows of his mind were open to this other presence and he found himself straining for the sound of her voice.

The violins struck a chord. It was time to dance again. This probably was the last time he would be close enough to Teresa to speak, and it was slipping by.

Lieutenant Magee, resplendent in his dress uniform, appeared through the crowd in search of Cecily. "Miss Marsten promised me a dance," he said, "and I've come to claim it."

Early in the evening Teresa had marked the corner that Cecily and Jonathan used as meeting place. Her glance had returned to it time and again. At first she wondered at him, later at herself. Earlier she was able to dismiss him from her mind at times. As the evening progressed he became an obsession, and her temper wore thin. "Now he will come to me," she assured herself at the conclusion of each dance, until as the evening lengthened she realized with heavy conviction that this hope was false. Outwardly she was serene, though the smoldering within kindled a blaze behind her sultry eyes. Her laughter grew more gay. No one should guess.

She had no plan in mind when she deliberately stopped beside him. It was only to punish him, she told herself. He should watch her bask in the admiration of other men, hear her carefree laughter and, watching, see that she had forgotten him. But she chastened only herself as far as she could tell. He was there so close that she might touch him but his back was turned and there was no hint that he was aware of her, even now. That was torment to a patience long since frayed and she determined that he should ignore her no longer.

Jonathan watched Cecily move away with Magee. In another moment Teresa would be gone, dancing away with some new partner, stepping out of

his life, too. He was listening to her again, just a phrase. She had enjoyed the dance; now someone else had approached.

“May I have the honor, Miss de Lerdo?” a new voice asked. “I believe this is our dance.”

“But there must be some mistake.” Teresa sounded regretful. She was standing so close he might have touched her, her voice distinct against the swelling music. “Yours is the next dance. I have this one promised to Mr. Jonathan Kirk.”

For an incredulous moment Jonathan doubted his own ears.

“No doubt he is looking for me,” Teresa continued in a clear voice. “If you see Mr. Kirk, will you tell him I am waiting here?”

There could no longer be doubt. Jonathan turned eagerly, all his anger forgotten.

“Teresa,” he said.

She smiled. “So you haven’t forgotten me?” she murmured. “I am very angry with you, Jontee. You don’t deserve the dance I saved for you.”

“I thought it was you who had forgotten,” he replied, and then, remembering, added, “Why did you send me away when I came to call? Why were you angry? What had I done?” The questions that had been troubling him came spilling out.

Teresa’s eyes widened. “Send you away?” she repeated in surprise. “When was this? Who gave you such a message?”

“The servant who hid during the fight with the bandits, you remember. It was he.”

“Luiz?” She was beginning to understand.

They hadn’t yet taken their place among the dancers. Teresa, a guest in the house, was familiar with its arrangement. The French doors behind them opened onto an upper gallery. She pressed her companion’s arm. “Come this way,” she urged. “There are some things which need explaining.”

They had the place to themselves. She made no further effort to conceal her anger.

“When was this?” she demanded.

“The morning after we arrived here. It was Luiz who gave me the message.” Jonathan recalled the words he had painfully rehearsed so many times. “He said, ‘I am to tell you she is not at home any time the señor calls.’”

The hand on his arm trembled. Teresa fought back her anger. Luiz was only the messenger. She knew very well who had tricked her and why. She convinced herself that her affair with this boy had been quite innocent. Nothing would have come of it, nothing. Her reasoning lacked logic but her willful anger was very real.

“And you believed him?” she finally replied. “Didn’t that message seem strange, coming from me?” Her voice, harsh at first, smoothed itself into softness at the end.

“I didn’t know what to think,” he confessed.

“But Luiz isn’t my servant, Jontee. Reflect. Who is his master?”

“Salazar?”

“Don Miguel,” she affirmed, and again her voice grew sharp. “We were tricked, Jontee.”

“But why?” He was baffled. “What has he against me? Why should he want to keep us apart?”

She pondered her answer.

Before she had been careful to describe Salazar as her guardian, and it had not occurred to Jonathan to question her story. She had thought it droll when Miguel had explained the necessity for the deception while on this trip.

“Otherwise many doors would be closed to us and that would jeopardize Gutierrez’ mission,” Salazar had concluded.

She had puffed out her cheeks and stroked an imaginary beard as she strutted the floor in imitation of Don Bernardo’s pompous manner. “We must make an honest woman of this pullet, if she’s to travel with His Excellency, the Minister to the United States, eh, Don Miguel?”

“I like you better as the wench you are.” He had laughed.

She had enjoyed the role of ward but now, in resentment at Miguel, she was tempted to abandon it. One cautious thought restrained her. She was not quite sure of Jonathan yet. She had no doubt of his infatuation, but would it survive the stunning knowledge that she was not what she seemed? Shrewdly she weighed her own feelings, too. Until she was more certain of his response and of her own desires, she was unwilling to risk revealing too much. Her anger did not blind her to Miguel’s liberality. She would proceed with care.

“He has been like a father to me,” she said, “so kind and generous.” They were standing at the rail, her shoulder warm against him. “But he has been very strict, too. He flies into a temper if he thinks a man so much as looks at me. Then he is terrifying.” Her candor seemed very innocent.

“But that’s unreasonable,” he protested. “Surely he expects you to fall in love and marry, like other girls.”

“In my country a girl has no choice. I will be expected to marry the man Don Miguel selects.” She sounded plaintive. “He would be enraged if I dared to disobey him.”

“You’re in America now.” Impatience made him brusque. “Here it’s different. When I fall in love with a girl, not all the guardians in the world

will be able to keep us apart.”

“Perhaps Don Miguel realizes that, Jontee,” she responded softly. She was standing very close. “It is the way I thought you would be. Every girl hopes she will be loved like that, when the time comes.

“Only remember this, Jontee,” she continued. “Never accept a message from me unless it is delivered by one of my own servants. Maria you remember. The other is José. You will know him because of his crossed eyes. These two I trust and no others.”

“I will always remember, Teresa,” he replied. And then because of the pledge implied in her words, because of her perfume which was fragrant about him, because of her nearness and of all the doubts now swept away, he took her in his arms.

“Teresa,” he murmured huskily.

“Jontee,” she whispered.

He kissed her.

Luiz, resplendent in Don Miguel’s purple livery, was assisting with the service at the punch bowl. He wasn’t at his best in times of peril, and traveling upset him. His quaking bulk wasn’t fashioned for rough trails. This was different. He flaunted the magnificence of his velvet coat and surveyed his fat legs surreptitiously in the mirror, the white stockings stretched tightly over his bulging calves. None of your skinny legs for him. It took a man to fill stockings properly, with never a wrinkle. He enjoyed mingling with the guests, retrieving the empty glasses, moving with the slow pomposity which he fancied was dignified. And there was no telling what an alert fellow might hear on such occasions. Gentlemen often had the careless habit of ignoring servants when they talked. He had pasted together morsels of conversation before now. Sometimes they were merely titillating bits of gossip, sometimes they had proved worth retelling—at a price.

Luiz was in the drawing room collecting empty glasses on his tray when Teresa and Jonathan walked out the door. His fat face betrayed no expression but his step quickened imperceptibly. This was one of the better scraps of knowledge, worthy of reward if used promptly.

Don Miguel wasn’t dancing. Luiz’ alert eyes made sure of that before he quit the room. He wasn’t in the hall. Luiz made it his business to visit the dining room where some of the gentlemen were enjoying a potion more vigorous than punch. He waited until his master had finished the story he was telling. During the laughter which followed Salazar glanced at the servant with raised brows. Luiz barely nodded. The motion was lost in his fat chins.

Don Miguel excused himself and, once outside, listened attentively to the quick muttering of his lackey.

Absorbed in each other, neither Jonathan nor Teresa heard the soft opening of the door behind them.

Don Miguel seized her by the shoulder, jerking her away so roughly that a pearl brooch at her bodice was torn loose. Almost with the same movement, and before Jonathan realized what was happening, Salazar slapped him across the cheek.

The young Virginian's response was instantaneous. His fist lashed out savagely and cracked against the Spaniard's jaw. It was a short blow but all the power of his body was behind it. It sent Salazar spinning against the railing. He struck it heavily with his shoulder and then slumped to the floor, dazed but not unconscious.

"You see, Teresa," he snarled: "he even fights like a savage. I challenge him to a duel and he uses his fists like a *pelado*."

Jonathan was standing astride the fallen man, his fists ready, his anger flaming. The words robbed him of his confidence. He had the shamed feeling that his quick rage had made him look foolish before Teresa. That irritated him.

He stepped back, retrieving what he could of his dignity. "I'll be glad to meet you, sir," he retorted stiffly. "Any time, any place."

Don Miguel had risen. His voice was coldly formal. He might have been exchanging remarks about the weather as he replied, "Name your seconds. I like my satisfaction to be prompt."

Jonathan thought swiftly. "Lieutenant Magee and Mr. John Durst will act for me. They both can be found at the Kentucky Tavern."

"They may expect a call tonight." And then turning to Teresa, Salazar offered her his arm. "Come, my dear," he said. The words were polite but the tone was mocking.

Teresa hesitated, then she took his arm, but as she stepped through the door she glanced anxiously back at Jonathan.



# Chapter 7

## *Don Miguel Lifts a Curtain*

JONATHAN lingered briefly on the gallery. His emotions were confused. Anger toward Salazar was mingled with exultation over the discovery that Teresa loved him. The first flush of his rage over, he wanted very much to behave punctiliously. There were rules of conduct provided for this sort of thing. He must inform his seconds, of course. Teresa's name must not be mentioned in connection with the affair. There was Cecily Marsten to think of, too. She should not guess what had happened. It had been a happy evening for her and nothing should mar it. He waited until these things were ordered in his mind and was surprised when he re-entered the room to discover how short the time had been. Although so much had happened, the dance was just ending. Cecily and Magee were headed toward him, and she was laughing at some remark. Don Bernardo Gutierrez had fallen into step beside them.

"Will you excuse us, Cecily?" Jonathan tried to make his voice sound matter of fact. "I have a message for Lieutenant Magee. I know we're leaving you in good hands."

Don Bernardo acknowledged this with one of his courtly bows. "I am honored," he said.

Cecily's brow was puckered as she looked after them, but she was smiling again as she turned to Don Bernardo. Jonathan, glancing hastily back, was confident that she suspected nothing.

"What's all the mystery about?" Magee inquired as the young Virginian took the precaution to draw his friend to a spot where they would not be overheard.

"I want to ask you to act for me." Jonathan put it formally.

Magee didn't grasp his meaning at first. "You want me to what?"

"I'm going to fight a duel. I want you to be one of my seconds."

The lieutenant whistled softly. "So you're as impetuous as ever, eh?" Then he held out his hand and his smile was quick. "Of course, Jonty, I'll be glad to assist you in any way. Whom do we fight and when?"

"Miguel Salazar."

Magee frowned. "This is awkward," he muttered.

Jonathan was quick to take exception to the remark. "Of course, if you'd rather not . . ." he began.

He was stopped by the lieutenant's ready smile and a friendly hand on his shoulder. "What in God's name are you so touchy about? The next thing I know you'll be wanting to fight me. I've told you I'd be happy to be of service."

"You didn't seem to like the idea when I told you who it was," Jonathan remarked.

"I didn't," was the candid reply. "Not because of Salazar, but because of Don Bernardo Gutierrez. He and I see eye to eye. We have very much the same dream and, together, I hope we may make it come true. I'd hate to have anything prevent our reaching an understanding. I don't know just where Salazar fits into the picture.

"I can't see how this should be affected by an affair of honor," he continued. "And it would make no difference if it did. A man stands by his friends, Jonty, and I'd resent it if you hadn't asked me."

Jonathan explained that he had named Johnny Durst as a second, also, and that the gentlemen acting for Salazar would call at the Kentucky Tavern that very night.

"The cause of this quarrel is none of my affair," said the lieutenant before they parted. "But it's necessary that I know how you feel. Sometimes these affairs can be arranged amicably. I doubt—" a smile warmed his lips—"your willingness to apologize, but how would you feel about accepting an honorable amend? Is this a duel of convention or are you out for blood?"

"I'll accept no apology." The Virginian's face was flushed.

"All right then, we'll have his blood," Magee agreed. "I'll have to get back to the tavern to meet Salazar's seconds anyway, so I'll get in touch with Johnny Durst. You have Miss Marsten to think of."

While Jonathan was presenting his friend's excuses to Cecily, the officer was paying his farewell compliments to his hostess. The hour was late, and some of the guests already were departing, but Jonathan asked for one more dance. It was a quadrille and he kept his mind upon the figures with an effort. He congratulated himself that he was doing very well until, homeward bound in the calash, Cecily turned to him and inquired, "What's wrong, Jonty?" Unconsciously she used the nickname employed by his friends.

"Wrong?" He did not have to dissemble; his surprise was genuine. How could she have sensed his inner turmoil? "Why, not a thing." He added, lamely, "Why do you ask?"

“Why were you in such a hurry to see Lieutenant Magee?” she asked. “Why did he leave immediately? Why have you been worrying, with that fixed grin on your face for the last half hour? Sometimes men are so silly. They treat girls as if they didn’t have a lick of sense.”

“I’m sorry if my smile has vexed you, Miss Marsten.” He grew formal in his irritation.

“It hasn’t annoyed me, Mr. Kirk.” She matched his formality. “If you’re trying to be strong and silent, go right ahead. If it amuses you to think you’re fooling me, I’ll pretend that I haven’t noticed a thing.”

Their progress was silent for some time after that. At first Jonathan was provoked by her remarks, then as he realized their justice, he was only regretful that his poor dissembling had failed to deceive her. “I’m sorry, Cissy,” he said. “Something did happen, but it had nothing to do with us and I hoped you wouldn’t know. I didn’t want your evening to be spoiled.”

“How could it bother me then?” was her reply.

Jonathan realized ruefully that this was a very hard girl to mislead. “Oh, let’s forget it, shall we?”

She appeared to dismiss the subject and he thought she had forgotten it completely until it came time to say good night. Once more he carried her over the muddy bank. “With Teresa in my arms like this,” he thought, “what an experience it would be!” He deposited Cecily gently on the gangplank.

“It’s been a wonderful evening,” he assured her.

“It was marvelous,” she replied. “Just like old times in Tennessee.” And then she added, “I hope it isn’t anything serious, Jonty.” The pressure of her hand was firm as she said good night.

Instead of returning to Gloucester, Jonathan ordered Gabe to drive him to the Kentucky Tavern. He was surprised upon entering to encounter Don Bernardo Gutierrez just descending the stairs. He had been on a cordial footing with the distinguished Spaniard and was surprised when, in response to his friendly greeting, Don Bernardo only bowed formally. The explanation wasn’t long in coming. Johnny Durst was waiting with Magee in the latter’s room.

“Who do you suppose is Salazar’s principal second?” Durst demanded. “The ambassador himself, Don Bernardo.”

Jonathan glanced quickly at Magee. “Will this complicate things for you?”

The lieutenant shrugged. “I think not. It was to be expected. I wouldn’t give a damn for a man who didn’t stand up for his friends.”

Magee was perturbed over the conditions of the duel, although he was making an effort not to show it. “How good are you with pistols, Jonty?” he

inquired. “Salazar doesn’t want this to be an ordinary bloodletting. I think he’d like to have your heart served on a platter.”

“Pistols suit me,” the Virginian replied. “Whatever you arrange will be satisfactory.”

“But have you had experience with a pistol?” the lieutenant persisted. “After all, I’m your second. Your interests are in my hands now.”

Jonathan confessed that he was entirely unfamiliar with the weapon. He was more than ordinarily adept with a rifle, but there had been no occasion for him to use a pistol.

Magee outlined the arrangements as insisted upon by Salazar. Don Stephen Minor was the Spaniards other second, but he had been unable to accompany Gutierrez on his call because all his guests had not yet departed.

“When you pick a quarrel, you pick a good one,” Durst commented. “Gutierrez and Minor for seconds! We’re certainly going to have the bigwigs with us in the morning.”

The accustomed dueling ground was located on a sand bar across the river, safe from interruption. The time set was dawn, now only a few hours distant. In view of the serious nature of the satisfaction demanded, Magee had refused to accept the terms until he had consulted his principal.

“I have a carriage waiting,” said Jonathan. “You’d better go on out and tell them everything’s arranged. I’ll try to get some sleep.”

Magee vetoed this plan. “Durst will ride to Concord,” he said. “I’m staying here with you and there isn’t going to be any sleep. I’ve ordered coffee. You probably wouldn’t close your eyes anyway,” he explained, “and the time is short for what we have to do.”

No sooner had Durst left than the lieutenant brought out a case of dueling pistols from a chest beneath the bed. “First,” he declared grimly, “you’re going to learn to shoot a pistol. This is going to be a duel, not a murder. Fortunately you understand firearms—that will be a help—but you must remember that a pistol isn’t a rifle. There’s a trick to it.”

Jonathan spent an hour under his friend’s tutelage, clicking the trigger of an empty weapon.

“Draw it up slowly,” Magee kept repeating. “You must remember. That’s what worries me most about you, Jonty. You’re too impulsive. A man who shoots fast in a duel is lost. If you can just control that hot head of yours, the battle is half won. Remember, too, that it’s the tendency of the weapon to shoot high. It kicks up. Once you draw your bead, hold our breath and count three, then squeeze—so—like shooting squirrels with a rifle. A quick shot is a jerky shot, and that’s always high.”

Jonathan made another effort.

“You aren’t holding your breath,” Magee scolded. “I tell you a dueling pistol is a jerky weapon. Hold your breath if you want to shoot straight.”

Jonathan tried again and again before Magee finally permitted him to stop.

“That’ll have to do. You’re improving,” he conceded. “We’ll practice again after a while. If you can just remember to take your time, everything will be all right.”

By this time Durst had returned. Gabe was ordered to drive the calash home and to come back on horseback bringing his master’s best black suit in one of the Natchez trunks. Magee was meticulous in his instructions about the desired wardrobe. There was no time for the Virginian to give the matter his personal attention, and it was important that he be arrayed in his best.

“But black,” the lieutenant emphasized. “It must be black.”

Jonathan wrote three letters to leave with Magee, in the event that the affair should have an unhappy conclusion. One was to his family at Redfields and addressed to his father, but he found on rereading it that its message was aimed mainly to his mother. The second was to Colonel Sargent, expressing his gratitude for the many favors shown him and requesting that the planter undertake the responsibility of seeing that Gabe got safely back to Virginia. In this he made disposition of his horses, asking that one be given to each of his seconds. The third letter took much longer to write. It was to Teresa.

Don Miguel Salazar flung open the door and stalked angrily into Teresa’s room. She was already in bed but not asleep.

“Well, Teresa?” he demanded.

“Well,” she retorted. Her eyes were sullen.

He took his stand in front of the open fire, his hands behind him, with the air of a man struggling for self-control. “You may leave us, Maria,” he told the servant who was bustling about the room, pretending not to notice their anger but careful not to miss a word.

“No, stay, Maria. Finish your work. I give the orders here.”

“Then you’d better tell her to go before I lay a whip across her back.” Miguel’s voice was harsh.

Maria looked questioningly at her mistress. After a moment’s hesitation Teresa nodded and the servant left the room. Not once did she glance at the man, but her indignation was evident in her purposeful stride, the square set of her broad back and the way she wrenched at the door. She was careful not to slam it behind her, however. There were limits to the expression permitted her and she knew them well.

Behind his back Salazar's fingers opened and closed, slowly, as though he felt something tangible in their grip. This was a new Teresa who faced him, an angry, defiant creature that he did not recognize, in spite of the years he had known her. Miguel was angry, but in his rage there was a cold, implacable quality. It was not unreasoned temper. The situation was very clear to him. There were certain things he intended to do, but, with frigid calculation, he recognized certain facts that made him bridle his tongue.

Teresa was largely a creature of his making. Most of what she knew was borrowed from him. There had been a time when he was essential to her. The need was hers. Those were their early years. She had been a delight to him then, but he was a man who had known many delights and he easily could have found others. Recently, however, the situation had changed. It had come about so subtly that he had been unaware of it. Even now, with its realization upon him, he could not name the time when his need for her had first mastered him. She had become a part of him. Even her willful temper and the other frailties he had given her. He realized, watching her now, that she had in a sense outgrown him.

He understood this because he understood himself. Self-interest had been the one urge he always had recognized. It was unfortunate, he reflected wryly, that he hadn't rid himself of her some years ago when there still was time. Now, he realized, it was too late.

"I am going to kill Jonathan Kirk in the morning." His voice was flat, impersonal. "You understand that, of course."

"Unless he kills you." Teresa's eyes were still sullen.

He shrugged. "The devil takes care of his own. I've fought seven duels and never had a scratch. Besides, he's just a boy. It isn't an even match. I wouldn't bother with him in ordinary circumstances."

"But these aren't ordinary?" Her tone was challenging.

"What do you think?" There was no humor in his smile; rather his lips twisted into a sort of grimace. "He isn't on my conscience, my dear. If you have any twinges, look into your mirror."

She slid from the bed and stalked barefoot across the floor, her hands clasped behind her, aping his dramatic manner. "Oh yes, I can look in my mirror! Of course I'm to blame for everything. I'm just a wench, anyway.

"My mirror!" Her voice rose shrilly. She tried to match his quiet control but this was too much. "You and your pretty damned words. First you tell me how you plan to murder this boy—it is murder—and then you try to put the blame on me.

"All right, so I kissed him! If I'd known the price was going to be so high, I wouldn't have stopped there."

Her hair had tumbled about her bare shoulders in a yellow cascade, and as she strode angrily about the room, her breasts trembled against the flimsy gown's restraint. Miguel eyed her moodily, reminded of his need for her.

"What do you want?" he demanded in sudden exasperation. "I've given you money, jewels, position. Everything!" Then his control asserted itself again, and he continued evenly. "There is a new world opening for you, Teresa. I haven't spoken of it because I haven't been sure myself. Such things take time. Most of all, the proper men are needed. Finally I have found them. I can offer you something else." He held up a hand and slowly clenched the fist. "Power! There is an empire in the making, an empire, do you hear?" He was consciously dramatic in his effort to capture her imagination. "And it will be ours, yours and mine.

"Do you hear me? Do you realize what I'm saying? I'm offering you a throne." His voice was ringing at the end.

She stared at him curiously, the anger ebbing in her eyes. With sure instinct, Miguel had hit upon the one formula calculated to capture her interest. This was something new. An empire! Before her stretched a limitless vista of new horizons. It did not occur to her to doubt. She knew him.

"Where is this empire?" she finally asked.

"Not far," he replied. His manner had become quiet again. "It is nearer than you think, both in distance and in time."

Teresa watched in silence as he turned to leave. Her rebellion was not put down but her mind was filled with the thoughts just planted there.

He stopped at the door, furious at himself for his weakness. He had intended telling her other things but had been halted by her defiance. He was thinking of these things as he looked back. "Remember this, my dear—" his voice was steady—"the things we have done are nothing compared to the future, but—" his eyes never wavered from hers—"remember you're part of my plans. I'm not going to have them upset because you want the thrill of playing games with some boy. Kiss another redhead and I'll kill you just as simply as I'm going to kill young Kirk."

He closed the door behind him.

Miguel Salazar wrote no letters that night. There were two reasons. He had, first, an unshakable confidence in himself; secondly, there was only one person in the world to whom he might have written, and he had just talked to her. He was a man with many enemies and no true friends. That did not bother him. Like Teresa, he was a creature of his own background. He could remember no genuine affection in his boyhood except for his father, Don

Pedro, and it had been killed long since. True, he still received affectionate letters from the old gentleman and replied in kind, but there was a reason for that. Don Pedro's purse was heavy and he was liberal. His money made all things possible. Miguel thought his generosity a sign of weakness and it moved him only to contempt, even while he enjoyed its luxury.

Miguel's earliest memories were of Horcajadas hacienda, his father's vast rancho, where the great sprawling house crowned the low hills overlooking valleys on either side. That was the origin of its name, which meant "astraddle." As far as the eye could reach stretched Salazar land. It was a kingdom, and his father, a gruff bear of a man, ruled it like a king. Miguel had been the pride of his heart. He often carried the boy with him about the business of the ranch, perched on the saddle before him and held gently in place with a huge hand. Those had been happy years. It had never occurred to Miguel that he lacked a mother. There were plenty of servants in the rambling house to insure its proper functioning, and the affection which his father lavished so freely upon him left no room for loneliness.

Don Pedro was in most ways a self-sufficient man. He had never married. His only affairs of the heart had been gusty interludes, and the thought of a son had never entered his mind until Miguel had been born as a result of one of these brief lusts. The girl was the daughter of a serving woman. His feeling for her was purely perfunctory, but he regarded the infant in her arms with an emotion akin to awe. A son of his own! The thought kindled an unsuspected yearning in his heart. His own flesh and blood! He saw in the child an heir for Horcajadas hacienda and a companion to share the future. His heart opened to the tiny lad. Strangely, there was something perverse in his affection too, for he could not bear the thought of sharing his great pleasure with another. The knowledge that a peasant girl was the mother of his son affronted him. His was a fierce, possessive love that could brook no rival. As time went on, he no longer could bear the sight of the woman and eventually he sent the whole family away. He made the arrangement with a cousin in a distant province. The mother's tearful parting with the child only fixed his purpose more firmly.

His father's love found another expression. He would tolerate no discipline for the child. No other hand should touch him and his own was stayed by a deep sentiment. Not unnaturally the result was that Miguel, at nine, was an impetuous youngster, accustomed to the habit of command, willful against restraint, an arrant brat. His father liked him so. But at this time there came a change to Horcajadas hacienda. The little boy may have wondered at his father's frequent absences, but the event was totally beyond his calculation. Don Pedro took a bride. Miguel's first warning of it was when a great coach, purchased especially for this journey, emerged from the



cloud of dust which rolled across the valley, and toiled up the hill. He had never seen anything like it, and his eyes were wide when his father descended and offered his arm to the proud lady who followed him.

The surprise was mutual. Doña Izabel had heard nothing of the child. The marriage had been considered a great match. Don Pedro Salazar was the last of an old line, the breadth of his holdings almost legendary. Doña Izabel de Lerdo y Salcedo was of an equally proud family, many of whom were distinguished in the king's service. For this proud heiress the boy's presence was a continued affront; to the child, she was the intruder. From the first it would have been apparent to anyone other than Don Pedro that the situation was impossible. "It will pass; give the boy time," he thought, as he watched Miguel's revolt against new authority. "She'll get used to the idea," he assured himself, after listening to Doña Izabel's angry protests. He was mad about his young wife, and his deep affection for the boy had been taking root in his heart for nine years. Stubbornly he refused to admit, even to himself, that there could not be room in the great house for two such passions. He had forgotten the time he had sent the child's mother away.

The willful boy found cunning expressions for his malice. Any order given by Doña Izabel was the signal for flagrant defiance, but that was not enough. His mind was constantly on the alert for new ways to plague her. Saddles and guns had been the natural paraphernalia which cluttered the living room in the old days. Now the room had been turned into a salon, its walls hung with brocades, but Miguel would not recognize the change. The new mistress would return from a brief absence to find the hangings in a heap upon the floor, saddles strewn about the room and dogs soiling the cushions of her imported furniture. Another time the lad invaded her dressing room while she was away. That time great armloads of her dresses disappeared. Only some charred fragments of silk remained among the ashes.

Doña Izabel had appealed to her family. There had even been a visit from her mother's youngest brother, Don Manuel de Salcedo, high in the king's service, to look into the matter. Don Pedro was troubled but his affection still was strong. It was a day and a land where a man was emphatically the head of his house, and even an Izabel de Lerdo could not flout such authority. The father tried, unsuccessfully, to reason with the boy but he refused to send him away.

That was before Izabel bore him a son. This momentous event was the beginning of the end for the rebellious Miguel. Not only did it fortify Izabel's hold upon Don Pedro, but it crystallized the determination of her family as well. Here was a legitimate heir whose future must not be

jeopardized. Manuel Salcedo paid the hacienda another visit. This time Don Pedro yielded. The boy was sent away.

The unruly independence of his early years had not prepared Miguel for schooling and its discipline. His life among the monks was one of constant turbulence. They would have sent him home but for Don Pedro's indulgence. To that there seemed no limit. He had yielded to necessity but his heart was still warm for the boy and was to remain so throughout his life. No drain was too great for his purse. It was as though, in this way, he sought to stay the uneasiness of his heart. The tutelage had been all too short at best. Miguel acquired the polish of a grandee, but there was little real knowledge behind its veneer. All restraint attempted by the good fathers only impelled him to further revolt. In spite of Don Pedro's generosity they were glad to see him go. His contempt of authority had been their despair.

It was his father's prodigality which opened the pleasures of the gay capital to the young man. He had all the good manners and all the vices of a fop. His means were unlimited. His smile was ready, and apparently no one thought to question his right to wear the great name he bore. It unlocked many doors in high places. Only in a few circles was he unwelcome. The de Lerdos and Salcedos knew him for what he was. Miguel affected not to notice this, but it was a canker that gnawed at his heart. He loved women, he loved wine and, most of all, he loved himself. Beyond this he had only indifference and contempt for the world about him. For the de Lerdos and their connections he carried an implacable malice that included his own father. He blamed these people as the originators of his exile and his father for his weakness in acceding to it.

Ana Dominguez had fitted well into the pattern of his life. He had known that he must have her at their first meeting. Seduction was his best accomplishment and he had found the girl's limited experience an easy fortress to conquer. It had delighted him to become her instructor. He was the master, she the pupil. The lessons were mostly in viciousness, but he had provided her with a more orthodox tutor, too, because it had suited him to polish the rough jewel. Her name had been a whimsey. "Ana" he did not like. He had permitted her to choose "Teresa" but he took sardonic pleasure in the "de Lerdo." It was a malicious way to humble a proud name. It had been his scornful joy that she should move in high circles, where they should hear of her. That amused him. He considered it a delicate refinement of revenge.

Ambition had been the only vice he did not own. He had accompanied Bernardo Gutierrez to Washington merely out of curiosity. He had no sympathy with Don Bernardo's republican cause, nor his mission to the American government. New Orleans was beginning to pall upon him and that had recommended the journey. It had been a simple matter to win

Gutierrez' confidence, particularly since he was lavish with funds and the ambassador was lean of purse. His estates had been confiscated by the crown. By every inclination Miguel was a royalist. His acquaintances were entirely in high circles. There was not a single republican ideal in which he believed, but he had never been a man to let a principle stand in his way.

Now, as a result of his conversations with two men, his aspirations had soared. Gutierrez, with his restless spirit of rebellion, had painted one picture. Magee, with his vision of an empire, had given him another. Each was sincere in his way. Beyond a certain point their paths diverged. Miguel Salazar, listening to them, had seen a vision of his own. Money would not have tempted him but here, before his dazzled vision, was something new. Power! To an appetite jaded by ordinary experience this presented an enticing picture with unlimited possibilities.

Gutierrez and Magee could have their dreams. He was fettered by no ideals. This new lust was all that mattered. Power! His mind was cunning with schemes. He could manipulate these men to further his own designs. While they were useful his money would support them. When their missions had been accomplished he would find means to rid himself of their troublesome fantasies. Use and discard—it was the practical way.

He had not intended to impart any of this to Teresa yet. He had been driven to it by the realization that she was necessary to him. Understanding her completely, he had realized that no ordinary appeal would suffice. She would require time to think about it. A thing of this sort couldn't be realized all at once, but in his cold confidence he was sure that it would grip her imagination as it had his. He had opened a door for her. Beyond it stretched astonishing horizons.

Power! He was so busy with his new dream that he gave no thought to the impending duel.

# Chapter 8

## *The Duel*

It was still dark when the party left the tavern. A black sky was spitting gusts of rain and the plank walk was slippery under foot. While Jonathan was occupied with his letters his seconds had been busy with final errands. Durst had hired two boatmen to ferry them across the river. Magee had found a physician to join them.

“Well, well!” Dr. Squires acknowledged his introduction heartily. “It’s a pity the weather turned bad. Now me, I’ve always thought I’d like a touch of sunshine when my time comes.” Jonathan shook the moist hand extended him, wondering if this were intended as a jest.

With Gabe, they had five in their party, not counting the boatmen. The Negro had insisted on coming and his master had consented without protest. Gabe was a familiar link with all the past which right now seemed strangely remote. The scrape of their feet as they followed his bobbing lantern was lonely in the darkness.

As they pushed out into the swift current the night closed down around them, with only the creak of the oars and the water whispering against the boat to relieve the silence. It was drizzling steadily now. The crossing seemed without end.

“How can you tell we ain’t los’ out hyar?” Gabe finally questioned. “I cain’t see nuthin’ but water.”

“A river’s one place you can’t get confused,” Magee explained. “The current flows only one way.”

The voices were noisy, as if the blackness were a wall against which they echoed. The sound had a welcome friendliness. After that they all talked.

“This weather’s bad for your priming,” said the doctor. “If you don’t look sharp, you’ll have a misfire.”

“Leave that to me,” the lieutenant broke in.

But the physician was irrepressible. “And if your priming is good, the light is poor,” he continued, his sharp tone a contrast to his gloomy predictions. “A rainy morning is a tricky one for duels. I’ve seen a lot of

them in my time.” He patted his black bag. “Professionally, of course. A rainy morning’s when the best shots miss.”

“Good God, man!” Magee exploded. “What a cheerful conversation!”

Then they all laughed. The guffaws were a form of release and they felt better for it afterward.

“Just the same,” Dr. Squires added, “it’s a bad morning for a duel, gentlemen. Bad light, bad.”

“Maybe he’s not a doctor at all,” suggested one of the boatmen, a man named O’Rourke. “Maybe he’s an undertaker.” At this they laughed again.

The other party had preceded them and was waiting when the boat finally scraped against the sand bar. Had the day dawned clear the first gray mist of morning would already be in the air. As it was, they shivered under their wet cloaks in a sooty gloom and waited.

The seconds held a brief conference. There was nothing to do but await the light. Then the two parties split into groups again.

Magee didn’t like this inaction. Jonathan’s impatience had been his concern from the first. Rather than leave the Virginian alone with his thoughts, he walked him briskly up and down the wet sand. His talk turned to Texas. There was plenty of time for final instructions later.

“There’s something about waiting for morning that reminds me of Texas,” he began. “It’s a sunny land but it’s dark too, dark and waiting for the dawn to come up—a dawn of free men, free ideas and modern civilization in a land still black with oppression. Oh, it may be a red dawn for a time, but liberty and opportunity are worth fighting for. It’s a dream I have,” he confessed, “this Texas country. Someday it will be as American as Lexington or Yorktown. That day isn’t far off, either, and I intend to be there when it comes.”

This wasn’t a new story to Jonathan. He had heard his friend speak of Texas before. “What does it have that this country doesn’t offer?” he demanded. “I like it here.”

“This is good country,” the lieutenant conceded. “Perhaps this is the place for you with your money and position. Its frontier day has already passed. You can already see what it’s going to be like. The same sort of country you’ve known in Virginia. Essentially it will be a rich man’s country, and if you can afford to sit in the game the stakes will be high. Out where I’m going it will be everybody’s country, enough land for all and to spare. And it’s still a frontier, still to be won. Maybe that’s what I like about it, its challenge.”

And so they talked until the dawn, sodden and dripping, finally arrived. Only then did Magee revert to the subject of the duel.

“I want you to remember what I’ve told you, Jonty.” His manner was brusque now. “Remember to hold your muzzle down. Remember to hold your breath before you fire. Remember it’s the slow squeeze on the trigger that does it.”

Jonathan was impatient. “Let’s get on with it,” he said.

“Not yet. I can tell you how to win this duel if you’ll only listen. Most men are in too big a hurry. They try to shoot first and that’s their ruination. It’s your weakness too, Jonty. You’re too quick on the trigger. I think I can cure you of it. Will you promise me one thing?”

“What is it?”

“I want you to count three after you raise your pistol,” the lieutenant declared solemnly. “Like this: One—two—three.”

“And what will Salazar be doing all that time?” Jonathan protested.

“If he shoots fast, you’ve got him. Damn it, you must listen to me, Jonty.”

Jonathan promised.

The rain was a mist upon the river, blotting out the far shore. Gutierrez had drawn a mark in the wet sand. Under the terms arranged, Jonathan and Miguel Salazar were to stand there, back to back. Gutierrez was to give the word, whereupon each was to advance ten paces, turn and fire at will.

The two principals to the quarrel stood aloof as their aides settled the final details. In the background the boatmen waited, curious spectators, wrapped in silence. Gabe was with them, squatting on his haunches, his worried eyes fixed on his master. Each party had brought pistols, Magee producing his case from under his cloak after Don Stephen Minor had offered a pair. The lieutenant was relieved when his were selected. They were the ones with which Jonathan had practiced. Every detail was punctiliously observed. The weapons were loaded by the seconds and examined, in turn, before being exchanged. Magee and Minor, as leading seconds, held loaded pistols too, for it was their duty to see fair play observed. Should either adversary infringe in any way the rules set down, he would immediately become the target of the opposing second.

Now all the arrangements were complete. Gutierrez, who was to signal the start, stood well to one side, Durst and the doctor with him. Minor and Magee took their positions abreast of the center line but about fifteen paces to either side of it, well out of the line of fire. Each of these held his primed pistol ready. Although this was in most cases merely a ceremony, they were prepared to fulfill their duty should it become necessary.

Jonathan and Miguel took their places, back to back.

“Remember, Jonty. Count three,” Magee had muttered when pressing the pistol into his hand.

As a last gesture before they took their positions, Gutierrez had called in a clear voice: "If either gentlemen wishes to offer an honorable amend—"

"No." Salazar's voice had sounded harsh.

"No," Jonathan had replied almost as quickly.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?"

Neither bothered to reply. They gripped their pistols more firmly and waited for the word.

"March!" called Gutierrez.

Jonathan stepped forward, counting his paces. They had been hurried at first but he caught himself and slowed his gait. He remembered Magee's warning. "Take your time! Count three! You're too quick on the trigger!" The lieutenant was right, he reflected: that had always been his fault. He must remember to count three. Strange, how many thoughts could race through the back of your mind at a time like this: Redfields and his family, Magee's advice, Gabe, his black face puckered with concern as he watched, but, most of all, Teresa.

"Eight—nine—ten." He counted the last steps deliberately. He was already raising his weapon as he turned.

It had been well timed. Salazar was wheeling too. The rain was wet on his pistol barrel as he brought it up slowly.

"Count three, Jonty. County three slowly." Magee's words seemed to ring in Jonathan's ears. He fought back the impulse to blaze away and forced himself to sight with slow care. It was hard to do. He was conscious of the perspiration in his palm where it gripped the pistol's heavy handle. "One," he counted silently.

"Why doesn't he shoot?" he wondered. Salazar had taken aim. He had leveled his arm with great deliberation.

"Two," Jonathan counted again. And still his opponent did not fire. "A slow squeeze. I must remember that," he thought.

Miguel was an experienced duelist. The lessons Magee had tried so hard to impart to Jonathan, he had known and practiced for years. He liked his adversary to fire first and quickly. Such shots were invariably wild. He had expected this youngster to follow that pattern. Why didn't the boy fire? Miguel drew his careful bead.

"Three!" Jonathan squeezed the trigger.

The two reports came in quick succession. Jonathan was conscious only of amazement as he watched his opponent. Salazar seemed to swing slightly to one side; his face wore an incredulous look as he tottered back a step and then sank slowly onto the wet sand. Gabe was running forward. "Is you all right, Mist' Jonty? Is you all right?" he was calling anxiously. Jonathan waved him back.

The young Virginian's shot had come first. He had aimed squarely at the middle of Salazar's body. His tutelage had been good but his eye and hand were inexact. His bullet went high, drilling through his opponent's shoulder. Salazar was a better marksman. His careful aim had been directed at Jonathan's heart, but the impact of the bullet had twisted him slightly and his shot, though at the right height, had gone a few inches wide, inflicting only a flesh wound in the left arm. In his first preoccupation Jonathan did not feel the hurt, but Magee's sharp eyes saw instantly what had happened.

"I almost gave you bad advice," he said gravely as he inspected the wound. "A fraction of a second later and he'd have had you."

Dr. Squires was kneeling beside the fallen man as they left. "You don't need a sawbones for a scratch like yours." Magee laughed, slapping his friend on the shoulder. "I'll tend to that."

The two companies exchanged the stiff bows that etiquette demanded before parting.

"Shure, that was a nice piece of wor-rk," declared O'Rourke unexpectedly as they approached the boat. He shook Jonathan's hand. "Now me, Oi'm handier with me fists, and at that Oi'll take a back seat to no man, but Oi know nice shootin' when Oi see it with me own eyes, sor." The warmth of his congratulations added to their light spirits as they embarked for the homeward journey.

The rain stopped, too, although the skies were still leaden and threatening. As they neared town they were objects of some interest. Gentlemen in a rowboat were not a common sight on the river, particularly at this hour of the morning. It was evident that most of the spectators guessed where they had been and why. This did not bother Jonathan until, close in shore, they were hailed from a flatboat moored there. It was Cecily, leaning over the rail, eying them gravely.

"You're out early," she called.

Johnny Durst waved a cheery greeting. "Maybe we're just getting in late," he replied. "You know there was a ball last night."

Jonathan was thankful for the cloak that hid his wounded arm and he pulled it more tightly about him.

"It couldn't have anything to do with what was worrying you last night, could it, Mr. Kirk?" she called.

Jonathan reddened. He wasn't going to lie about it but he'd rather she didn't know. "We just had a little business to see to." He had the uncomfortable feeling that she still was watching when he clambered from the boat a trifle awkwardly.



There was another who watched their arrival. He lounged in the shelter of a warehouse, nursing the reins of his waiting horse, and his cloak was wet from the long wait. He studied the approaching boat, his head bent to one side, until its occupants were identified. Then he swung into the saddle and headed up the hill. The animal floundered in the squashy going as he felt the spurs, his hoofs making sucking noises in the slush under foot.

Teresa recognized the rider as he turned into the drive. That curious twist of his head was unmistakable.

“It is José,” she said, her voice edged with impatience. “Quick, Maria, bring him to me.”

She paced the floor until her messenger arrived. Miguel she could abandon, just as she might discard a well-loved dress, prized once but grown tarnished. Her anger at his recent interference would make it easier. She bit her lip as she remembered. Miguel’s hard sureness, the facility of his cunning, had fascinated her, but he was no longer young. He did not send her blood pulsing like the youth from Virginia.

She was too much Miguel’s shadow not to calculate shrewdly. Her inquiries had made sure of the young man’s position in the world. She had no intention of abandoning luxury. Memory of *la Guera’s* squalid years made her prize it the more. She was ready to welcome young ardor, triumphant—and rich.

And she was prepared for Miguel, too, should he come riding back. His talk of empire and power had been only empty words at first. The range of his thoughts had been almost beyond her conception. This morning those words had taken root. Questions were sprouting. She had the conviction that he had not spoken idly, and yet he had hinted at things that sounded fantastic. If they were true, she thought—and her eyes grew hazy with speculation—she and Miguel, a Miguel successful in the duel, had not come to the parting of the ways—not yet.

José’s muddy boots traced a path on the polished floor but he went unbuked.

“You saw?” she demanded impatiently.

“Yes, señorita, I saw.” The cross-eyed servant nodded. “Only one boat returned. El Rubio sat in it. His arm was bandaged, that is all. He was laughing. Don Miguel I did not see. His boat did not come back. I did not wait longer. I rode away fast, as you ordered.”

Teresa let her waiting breath escape in a long sigh. The uncertainty was over. Her decision had been made for her, on that dueling ground across the river. It was a relief to know.

“Wait,” she ordered. “I have another errand.”

The purpose was clear in her mind when she sat down at the desk, but the note proved surprisingly hard to write. She tore up two attempts and gnawed at the feather of her quill impatiently. Now that a conclusion had been reached it was easy to say too much. Her final message was brief, but her restlessness was there.

“My dear one,” she wrote: “All this night I have waited for news of you and it has been a torment in my heart. I am still waiting. Come to me soon.”

She signed it, “Your Teresa.”

“Take it to El Rubio,” she commanded as she sealed it. “If you ride fast, you’ll reach him at the tavern.”

The servant recognized her urgency. “I will deliver it quickly,” he promised as he hurried away.

Maria dressed her mistress with care. There was no telling how soon the expected visitor might arrive. Teresa leaned back in the chair, conscious now of weariness. But the turbulence in her mind had passed; her eyes were no longer clouded. With each soothing stroke of Maria’s brush her taut body fell into deeper relaxation.

Carriage wheels crunching on the wet gravel of the drive disturbed this ritual. She was peering from behind her curtains as Miguel was lifted out carefully. Her swift scrutiny missed no detail—the bandages bulky on his shoulder, the sand a muddy crust on the black silk of his stockings. His face was white but his lips moved as she watched. So he was able to talk!

It was not pity but doubt that sharpened the soft lines of her face again. What of her decision now? Her eyes were sullen as she paced the room with new impatience. The conflict in her mind began again. On one side, Miguel held open a door to the bright future his words had painted. “Empire” and “power” were tempting words, even if he exaggerated. On the other, a new passion beckoned. When she had thought the decision final, she had warmed to it in anticipation. She was not ready to give it up. Her perplexity angered her and her wrath was directed at Miguel. She could hear scuffling feet in the hall as he was carried into his room but she remained motionless. She was in no mood to face him yet.

Miguel Salazar’s wound was not dangerous but it was uncomfortable and serious enough to incapacitate him for some time. His rage was greater than his hurt. Such a denouement to the encounter had never occurred to him. His pride rankled but there was more to it than that. He had journeyed over the river with the firm intention of killing Jonathan Kirk. His failure had tugged at his temper as he lay in the boat that brought him back, his lips stiff, his eyes sullen.

Miguel did not expect Teresa. He wasn’t even thinking of her. That wasn’t the reason for the restlessness which he could scarcely conceal until

the doctor left. Then he sent for Luiz, and he was propped up in bed, his quill scratching busily across a sheet of paper, when the servant entered. He did not look up until the note was finished. Then he handed it to Luiz to sand. The man could not read—no harm could come of that.

“You are to take this to Dan Clampit, the gambler,” he directed, sealing the message carefully. “You will find him in the town Under the Hill. I want it placed in his hands at once. You understand? At once.” Salazar’s eyes were shrewd. “There will be a reward for promptness, but God help you if you’re late.”

Luiz was prompt. After Dan Clampit read the message he thrust the paper in the fire and watched until it was consumed.

# Chapter 9

## *All Eyes Turn West*

WAS MIGUEL'S wound only superficial? Teresa needed to know before Jonathan's arrival. She studied her expression in the mirror to make sure it did not betray her. She knew how well Miguel's sharp scrutiny could read her face. Satisfied, she went to him.

He identified the soft rustle of her dress without turning his head. "Your anxiety touches me." His voice was mocking. "You took the devil's own time in coming.

"Set your heart at rest, my dear," he continued in the same sardonic vein. "I have no intention of dying yet. I have work to do."

"And the young Virginian?" Her voice was carefully controlled.

"Don't tell me you haven't heard!" he jeered. "You give yourself away by waiting so long to inquire. That swivel-eyed José must have brought you the news."

Teresa forgot to guard her expression. A light flared in her eyes. "So you didn't kill him after all. It's you who give yourself away. You're always bad tempered when you're crossed."

With taunting mimicry she copied his swagger and the dramatic intensity of his speech. "He isn't on my conscience. If you have any twinges look in your mirror."

"I have no regrets," he retorted harshly.

"But you've got a bullet in your shoulder. This time you met your match."

He flushed angrily. "I was thinking of other things—my plans for the future. They blinded me. It was like having the sun in my eyes."

"And you were so sure of yourself. The great Miguel Salazar taking time out from his dreams to kill a boy. You thought he was hardly worth the bother, but he had my kisses on his lips and he was young—and attractive."

"You think so?"

"Why else would I be in his arms?"

Fury drained his face of color, accentuating its pock marks. "I'm still here. There will be another day. Next time I shan't fail."

“Next time I’d like to be there,” she flared. “This boy with the red hair doesn’t miss either. You’ll probably get some lead in your heart if you try it again.”

“Someday I’ll give you the beating you’ve earned, Teresa. That will be a new experience for you.”

“You’ll get another surprise when you try it,” she promised. “Haven’t I told you about the man I killed at Motin? He thought I looked easy, too.”

He stared at her, conscious of the widening gulf between them and searching for a way to bridge it. Now, hurt, he felt the need of her greater than ever. He changed the subject abruptly.

“Last night I told you of my dreams,” he began.

“I haven’t forgotten what you said. Empire! A throne!” She sneered. “Next you’ll tell me you’ve got an army. It doesn’t make sense.”

He laughed. “I don’t wonder you’re puzzled,” he replied, “but it’s caught your imagination, too. Come, look at me. I want to see it in your eyes.”

But she was stubborn. Another passion was pulling at her heart. Watching her, Miguel realized this. It angered him.

“Sit down,” he commanded. “The time has come to tell you more. Mexico is seething with rebellion. Not only the natives but many of the Spaniards have turned against the king. There’s been a great deal of bloodshed and there will be more.”

“You’ve been listening to Don Bernardo,” Teresa retorted. “It’s a tune I’m tired of hearing. Hidalgo is dead; his army is crushed. Pfa! I thought you were too clever to be taken in by such prattle.”

“Let me finish,” Miguel interrupted her. “There has been one trouble with all the revolutionists. They fought too much with words and ideas, an impractical crew of idealists. What they needed was a leader; someone who could co-ordinate their efforts, someone hardheaded and practical, who would know where and when to strike. Someone whose ambition—” his Latin eyes were blazing now—“was greater than those empty words they spoke. Such a man could be a king in that country now.”

“Like you?”

“Like me,” he agreed.

“But not now. The revolution is dead,” she protested.

“The fire smolders. It only needs fanning to blaze again at the proper moment.”

“How can you get a throne—” she voiced the doubt in her mind—“using people who are rebelling against a king?”

He shrugged, unmindful of his wound. “The French beheaded a king,” he replied. “They fought for pretty words. Liberty! Equality! Brotherhood! Bah!” he scoffed. “What did they get? Napoleon! Crowds follow him,

cheering, in the streets. Today he rules Europe. They raised a revolution to get rid of a doddering king, and got an emperor instead. He sits on a throne, Teresa, and he climbed there on the shoulders of a mob that guillotined its king. He is the most powerful man in the world.”

He gave his words time to sink in. “With a revolution I can do the same thing,” he resumed. “West of us lie the New Philippines, the Texas country, Magee calls it. It has two advantages for my plan. It’s beyond the easy reach of royal troops, and its people have the restlessness of pioneers. Let me march an army into the country, spouting the drivel of all revolutionists, and they will join me.

“You ask where I’ll get an army? You wonder who is to mouth these empty slogans? I have found the men for it. Bernardo Gutierrez believes these words. They roll easily from his tongue. And his name is known in Texas. They will believe him. He’s my revolutionist. He’ll inspire my mobs.

“Magee is my soldier. I have listened to him talk. I have watched the light in his eyes when he speaks of Texas. He has a vision in his heart, that man, and he will lead my army. He can raise a nucleus for it before he crosses the border. I will supply him the money. Ah, Teresa, it is the land and the time! The tools are ready for my hand and I am the man who can use them. This isn’t just talk, this isn’t something years away. The time is now. I’m offering you a throne.”

Listening, Teresa fell under the spell of his extravagant dreams, as she had so often done before. By the time he had finished, the fantasy seemed real, the crown almost within her grasp. For the moment, even the cause of their angry bickering was forgotten. She flung herself upon the bed beside him.

“You can do it, Miguel. I know you can do it, darling.”

He was heedless of the twinge from his wound. What did it matter?

Miguel sent for Gutierrez as soon as Teresa left. He felt a need for instant action. Ambition prodded him. And even more than that, he was still not sure of Teresa. Until Jonathan Kirk was removed, he was on unsafe ground with her and knew it. Consequently, he was rather pleased when Don Bernardo sent back word that he was occupied with a guest, Lieutenant Augustus Magee.

Luiz had brought the message hesitantly. He was surprised at Miguel’s quick smile.

“Good,” he said. “Excellent! I was about to send for a fly, and I find him already in my web. My compliments to Don Bernardo, Luiz, and tell him I shall be very happy to see the gallant lieutenant, too.”

When they arrived, neither man was prepared for Salazar's cordiality. He had been in a grim temper at the time of the engagement. But when they reached his room, he extended a hand to Magee, and shrugged off an inquiry as to his wound with a smile.

"Nothing," he said. "Only a scratch. I shall be ready to travel tomorrow, as planned."

"In a week, perhaps," Don Bernardo remonstrated. "With luck. I'm afraid you're making light of your hurt."

"Tomorrow," Salazar insisted. "You forget my coach. With the aid of a few pillows I can have a bed as comfortable as you please. We have business ahead of us, gentlemen. I am impatient to see it begun."

Magee glanced in surprise at Don Bernardo.

The Spaniard explained. "Miguel is in my confidence, Lieutenant. He is aware of our conversations and has heartily endorsed our plans."

"More than that," Salazar declared, smiling warmly. "You two have vision, courage, ability. Don Bernardo's name is well known and popular. The people will rise to his call, and few men could voice a summons with more eloquence. You, Lieutenant, are a soldier. You know how to back up words with force. But where is your army? Who will furnish the funds for it? Rifles and ammunition are required. Cannon are wanted, and wagons to haul the provisions, to say nothing of the stores themselves.

"I have considered these things and I seem to see an opportunity for my own services. You both have many admirable qualities which make me believe in your success. There is one thing you lack, however, which I have." His smile was quick and disarming. "Money! Someone with a purse fat enough to back the adventure and a confidence strong enough to risk it in the cause. I have both, gentlemen."

This came as a new and greater surprise to Magee. He had not revealed his purpose to Salazar. For one thing, such schemes as this did not often find support among men of his class. For another, he lacked confidence in Miguel Salazar.

"What is your interest in our plan, Don Miguel?" Magee asked cautiously.

Salazar showed surprise at the question. "Liberty," he replied briefly. "My heart is in the republican cause. Why do you think I accompanied Don Bernardo to Washington?"

"That is true," Gutierrez was quick to agree. "Miguel is a loyal friend. Do not be surprised, Lieutenant, if you find adherents for this belief in high places as well as low."

Don Miguel himself took charge of the discussion then. "I understand these ideals of yours, Lieutenant Magee. Perhaps I realize them so well

because they correspond to my own sentiments. Each of you has a dream. With Don Bernardo, it is the revolution. That is his goal, and it is inspired by the highest motives. With you, sir—" his glance at the young officer was penetrating—"I think it goes further than that. It is a means to an end. In your imagination you already have peopled the fertile Texas land with your countrymen. You see it rich and prosperous. Before this can happen, the land must be freed of Spanish tyranny. That, I think, is your aim. We have no conflicting interests."

This was only the beginning of their conversation. From it they progressed to a discussion of details. It was Magee whose practical mind envisaged the organization of his troops.

"There's a ready-made army in the Neutral Ground," he declared briskly. "Skilled and hardened men who fear neither heaven nor hell."

"The Neutral Ground? Where is this place?" Salazar inquired.

"Your country and mine almost went to war over the western boundary of the Louisiana Purchase," the lieutenant explained. "It was avoided by making neutral territory of the disputed area. It's a belt of wild land between Texas and Louisiana. It couldn't be situated better for our purpose."

"And these men? Who are they?"

"Outlaws, ruffians of every description, who have taken refuge there because it's a place beyond the law's reach."

"Bandits!" exclaimed Gutierrez. "A rabble! I want none of them."

"Outlaws, yes," the officer admitted, "but not a rabble, Don Bernardo. They have their organization. They've learned to fight together. I know, as none else can, because it's been my job to run them down. They are the fiercest fighters in the world. Why, with an army of men like that at my back, I could conquer anything."

He explained the merciless guerrilla warfare in which he had been engaged ever since he had been graduated from West Point. "That's why I'm stationed at Natchitoches. They'd become so bold we had to take action. We've succeeded in making the border safer, but we've never been able to crush them, and there's a very good reason for it.

"These are no ordinary rogues. They're frontiersmen, too, wise in every trick of woodcraft. Tough, ruthless and skilled! What a combination!" He made no secret of his admiration for these opponents.

"What makes you think they'd follow you?" Salazar asked.

"They will follow a good fighting man anywhere," replied the lieutenant warmly, "given the incentive. They know me. They know I can fight. Just as I respect their abilities, they respect mine. I can lead them."

"And the incentive?"



“What does any man want?” Magee asked in reply. “Opportunity. There are plenty there who’d like another chance to live in society, Others—” he smiled—“will come simply for the love of a good fight.

“I will offer them a chance at citizenship with no questions asked. We’ll need men to fill our plains. To every volunteer I’ll offer a league of land, more than he ever dreamed of owning. There’s enough of it to spare where we are going. And in addition, forty dollars gold, above their pay. They’ll need money, once the fighting’s ended. That will be their stake, the capital to tide them over when they settle the land.

“Oh, we’ll find other men. New Orleans is full of rivermen, hard-fisted fellows who fight among themselves when there’s no other brawl going. The woodsmen from the back country, the land seekers, who already are crowding these trails—they’ll come, too, but I’ll find the nub of my army in the Neutral Ground.”

“He knows his men and he’s the one to lead them,” commented Salazar dryly.

Gutierrez understood his functions equally well. His chore was to arouse the country, convert it to their cause, even before their troops marched. His name and influence would do much. His eloquence would help. He was confident of finding support, once they crossed the border, although naturally uncertain of its extent.

“And I,” added Miguel Salazar, “will finance the project. We are a triumvirate, each useful to the others, each with his allotted task. That’s why I am pushing on to New Orleans tomorrow. The time to strike is now, before the Hidalgo revolution is forgotten, while men are still thinking of what might have been.”

Before they parted, the plan of campaign was perfected. Salazar was to supply Magee with the funds to recruit his army in the Neutral Ground. Gutierrez was to remain in New Orleans, rallying as many men as possible to the cause.

The expedition was to be organized at Natchitoches, the last town on the American frontier, bordering the Neutral Ground from which Magee hoped so much. It had the advantage of being his station. He was to retain his commission in the army until all was in readiness.

Miguel was smiling when he sent Luiz to inform Teresa that they would leave the next morning. The rapid maturing of his plans pleased him. He wanted to remove her from Natchez quickly. The sooner Jonathan Kirk was left behind the better.

Teresa heard his message just as she started down the stairs. Jonathan had arrived.

“Tomorrow?” She showed her surprise. “But Don Miguel cannot travel so soon, Luiz.”

“Those are his orders, señorita.” Luiz bobbed his head. “He has instructed that a pallet of pillows be prepared in the coach for his comfort. He does himself the honor of riding with you.” This time his bow was more sweeping.

Jonathan had lingered only to change his mud-spattered clothing when he received Teresa’s note. Now he was immaculate in white stockings and green velvet, extraordinary attire for morning wear but the costume he had worn the night before. He was too impatient for the sight of her to spare time for a ride to Gloucester. He had dressed for the duel in Magee’s room at the tavern and had changed into the only clothing quickly available.

Teresa’s steps lagged as she entered the room. There had been important changes since she had penned the note which brought the Virginian hurrying to her. She had had no time to perfect a speech. She was not even sure she was ready to tell him good-by, although Miguel’s voice was still in her ears, his confidence in the future he had painted strong within her. Jontee was young.

When Jonathan turned from the window, she was standing there, smiling at him uncertainly. She seemed even more beautiful than he had remembered.

“Teresa,” he said.

“My dear!” Her tone was so soft he scarcely heard it. But what did it matter? The time for words had passed. Swift strides carried him across the room, and she was in his arms. The lips which clung to his were hot. For a delirious interval she laid aside Miguel and his grandeur. Only the moment mattered. For Jonathan, it was a time equally mad. The murmur of her endearments filled his ears.

“I have always known I would find someone like you,” he said. “I knew you were the one, when I first saw you.”

For answer, she only nestled closer in his arms.

“And now that I’ve found you, I’ll never let you go again,” he continued.

That brought her to her senses. “But we are leaving tomorrow!” Her tone was flat. The eagerness in her voice had died.

“You can’t,” he protested. “Teresa, I love you. Don’t you understand?”

She was breathless when she pushed him gently away. Miguel’s voice began echoing in her mind again. The time had come to tell this boy good-by, and yet she temporized.

“I had to see you before I go,” she said.

“Where?” He was bewildered.

“We are leaving for Texas,” she replied. “It is far away, and O my love, my heart is sad at parting from you.”

Texas! All Magee’s descriptions rushed through his mind. What had Teresa to do with Texas?

“When do you leave?” Had he found a love like this only to lose it?

“Tomorrow.”

“We can be married here,” he persisted. “You don’t need to leave.”

“Married!” Her lips framed the word soundlessly. She looked at him and his ardor was echoed in her own heart. But louder still Miguel’s splendid promises sounded there.

“Someday, perhaps,” she replied. “In my country things cannot be done so fast. I must go tomorrow. My guardian has arranged it.”

“Don Miguel?” His question was bitter. He thought he was beginning to understand. This was a plan to separate them.

She nodded.

“How long will you stay in Texas?” he asked. A resolve began to take shape in his mind.

“How long? For always, Jontee. That will be my home.” She held out her arms to him. “Tell me good-by, Jontee.”

He kissed her again. “No, not good-by, Teresa,” he declared. “Not good-by. Nothing can part us now. I am going to Texas, too.”

## *Death at the Tavern*

A SMILE warmed Magee's face when Jonathan announced that he was going to Texas. "Good!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad to hear it, Jonty. I'd about given you up. We can use him, can't we, Kemper?"

"If we can just get him there in one piece."

Jonathan was surprised to learn that Kemper was headed for Texas, too. He had journeyed on to New Orleans to adjust personal affairs. This accomplished, he had returned here for a conference with Magee. The talk was of gunpowder, artillery and volunteers, baffling to the youth who did not understand their plans.

"The Spaniards won't let any more American colonists cross their border," Magee explained. "They don't like our way of doing things nor our ideas. That's the trouble mostly, our beliefs."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" Jonathan asked.

"I didn't think you were coming," was the reply. "There was no point in discussing it if you were staying in Natchez."

"But you're going to Texas. They aren't keeping you out," the youth protested. "How have you arranged it?" He was thinking of Teresa again. Nothing should hinder him now.

"Yes, we're going." It was Kemper who replied. "They can't stop us. Anyone who tries is going to get hurt. We're Americans, by God, and we're not used to truckling to kings." The windows rattled as he struck the table with his giant fist.

Magee's alert eyes were watching Jonathan during this speech. The Virginian was unprepared for its violence. Until recently Texas, to him, had been only a name fogged in obscurity, and these warlike preparations hinted at obstacles he hadn't anticipated.

"We're going," the lieutenant now explained, "and we're going in force. We'll be so strong they can't stop us, and we'll take our own government with us. Do you understand, Jonty?"

"It's a good land. You'll like Texas. But I'm speaking of greater opportunities now." His voice grew resonant, filling the room with his eagerness. "We're going to carve out our own country and rule it ourselves. We'll attract colonists from every part of the American frontier, the finest, sturdiest people alive. They'll come because they're looking for just such a

land. They have the same dream of freedom, too. Is it clear now, Jonty? This is the greatest adventure of our time. We're asking you to join us in it."

There were many questions in the back of Jonathan's mind. Later they were to find expression. At the moment he was under the spell of Magee's voice and he was always thinking of Teresa. "I understand," he said. "I'll go with you."

Plans for the immediate future were explained. Magee was leaving the next day for New Orleans, to complete final arrangements for the expedition. There were ammunition and supplies to be procured.

"Kemper is going by boat," Magee continued. "He's helping me organize the army and will be second in command. Why don't you go with him? He can use a dependable man."

"But I have my horses," Jonathan pointed out.

"That's no problem," the lieutenant declared. "I can take them with me. I'll have volunteers and they'll need riding animals."

In Magee's restless mind each new detail fell quickly into the pattern of his scheme. Either it was adopted instantly or weighed briefly and discarded.

"I have a pleasant surprise for you," he announced. "You'll travel in the same boat with your friends the Marstens."

"Are they going?" Jonathan was amazed.

"In the morning. Johnny Durst is in their party too."

"You mean we're taking a girl along when there's fighting to do?"

"She'll be safe enough." Magee was impatient of the interruption. "The more women, the better. We want colonists. You can't build a nation without homes. Of course, we'll leave them in Natchitoches until the country's safely won. I have considered all these problems, Jonty. Leave them to me."

The officer paused in his restless striding about the room to frown at his watch. "I have an appointment," he said. "As it concerns your trip, why don't you both come along?"

He took them to the Marsten boat, where they found arrangements already in progress for the journey. Johnny Durst was there, and two boatmen idled against the rail, listening to a lumberman who was deep in argument with the three Marstens.

Benjamin Marsten had an uneasy look. "Well, if that's your final offer, I guess—" He never finished the sentence.

"I guess we'll have to find another buyer," Cecily interrupted, her manner crisp and businesslike. "These beams are all heart oak. We planned to use them in building a house when we reached our destination. We wouldn't sell at all if we could take it with us."

Jonathan was surprised to learn that the boat was being sold. He had concluded that this was the craft in which they would journey to

Natchitoches. Johnny Durst explained why it was impossible. It was a typical Mississippi river boat, about forty feet long and fifteen feet wide, guided by a long sweep at the stern. Its timbers were of heavy hardwood, and its cabin was large and comfortable. These boats were ideal for a downstream voyage. Many settlers even carried live stock on the forward deck, and the thick plank railing, three or four feet high, was sturdy enough to repel a rifle bullet in case of attack. However, for a voyage up the Red River, which was the way their route now lay, such a craft was too cumbersome. Pole boats were used. While Durst was explaining this, the Marstens reached an agreement on the sale. It was evident that Cecily, rather than her father, had driven the bargain and that it had been a good one.

“I will lose money on it.” The lumberman’s shrewd gaze once more scrutinized the sturdy planking.

Cecily laughed. “It’s the best buy you’ve made in many a day,” she retorted. “All heart oak and hand-picked. I doubt if you’ll find another one like it soon.”

“When will you be ready to turn it over to me?” the purchaser inquired, counting the money out of his leather pouch.

“That depends on Mr. O’Rourke.” Cecily turned to the chunky, wide-beamed boatman who lounged against the railing, watching the proceedings with a mild blue stare. From time to time he mopped with a red handkerchief a head as bald and pink as a baby’s. Glancing at him directly for the first time, Jonathan was surprised to discover the loquacious boatman who had helped ferry him to the dueling ground.

The recognition was mutual. The little Irishman turned, his wide blue eyes crinkling in a smile. “Shure, its Misther Shoot-Em-Down Kirk,” he trumpeted noisily, ignoring Cecily’s question. “Oi’m hopin’ you’ll be afther takin’ this trip with us, Mr. Kirk. Oi’ll be more aisy in me mind with a good fightin’ man along when we hit the Indian country.”

Jonathan flushed at this allusion to the duel.

“Mr. Shoot-Em-Down Kirk,” he heard Cecily echo with cool detachment, in a voice barely loud enough for his ears. “I’m sorry to disappoint you, Mr. O’Rourke,” she continued in a louder tone. “Mr. Kirk has just come to tell us good-by.”

Jonathan found this irritating. After all, he had no cause to be ashamed. Let her imagine what she pleased. He didn’t care, he told himself impatiently.

Magee explained Jonathan’s intention of joining the party. “His servant Gabe will come too,” he added. “That makes two more hands.”

“Shure, it’s a crew Oi’m needin’,” declared the boatman. “If he can’t use a pole, that big black man of his can.”

Benjamin Marsten held out his hand. "You'll be a very welcome addition to our party, my boy." His manner was cordial.

Jonathan noticed that Cecily said nothing. That nettled him further. He had no intention of intruding where he wasn't wanted. "Perhaps the boat is already filled," he suggested stiffly.

"Nonsense, man," Durst protested. "We're having trouble getting the necessary crew. We need you."

"Shure, Oi'll larn ye to be as handy with a pole as ye are with a pisthol," O'Rourke promised.

"We need men, Mr. Kirk." When Cecily finally spoke her tone was impersonal.

"Well, that settles that," declared Magee, and Jonathan made no further protest. Reluctant as it was, Cecily's invitation had been added to the others.

Magee had purchased a pole boat from O'Rourke. This was an entirely different type of craft, about thirty feet long, five feet wide and pointed at both ends. It drew less than a foot of water, and it had no cabin. Instead, it was fashioned with gunwales about three feet high, and these were planked over with a narrow deck which ran the length of the craft along one side. A large sweep or steering oar was fixed in the stern. Normally, a crew of six to eight men was required to propel it upstream. However, there were few boatmen headed for Natchitoches, and O'Rourke had so far recruited only one to help him on the journey.

This was Giles Brady, the lank, bearded woodsman in buckskins who had guided the Gutierrez party down the Trace. As a matter of fact, it had been Magee rather than O'Rourke who had interested Giles in the journey. He was ever on the alert for such rugged frontiersmen. Brady was a volunteer for the lieutenant's army. So the crew stood: O'Rourke, Brady, Ben and Cris Marsten, Johnny Durst, Samuel Kemper, Jonathan and Gabe.

"Shure, we'll get along nice enough now," the Irish boatman assured them with a glance at Kemper's burly frame. "'Twon't be an aisy thrip for passengers. 'Ceptin' the lady, they'll wor-rk thar way, but 'twon't harm them none to larn the use of a pole. Oi may foind another hand or two. The more the merrier, when thar's wor-rk to do."

It was arranged that their journey should start the following dawn. There were no accommodations for sleeping on the new boat. They would tie up and camp along the shore at night.

For Jonathan it was a busy afternoon, filled with final preparations. There were farewells to say at Gloucester and these were not easy. The Sargents had been hospitable.

"Texas!" exclaimed the colonel. "Are you mad, my boy? That's a wild frontier. When you're not fighting Indians you'll be fighting Spaniards. I

hear their king doesn't welcome Americans."

"We'll be a strong party, sir. We won't need to worry on that score," the youth assured him, somewhat evasively.

"What's wrong with Natchez?" Mrs. Sargent asked. "We thought you intended to settle here."

How could he tell them that land was no longer his consideration? He was thinking only of Teresa now.

Because of the early hour set for their start, he decided to sleep at the Kentucky Tavern. Magee was leaving at dawn and the horses had to be turned over to him that night.

He was unaware of the hostile eyes that watched him when he arrived at the inn. He asked for the room he had occupied before because it was convenient to Gabe's quarters in the annex at the rear. The Negro followed him up with the luggage and remained while Jonathan went in search of Magee. If he heard footsteps on the gallery outside, he paid no attention.

Salazar's note had reminded Dan Clampit of a wager made back on the Trace. The Spaniard was growing impatient. From the gallery the gambler identified the voice he wanted to hear, and marked the room well. It was the third window from the corner. As he slipped furtively down the rear stairs he was smiling confidently.

The Marstens invited their new traveling companions to supper aboard their boat that evening. Magee was present too. It was a gay occasion; the new adventure to start on the morrow gave an edge to their laughter. O'Rourke had moored his boat alongside, ready for departure, and supplies for the trip already were stored aboard. In spite of the boatman's protest, Cecily had insisted on taking the chest and table which had been her mother's.

"Shure, we've rapids ahead of us," the Irishman complained. "Oi can make ye a chist when we get thar, Miss. This ain't a car-rgo vessel."

The girl had been adamant. The precious furniture already was transferred. They all helped with the chore before sitting down to their last meal in Natchez.

The last guest had left the common room of the tavern. The final candle had been snuffed out. Clouds scudding across the sky blotted out the stars and deepened the shadows which nestled in the corners. The back stairs creaked beneath Dan Clampit's weight and he paused. He waited there, silent, alert for some sound from the darkened rooms before he resumed his cautious advance. He took stealthy refuge in the gloom after he gained the second floor. The night was mild about him. The town was still. When he



moved again, his tread was catlike, his body was pressed against the wall. At the third window he listened. It was half open and he could hear the cadenced breathing of a sleeping man. His teeth flashed white in the dusk as he smiled. There could be no mistake. This was the room. With supple fingers he eased the casement wider, inch by inch.

This time there would be no one to intervene. The rage he had been warming in his heart was violent in his hands as he drew the knife from its sheath. Then his gaze darted around once more, probing the darkness, before he stepped quietly into the room. He needed no light. The sound of that regular respiration guided his soft step toward the bed. He crouched there, poised, waiting, making sure of his blow. Twice his arm rose and fell savagely. There was a coughing moan which he stilled with the fingers of his other hand as he struck again. He felt the muscles of the throat beneath his hand go flabby. The breathing had stopped.

The knife was wet when he thrust it back into the scabbard under his arm. Then he slipped out as he had come, a wraith fading quickly into the night. The steps moaned uneasily under his weight. That was the only sound and no one heard it.

# Chapter 11

## *Indian Trouble*

CLAMPIT expected his crime to provoke a turmoil and had prepared for it. A pirogue with two paddlers was moored and waiting for him at the river's edge. He hurried toward it, glancing back only once to make sure that he wasn't followed. He was not troubled by scruples. A score had been paid, and it was overdue. To be sure, there might be pursuit, but the waters of the Mississippi, muddy as they were, would show no trail. He would be well on his way to New Orleans and beyond immediate reach by the time the search in Natchez was abandoned. If he had to remain out of sight for a time, that could easily be accomplished with the funds made available by Miguel Salazar. There was even the Texas frontier or the Neutral Ground, if necessary. Two thousand dollars! A man could travel far on that.

When he stepped into the boat, dawn was several hours away and there was no alarm. He would have a good start. His belongings had been stowed aboard for hours. He relaxed against the blankets and his hand fell upon the silver-mounted rifle caressingly. He was smiling as the pirogue shoved off into the night, its bow pointed for New Orleans.

A stranger had ridden into Natchez late in the evening, heading up the Trace. Magee had just sent Gabe to the boat with his master's luggage, and the stranger was assigned to the vacant room. The next morning his body was discovered, stabbed three times. His assailant had escaped through the gallery window. Robbery wasn't the motive. His money belt was untouched. No one ever learned his name. Natchez Under the Hill seethed briefly with the mystery and then forgot it. There was no trace of the murderer.

The company aboard the Marsten boat was astir early. They were all on hand. It had been Johnny Durst who suggested that they remain there overnight in preparation for an earlier start. The plan had seemed a good one. The men had slept in their blankets on the wide deck. Jonathan had not

returned to the tavern. "I'll send Gabe down with your baggage," Magee had promised when the plan was adopted. They were transferring their remaining effects to the pole boat when a voice hailed them from the bank.

"Is this the party that's lookin' for boatmen?" it called. "I hear you're headed for Natchitoches."

"Shure, if you're a poleman ye've come to the right place," O'Rourke responded. "But ye've almost come too late. Come aboard and let's have a look at ye."

The Irishman surveyed the newcomer in the light of Gabe's lantern. He saw a tall, leathery man whose complexion was tanned almost the color of the frayed buckskin shirt he wore. His appearance was anything but prepossessing. A red scar seamed the left side of his face, puckering his features into a sort of perpetual grimace. His left ear was missing.

"What's happened to ye, man?" O'Rourke demanded, but his eyes were swiftly appraising the breadth of the stranger's shoulders and the powerful, lean hands.

"Them's b'ar marks," replied the stranger. "They bothered me too, at fust, but I got used to 'em. You shoulda seen the b'ar, though. He got kilt."

"Ever poled a boat before?" the boatman asked.

The man nodded. "I've done most ever'thin', I reckon, and I'm honin' to git to Natchitoches."

"Shure, Oi like the looks of ye," O'Rourke decided. "Oi've got me a crew that don' know one end of a boat pole from t'other. Git in, man; we're ready to start."

Jonathan regretted his decision to travel by water many times before the voyage ended. Had he ridden by way of New Orleans with Magee, the distance would have been three times greater, but it would have been an easier trip and a quicker one. The journey had its pleasant side, but for the most part it was grueling work, interspersed with its moments of danger.

There was no hint of this at the start. It lacked two hours of sunrise when they left Natchez, their oars splashing noisily as they pulled clear of the shore. Then the mighty river tugged at them, the paddles were stored and they slipped effortlessly along on the current. O'Rourke, leaning against the stern sweep, peered at the blurred silhouette of the shore and set their course for midstream. Now and again patches of starlight glimmered through a rift in the scurrying clouds. Then the river grew faintly luminous. It made the night seem doubly black when the stars were obscured. During one of these periods when the shadows seemed to wrap about them and shut out the world, they almost ran down a pirogue. O'Rourke had cut close to the right

shore as they swept around a bend. They never saw the men in the smaller craft. They collided, a glancing blow. There was a hoarse shout and profanity followed them across the water. No damage had been done. Voices muttered above the soft plash of paddles as the boats drew apart.

They had two days of this lazy drifting. They were in high spirits. The days were only pleasantly warm, and the spell of the adventure which lay before them lightened their mood. Johnny Durst shared the forward seat with Cris Marsten, but his attention was mainly directed to the seat behind where Cecily sat with her father. Their talk was of inconsequential things and liberally sprinkled with laughter. Even Benjamin Marsten seemed to have slipped off some of his years. The four of them might have been starting on a picnic, thought Jonathan, who was wedged in beside Kemper's bulky frame. The two men scarcely had room to breathe in this cramped space. Their talk was of sober things: the nature of the country into which they were going, how large their force would be, what sort of troops they would face. Kemper's mind was on the problems ahead. Cecily had made no further mention of the duel, but Jonathan had not forgotten the mockery of her tone when she picked up the boatman's chance remark. His resentment made his manner toward her stiff. Not that he minded, Jonathan told himself. Who was she to judge him?

In the beginning Cecily was more provoked than angry. If he wanted to fight a duel, that was his affair (although she did wonder at its cause). It was the smug way he had turned aside her questions that irritated her, she told herself. It piqued her to be treated as a child. She matched his taciturnity with a growing formality. Carefree companionship with Johnny Durst and her younger brother Cris seemed to satisfy her completely. Jonathan listened to their laughter over the distance of his reserve and felt very remote from it. For one night their friendship had been warm with understanding but she seemed to have forgotten it. There were times when she looked at him with puzzled eyes, but he was unaware of that.

They reached Fort Adams at the mouth of the Red River the second night.

"Here's where our work begins," O'Rourke promised as he pointed out the stream which was to be their new highway. It was half a mile wide at this point, with water the color of its name.

For most of them poling was a new and toilsome experience. The purpose of the planked deck which ran the length of the boat now became apparent. Here the polemen worked, six at a time. Each was equipped with a long staff tipped by an iron hook, for use instead of oars. Together they would plant their hooks firmly in the river bed and then walk, from bow to stern, propelling the boat forward its own length. Two men stationed by the

helmsman would then plant their poles in the mud, holding the gain made while the polemen retraced their steps. Back and forth they tramped the narrow deck, each round trip carrying them that much nearer their goal. It reminded Jonathan of a treadmill. Their progress was tedious and the monotony of the steadily repeated performance, hour on hour, day on day, seemed never ending.

They took turns at spelling each other. Each hour three men shifted, one to take the rudder, the others to handle the poles at the stern, a relatively easy task. The current was not swift; it was the seemingly slow advance and the constant reiteration of the same movements that were wearing.

“An excellent tonic for an impatient soul,” commented Ben Marsten sadly. “It teaches the virtues of the plodder.”

“Shure, there must be a haythen proverb for it, misther,” O’Rourke suggested. He had developed a fondness for Cecily’s father and took a special delight in listening to the Latin phrases that rolled sonorously off his tongue.

“My Latin’s oozing out these blisters on my hands,” the old man retorted. “*Ecce signum*. Behold them.” He held up a bandaged palm.

The journey was not all toil, however. It was new and interesting country to them. Only Jess Leeman, the scarred latecomer, had made the trip before. They passed the mouth of the Black River on the third day. The willow-lined shores had grown gradually higher until now they loomed twenty-five feet above the water. Usually the party pitched camp while it was still fairly early, choosing a site on top of these precipitous green walls. Often they hunted in the evening. Game was abundant. Occasionally they explored the vicinity before dark. The country changed in character, they discovered, as they moved away from the river. They found a second bank some distance from the first, this one only about six feet high, almost as if it were a man-made guard against the stream’s overflow. Here even the nature of the vegetation changed. In place of the willows they found pecan, cottonwood, oak, persimmon, haggberry and sycamore trees. There was a fairly level plain on either side of the river, but after a distance of about a mile the ground began to slope down, soon to become a practically impassable swamp. Towering cypress trees spread their roots in this morass. By the end of the first week the river had narrowed to about one hundred and twenty yards and the swamp was approaching closer and closer to its banks. Now they found that the strip of dry land skirting the shore had shrunk till it was only about a quarter of a mile wide.

Each night their camp more closely resembled a jungle island, the river on one side, the swamp on the other. Clouds of insects harried them. They took turns at feeding the smudge fires to fend them off.

They had passed only one white settlement, Avoyelles, a few days north of the Black River, but as they reached it in midday they halted only long enough to buy salt. French was the language spoken here, and Kemper the only one who could make himself understood. At Rapides they stopped. This prosperous settlement seemed almost like a city after their twelve days in the rank wilderness. Here a courthouse looked down from the high left bank upon the wide river. In its shadow huddled a variety of frame buildings, much like chicks near a hen. When they pitched their camp below the town it was late afternoon. Kemper went into the town in search of a team and cart to help them around the falls which blocked their progress here.

The portage around the falls was hard, wet work. There were two of them, about three-quarters of a mile apart; both were impassable in the boat. The baggage was loaded in the cart first and this trip was uneventful. Loading their thirty-foot craft into the cart was another matter. It was light by comparison with the heavy Mississippi flatboats but hauling it from the river taxed their strength. They stood in shoulder-deep water while they tugged it ashore. Only Cecily missed a soaking that day.

The trip had its agreeable incidents, too. One of these was their stop at a prosperous Indian village, the third night after leaving Rapides. It was the home of Appalaches who had migrated from Georgia some years before, bringing with them a higher civilization than that of neighboring tribes. All about the village were cultivated fields. It resembled a white more than a red settlement, with horses, cattle and hogs grazing in the pastures. The dwellings were of logs. Astonishingly, they had milk to drink here and were able to purchase cured pork.

This hospitality did not prepare them for their adventure among the Pasquegoulas, whose town was spread along both banks of the river. They reached it the following night and camped above it where two branches of the stream forked.

Almost immediately visitors began to arrive, sitting about them so closely and in such numbers that it delayed their camp preparations. Four members of their party appeared to excite particular curiosity: Jess Leeman because of his scarred face, Kemper because of his great bulk, Jonathan because of his red hair, and Cecily because she was a woman and young. The chief, Milchilotan, displayed particular interest in her, though his expression never changed. When he stalked back to the village he sent a messenger to announce that he was preparing a feast for the guests.

"I'm glad to hear that," Kemper confessed. "I was a little worried. This is supposed to be a civilized tribe. They've lived here, peaceably, for years.

But I haven't liked the feel of things. They're too watchful. Now I feel better. They surely wouldn't give us a feast if anything was wrong."

This was a permanent settlement, not as prosperous as the village they had just visited, but scattered over more territory. It was a collection of small farms, rather than a town, with the cabins separated by sprawling fields which gave an aimless, patchwork appearance. The dwellings were a surprise to Jonathan. He had expected to find Indians living in tepees.

A long cabin, set well back from the river, was the scene of the feast, evidently the tribal council house. The chief's cabin shared the same clearing.

"We leave our rifles here," Milchilotan informed them. "When men meet in friendship, guns are not needed." He pointed to a tree where the Indians were laying theirs down. About forty of the village elders were present.

"It's just invitin' trouble," Giles Brady protested. "I don't care how civilized this tribe is, I keep my weepens."

Kemper turned to the chief. "The Pasquegoulas are a great people," he said. "Many days' journey from here I heard of Milchilotan, and a town too big for one bank of the river. Yet I see here many squaws and only forty braves. I do not understand this."

"This is the season for hunting," replied the sachem. He pointed to the west. "Our young men are there, killing the buffalo."

Still Kemper hesitated. "We are all friends here," he said slowly, "but Milchilotan understands that the rifle is the hunter's bride. Even in sleep we hold our guns. But—" he smiled now—"we will draw the priming so that you may know we come in peace."

He did so, ostentatiously, and the others followed his example before they entered the lodge. But they took their weapons with them.

The cabin was of peeled logs, with a fire burning in the center of the earthen floor, the smoke escaping through a hole in the bark roof. It had no windows and only the one door. The air was thick with haze, and the food, by white standards, was greasy and poorly cooked, but the novelty of the experience outweighed its drawbacks, even for Cecily. At length Milchilotan wiped his fingers upon his leggings and lighted the ceremonial pipe. It was passed solemnly from hand to hand.

"Now for the speeches," Kemper grumbled in Jonathan's ear. "That's the worst part of an Indian feast."

But they heard no speeches.

"Get the woman out of here!" someone shouted. "Get her away. Help! Help!" The final word was cut off abruptly.

The cry had sounded muffled, yet near at hand, its accent unmistakably a white man's. It was not repeated. They all strained to listen in anxious

silence. Jonathan stared across the dim room toward Cecily who was seated between her father and an Indian.

“Keep your head.” Kemper said in a low growl. When he addressed the chief his tone seemed unconcerned. “You have other guests here?”

Milchilotan’s face was expressionless. “The Pasquegoulas do not shut guests away from their fires,” he said.

“I heard a white man’s voice,” replied Kemper, his voice still mild.

“The white men are our friends,” Milchilotan retorted. “You listen to the chatter of a squaw.”

Kemper smiled as if satisfied with the explanation. His manner kept casual. “It is late and we have far to travel,” he said, rising. “The feast has been good and we are sorry to leave our Pasquegoula friends.”

The others had been watching him closely, waiting to follow his lead. They arose too. Milchilotan never moved, but several Indians stood in the doorway, blocking their exit.

“It is many days travel to Natchitoches in your heavy canoe,” the chief replied. “I will trade you many horses to make the journey easy.”

“I must discuss this,” Kemper replied. Turning to Jonathan, he spoke guardedly. “I don’t know what he’s got up his sleeve. Stick close to Cecily. I don’t like the looks of this.”

He advanced toward the chief. “You speak of trades. What is it you want, Milchilotan?”

“The squaw,” the chief replied, his beady eyes fixed upon her. “My lodge is empty. I am a great chief.”

Kemper alone seemed unperturbed. He still was grinning as he stepped toward the chief. Ben Marsten’s jaw was slack with amazement. Johnny Durst showed his fury. Giles Brady was beside Jonathan as he crossed to the girl’s side.

“She belongs to another,” Kemper was saying above the sudden bustle of movement. “Such a trade is impossible.”

“Then I will trade him the horses,” the chief persisted. “Milchilotan will be your friend. You can go in peace after you give me the squaw.”

Disarmed by Kemper’s manner, serene because the Indians in the room outnumbered the whites five to one, the seated chief was utterly unprepared when two huge paws gripped him by the throat and swung him clear of the floor.

“Now!” Kemper’s hoarse shout filled the room. “Keep together and follow me.”

The Indian seated at Cecily’s side made a grab for her. Jonathan’s kick caught him in the jaw and sent him spinning against the wall. “Hang on to



my coattails, Cissy,” he ordered. He grasped her by the arm and lifted her to her feet.

Brady and Leeman, both experienced fighters, were preceding Kemper toward the door. Each held a drawn knife. Milchilotan was as helpless as a child, dangling in Kemper’s powerful grip. The fingers eased their pressure a little about the dark throat. “Tell them to clear out of the way,” he ordered. “If there’s any trouble here you’ll be the first to die.”

The Indians who blocked the doorway had drawn their knives, but they hesitated, eying their helpless chief uncertainly. The whites were in a compact body now, grouped about Cecily. Jonathan, screened by those in front, was hurriedly repriming his rifle. So was Durst. Milchilotan evidently realized his helplessness. He spoke gutturally, and the Indians drew back. Jonathan completed his priming. He lifted his weapon, aiming at the man nearest the door.

“No one leaves this lodge,” he called, and was surprised at the harshness of his voice. “I’ll shoot the first one who moves toward the door.”

Kemper’s fingers at the chief’s throat might win their way out of this room, but what then? Jonathan was thinking. How could they hope to fight their way out of the village, with forty braves at their heels?

His pointed rifle was an even more potent menace than the threat to their chief. A path was opened for them.

“Good work, Jonty, keep ’em covered,” Kemper said. “Brady and Leeman will go first. If the squaws who cooked the meal are still outside, shoo ’em in here. We don’t want the whole village down on us if we can help it. All right, the rest of you get those rifles primed.”

Half a dozen Indian women were swiftly rounded up and brought in. So far, no alarm had been spread.

Kemper never relaxed his grip on the chief. Now he turned to the Indians waiting at bay against the wall. “Milchilotan goes with us,” he said, his voice an ominous rumble. “Attack, and he will be the first to die.”

Jonathan, nerves taut, finger on trigger, still held his gun ready. How long this could go on, he had no idea. He wished Kemper would give the word that would take them out of here. One false move, and they’d have the whole tribe at their throats, but still their leader waited, weighing each decision carefully before announcing it.

“All right, let’s go,” he ordered finally. “Brady and Leeman first again, to guard against surprise outside. Then you—” he nodded at Ben Marsten —“and your daughter. I’ll bring the chief. Jonty and Durst will come last. They’ll cover us with their rifles.”

Under Kemper’s instructions Gabe closed the door behind them and O’Rourke propped a log against it.

Giles Brady turned to the prisoner. "Where's that white man?" he demanded. "The one we heard yelling?"

Milchilotan's face was blank. He said nothing.

Jess Leeman pressed his knife against the Indian's bare chest menacingly. "I'll make him talk," he promised.

The savage hesitated for a moment and then pointed to the near-by cabin. Fearing a trap, they investigated the dwelling cautiously. The chief had told the truth. A white man was there, bound and gagged, watched by two squaws whom they took by surprise. The women were thrust into the council lodge with the other Indians while the captive was released.

"*Merci, m'sieur,*" said the new addition to their party. "I theenk we better move from here queeck, eh?" He surveyed with approval the armful of Indian weapons that Marsten was carrying. "Maybe she's not such a bad feex after all, eh?"

Kemper organized their retreat. Boldness was their best course, and it had the advantage of speed. The cabins were scattered. Anyone who saw them leave must believe they were leaving the council lodge as friends. If the young braves actually were away on a hunt, they had to contend only with squaws.

Events proved the wisdom of their plan. Dogs yipped at their heels each step of the way. They kept closely bunched, Milchilotan in their center, a knife against his ribs. Each nerve was alert, each rifle ready. They were conscious of the eyes that peered at them from the darkened cabins. Their audacity succeeded where an attempt at stealth would have spread alarm. On the outskirts of the village Kemper waited with Brady and Leeman to hold off pursuit while the rest broke camp.

They packed hastily. Milchilotan, securely bound now, was placed in the boat. They were not yet ready to give up their hostage.

Étienne Vauban, the prisoner they had rescued, was a weazened and voluble French trapper, who fortunately was thoroughly familiar with the country. The river forked here. The stream to the right Vauban called *La Rivière de Petits Bons Dieux*, and explained that log jams blocked its passage. To the left stretched the Cane River and that way lay Natchitoches. They feared pursuit, particularly in view of their boat's slow progress. Vauban knew the trail which paralleled the river for some miles, and volunteered to guide a rear guard there. "But I theenk she is safe," he shrugged, pointing at the captured Indian weapons. "Besides, thees are not bad men here, m'sieurs. Tonight they are onгры. Thees theengs happen sometimes. It weel not last."

Giles Brady and Jess Leeman were assigned to accompany Vauban up the trail. They were to meet at a point where a large cottonwood was

uprooted across the stream. The little Frenchman identified the meeting place carefully. Then the boat headed up the Cane River by starlight.

# Chapter 12

## *Show-Down at Crow's Nest*

ÉTIENNE VAUBAN had been right: there was no pursuit. But Kemper did not relax his vigilance and the captive chief was not released until they had reached Little River.

"There ees no danger now," the trapper assured them. "You came at a ver' bad time, m'sieurs, when Milchilotan was ongrly weeth Étienne. She don't happen ver' often, but thees time I was in a bad feex. I am a man of peace. Everywhere the Indians welcome me. Thees time was only a leetle meestake."

"That's the way it looked," Kemper retorted. "They had you tied up like a sack of potatoes. What sort of a mistake was it?"

"I am a trapper, m'sieur. Everywhere I go among the Indians and they are my frien's. They love Étienne Vauban."

"The Pasquegoulas had a queer way of showing it," commented Jonathan.

"Just a leetle meesunderstanding," Étienne protested. "All because the Coushattas are ver' good tribe. They found one of Milchilotan's hunters, seeek on the trail, and took him to their camp. *Voilà!* Étienne was there, too. How else could eet happen?" The little man shrugged dolorously.

Eventually they got the story out of him. Étienne Vauban was a brave man, he confessed, when courage was necessary, but, after all, discretion and strategy had their place, too. It was wise for a trapper who spent his life among the Indians to win their friendship. "I am their brother," he explained. "No matter where I go, among the Coushattas, the Tejas, the Opesulas, the Alabamas or the Pasquegoulas. All are my brothers for I have married into their tribes."

His subtle method of appeasing possible enemies had been both original and effective until "by the vilest chance" he had been exposed. In each tribe Étienne had taken a wife so that regardless of where his trapping expeditions carried him he not only was among friends, he had a fireside of his own conveniently near by. His duplicity, although he preferred to term it sagacity, had gone undiscovered among his red brothers for years. The very nature of

his solitary existence, with its frequent absences for long months, had made this possible. The unfortunate arrival of the Pasquegoula hunter at a Coushatta village where Étienne was enjoying a temporary reunion with one of his wives had been his undoing. This particular Indian happened to be the brother of the French trapper's Pasquegoula wife, and "he carried tales, m'sieur," Étienne lamented.

Unaware of this unhappy development, Étienne had stopped at Milchilotan's village with only the best of intentions, he assured them. Retribution had been swift. He had done his best to explain to his red brothers. "And that, m'sieurs, ees where I made the meestake," he added.

"It seems to me you have mistakes scattered through all the tribes in this part of the country." Jonathan laughed.

Étienne shrugged. "No, it was the explanation," he said, with a droll glance at Cecily. "I tol' Milchilotan my people honored great chiefs with many wives.

"'You are a great chief too,' I tol' heem. 'Étienne is ver' sorry there ees no white squaw here,' I say. 'Then you weel see. She would make herself the beeg honor to be Milchilotan's squaw. Eet ees so we honor great sachems, just as you have honor' me.'"

The trapper indicated Cecily with his outstretched arms. "Eet was a ver' good story, m'sieurs, and maybe she would have work'. But then, mon Dieu! you arrive! An' weeth you ees thees girl.

"'Aha!' says Milchilotan. 'She is ver' nice, thees squaw. Only skeeny but I will fatten her up.'" There was contrition in Étienne's glance. "Pardon, mademoiselle, eet ees the Indian way. They like their women ver' fat."

"That just goes to show how ignorant they are," Kemper shouted amid the laughter.

"Étienne has talk' too much again, just like with Milchilotan," the Frenchman exclaimed. "But when the chief decide he weel take thees girl, he tie me up to keep shut the mouth, eh? But I know what goes on. That ees why—" he tapped his chest bravely—"I, Étienne Vauban, risk my life to shout out the warning."

The weazened little trapper did not mind the hilarity with which they greeted his voluble explanations. Étienne's wives became a favorite topic of conversation. Even the hoot of an owl at night was ascribed to one of his deserted spouses. He merely smiled, his leathery face seamed with myriad wrinkles. "Maybe eet ees so," he said. "But naturally, m'sieurs, they would be forlorn without Étienne, and that ees a lonely cry."

There was another result of the adventure. The reserve which had been building for so long between Cecily and Jonathan was swept aside. She seemed happier. Sometimes she sang, watching the men pole the boat up the

narrowing stream. Again he discovered that he liked the directness of her manner, her unaffected sincerity. This did not prevent his mind from turning toward Teresa. The two girls held separate places. One was the dream leading him to Texas. Hers was the image in his heart. Often he remembered the warmth of her lips. The other he saw in no romantic mist. Cecily was a straightforward companion whom he treated like a sister.

For three days they journeyed up the Cane River, so called because of the sugar cane which grew lush and wild along its banks. In reality this was just a branch of Red River, Étienne told them, uniting with the other fork some sixty miles beyond. At the next fork they swung to the right on Little River. As before, both were actually beds of the same stream, and they united again just below Natchitoches. The Cane was blocked by log jams and not open to navigation, although it was the larger of the two. Now they began to pass plantations on both banks, with well-kept fields and comfortable houses set far back from the shores. This was a well-developed, prosperous country, settled for a hundred years.

Great white houses, facing the river on both banks, were their first intimation that they had reached their goal.

“Natchitoches, she ees there,” Étienne pointed.

They had to climb the grassy slope to see the town proper, two hundred yards back from the stream, its buildings grouped about the hundred-year-old trading post which the trapper pointed out. He showed them the new American fort, too, beyond the town, where the low wooded hills began.

Their journey had required one day less than four weeks and Magee, covering a greater distance by horse, had already arrived. He had rented an adobe cottage on Amulet bayou near the Chamard house for the Marstens, and had engaged rooms at the tavern for Kemper and Jonathan. The bustling town was overflowing its capacity. In addition to the Spaniards exiled here since the failure of the Hidalgo Revolution, the nucleus of Magee’s army was beginning to gather. Natchitoches had a normal population of three thousand, but was now considerably larger. Gutierrez had rented the imposing residence of Theophile Tauzin facing the river. This was the town house of a French family of noble extraction, which had extensive plantation holdings. They were friends of the republican cause and had aided materially in financing it. No secret was made of the plans for the expedition here. It was common talk in the town.

Salazar had shipped Gutierrez a printing press, and it was busy with the publication of Don Bernardo’s manifestoes. He had just printed one entitled “The Brotherhood of Man.”

“Riders slip across the border with these broadsides almost every day,” Magee explained. “We’re sowing our seed in the Texas country. They’ll be

ready for us when we arrive.”

Near the fort a small camp had been established for such of Magee's followers as had already arrived. These were a mixture of all the elements which went to make up the frontier. Rivermen from the Mississippi, recruits from New Orleans; pioneers like the Marstens, seeking land; woodsmen in fringed leather garments, hunting a new frontier.

Magee was still on duty, often away with his troops in pursuit of Neutral Ground outlaws. His resignation from the regular army had not yet taken effect. When in town, however, he was feverishly active holding conferences with Don Bernardo and the group of leaders he had assembled for his expedition. Its organization was taking shape. Gutierrez, because of the influence of his name, was nominally its head. In reality, he was the propagandist, and the plan was to make him the head of the civil government, at least at first. Magee himself was to be the actual military chieftain with the title of colonel, and Kemper, with the rank of major, was to be second in command. There were other men experienced in frontier fighting: Fisher, Lockett, Perry, Ross and Despallier, the Frenchman. Fisher was Magee's adjutant; Lockett, Perry and Ross were captains, although there were scarcely enough men in the army to form a company yet.

Jonathan's days were busy. Upon Kemper's recommendation he had been made a lieutenant of scouts.

“But I'm afraid I don't know much about scouting, sir,” he had protested.

“You'll learn fast enough,” his friend had replied. “I'll give you experienced woodsmen; our army will be full of them. I want a man of judgment to lead them, someone who can command their respect.”

So far there were only two men in the company, but true to his word, Kemper had picked good ones. They were Giles Brady, the Kentuckian, and Étienne Vauban, the French trapper.

The young Virginian fell into the habit of dropping in at the Marsten cottage in the evening. It was a second home to him. He was not the only habitué. It had become the meeting place for the party which had journeyed up the river together.

They all had taken pride in contributing to its comfort. The soft skins underfoot were tanned by Étienne and Giles. O'Rourke, whose broad hands were deft, had helped to make the benches. His greatest pride was the two chairs with the carved rockers which he and Cris had fashioned in secret, as a surprise for Cecily and her father. He had made a ceremony of their presentation. Cecily had been hustled mysteriously from the room while the chairs were placed, side by side, before the fire.

“Rocking chairs!” she exclaimed, when Cris led her back. She rubbed her palms over their hand-polished surface.

Jonathan watched the way her lips curved in smiling, the joy dancing in her eyes and the chestnut curls that were soft about her face. “Why, she’s lovely!” he thought, and was a little surprised.

They all took pleasure, too, in the mahogany table and chest that Cecily had insisted on bringing. As the candlelight reflected ruddily against their polished wood, they seemed well worth the effort it had cost to bring them. Some of these men had never known a home like this and they sunned themselves in its warmth; to others it restored half-forgotten memories.

Denis O’Rourke had attached himself to the family and had announced his intention of joining the expedition. “If it’s a brawl comin’, Oi’ll have a hand in it,” he declared. Giles and Étienne kept the larder well stocked with game brought back from their frequent scouting trips. Johnny Durst had pushed on to his home at Nacogdoches, but had returned once for a brief visit. “We’re waiting for you over there,” he promised. “There’s scarcely a man in our section who won’t join Magee’s army.” Even Kemper, in spite of his activity these days, was a frequent caller. The only member of their party who was missing was Jess Leeman. They had not seen his scarred face since the day they reached Natchitoches.

Watching Cecily, Jonathan thought he understood the warm welcome she extended this circle of friends. Aside from her natural cordiality, he recognized her effort to keep her father happy at home and away from the tavern. Her vigilance could never be relaxed and it was her constant effort to make this restraint pleasant. When Ben Marsten grew morose, as he did at times, she was at her gayest. As Jonathan’s understanding increased, so did the warmth of his affection for her. Johnny Durst was a lucky fellow, the Virginian told himself. He’d never find another girl like Cissy. “I couldn’t think any more of her if she were my own sister,” he reflected more than once. He felt sure of her friendly regard, too. He liked the way her eyes warmed when he entered the little cottage.

Magee dropped in one night with Kemper. He had use for Jonathan and his scouts. “Can you take me to the Crow’s Nest?” he asked Étienne.

The trapper shrugged. “I have been there often, m’sieur. I can guide you, but bringing you back ees another thing. You have fought thees men too long.”

The Crow’s Nest was a village hidden in the forests of the Neutral Ground. Few men from this side the border had ever been there.

“This time I would go as a friend,” Magee explained. “I want to talk to them. It’s the Spaniards I’m planning to fight now and I want them to go with me.”



It was finally arranged that Étienne should go first and explain their mission. Magee would follow with Jonathan and Giles. Étienne didn't like it. "You weel not come back alive, m'sieur," he promised. "Thees men have reason to hate you, and they are more savage than the Indians."

"It's a chance I'll have to take," the lieutenant admitted. "Perhaps I should go alone though." He turned to Jonathan. "I'm not ordering you to stick your neck into a trap."

The young Virginian insisted on going, however, and Giles too. It was decided that the three of them had a better chance of getting through than would a strong force, which might provoke a battle. Four resolute men (for Étienne would meet them there) would have some chance of fighting their way back if things should go wrong.

They started their journey before dawn the following morning, Giles in the lead, for he already had learned most of these trails. West of the town the plantation country stopped abruptly. Here the wilderness began. They followed a well-defined path through the forest for two hours before Giles reined in his horse. "We'll leave the critters hyar," he said. "This is whar Étienne reckoned to jine us."

They found the trapper's horse tethered in a thicket when they led their own animals there for concealment. The Frenchman joined them while they were busy at this task.

"They weel hear you, m'sieur," he said. "That much they have promise'. After that, *voilà!* Who can tell?"

The track they followed was rough now, skirting the hills and leading through tall pines. The pace was swift and they marched in silence. After about an hour of this, Étienne halted them at the border of a large clearing while he stepped into the open and whistled to make his presence known. He was answered by a hail and, turning, he beckoned to his companions. A dozen log cabins were grouped in the clearing where probably fifty men lounged. Word of Magee's coming had spread. The meeting was held outdoors, the outlaws perched on stumps or seated on the ground, listening attentively.

It was the same theme Jonathan had heard his friend discuss so often, the Texas country and its promise. Magee's eyes were two dancing flames as he spoke. He stressed the battles to be fought, for these men were fighters, and he told of the opportunities in the new land. Each volunteer was to receive a league of land and forty dollars gold when the campaign was won. They would receive their supplies and wages of four dollars a month. Jonathan watched the audience intently. Their grim faces were expressionless. The men were lean, hard-bitten. Most of them were in buckskins and each held a rifle in his hand.

“Every man will be treated the same,” Magee concluded. “It’s a new country with an even start for everyone.” Then he stood, watching them, waiting for some reply.

“Mighty purty words,” one of them finally spoke. He was a tall, leathery fellow, whose close-set eyes glittered from beneath shaggy brows. Watching him, Jonathan was surprised to find the face familiar, although at the moment he could not remember where he had seen it. “Mighty purty,” the man repeated. “But I didn’t come hyar to listen to speakin’. I come ’cause I heered Magee was comin’ and I had a score to settle with him.” He pointed a bony finger at the lieutenant accusingly. “Thar he stands. The man that’s been huntin’ us down. We’ve got him whar we want him. That’s why I come.”

Jonathan tightened his grip on the rifle. He recognized the speaker now. This was the outlaw who had been wounded and captured in the battle along the Trace. He resolved that his bullet should find him first if it came to shooting.

“Take it easy, Tom. He came hyar as a friend this time, and I liked his talk.” Jonathan knew that voice. He could scarcely conceal his surprise as he glanced across the clearing into the scarred face of Jess Leeman.

“We’ve been on diff’rent sides of the fence,” Jess continued. “Magee’s been hard, and I reckon we ain’t been soft ourselves. But I know a fightin’ man when I see one. Me, I’d welcome a chance to take a crack at the Spaniards. I’m int’rested in this idee, and if I go I want to know the man I’m fightin’ with. I’d be satisfied behint Magee ’ca’s’e I know he’s a tough scrapper.”

In the silence which followed, Jonathan sensed that Leeman and the outlaw of the Trace each had his following, and there was no way of knowing which way the decision might swing. Any overt movement might precipitate a battle fifty against four. Finally Jess spoke again. “I reckon we’ll have to figger this out amongst ourselves,” he said. “We’ll git word to you what we decide. For now we passed our word that you could come hyar, and thar ain’t goin’ to be no trouble. You can go.”

As he concluded, the outlaw rose, his rifle under his arm, and stared about at his fellows. Jonathan realized that they had found an unexpected ally.

“I’ll be waiting to hear,” Magee replied and, turning, he crossed the clearing, apparently unconcerned by the menace on which he turned his back.

The distance back to the friendly forest seemed endless to Jonathan. At any instant he expected to hear the spatter of gunfire which would mark the

end of the truce. Nothing happened. Jess Leeman must have covered their retirement.

No word came from the Neutral Ground for three days. They were restless, floor-pacing days for Magee. It was the only time Jonathan ever saw his confidence waver. "I've failed," he said. "They were the men I counted on most, and they aren't going to join me."

"We'll get others," the Virginian promised. "A few more men arrive from New Orleans every day."

"Not like these!" Magee exclaimed. "I know 'em. They'd make the best damn troops in the world. They can live off the country; they can follow any trail in it. And at the end of a march that would exhaust an ordinary army, they'll whip their weight in wildcats. There's a ready-made army in the Neutral Ground. But they aren't coming. I've failed."

Jonathan was at the Marsten cottage that night when Étienne called him to the door. "There ees a frien' here to see you, m'sieur," he explained, his manner mysterious. "A ver' good frien'."

Jess Leeman was waiting outside.

"We're comin' to Texas with you," he said. "Of course that's some that won't an' some that will. Tell Magee. Most of 'em hate his guts. But they sure admire the way he fights."

"He likes the way they fight, too," Jonathan assured him.

They were standing in the light of the open door, where Cecily could see them as she passed. She knew all about Jess Leeman. Étienne had told her of the meeting in the Neutral Ground.

"One meenute those outlaws are ready for to shoot us," he had concluded, "and then, *voilà*, our good frien' M'sieur Jess steps up. Nevair was Étienne so happy to see the scars on a man's face."

"Come in, Jess," Cecily invited now, holding out her hand.

The outlaw hesitated. "This ain't the river, ma'am. 'Twouldn't help you none for me to be seen in your house in Natchitoches."

"Nonsense." Her reply was swift and sincere. "We're old friends. Come in."

"You proved just how good a friend at the Crow's Nest the other day," she added after he stepped into the room. "I won't forget that, Jess."

Kemper was absent, busy as usual. Johnny Durst was in Texas. With these exceptions, the party that had shared the voyage in the pole boat was united again. They laughed over its memories. The hardships of the trip seemed pleasant in retrospect.

One hundred and eight outlaws from the Neutral Ground came in to join the army. The town was hostile and uneasy at their presence, but Magee camped them west of the fort, and divided them up among the three companies of Lockett, Perry and Ross. He wanted a leavening of them in each company, not only because of his respect for them as fighting men, but also because he was determined that all companies should be representative of the entire force. "I want no unhealthy rivalries," he said.

Jonathan's little company of scouts had grown, too. "I want you to grant me a favor, Jonty," Cecily said on one of the rare occasions when they were alone. Usually the house was crowded but today Cris and his father had gone hunting with Étienne and it was too early for the gathering that had become a regular evening custom.

"You've only to name it," he replied, wondering at her gravity.

"Take Father and Cris in your company with you," she urged. "Cris is just a boy still, only sixteen, and Father—" she hesitated, fumbling for a word, and then, characteristically, she looked him straight in the eye—"Father isn't the man he used to be, Jonty. He's really more of a child than Cris now, in some ways."

"Why should they go at all, Cissy?" His voice was gentle with understanding. "It's a long way to San Antonio, and it's going to be a hard one."

"We've come here for a new start," she replied. "You understand that. Texas is a land of opportunity for us, just as it is for all these others who are going. Cris and Father have to go. They must do their full part. I don't want it any other way, Jonty, but it worries me, too. You see, I'm the one who was determined to come here. It was my doing. By every right I should be the one to go."

"But you're a girl," Jonathan pointed out.

"And so I can't go myself." Her tone was rebellious. "I have to send others in my place."

She's right, he thought. She's the strong one. Whatever future they build, it will be because of her.

"I'll feel better about it if I know they're with you, Jonty," she continued more calmly.

"We're scouts," he protested uneasily. "I'd do the best I could for them, Cissy, but most of the time we'll be out ahead of the army."

"But you'd all be together," she insisted. "And I have confidence in you."

Ben Marsten might easily become a liability in such a company. The thought troubled Jonathan, but there was no hint of this in his smile.

“All right, Cissy,” he promised, holding out his hand. “Don’t worry, I’ll look after them.”

“I’ll be worried about all of you.” She answered the firm pressure of his grip.

Magee objected to Ben Marsten as a scout, when he heard of it. “He’s too old for the job,” he said.

Jonathan, remembering his promise, was obstinate. “It’s my company,” he insisted. “I’ll be responsible for him.”

The officer was unexpectedly gruff. “Cissy doesn’t know what she’s asking,” he commented. But he dropped the subject.

Denis O’Rourke insisted on joining the company after that. “A man foights better with his friends,” he said.

“You’ll please me if you’ll promise to fight only Spaniards,” was Jonathan’s comment.

The question of taking Gabe troubled him. “There will be fighting,” he told the Negro, “and I couldn’t go home and face my mother if anything happened to you.”

“How ’bout me?” the old servant demanded. “What’s yo’ mammy goin’ to say to Gabe if’n he come home ’thout you? ‘Gabe,’ she’ll say, an’ her eyes’ll flash lak sparks, ‘Gabe, you ol’ black rascal, how come you back hyar alone?’ No, suh, Mist’ Jonty, yo’ folks done sent me to look after you and that’s what I aims to do.”

“I thought maybe I’d leave you to look after Miss Cecily,” his master explained.

The old slave looked stubborn. “It’s goin’, Mist’ Jonty. Might as well settle yo’ mind on it. Ain’t no way you can leave dis darky behind.”

Jess Leeman had not come in with the other outlaws. Instead he appeared at the Marsten’s door one evening, looking for Jonathan.

“I’d sort of like to travel with my friends—” he indicated the others with a nod—“if you’ll take me.”

“I need men like you, Jess.” Jonathan shook his hand.

“I’ve got me a pardner,” the outlaw explained. “We’ll have to stick together. He’s hard as oak pegs. But you won’t find a likelier hand at scoutin’ or fightin’.”

“Bring him along,” was the hearty reply.

Jonathan regretted this last invitation when he met Leeman’s friend. It was Tom Sartin, the outlaw who had wanted to shoot Magee at the Crow’s Nest. But he seemed to carry no grudges. He was a solitary figure, seldom entering into the companionable talk of the others. On the other hand, he was most skilled in frontier craft, a valuable man for the work ahead.

That completed the group. More and more they were in the saddle. None of them knew the date set for crossing the frontier, but a train of ten supply wagons had arrived from New Orleans, together with three six-pounders. The little force now numbered about one hundred and fifty men, and they were getting restless. Everything seemed ready to move, but Magee, who had resigned from the American Army, was anxious for the arrival of reinforcements from New Orleans. He had hoped for a much stronger expedition.

For a week Kirk's Scouts, as they now were called, had been across the frontier on reconnaissance. On their way home they found Magee's troops camped on the Neutral Ground, on the east bank of the Sabine River, ready and waiting to move. Kemper was in command there. Gutierrez and Magee were holding a conference in Natchitoches.

"You'd best report to the colonel in person," Kemper advised. Jonathan took his company with him. It probably would be their last meeting at the Marsten cottage before the campaign started and they all looked forward to it. Once in the town, he rode off in search of his commander, promising to join the others later.

He was headed for the Tauzin house when he saw her.

An outrider, resplendent in yellow velvet and riding a white horse, was followed by a baroque golden coach. For a moment, Jonathan thought he must be back in Natchez, and this the Yellow Duchess riding out from Concord. On this frontier, the sight was fantastic.

Jonathan reined in, amused by the grotesque splendor. Astride his horse, he sat too high to look into the carriage and could not see its occupant.

Suddenly he recognized the footman at the rear. Those crossed eyes were unmistakable. It was José.

José here! It could mean but one thing. Jonathan wheeled his horse and spurred into a gallop after the hurrying coach.

"Teresa!" he called. "Teresa!"

# Chapter 13

## *First Blood*

TERESA was thinking of Jonathan Kirk. He was going to Texas, too, he had said. She had chosen Miguel and power. She knew her mind, but her memories would not be quiet. Why couldn't she put the red-haired youth out of her mind? He was dead.

Miguel had told her of it. "Shocking news from Natchez today, my dear," he said. "Remember the young man from Virginia? The red-haired boy?"

She was conscious of his sardonic gaze, and she hid her uneasiness behind an answering smile.

"Certainly I remember him."

"Well, the poor fellow is dead." His voice was expressionless.

She waited for him to go on, but he had finished. "He knows I want to hear," she thought. "He's forcing me to ask. I shall not. I won't give him that satisfaction."

But at last her anxious curiosity was too much for her. She gave in. "What happened to him?"

"Happened? To whom?" His eyes were mocking.

"You said Jonathan Kirk was dead." She tried to smooth the sharp edges of her voice.

"Oh, yes." Still he prolonged her torment. "I remember now. The young Virginian. He was murdered, my dear. Stabbed to death. It happened the night before we left Natchez. Strange we didn't hear before, wasn't it?"

"Odd," he continued, his malicious eyes dancing as he watched her. "The evening of the very day I planned to kill him myself. Things have a way of working out exactly as I plan them."

She knew then. It was his doing. He had known all along and had bided his time to tell her. From that moment she hated Miguel Salazar. Not a quick, fierce rage that could flare up and die down quickly, but a cold, implacable, lasting wrath, the stronger because she would hide it.

"Yes, it is very odd," she said, and her voice sounded strange in her own ears. "Good night, Miguel."

He frowned after her, uneasy at her quiet. He would have understood a fiery outburst. There had been many wild tempests in their years together. This new calm was unfathomable.

After that, a sort of abandon marked the way she gave herself up to Miguel's dream. Power! A throne! She fed her mind with these lavish visions constantly to crowd out other memories. If Miguel's caresses no longer stirred her, she never let him guess it. Jonathan's name was not mentioned between them again.

Yesterday she had watched Magee's little army march off to the Sabine. Her eyes had narrowed. "You call that an army?" she had asked. "A hundred and fifty scarecrows?"

"That is only the start, my dear." Miguel put his arm around her. "You're watching the first rising of the tide. Others will follow. More will join them across the border. Have a little faith. Have I been wrong before?"

The coach had turned from the town into the road skirting the river.

"Teresa!" someone called. "Teresa!" A horseman was galloping beside her window.

She leaned forward to peer up at him.

It was Jonathan!

For one giddy instant she thought it a delusion.

Then he called again, shouting her name, and she knew it was really he. She was laughing madly when finally he succeeded in halting the postilions. She did not stop until he opened the door and took her in his arms.

Then she grew quiet and her fingers stroked his face as he kissed her.

"They told me you were dead," she said finally.

"I don't think I've ever really lived before," he replied, and kissed her once more. She clung to him.

"I thought I'd never feel your lips again," she murmured.

He had not realized the actual meaning of her words in his first joy. Now he held her at arm's length, frowning.

"Who told you I was dead?"

She had formed the new habit of thinking before she spoke. She wanted no more conflict between him and Miguel. One man offered her love. She desired it. The other offered a dazzling future, and she was not ready to give it up, either.

"I heard it in New Orleans," she faltered.

"From Salazar?" he demanded angrily.

She shook her head. "A traveler from Natchez brought the message. A man was murdered there and he said it was you." She threw her arms about



him again. “Don’t let us speak of it again, Jontee. I do not wish to think of my unhappiness, now that you are safe.”

For the first time they became conscious of the waiting postilions and grooms, spectators of their fervent embrace.

“José,” Teresa called.

The groom scrambled from his perch and took the reins of Jonathan’s horse at her command.

“They have seen too much,” she said, pulling him gently toward the coach, and laughed softly as she watched the flush creep into his temples. He was remembering the ardor of those public caresses. She liked that. He was going to be delightful, this Jontee.

The time was short. Jonathan told her much; of Magee and his army—quite familiar to her—and of his part in the enterprise—which was news.

“It is because of you that I came, Teresa,” he concluded. “No matter where you go, I will follow you.”

“And no matter where I am, I shall want you beside me.”

When the time came for them to part, he explained that he was headed for the Tauzin house to find Magee.

“But he is at the tavern,” Teresa protested. “You will find him there.” Miguel Salazar was waiting at the Tauzin house, and she did not want these two to meet again. Not yet.

He turned back, with her kisses still hot on his lips, her promise still soft in his ears. “I will see you soon, my love—in Texas.”

Magee eventually returned to the inn and restlessly paced the room as Jonathan reported.

“I’m tied up here, Jonty,” he said. “I don’t like this damn waiting. The summer’s slipping by. I wanted to move in June and here it’s the ninth of August. That’s the only trouble with these Spaniards I’m working with. Time means nothing to them.”

He explained that more men and supplies were on their way. “I don’t dare leave anyone else to forward them. They might never arrive.” He sat down at the table and frowned at a blank sheet of paper. “I’m ordering Gutierrez to move on to Nacogdoches. Kemper will be in real command of the army till I get there. I want no misunderstanding about that so I’m sending written orders. Are you ready to ride?”

Jonathan explained that his men were waiting at the Marsten cottage. “Good.” Magee already was scribbling his command. “Pick them up and start at once. Kemper will need every man.”

The commander of the little army gripped his friend by the shoulder before they parted. "This is the beginning, Jonty," he said. "I wonder if you realize what's ahead. Nothing but death can stop me now."

Cecily seemed to sense his orders before he spoke. She stopped her conversation and scanned his face as he entered the room.

"We're riding, right away," he told her.

"I was expecting it. This time you won't be back until it's over, will you?" She spoke calmly, but her eyes were anxious.

"No, I think not, Cissy."

During the bustle of departure, he found an opportunity to speak to her alone. "I'll take care of them," he promised. "Don't worry." He pressed her hand reassuringly.

"I know you will, Jonty. Take care of yourself, too."

"Don't worry about me." He grinned and patted her affectionately on the shoulder.

Kirk's Scouts crossed the Sabine ahead of the army on August eleventh. "Keep your eyes open and your mind calm, Jonty," was Kemper's final admonition. "Remember, it's information I want from you. Never lose sight of that. Keep me informed and let me fight the battles."

Except for Cecily waiting in Natchitoches, Durst in Nacogdoches, and Kemper back with the main force, Jonathan's little company was the same group that had been together for so long. Only Tom Sartin had been added. They were not a military formation, but a group of tried friends, riding out into the dawn.

Étienne Vauban, familiar with the trail, led the way, Giles Brady at his side. These two formed an advance guard, a hundred yards ahead of the rest.

Gabe rode beside his master with Denis O'Rourke and the Marstens, father and son, close behind. Jess Leeman and Tom Sartin followed some distance in the rear.

Attoyac, only a huddle of houses called a village by courtesy, was their first destination. They reached it before dawn.

Gabe was left to guard the horses while the others crept forward in pairs from each direction. Cris Marsten was with Jonathan. They first reached a stake corral, where they could hear animals moving restively. The creatures had caught their scent. Peering in, they saw it was filled with horses. One of them nickered.

“We’ve struck a Spanish patrol,” Jonathan whispered. “It’s up to us to cut them off from their horses. Keep with me, Cris.”

Crouching in the shadow of the corral, they worked their way swiftly around it, heading for the gate on the opposite side. They had covered half their path when the alarm was given. The approach had been so quiet that the sentry on duty had heard nothing until then. Now he fired, and there were three quick echoes to the shattering sound. Three sure bullets cut him down. The Spaniards had no chance to defend themselves. The momentary confusion centered about the corral gate, where several tried to get to the horses and escape. Jonathan and Cris reached it at the same instant, swinging right and left with their rifle butts, driving the enemy back. Only one man got away. How he reached his horse they never learned, probably by clambering into the corral at another point. The swift tattoo of hoofs as he broke from the gate was their first warning. Cris made a futile grab at the speeding animal. Jonathan fired after him hastily, but the target was shadowy. He missed.

The rest of the Spaniards—there were eighteen of them—surrendered. None of the scouts had received a scratch. Jess Leeman showed them how best to tie the prisoners in their saddles. Their ankles were bound to the stirrups, and these were lashed together under the horse’s belly. Thus their hands were left free, they could ride in comparative comfort, but they could not budge from their saddles. Ben Marsten and Denis O’Rourke were sent back with the captives. Jonathan could spare them best; they were less skilled in this sort of warfare.

“That was plumb easy.” Jess Leeman grinned. “Étienne must have had a wife thar at Attoyac, too. He knowed the place so well.”

Even the weazened trapper joined in their strident laughter.

“Just the same, I wish that fellow hadn’t escaped,” Jonathan complained. It worried him, and he redoubled his precautions. All day his small command rode hard, exploring the country ahead of the advancing army. The enemy would be warned now. But there would be no ambush if Jonathan could prevent it.

“*Mon Dieu!* You borrow the trouble, Jonty,” Étienne protested, returning from a tiresome ride to investigate the bank of a distant stream. This care had made a weary zigzag of their progress. “Only trust Étienne. He can smell danger farther than mos’ men can see.”

They made a cold camp that night, chewing on their jerked beef after rolling wearily into their blankets. There could be no cooking. A blaze could be sighted too far. It was the first of many such nights.

Their route lay north of San Augustine, where a small settlement had sprung up around the old Spanish mission. The rancheros there were

predominantly American and favorable to their cause, but Kemper wanted no messenger bearing tales of his strength back to the Spanish commander. Nacogdoches was their goal—the strongest point in East Texas. Here Magee hoped to concentrate his force, adding to its strength, before moving on San Antonio de Bexar, the capital.

The Salitre Prairie lay before them, a long day's ride to Nacogdoches. There were open plains here, barren and salty in long stretches, and hemmed in by pines on the rolling hills. It was nearly noon of the following day when Étienne came hurrying back with news that he had sighted a Spanish force ahead, eighty strong and riding toward them.

"This is what comes of letting that man escape," declared Jonathan. But he was encouraged by their numbers. It was a strong party but totally inadequate for the army which was not far behind him.

Cris was sent galloping with a message for Kemper. This left only six in Jonathan's company. They fell back into the shelter of the wooded hills.

The Spaniards were advancing at a brisk trot, apparently confident of their strength, when they topped the crest of a hill and saw—not more than two hundred yards away—the first of Kemper's men approaching from the opposite direction. Captain Perry's company, about fifty strong and the only one fully mounted, was galloping to reinforce Kirk's Scouts. Spaniards and Americans pulled up in equal surprise.

Jonathan, off in the trees to the right and between the two forces, had foreseen the situation and sent Gabe to warn Perry, but the time was too short. The Negro was just riding up with the message when the Spaniards trotted over the hill.

The rest of Jonathan's little force had dismounted. The time for concealment had passed, though their presence still was unknown.

"Every man draw a bead," ordered the Virginian, "and let them have it."

Their rifles spat angrily from the forest's rim. The range was long. But these four men of his had lived by the rifle—Giles Brady, the Kentucky woodsman; Étienne, the trapper; and the two outlaws from the Neutral Ground, Leeman and Sartin. Two of the enemy swayed from their saddles. A couple of horses went down. Jonathan knew that if anyone missed it was he.

The little volley signaled Perry's company into action. Without waiting for a command, they let out a yell as they pressed their horses forward, firing raggedly as they rode.

The flanking volley caught the Spaniards by surprise. They fired only half a dozen hasty shots before they fled in panic. They left two dead upon the field. Seven others were captured. Their colonel, Montero, barely escaped as he tried to check the disorder. He could more easily have stopped the wind.

Kemper halted the army at Quirk's ranch that night. Captain Lockett's company was thrown forward to reconnoiter the approaches to the town. Jonathan Kirk's Scouts, now rejoined by their missing comrades, were ordered to circle Nacogdoches and intercept any messengers trying to leave by the King's Highway to the west.

Jonathan pushed his little band hard, but their horses were jaded and most of their path led through forests where the going was necessarily slow. Their start had been late and it was long after dark before they cut across the road which led to San Antonio de Bexar. They bivouacked there, with outposts thrown out east and west, but they had their trouble for nothing. Colonel Montero and his few regulars had fled that way hours before.

A large force moved east from Nacogdoches the following morning. Lockett's scouts warned Kemper of its strength—more than three hundred men—and he fortified the crest of a hill near Quirk's. He was determined to give no ground. The success of the entire campaign depended upon a victory here. Trees were felled to form a rampart for his marksmen, and earthen platforms were built for his artillery, so that the guns could command the approach up the valley.

Two men rode into view carrying a white flag. Kemper and Gutierrez rode down the hill to meet them and were amazed to recognize Johnny Durst, a wide grin on his face. His companion was a handsome, well-built man, whose grizzled hair framed a genial, ruddy face.

"I hear you have an army with you, Johnny," Kemper hailed him. "What's the meaning of it?"

"We're friends, I hope." It was the older man who replied. "Johnny's been a good ambassador for you, but there are a few things we need to understand before you fetch an army into our town."

Johnny Durst made the introductions. His companion was Samuel Davenport. Prosperous and respected, a partner in the trading firm of Barr & Davenport, he was the outstanding citizen of the section and already well known to the others by reputation. Johnny Durst and his brother had been taken in by the bighearted Irishman as orphan children. Finally, having no sons of his own, he had legally adopted Johnny.

"My boy has told us all about your plans," he said, "and we're in sympathy with them. There's no love for Spanish royalty in Nacogdoches. It's your army that's bothering us. We understand it's composed of ruffians from the Neutral Ground. And we have no love for them, either."

"We have some of them," Kemper admitted. "We came to fight." There was a twinkle in his eye. "And we were looking for fighting men. I don't know where you'd find better. But we have settlers, too, whose womenfolk

are waiting in Natchitoches. We aim to keep this country after we win it. They're the ones we're depending on for that."

Davenport seemed to like this sort of talk. "What about these outlaws? Can you control them? We want no pillaging."

"We've come to chase the Spaniards out," was Kemper's reply. "We want friends here, not enemies. I'll be responsible for my men."

"In that case"—Davenport held out his hand—"you've found them. There's not a man in all this section who won't help you. Welcome to Nacogdoches!"

Gutierrez could not contain his delight. Standing up in his stirrups he shouted, "Down with the king! Long live the republic!"

"Confound the man," growled Kemper, as his horse, frightened by the unexpected shout, gave a wild plunge that almost unseated him.

# Chapter 14

## *Reunion*

MAGEE caught up with the army as it was leaving Quirk's. He had fifty horsemen with him, recruits from New Orleans. Davenport's sympathy for the cause assured their welcome in Nacogdoches, and when he threw open the second floor of his store for Magee's use as headquarters, volunteers flocked in by dozens. Valuable stores were acquired too. When Kemper approached, Colonel Zambrano had been trapped here with a pack train of sixty mules and a hundred armed drivers, on their way to Natchitoches on a trading expedition. The guards had deserted, and Zambrano had escaped with Colonel Montero. Among the royal stores seized were a quantity of flour, powder, ammunition, lances, six hundred mules and horses, eighty thousand pounds of wool and a quantity of silver.

The new troops were organized rapidly. Despallier was given the task of organizing a new company composed of Mexicans who had deserted from Montero and Zambrano. James Gaines raised a company from the town and outlying ranches. McFarland, an experienced Indian fighter, was commissioned a captain with authority to recruit among the Indians.

The army was beginning to take form, and Jonathan was glad that the outlaws from the Neutral Ground no longer were its dominating influence. Magee was rallying men of influence to his cause. Davenport had accepted a commission as quartermaster, and was busily collecting stores. He had long been the Spanish Indian agent in this territory, and, when it became evident that only the Alabamas would join them here, it was he who dispatched Captain McFarland to the distant Lipan and Towakaway tribes. The army now was about five hundred strong—three hundred Americans, the rest newly recruited Mexican troops. Besides the companies of Lockett, Perry and Ross, Magee now had companies commanded by Gaines and Despallier, as well as the Alabama Indians.

Reports of his success had stimulated interest on the American side of the border, and recruits continued to arrive. This news had its effect in other quarters, too. Johnny Durst accompanied Captain Ross back to Natchitoches with the captured mules and wool, where they were sold to raise additional

funds for the army. Johnny brought Cecily a detailed account of their venture.

“At the rate recruits are passing through here,” he told her, “Magee’s army will double in size before long. They’re well equipped, too. Nothing can stop us, Cissy.”

“Where is Jonty’s company? How are they all?” was her first question.

“They’re fine,” Johnny told her. “Kirk’s Scouts drew first blood in the campaign.” He described how the enemy outpost had been surrounded and captured, and how, later, Jonathan’s band had opened fire on the approaching enemy troop at Salitre Prairie. “I don’t see as much of them as I’d like,” he admitted. “Half the time they’re out scouting, but it seems to agree with them. Both Cris and your father look well.”

“Everything is safe in Nacogdoches now, isn’t it?” she inquired.

Johnny Durst laughed confidently. “Nacogdoches will be just a base from now on,” he declared. “The war’s over as far as we are concerned there. The fighting will be around San Antonio.”

“Then there’s no reason I can’t come that far,” Cecily decided. “I’ll be just as well off there as here, and far less lonely. At least I’ll get to see my family once in a while, and I won’t have so long to wait for news.”

Johnny could see no objection to this plan, and he made the arrangements for her. A team and wagon had to be found for the furniture. Johnny drove it for her himself, and they made the trip in company with Ross’s returning detachment.

Teresa, too, was impatient to be off. These successes foretold the realization of her soaring ambition. Already, this was her army, Texas her country, and the throne Miguel Salazar had described awaited her in San Antonio de Bexar. Miguel could not leave yet. He functioned at Natchitoches as a forwarding agent for men and supplies. He was no less restless to be on the scene, but he recognized the necessity of his task.

“Everything is going according to plan. Gutierrez and Magee are only tools. This is their hour. Ours will come later. Be patient,” he counseled her.

“How can I?” she flared. “Isn’t this my war? Why aren’t you fighting too? Sometimes I wonder if you’re only half a man.”

“You know better than that.” He jostled her with rough playfulness. “Or do you want further proof?”

She melted against him submissively. It was a trick she had learned since her old ardor for him was gone.

There was an amused glint in his eyes. There had been a time, not long since, when he had felt her slipping away from him. Not now. He was sure



of her once more.

Jonathan was a part of her restlessness. A passion so near to love was new and surprising to her. She craved the sight of him.

Miguel finally acceded to her wishes. Captain Ross was returning to Nacogdoches and she would have safe escort. He would follow shortly. Although his permission was given reluctantly, he felt that it was wise to pamper her interest in his vision of empire.

The two girls traveled in the same convoy. Cecily Marsten stared in astonishment at the rococo yellow coach with the prancing white horses. Teresa, leaning back on her cushions, did not even notice the girl who rode in the wagon.

She entered Nacogdoches like the queen she planned to be, pleasantly conscious of the sensation she was creating as the rough soldiery crowded to stare at the sumptuous coach and catch a glimpse of its elegant occupant. "They like the trappings of royalty," she assured herself, and took confidence from the thought. "They shout 'Down with the king!' but look at them now. Miguel is right. Napoleon has proved it." She did not hear the jeers which followed her grotesque equipage.

Gutierrez had already rented a house, ready for Salazar's coming, and Teresa settled there, impatiently waiting for Jonathan's return. Kirk's Scouts were out on patrol in the Trinidad River country. Don Bernardo held open house for the leaders of the expedition, and since he felt it his pleasant duty to entertain Teresa in Miguel's absence, she had the opportunity to meet these men. Magee, she knew. Now she weighed him carefully, without appearing to do so. She found herself estimating the value of each new personality in the light of her ambition. What were his capabilities? What were his aims? How would he fit into this plan of empire, once the empty promises of a republic were abandoned and a throne revealed at the end of the campaign?

She knew Salazar's mind as she knew her own. Gutierrez she understood, too. He envisioned a republic of Mexico, independent of the Spanish crown. Such a man was necessary to stir the rabble now, but there would come a time when his usefulness would end. With this new shrewdness, she measured Magee's ambition, and yielded him a reluctant admiration as she recognized his ability. Here was the soul of the expedition. Nevertheless, he was a menace to her. This restless spirit would never be harnessed to another's purpose. Conquest was in his veins.

As she chatted with him, she read his aspirations, but her careless laughter cloaked the resolution forming in her mind. She had no doubt that Salazar planned to eliminate this tool as soon as his usefulness was ended. He was too adroit to miscalculate Magee's competence. Her misgivings

arose from watching the other leaders. All were American, just as was the backbone of the army. American leaders and American troops. How far could Salazar trust them? Would they accept his leadership?

Perhaps her speculation was influenced by her constant longing for Jonathan. Already she was slightly drunk with her obsession of power. In this delusion, nothing seemed impossible. She craved the crown, but she wanted Jonathan too. From the turbulence of these thoughts her own scheme was born, and, to her, it seemed as plausible as the others. Let Gutierrez dream of his revolution. Let Magee snatch his empire. Salazar, in time, would get rid of them both. That need not be the end. There were things Miguel did not know. His suspicions were stilled by the belief that Jonathan was dead. Slowly her brooding turned into resolve. Salazar's usefulness would come to an end, too.

Then it would be his turn to go. It was El Rubio who would share her throne. Desire mothered the plan but, to her, it seemed the most practical of them all. The man of her choice was sharing the dangers of the campaign while Miguel waited across the border. And—this seemed most logical of all—El Rubio was an American. The *yanquis* would follow him, even into the shadow of a throne, if it were handled skillfully.

Kirk's Scouts ranged as far west as Trinidad de Salcedo. The fall rains had set in, and they rode in a soft drizzle that made the turf slippery. Their clothes, once sodden, never dried out. For almost a week they plodded endlessly in a dripping discomfort which was, in a way, their ally too. It kept enemy patrols in camp. They spent one bleak night in a thicket along the river, so close to Trinidad that they could hear the bugle summoning the men to mass in the morning. That night Étienne Vauban slipped into the village for information. It was nearly midnight when he returned, and his report was encouraging. Montero had managed to assemble a force of about fifty men, all but ten of whom were half-hearted volunteers. There were Gutierrez' proclamations in the town and the folk looked hopefully toward Nacogdoches, even while they paid lip service to the royal commander.

Wild rumors were current about the strength of Magee's force. "They say we have soldiers by the thousand's," the trapper declared, and then with a twinkle in his eye, added, "Their ears are so beeg, m'sieur, Étienne tol' them we have two armies. *Voilà*, thees king will find no soldier to fight us here."

Jonathan sought out Magee as soon as he returned. He found him in a conference with the other leaders above Davenport's store. It was already dark and the candles guttered in the wind as he opened the door. The

commander scowled as he glanced up from the paper-littered table until he recognized the intruder.

“Jonty!” he exclaimed. “I was just waiting to hear from you. We’re ready to move. What’s the news from Trinidad?”

Jonathan reported.

Magee turned to Davenport. “Issue rations to each company immediately. Tomorrow we march on San Antonio.”

As Jonathan turned to leave, his commander called, “There’s feed for your horses in the corral back of the store. Care for your animals first and wait there for me. I won’t be long.”

Jonathan was strict in the attention he demanded for the horses of his little troop. They were tethered in the lean-to back of the corral and rubbed down vigorously as they were fed. The Virginian understood how to care for horseflesh.

They were still engaged in this work when Magee joined them. “I have a surprise for you,” he said. “We’re all having supper together at a place I know.” He was smiling and in a light-hearted mood, but would tell them nothing more until they arrived at the adobe cottage. “You’ll be in the saddle two hours before dawn so I thought we’d make the most of it,” he commented as he rapped on the door.

Cecily Marsten admitted them. The colonel had sent Johnny Durst on ahead to warn her, loaded down with an armful of provisions.

It was like the evenings in Natchitoches, with all of them talking at once. The familiar furniture which she had clung to so long, looking a little more scarred with travel, contrived to make the room look the same. Weariness was forgotten, all thought of the long trail ahead blotted out in the pleasure of the reunion. The talk was more of past experiences shared than of the unknown future. Only once was their venture mentioned.

“After San Antonio, what?” Johnny Durst asked Magee.

The colonel was silent for a moment, his eyes measuring them. “That will be only the beginning.” He spoke deliberately. “San Antonio is the capital of a vast country. We’ll set up an American republic. If the Spaniards keep sending armies against us, we’ll keep moving farther south and west. Our borders must be safe. If they let us alone, Texas is big enough for my ambition.”

“That reminds me of something. Cissy has a surprise for you.” Johnny Durst looked at the girl inquiringly. “Is it ready?”

“It’s partly Johnny’s surprise, too,” Cecily explained as she opened a drawer of the chest. “He found the material for me.” She took out a package and handed it to Magee. “Perhaps I should have consulted you about it but the only silk Johnny could find was green. I hope you’ll like it.”

The colonel unwrapped the parcel. Cecily had made him a flag. It was of green silk with a yellow fringe.

Magee held it up for them all to see. "Our colors," he said. "It's a beautiful flag, Cissy, and I'm glad you chose this color. It's appropriate. Texas is a green country. Your flag will be planted on the walls of San Antonio. You're our Betsy Ross."

Gaiety made the evening short, and it was late before they realized it. With the army moving at dawn, Kirk's Scouts soon would have to be in the saddle. Jonathan had no opportunity for a word alone with Cecily until it was time to leave.

"Don't run unnecessary risks, Jonty," she said, her eyes sober now.

"Don't worry, Cissy," he replied. "I'll keep an eye on Cris and your father. If things keep on the way they're going, we may march into San Antonio without firing another shot."

He put an arm around her shoulders and squeezed her in brotherly affection as he turned to leave. The company was to meet at the corral in two hours. The time for rest was brief.

Ben Marsten and Cris were sleeping at home. The others, assigned no quarters, intended to bed down on the floor of Magee's headquarters. But when they arrived there a shadow detached itself from the building and plucked the Virginian by the sleeve. It was José.

Maria had witnessed the arrival of the scouts, and had informed her mistress. José had been dispatched in quest of Jonathan, and had quailed before his mistress' anger when he reported back empty-handed.

"Go," she stormed. "Find him. Do you hear? Find him and bring him to me, and don't come back until you do," she shrilled after him as he bolted from the room.

"Where did you come from?" Jonathan demanded.

"The Golden One is here," José replied. "Come. I Will take you to her."

Teresa here and he hadn't known! Jonathan cursed the fate which had kept him idling in the Marsten cottage when he might have spent blissful hours with her. "Hurry," he urged his guide, mindful of the speeding time. In two hours he would be on the trail, and there was much to do before starting. One hour with her, perhaps. No more. He abandoned all thought of sleep. José seemed to dawdle through the streets.

Teresa paced the floor and eyed Maria, snoring in her chair by the door. There had been an hour when the girl's anger had turned on Jonathan. He was here and hadn't come to her! She would teach him that Teresa de Lerdo did not wait for any man. She went to bed—but sleep would not come. The turbulence of her desire would give her no rest. Her mood changed quickly. How could Jonty know she was here? It was that stupid José's fault. Once

more she was walking the floor when she heard the hurried footsteps in the street. She shook the sleeping serving woman until the fat chins quivered like jelly.

“Stop your snores,” she cried. “Wake up, Greaseball! Wake up! He is here.”

Maria unfolded one drowsy eye in time to glimpse her mistress darting from the room. It would never do, Teresa thought, for him to find her awaiting him at the door like some eager schoolgirl. But she forgot her resolution when she heard his voice, and came flying to meet him with outstretched arms.

“Jontee,” she murmured. “Jontee, I thought you would never come.”

She clung to him, her lips crushed to his. She had not guessed that love could be like this. It always had been something to accept, not something to give.

She had forgotten her night gown’s sheer material was never meant to conceal her lithe body. Had she remembered, it would not have mattered. But the sight disturbed Jonathan, who had never seen a woman so. Her arms were about him and he could feel the warmth of her, under his hands.

She drew back presently, to look at him. “You are burned red, the color of an Indian, my darling. I think you belong to this country.”

At arm’s length, he could see her more clearly. Her flesh glowed through the thin fabric. Embarrassed, he turned his eyes away.

She saw and understood. Her laugh was soft as she clutched him to her again, so fiercely that she could feel the bruise of the thong which held his powder horn. The sound in her throat was wordless—a cooing moan—which he tried to stifle with kisses. There was no end to their hunger for each other.

It was hard for him to tell her how soon they must part, but their hour was slipping by.

She stared at him incredulously. For her, their love could have no such ending. “But you must rest,” she urged. “My bed is here.”

Again she felt his arms trembling about her and looking up, she read the torment in his face. She learned something else from that glance. She did not fully understand the young idealism that had placed her on a pedestal, but she guessed it vaguely and was too shrewd to challenge it. Not yet. She pushed him from her, reluctantly.

“I was only thinking of you, darling.”

“I know.” He kissed her, gently this time.

“It won’t always be this way,” he promised. “Once we have won this war, I’ll have time for nothing but you. I’m going to find a plantation on the

banks of some river and build you a palace, where we'll live happily the rest of our lives and nothing will ever part us again."

The word "palace" suggested the plans brewing in her mind. "I like to think of that, Jontee. We will be very happy. You will be rich and powerful. I shall see to that."

He raised his eyebrows. "You'll see to it? That's my end of the bargain. Don't bother your pretty head about such things."

This new mood of giving, prompted by her ardor, made her reckless. She wanted to tempt him. "Anything can happen in this new land," she said. "Here a man may be a king if he has the will for it. Once this empire is conquered, who will rule it? Have you wondered of that?" Her eyes were on him. "Stranger things have happened. Someday even you and I may sit together on a throne."

He laughed. "We want none of that. We're Americans, and we'll set up our own kind of government. We've come to throw a throne on the rubbish heap."

"Sometimes I dream of such things," she said. "It is a happy dream, Jontee."

He tilted back her chin and kissed her on the lips. "You are so beautiful," he murmured. "There never was a queen like you."

She nestled into his arms, meeting his farewell kiss. He loved her. That was enough. The rest would come.

# Chapter 15

## *Forced March*

THE night was still black as Jonathan Kirk's Scouts clattered out of the town. Here and there candles gleamed, hints that the drowsing army soon would be astir. They looked back at the friendly lights while watering their horses at the ford. They could carry this memory with them along the unknown trails ahead.

It was two days' hard riding to Trinidad de Salcedo. As they left the pines behind, they found themselves in a gently rolling country, with grass lush on its open plains and live oaks in stately clumps, dark against the sky. The weather was good now, so bright that they longed for clouds as they rode into the westward sun through the long afternoon. They squinted into the slanting rays through narrowed lids until Jess Leeman taught them a plainsman's trick. They had stopped to water their horses at a creek. Jess dipped up some mud in his fingers and smeared black crescents under his eyes. When he explained his purpose, they all tried it. Their appearance was droll, but it afforded some relief from the sun's reflection.

Their caution in approaching Trinidad was wasted. Étienne, who crept into the village after nightfall, returned with the report that the enemy had fallen back. Accounts of Magee's strength were so exaggerated and the proclamations issued by Gutierrez had been so effective, that the Spanish volunteers had deserted. Left with only ten men to face the approaching army, Montero had retreated to San Antonio.

"Thees ees one of the bullets that sent the Spaniards running, m'sieur." Étienne held up a handbill he had found in the town. It was one of Don Bernardo's circulars, headed, "Why do you fight for the *gachupines*?"

"What's a *gachupine*?" Cris asked when the edict was translated.

"It means a man who wears spurs," Ben Marsten explained. He had interested himself in the republican propaganda and understood it. "Actually it's a contemptuous epithet applied to the arrogant Spaniards sent out to govern these people. Native Mexicans don't like them any better than we liked some of our royal governors before we won our independence. 'Death to the *gachupines*!' was the war cry of the Hidalgo Revolution.

“That explains why so many Mexicans have joined us. If we can make this a *gachupine* war, they’ll be on our side.”

As proof of this contention, Jonathan was overwhelmed by volunteers, eager to join the army, when he led his scouts into the town. A messenger was sent riding to inform Magee, and a patrol was established beyond the river crossing to guard against surprise.

The army spent several days there in spite of Magee’s impatience. He wanted to hit the enemy quickly, but a messenger had arrived from Nacogdoches with word that nearly two hundred additional volunteers were on their way. His force was too small to ignore such re-enforcements.

When the westward march was resumed, there were more than eight hundred men in the ranks: about two hundred native Mexicans, eighty Indians and more than six hundred American volunteers.

Kirk’s Scouts were again in advance. They had no trouble crossing the Trinidad and Navasota Rivers, but the Brazos was another matter. Swollen by recent rains, the muddy stream roared, bank full, blocking their path. Jonathan was impatient to get ahead but this was no task for night and it was growing late. They camped there until dawn before attempting a crossing.

At this stage the river was wide and the current swift. There was some hazard from driftwood, too, logs occasionally swirling by with a speed that was lethal for swimming men. First a raft of driftwood was lashed together for ferrying their rifles, ammunition and blankets, and long poles cut to propel it. O’Rourke was in charge of this, with Tom Sartin to help him. The others were to swim the horses across.

“I’ll go first,” Jonathan decided. “One armed man across there could pick us off, one at a time, if we all tried it at once. You can cover my crossing from here.”

He had difficulty in forcing his reluctant horse into the water. Once in, however, the animal struck out boldly for the opposite shore. Jonathan slipped off and swam too, clinging to the saddle with one hand. It was a hard crossing, but he made it without incident, although the force of the current carried him far downstream. His soaked clothing sloshed in the saddle as he scouted the west bank for any hidden enemy, before beckoning the others to follow.

The men poling the raft had tied their horses behind it to swim, and this made trouble. The animals balked at first, and had to be driven from behind before they would enter the river. The other horsemen followed.

Caught in an eddy, a drifting log spun in the rough current, striking Ben Marsten’s horse. Fortunately it was a glancing blow, but the animal became panic-stricken, lunging and pawing at the water. Marsten lost his grip on the saddle and, floundering in the surging tide, was swirled away.



Cris saw his plight and, abandoning his horse, swam toward him, Jonathan watched from the bank, too distant to be of service. The boy reached his father. For an instant the two heads vanished, then they bobbed up again, farther downstream. Jonathan groaned at his helplessness as they again disappeared beneath the surface. Ben Marsten was big-framed and flabby. The slender youth was unequal to the burden.

Jess Leeman urged his horse into the current. Those flailing hoofs would be fatal if they struck a swimming man.

“No, Jess, no!” Jonathan yelled but the words were lost in the rush of water.

Jess was almost on the struggling figures now. He turned his mount for the shore and, leaning far out, clutched at them, his hand closing about the boy’s collar.

The horse lunged as it felt the drag of this added weight, churning at the yellow foam and losing headway. Cris grasped the saddle.

“Hang on,” Jess shouted. “He’ll tote you an’ yore paw. I can make it all right.”

The outlaw released his grip and started swimming.

His load lightened, the horse once more started for the shore, carrying Cris and his father to safety. Jess was tiring as he neared the bank. The last few feet of rushing water was almost beyond his strength. Jonathan plunged in to meet him. Together they scrambled up the slippery bank and sprawled there for a time, resting.

“Jess,” Jonathan said presently, “that was the damndest thing I ever saw a man do.”

“Shucks, didn’t you come after me, when you seen I was plumb tuckered out?”

“That was different,” the Virginian objected. “You were nearly ashore by then.”

The harsh lines of the outlaw’s scarred face softened when he smiled. “Miss Cissy’s my friend.”

The army was five days crossing the flooded Brazos, floating its supplies over on log rafts. Magee was restless at the enforced delay, and sent Lockett’s riflemen to re-enforce Jonathan’s company and patrol the country far ahead. “If they hit us while we’re crossing, with our force divided, they’ll cut us to pieces,” the commander declared. “That’s what I’d do if I were in their shoes.”

Their mishaps were many. Despite every effort, the rafts often were carried as much as a half mile downstream by the swift water. Horses,

swimming behind the rafts, often broke loose and had to be caught by volunteers who raced up and down both banks. The crossing, however, was finally accomplished with no losses more serious than a few sacks of corn spilled when a boat capsized. They were now more than three hundred miles deep in Texas territory—well over half the distance to the capital.

Kirk's Scouts encountered an enemy patrol at the Colorado River, two days beyond the Brazos. Jess Leeman and Tom Sartin, in the lead, almost rode straight into the outpost. There were only three men in the party. Jess saw them dive for their rifles and, without waiting for the others, fired from the saddle and sent his horse charging into the camp, Sartin right behind him. Two of the Mexicans managed to reach their horses and escape. The third was slower and, seeing flight was hopeless, took refuge in the thick underbrush along the bank. Here he was found and captured.

The prisoner was terrified and quite willing to talk. Governor Manuel Salcedo was waiting at the Guadalupe River crossing with fourteen hundred men, he said. The outpost here was one of several thrown out to watch the approaching Americans while the wily Spanish leader was carefully setting his trap. Jonathan was suspicious of the story. It would have to be investigated.

O'Rourke was sent back to inform Magee. He took the prisoner. The rest of the company camped for two hours to feed and rest their horses, and then pushed on after dark toward the Guadalupe, more than sixty miles away. Another halt was called at dawn. Their animals were growing jaded. They camped in a copse of oaks where they could watch the road, and rested until noon. No one slept, however, until the horses had been rubbed down with tufts of dried grass and fed the last of the corn they had been issued at Nacogdoches. The King's Highway here was a wide, well-marked track, winding through low hills which loomed higher to the west.

They left the road when they resumed their march, skirting wide around San Marcos to avoid any patrols, and heading south toward the river. It was after dark when they reached it and they estimated that they were probably eight miles below the regular crossing when they made camp. Giles Brady and Étienne Vauban, whom Jonathan adjudged the two best woodsmen, were sent ahead to investigate. They were back by midnight, their horses splashing noisily in the crossing.

"A thousan' campfires, M'sieur Jonty," Étienne exclaimed. "There ees one beeg army yonder. Ol' Salcedo seets there like a fox, waitin' for us."

"Well, maybe not a thousand, but I calc'late that feller told us the truth," Giles amended.

They were a stained and weary outfit when they rode into Magee's camp with the news. The colonel immediately called a council of war where he

had Jonathan repeat his message for all to hear. Gutierrez was in favor of pushing on to the Guadalupe. "Sooner or later we'll have to fight him," he declared.

Magee vetoed this. "I want to meet Salcedo, but I don't want him to pick the battleground. He's thirty miles from his base and we'd be nearly four hundred from ours. Let's leave him waiting there and get us a base of our own. How far is La Bahia?"

"I guess it at about a hundred and fifty miles from here," Davenport replied.

"We can beat him to it." Magee was positive. "We'll be halfway there before he can guess our intention. With a base at La Bahia, we're less than a hundred miles from San Antonio, and better still, we'll be south of it and a threat to his communications. He'll have to come to us."

The others agreed. Magee's decisions always were quick and convincing.

The road to La Bahia had branched off at Trinidad and lay miles to the south. In open country this was not a serious handicap. Once more the colonel detached Lockett's company to assist Kirk's Scouts in masking the army's movement. Lockett was to advance one day's march toward San Antonio in an effort to deceive Salcedo's outposts into thinking that no change had been made in their plans. Jonathan's scouts were to patrol Magee's right flank, guarding against the filtering through of any spy who might report their movements. These precautions taken, the forced march began. The army was on the move hours before dawn each morning and still was moving long after sunset. Short halts were called intermittently throughout the day, the men throwing themselves wearily upon the ground to snatch a few minutes' rest. Frontiersmen, they were inured to hardship, and Magee drove them mercilessly. There were some who fell out, but the colonel refused to stop for anyone.

"Lockett will come this way," he said. "I've left orders for him to pick up all stragglers."

To Kirk's Scouts that march became an unending nightmare. For every mile the army traveled, they went three, swinging back and forth around its flank, searching every clump of trees, every creek bed, for possible hostile eyes. They knew no rest.

During this ceaseless weary plodding, Ben Marsten fell ill. Ever since the crossing of the flooded Brazos, his cough had been a racking worry. The others either had the vigor of youth or were calloused to such rigors, but the unending hours in the saddle and constant exposure were wearing down his resistance rapidly.

He clung on doggedly, his determination winning him a new respect from his companions, but there came a morning when he was no longer able to drag himself into the saddle. His body was hot with fever and his words were an unintelligible jumble.

“He can’t go on.” Cris Marsten’s face was puckered with worry. “If you’ll just let me stay here with him until his fever breaks—” He glanced again at his father.

Magee was depending on their little force to screen his flank. There could be no stopping here. Jonathan eyed the sick man, remembering his promise to Cecily. “If we only had a wagon,” he said, bitter with the knowledge that the army was miles away.

“How about a *travois*?” Étienne asked. “We can carry heem that way.”

“I’ve never seen one.” Jonathan seized on the suggestion. “Do you know how to make it?”

The trapper drew a picture in the dust of a primitive Indian litter. “Étienne can make anything an Indian can make, m’sieur,” he promised.

They all helped with its construction. Two long poles, no thicker than a man’s arm, were fastened to Marsten’s horse, like shafts. Their free ends, dragging behind, were lashed together and a crude litter was made with a lacing of rawhide thongs. When it was finished, Marsten was wrapped in his blanket and secured on this cot. It was primitive but serviceable.

“The army is off there, Cris,” Jonathan pointed. “You’ll go with your father. You can’t travel faster than a walk so you’ll have to keep moving. Don’t stop for anything.”

“Gabe—” he turned to the Negro—“I want you to ride as fast as you can. When you reach the army, find Dr. Forsythe and bring him back to meet Cris. Understand?”

The servant already was cinching his saddle girth. “I’ll fetch him, Mist’ Jonty,” he promised.

No one else could be spared. The safety of the entire army might depend upon them and one-third of their company would be absent. They rode on but they turned their heads to watch the little caravan until it faded from sight.

Hour on hour Cris rode. Ben chattered incessantly in his delirium. It was agonizing to be held to this slow walk, with that sick voice constantly in his ears to remind him of the need for speed. Nor could he ride beside his father. The horse dragging the litter had to be led. On and on he plodded, his muscles aching as he strained against the crawling pace. Always his eyes were searching the horizon for some sign of Gabe and the doctor. It was late afternoon when he finally saw them, growing specks against the sky. They were looking into the sun and had not seen him yet; their course led to his

left. Cris fired his rifle to attract their attention and saw them veer toward him.

The doctor made no effort to hide his concern. "We've got to get him to a wagon," he said, appraising the crude litter.

"How far is the army?"

"About ten miles. But they'll be moving again before midnight."

"We'll make it," Cris replied. "We've got to make it."

They trudged on through the night. Part of the time the doctor walked beside the sick man, doing what he could for him, but they never stopped.

The camp was reached while the army was huddled over its breakfast fires. A pallet was rigged for Ben Marsten in one of the powder wagons.

The night of November thirteenth a biting wind blew down from the north, doubly cold because the day had been so warm, but Magee would permit no fires. They were approaching La Bahia. There had been no word of Salcedo in days. Lockett's force was somewhere back up the weary trail. The army was allowed a four-hour rest before the advance was ordered. Weary as they were, the men were anxious to go on. The wind had grown icy and they were half numb with its chill. Magee sent Jonathan and his scouts ahead to reconnoiter.

"Get somebody into the town and find out what you can," he ordered. "I want to know the strength of the garrison and what's become of Salcedo."

As usual, this task fell to Étienne. Jonathan halted the company about a mile away and waited. This was an old settlement with a fort or presidio in the town and a mission across the river, less than a mile away. There were two other missions in the vicinity: one, Rosario, only a couple of miles distant, the other at Refugio, about thirty miles south. It was a prosperous town with a population of about fifteen hundred and many stone buildings.

The trapper soon returned with the needed information. The fort was strong, enclosing a considerable area behind a stout stone wall, and defended by sixteen cannon. However, the garrison numbered only one hundred and sixty men and there was no word of Salcedo's coming. Jonathan sent a messenger back to Magee with the news. The rest of them waited, huddling against the river bank to escape the wind, and tried to rest. The colonel himself galloped up with fifty men from Perry's Company.

"Come on, Jonty. We're going in," he said. The man seemed indefatigable. His eyes were dancing. "We've done it," he exclaimed. "I'd like to see Salcedo's face when he learns where we are."

They were sixty strong as they clattered through the silent street. They rode straight to the fort where Magee, on being challenged, demanded

surrender and ordered the sentry to bring the commander to him. His English made no sense to the sentry's startled ears.

The colonel turned to Davenport. "Tell him what I said."

Davenport repeated the order in Spanish.

The guard didn't even bother to send for the commandant. Almost instantly the gate swung open. "*Me rindo!*" the excited sentinel shouted, rushing out, unarmed, to surrender. The taking of La Bahia was as simple as that. The battle had been won in that long heart-breaking march.

It was two days before all the stragglers arrived, but they were surprisingly few. Magee's confidence in his troops had been justified. The stores captured included the sixteen cannon, a quantity of powder, corn and salt, and, most important of all, a chest of specie which Salcedo had stored there to pay some of his troops. It amounted to four thousand dollars. Magee ordered each man in the army paid five dollars from this fund. It did much to relieve their weariness. A few of the prisoners enrolled in the new army, professing no love for the *gachupines*. The cannon were the most futile of their newly acquired possessions, some of them useful only as ornaments to awe the natives. Three would not even fire. They were rusty relics of La Salle's ill-fated expedition in 1685.

The army was allowed one day for rest and repair of equipment before Magee started putting the defenses in order. The fort stood at the north end of the town. It was sturdily built of stone and stood on a bluff overlooking the river. The colonel ordered earthen bastions erected on either side of it, where he placed his artillery in position to command the northern approach. At the same time he took steps to provision his army, sending out several parties in search of cattle. Captain McFarland, with a strong party, was dispatched on a scouting trip to the west with instructions to advance as far as the Nueces River. This was the main road to Laredo and Mexico, and any reinforcements for Salcedo would come from this direction. Two patrols were sent northwest toward San Antonio, one on either side of the river. Lieutenant Drake of Lockett's company headed the one on the east bank. He had fourteen men. Jonathan Kirk's Scouts were on the other side. They were instructed to maintain a patrol thirty miles to the north, and keep Magee informed of any enemy movement. Ben Marsten, still very sick, was left behind.

Cold camps were impossible in this weather. For three days the wind had been whistling from the north and its breath was wet. The men's hands were numbed and blue and their soaked clothing no longer shut out the chill when

Jonathan called a halt for the night. He chose a spot sheltered under a high bank at a curve in the river.

“We’ve got to have a fire,” he said, “but I want it where it can’t be seen very far.”

“You’re wastin’ a lot of worry,” Giles Brady replied. “There won’t be any Spaniards prowlin’ in such weather. Magee’s the only man in the world who could think up such an idee.”

Jonathan posted a sentry. The rest of them huddled under the shelving bank for protection and tried to dry their clothes. The Virginian, stiff with fatigue, thawed in the heat of the flames.

At such times, his thoughts always turned to Teresa. She was never very far from his mind. He had been stirred by the memory of her kisses at the close of many weary days, and invariably he remembered her, not in the ridiculous coach which offended his taste, but as he had seen her last, in the intimacy of a night dress through which he could feel her warm pulsing. The transparency of that filmy gown was a disturbing recollection.

Sometimes thought of that reckless hour troubled him in other ways. She had exposed her body so carelessly, and the abandon of her caresses tormented him. Always these thoughts shamed him, however; his doubts were smothered in warm memories. She loved him and was careless in the candor of her giving. If there had been anything wrong, it was in his own disturbing desire. When he went to sleep, it was to dream again of Teresa—in his arms.

He was awakened by Tom Sartin shaking him. Dawn was bleak in the sky, and the pleasant warmth of the fire was gone. Jess was scattering the charred logs with hurried kicks.

“Our fire’s been seen.” Sartin was nudging each man in turn as he aroused the camp. “Thar must be a thousand of ’em.”

Jonathan clambered up the bank to look for himself. The light still was uncertain but he could distinguish movement on the plain above. A horse whinnied out in the shadows and there was an answering nicker some distance away. Giles Brady had climbed to his side and was watching, too. “’Pears like they got us surrounded,” he observed. “An thar’s plenty of ’em. I reckon we’re in a mite of a jamb.”

Each man was priming his rifle. “I hyar Spanish prisons ain’t much,” Jess Leeman observed dourly. “I’d ruther fight it out right hyar.”

They took turns watching. The Spaniards, sure of their prey, were closing in slowly. Indistinct forms were beginning to take shape in the fading shadows. A large body of cavalry circled them on three sides. The river at their back was their only hope of escape but Jonathan was wary of a trap. It seemed unreasonable to believe that such an obvious line of retreat

would remain unguarded. Yet it must be attempted. Magee must be warned of the enemy's approach. "We'll try the river," he said. "And remember this. Whoever gets through must carry the word to Magee."

Rifle fire broke out behind them, across the stream. An irregular volley was followed by scattered shots. It ended almost as quickly as it began.

Giles jerked his thumb in that direction. "I reckon that was Drake's company. They had 'em surrounded, too. Didn't last long, did they?"

Jonathan had a clearer picture of the situation now. The enemy line was advancing on both sides of the river at once. "Saddle up, quick," he ordered. "We're getting out of here."

He was mounting as he continued, "Our best chance is to be where they least expect us, so we'll cross here. There's a possibility that they broke their lines when they closed in on Drake's camp. Besides, they'll figure us to head straight south for La Bahia. We won't do that. We'll ride north. We'll stay under the bank as long as possible and take it easy, hoping to slip through if we can. If we're seen—" he gripped his gun more firmly—"we'll fight our way through. Everybody understand?"

There was no further comment. Each man held his primed rifle high out of the wet as they edged their reluctant animals into the cold river. Fortunately it was not beyond the depth of their horses. The crossing accomplished, they turned to the left, sheltered by a grove of large pecan trees. The underbrush was scant. Jonathan restrained an impulse to set spurs to his horse and make a dash for it. Instead, they worked their way cautiously along, taking as much advantage of the shelter as possible. Off to their right they could hear shouts and laughter. The sounds must come from the camp where Drake had been surprised. It angered him, but there was nothing he could do about it now. After several hundred yards of this stealthy progress, they reached a point where a bluff edged into the stream, blocking their path. Jonathan turned his horse up the bank. The damp earth smelled good as the horses churned their way up the slope.

He was in advance. There was no shelter now and directly ahead he saw a dismounted Spanish patrol, about thirty strong. The time for concealment was past. He aimed his rifle at the nearest soldier.



# Chapter 16

## *A Red Blade*

JONATHAN'S company was at his heels. No word of command was needed. They followed his lead, charging headlong through the smoke of their volley. Several of the enemy went down and the others, taken completely by surprise, scattered before the sudden impact.

Their rifles empty, Jonathan and his men leaned low over their horses and dug in their spurs, riding straight for the surprised outpost. The Spaniards scurried to avoid the plunging horses; the scouts had broken clear of the trap before the officer in charge got his men in hand. A few rifle balls sped harmlessly overhead but the Americans had a wide lead before the enemy was mounted and giving chase.

"Shure, we're lucky to git out of there with a whole skin," O'Rourke exclaimed.

"We're not out of it yet." Jonathan was staring over his shoulder at the pursuing troops about two hundred yards in their rear. "They're between us and La Bahia and they're driving us north. If that's Salcedo's advance guard, they're herding us straight into his army."

The more he thought of it, the more Jonathan was convinced that this was the enemy's intention. They were making no effort to overtake them, but had settled down into an easy canter, on their trail. Moreover, he was troubled by his obligation to keep Magee informed. They were on an open rolling plain. There was cover only along the river bank but he had no intention of being trapped there again. Determined to find a way to turn his course, he decided that the undulating hills offered the only opportunity. When they were galloping toward the crest of one of these swells, his plan took form and he issued rapid instructions.

"Load your guns now," he said. "When we pass the top of the hill we'll dismount and give them a volley. Everybody pick a man."

They had ample time. The scouts threw their reins to Gabe and crept back to the brow of the hill, well concealed in the tall grass. There were thirty-one men trotting after them, led by an officer whose bright uniform was easily distinguishable.

“You take the officer, Jess. You’re a better shot than I am,” Jonathan instructed. “All set? Fire!”

Flame lashed out of the grass. They had held their volley until their enemy was not more than forty yards distant and the range was deadly. Seven men fell from their saddles. The others were thrown into confusion to which the panic of the riderless horses added.

“Load! Load!” Jonathan found himself chanting feverishly. His fingers trembled in their haste as he spilled powder into his weapon. If their opponents charged while their guns were empty, it would be hopelessly one-sided.

Jess Leeman was ready first. Another victim swayed from his saddle in answer to the rifle’s voice.

The enemy’s uncertainty came to an abrupt end. They had been milling around hesitantly, awaiting orders that could not come. They fled as saddles began to empty once more.

Jonathan led his men abruptly to the right now, the river behind them. He was careful to keep their movement concealed as long as possible by the hill where they had made their stand. They continued in this direction for an hour before turning south, on a wide circle of the enemy, to reach La Bahia. They encountered no more troops. The need for haste was great, but their destination was thirty miles away and they husbanded their animals, riding at a gallop for thirty-minute intervals, slowing to a walk for about the same length of time. They arrived that night in time to advise Magee of the enemy’s approach, the only scouts who returned safely.

Alerted by this warning, Magee was ready when Governor Salcedo approached the next day. The *gachupine* army rode in from the north and occupied the Espiritu Santo mission less than a mile away. Jonathan was on the tower at the fort with Magee, watching them. The enemy forces were spread out before them in the distance like toy soldiers. “He knows his business,” the colonel remarked as he watched Salcedo deploy his troops on the plain.

Magee estimated the royal army at about fifteen hundred men. There were horses to spare. Even the infantry was riding as it entered the plain. Jonathan counted fourteen pieces of artillery massed before the mission. This was almost a fort itself, with sturdy walls enclosing the rectangular group of stone buildings. As they watched, the flag of royal Spain was unfurled from the mission tower.

The twisting San Antonio River formed a horseshoe, open to the north and almost encircling a plain about three-quarters of a mile in diameter. The mission stood near the open end of the shoe. The town of La Bahia and its fort were located on a high bluff across the river at its apex, which was

pointed south. The river was about twenty yards wide, for the most part deep but with several accessible fords. The plain below was commanded by the guns mounted on the fort.

A picket line was thrown out under command of Captain Ross, and here the enemy was first engaged. Spanish cavalry advancing toward the river was driven back. From his position in the tower Magee had a clear view of the entire action. It was as though he were watching an animated map. Salcedo wasn't wasting time. He sent three columns of infantry forward in support, one deploying in the center, the others advancing in solid columns along the flanks. The American commander was equally determined to win this initial battle. He threw his entire force into the action immediately, and had the advantage of anticipating his opponent's moves. Captain Gaines, with his company of Nacogdoches Mexicans, was hurried to the left flank to halt the column advancing there. Perry's company was rushed forward in support of Ross, while Lockett was sent to stop the column on the right. Jonathan and his scouts accompanied him. The royal troops walked into traps on their flanks and a determined resistance in the center. They were trying to move in military rank against expert marksmen, frontiersmen who knew how to take advantage of all available cover. After about two hours, Salcedo's troops were driven back.

Magee was in high spirits. "That's what we needed. One good general engagement under our belts. The men will have more confidence now they know they can whip regulars."

Governor Salcedo took vigorous measures to invest La Bahia at once, placing outposts both up and down the river on both sides, and driving in the American pickets.

Magee's principal problem became one of supply. An ample supply of corn had been stored at La Bahia and there was plenty of salt, useful for curing meat, but the beef was lacking. Forage for horses was another problem. Scouting parties were organized to slip through the enemy lines and drive in cattle at night. Whenever they were successful the army had meat to eat. Only the horses necessary for these parties were kept inside the town. The rest of the live stock, about two hundred head of horses and mules, was assembled into a *remuda* and driven out to be pastured under guard several miles away. Once when Jonathan's company returned from a successful cattle hunt they learned that these horses had been captured by the Spaniards. It was a serious blow. Gutierrez was in despair when he heard the report, but Magee remained unshaken.

"They've got plenty of horses." The colonel pointed toward the enemy lines. "We'll have them all when Salcedo surrenders." Nothing ever shook his confidence.

Salcedo was receiving constant re-enforcements, and his siege lines grew steadily tighter. It became increasingly difficult to drive beeves in at night, and there were frequent brushes between the scouting parties and enemy outposts. Salcedo was waiting for siege guns with which he planned to batter down the fort. This was well known to the Americans. One peculiarity of the siege was that each side was well informed as to the movements and intentions of the other. There were many Mexicans in Magee's army who seemed able to keep in touch with their friends in the other camp. Desertions were common; Salcedo had greater trouble from them than Magee.

Magee's dispatches were full of confidence. His position was strong. It threatened the enemy's communications and it gave him a base of operations. He refused to be disheartened by the hardships of the siege. "Sooner or later he'll have to attack," he reminded his staff. "This time we've chosen the position. With marksmen like ours, he can never dislodge us."

Miguel Salazar arrived in La Bahia when the siege was a month old, coming through the lines at night with a party of Lockett's riflemen. He was not lacking in personal courage. He had made the long ride from Nacogdoches with three men. It had not suited him to be so far from the base of operations. His plan was delicately balanced. There was a certain point beyond which his instruments became perilous. Magee the soldier must never become Magee the conqueror. Gutierrez the rabble rouser served his purpose at a definite time. Both must be discarded at the proper moment.

Jonathan was away with his company in search of beef when Salazar came and it was a week before they met at Magee's headquarters.

Kirk's Scouts had driven in twenty beeves. It was the custom to butcher the cattle inside the town. Horsemen could drive more beef than they could carry. When Jonathan entered the room, a discussion was in progress between Magee and Kemper, on the one hand, and Gutierrez and Salazar on the other.

"Well, Jonty, what luck this time?" Magee inquired.

Miguel glanced up casually and then, when he recognized the newcomer, the pockmarks which pitted his face whitened perceptibly.

Magee noticed this. He glanced from one man to the other swiftly. "I haven't forgotten that you two have a quarrel," he said brusquely. "But I want to remind you that we're at war now. Our fight is with the Spaniards. I won't tolerate any private feuds. Both of you are valuable to this army and we need every man. Do I make myself clear?"

Miguel Salazar smiled. His shrug seemed to indicate that he had thrust the matter aside as of no consequence. "You're right, as usual, Colonel." His

voice was smooth. "This is no time for personal animosities."

He glanced once more at Jonathan as he left the room. He was not smiling then.

When he reached his quarters, he flung open the door and stood glaring about the room, his eyes slits of hatred. Luiz recognized the marks of his wrath and would have backed away but his master stopped him. "Where's Clampit?"

The servant feared the controlled calm of the tone more than if his master had cursed him. "I will find him, Don Miguel." He was trembling in his eagerness.

"I must see him at once," Salazar was shouting now. "At once. You understand? Now find him."

But a messenger arrived from Magee's headquarters before Salazar could see the gambler. Salcedo had sent a request for a parley, under a flag of truce, and Magee wished him to attend. The opposing commanders met at the ford just below the town. With Governor Salcedo were Colonel Simon Herrera, former governor of the colony, Colonel Montero, who had abandoned Nacogdoches, and a bugler. Magee had brought Gutierrez, Salazar, Kemper, Perry, Gaines and Despallier. Ross and Lockett were left in command of the town during the parley, at Gutierrez' insistence. He feared treachery. Salcedo spoke English, having traveled extensively in the United States.

"Your position is hopeless, Colonel." He addressed all of his remarks to Magee, not deigning to look at Gutierrez. "I am prepared to offer magnanimous terms for your surrender. I believe you have been misled in this adventure, and I offer you an adjustment whereby you may retire with honor."

"Your Excellency forgets that I hold the town and fort of La Bahia." Magee smiled. "My position is impregnable."

Salcedo shrugged. "It is you who forget. You are fighting the Spanish crown. Whatever resources are necessary will be sent me. Only today a regiment of cavalry, five hundred strong, re-enforced me. I am prepared to offer a worthy and honorable opponent generous terms. Otherwise there can be but one end to this venture."

"What are these terms?"

"Lay down your arms and surrender your position. In return, I offer a safe conduct for you and all your troops back to the border. You will be accorded all the honors of war and, in addition, one man in each four may retain his rifle.

"However—" he glanced at Gutierrez—"you have with you some revolutionists who are Spanish subjects. I cannot offer them terms. I refer

specifically to Bernardo Gutierrez and a man who calls himself Salazar. These two must be turned over to me.”

He had glanced only casually at Gutierrez but when he mentioned Salazar, his eyes were hard.

Miguel bowed. “You honor me with your attention,” he remarked mockingly. “I seem to recall other occasions in which you have interested yourself in my affairs. That’s one of the matters I’m here to correct.” Salazar’s memory stretched back many years. He was again at Horcajadas hacienda, and an important visitor had arrived to see his father. Don Manuel Salcedo represented the proud de Lerdo and Salcedo families, demanding that a rebellious lad named Miguel be sent away. Salcedo was remembering, too, and he recalled how the de Lerdo name had been ridiculed when Salazar had given it to his mistress. The hostility between the two men was open, although none of the others gathered there understood its source.

“In return, I’ll offer Your Excellency the same generous terms,” Magee broke in. “You may retire below the Rio Grande with such of your troops as wish to accompany you, and I will permit one man in four to carry his arms. The capitulation, of course, includes San Antonio de Bexar.”

“You offer me terms!” Salcedo exclaimed. “I thought I was dealing with a sensible man.”

There the interview ended.

Clampit was waiting in Salazar’s quarters when he returned. The Spaniard closed the door carefully behind him and stood there with arms crossed, staring at the gambler. “I wonder that you dared to come here with me,” he exclaimed. “I’m not used to being swindled.”

The gambler arose from the chair where he had been waiting. “What’s this all about?” he demanded.

Salazar shrugged. “You told me Jonathan Kirk was dead. You even described the scene most graphically. I paid you two thousand dollars on that wager.”

“Well?”

“He is very much alive. I saw him here not an hour ago. He’s in charge of a company of Magee’s scouts.”

Clampit sat slowly down. His expression was dazed. “It can’t be,” he whispered. Jonathan had been missing from the gambler’s world since the night of the crime. Texas was a vast place and the obscure lieutenant of scouts had not been mentioned in the few accounts he had heard of this expedition.

Miguel had suspected the gambler of trickery. Now, watching his incredulity, he was not so sure. “What happened in Natchez?” he asked.

“I told you. There could be no mistake. I followed him to his room.” Clampit shook his head slowly. “That night I went back there and killed him. I stabbed him three times.”

“Then someone died at Natchez but it wasn’t Jonathan Kirk.” Salazar’s tone was calmer now but no less deadly. “I saw him today, I tell you.”

The gambler looked up. “If he’s here I’ll find a way to finish the job,” he promised.

Salazar strode restlessly about the room. This new knowledge brought other things to mind. Teresa’s recent coldness. Her insistence on traveling on to Nacogdoches. Had she gone there to meet the man he had thought dead? The more he thought of it, the more his conviction grew. His eyes blazed.

“I’ve made inquiries about him,” he said. “He is away on patrols most of the time. When here, he occupies a cot in Magee’s quarters. There’s no telling how soon he’ll be leaving again. I want him killed tonight.”

“Show me the house,” the gambler said.

Jonathan was kept busy at headquarters late that night. Messengers were going and coming, and Magee had requested two men from his company to act as guides. Davenport and Ross were leaving for Nacogdoches: Davenport to collect and forward supplies, Ross headed for New Orleans to raise re-enforcements. Jess Leeman and Tom Sartin were to lead them through the enemy lines. McFarland’s patrol, missing for many days, arrived that evening too, bringing with them twenty-five prisoners.

Magee seemed never to rest. He anticipated an attack by Salcedo following the parley, and his active mind already was working out its details. The supply of powder was adequate but there were only a few rounds of ammunition for the captured artillery.

“Grape or canister would be the thing.” His training had been as an artillery officer. “These Spanish troops attack in ranks. It would be slaughter.”

“No use wishing for what we haven’t got.” Captain Perry always tugged at his ear when thoughtful. “I’d settle for a few more rounds of any kind of ammunition.”

“We’ll make grapeshot.” Magee turned to Kemper. “Scraps of chain will do fine. Search the town tomorrow. Collect every scrap of metal. That includes our own trace chains and the metal tires off the wagons.”

“If we use them, we’ll be without a supply train,” Kemper objected.

“When we move out of here we’ll take the Spaniards’ wagons,” Magee retorted. “Put the smithy to work. Break the chains and tires into scraps three inches long. Put another detail to work cutting up every scrap of

canvas available: tents, wagon covers, everything. The metal scrap is to be sewed into canvas bags. This will be our grapeshot. It's deadly," he pointed out, "when used against massed troops. The bag bursts and the air is filled with flying metal.

"As for you, Jonty," he continued, "I want you to take a strong detail out and cut stout poles. They must be six feet long and of hickory or oak. Our men furnished their own rifles. They have no bayonets. We'll make each one of them a sharp spear instead. That's for close work in case they break through our lines at any point. It will beat empty rifles."

It was this restless energy, coupled with ability to foresee emergencies, that had won him the devotion of his officers.

It was nearly midnight before, their work finally finished, Jonathan accompanied Magee to the small house where he lived. The officers had taken charge of a small block of dwellings. Kemper and Ross occupied one, Salazar was Gutierrez' guest in another, Gaines, Lockett and Perry were lodged in the same row. There was one sentry at the end of the narrow street, where headquarters were located, but there were no other guards. Jonathan flung himself upon his couch and was asleep almost instantly. He had been several days in the saddle. Magee, in the adjoining room, was more restless. His busy mind was slow to relax.

Out beyond the walls a coyote howled. Shadows were sharp in the moonlight. One of them stirred near the open window of the room where the young Virginian slept. It was silhouetted briefly against the window and then was gone. There was a faint scraping across the plank floor. Magee heard it and sat up in bed, listening. Then he laughed at himself. Could his nerves be playing him tricks? He was about to lie down when his alert ears again caught that stealthy whisper of movement across the rough puncheons.

Clampit stood crouched over Jonathan's bed, peering down. There would be no mistake this time. The moonlight made identification easy.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" Magee demanded from the doorway.

As the gambler whirled to face him, the colonel caught the glint of his knife. He did not shout an alarm. Instead, he charged. Clampit's arm moved swiftly. The pale light glittered on the speeding blade.

Magee's challenge aroused Jonathan. He awoke with senses alert. There was no time to identify anyone. He saw only a shadow moving beside him and he heard Magee's gasp as he fell. He still did not know what had happened, but he sensed the danger as he leaped for the man beside him.

Clampit's attention had been momentarily diverted by the colonel's entrance. Now he struck savagely at Jonathan, twisting away from his outstretched arms. He was unarmed now and no match, he realized, for the



brawny Virginian in a rough and tumble scramble. The punch threw his assailant off balance. That gave him precious seconds. He sprang for the fallen Magee.

The blade gleamed wet and red when he recovered it. Jonathan was on him before he could turn. There was no time to throw it. The impetus of the rush hurled the gambler against the wall, even as he was twisting to strike. A crushing fist rattled his head against the masonry. He was dazed but desperate. Once more the gambler swung with his weapon, but now Jonathan had seen the knife and was grappling for it, clutching his opponent by the wrist. They fought with a rash fury. Powerless to swing his hand, the gambler kicked out viciously, catching Jonathan in the stomach. He stumbled back under the impact, sickened, but still clutching that wrist and wrenching at it so violently that the knife clattered to the floor. Both men dove for it.

As Jonathan reached across Magee's body his hand was suddenly warm and slippery, but his fingers gripped the hilt surely. Blood! The meaning of Magee's quiet was red in his mind as he lashed savagely at his opponent, striking again and again in his fury, even after the man was limp.

Jonathan crouched there, the dagger wet in his hand, for some time before the mist cleared from his brain. Then he rose painfully and stumbled in search of a candle. Its blaze flickered uncertainly in the breeze from the unshuttered window. His eyes were dazed as he stared at the wild disorder of the room and the two still forms on the floor. Dark stains were creeping across the uneven puncheons in a spreading pool. His eyes widened when he recognized Clampit, but his first thought was for Magee.

He lifted his commander to the couch and pressed his shirt against the wound from which the blood still poured. "The doctor," he thought. "Dr. Forsythe. I must get him quickly. It may not be too late."

The physician was quartered in the same house with Kemper. Jonathan was still dazed when he awoke them. "Come quick." His voice was almost a sob. "It's Magee."

Neither man needed a second summons from this wild messenger, half dressed and covered with blood. Kemper's voice was heavy with anxiety as they ran toward the scene.

"What happened?" he demanded.

"It was Clampit the gambler. You remember him. That's all I know," Jonathan replied. "I'm afraid Magee's dead."

Magee was dead. Clampit's knife had caught him just below the heart. There was nothing the doctor could do. The gambler was dead, too, of a dozen wounds.

The officers of the garrison were hurriedly summoned. No attempt had been made to right the disorder of the room. The murderer's body still lay where it fell. Only Magee had been moved. His body had been carried to the cot in the next room. He might have been sleeping there. Davenport and Ross had already departed on their mission but the others were present, Kemper grim-faced, the others still too stunned fully to realize the disaster. Perry, Lockett, Gaines and Despallier, all had arrived. Jonathan leaned against the wall, staring down at Clampit's body with unseeing eyes. Dr. Forsythe was the only one seated. When Gutierrez arrived, Salazar was with him.

Miguel thought he knew the meaning of the summons to Magee's house. The night had masked the smile on his lips as he and Don Bernardo hurried there. This time, he thought, Clampit did not fail. Jonathan Kirk was dead. Probably there would be a search of the town for the slayer. But who would think to look for him in Gutierrez' house? He'd have no trouble sheltering Clampit there.

When he entered the room, the first person he saw was Jonathan. Then his eyes traveled swiftly to the floor. So it had been bungled again, he thought angrily. But his set face did not betray his rage.

Each of the group was stunned by Magee's death. They were able and resolute men, but Magee had fired them with his vision. His dream had brought them here and his personality had drawn them together. Without him the expedition, for the moment, seemed almost meaningless.

Jonathan told his story.

"Who was this man?" Perry demanded. "What was his motive?"

"He was a gambler named Clampit," Kemper replied. "Kirk and I both knew him. We all traveled in the same party down the Natchez Trace."

# Chapter 17

## *The Battle of the White Cow*

KEMPER's burly shoulders sagged, his face was bleak. Perry stirred uneasily about the room, swearing softly under his breath. "Who is Clampit? Where the hell did he come from?" he kept demanding.

There were frank tears in Despallier's eyes. The dour McFarland stood at the door, a blanket across his shoulders as usual, scowling silently into the night, as if reluctant to face the tragic room. Gaines's face was forbidding in its baffled fury. Lockett stood by Jonathan Kirk, his grim stare fixed on the floor's red stains.

"We could more easily have lost a battle!" exclaimed the voluble Gutierrez. His sorrow was genuine, and with him sorrow needed expression. "Magee was worth an army! Our loss is irreparable!"

His words reminded them of the need for immediate decisions. Gutierrez was their nominal chief, but in their shocked grief the officers turned to Kemper for leadership and he presided at their council. Gutierrez should continue as head of the expedition, they decided, and his role should be emphasized before the men, but Kemper was elected to take Magee's place as military commander, with the rank of colonel.

It was thought best for Magee's murder to be kept secret from the troops, at least for the present. His leadership had had a singularly personal quality. Many of these men followed ambition, but few were fighting for a belief. It was not the army of a nation. It was not devoted to a cause. It was peculiarly Magee's, and the officers feared the effect of his death upon it. They buried Clampit secretly in a shallow grave hastily dug in the garden behind the house, but they could not bring themselves to treat their leader in such fashion. The doctor undertook to prepare his body for later interment, and he was left lying on his couch. Word was spread that the colonel was ill and could see no one.

The army was anxious over the report of his illness. He had been among them constantly, directing the construction of fortifications, inspecting the distribution of food, his sure confidence an unfailing stimulant. Kemper and the other officers worked tirelessly to fill his place. His final instructions had

been to prepare grapeshot and lances to repel Salcedo's expected attack. These orders were put into immediate effect. Volunteer blacksmiths kept the forge busy day and night. Kirk's Scouts brought in oak staves for lances, and their sharpened points were hardened over campfires. Kemper drove them relentlessly. La Bahia bustled with activity.

Magee's burial was delayed for three days. Only when Dr. Forsythe insisted it could be deferred no longer was word finally passed that he was dead. His illness, they said, had been fatal. The stir of the army's activities was halted only briefly for the ceremony. Kemper didn't want to give the men time to think of their loss.

There was much talk of his death, though. It had been pneumonia that had claimed him, some said. And then another story started. A native woman who cleaned Magee's quarters told a strange tale of dark stains on the puncheon floor; an effort had been made to wash them up, but she knew blood stains when she saw them; the colonel had taken his own life. The story went the rounds of the camp. Most men scoffed at it, but it persisted, a disturbing rumor.

Supplies were running low in the besieged town. The store of corn had been rationed meagerly and still held out. Each company ground its own daily, the Americans baking theirs into hoecake, the native troops subsisting almost entirely upon *tortillas*. In spite of continued efforts to drive in beeves, the meat supply had almost reached the vanishing point. Salcedo's troops had killed off most of the available cattle and the siege lines were growing ever tighter. As the stores dwindled, dissatisfaction increased. The town folk, who had greeted the entrance of the army enthusiastically, grew first lukewarm and, as time went on, actually hostile. Desertions increased among the Mexican troops as hope sagged.

At this time a recruit was taken into Jonathan's company. His name was Pablo Savias and he was a native of La Bahia.

"Capitan, I can get you meat," was the way he approached Jonathan.

At first he had not been taken seriously. The attitude of the town did not inspire the Virginian with confidence. He refused to take Pablo along on patrol. The man persisted in his offers, and when he volunteered to go out alone, Jonathan finally relented. "We probably won't see him again but it will be just one less mouth to feed here," he told Cris Marsten.

Three nights later Pablo Savias returned, driving seven beeves ahead of him. They were immediately butchered. It was the first meat in the town for two weeks. The Mexican became a hero with the army and Kirk's Scouts welcomed him to their ranks.

The garrison's growing hunger brought about the Battle of the White Cow. Where the animal came from no one knew, but she emerged from the

trees below the fort, ambling quietly toward the ford and the *gachupine* lines beyond. Jonathan's company was on outpost duty.

"*Eh bien!*" Étienne exclaimed. "I see bifstek." He pointed excitedly to the animal.

Cris Marsten leaped to his feet and started down the bank. "Let's get her," he shouted.

Jonathan was as hungry as the others and the enemy lines, quiet for days, were a safe distance beyond. "All right," he said, "but watch out. We might run into an enemy patrol."

The cow heard them coming. She stared mildly at them from the far side of the ford and then broke into a trot. The scouts spread out in pursuit. They were midway between the lines now, on the plains below the fort, but the Spaniards were taking no apparent interest in the foray. O'Rourke and Cris headed the cow off and started her back toward the river. Their mission seemed to have been safely accomplished before they realized what had happened. A company of Spaniards, either on patrol or after the cow themselves, had made its way around the curving river, sheltered from view by the heavy growth along its bank. They were between Kirk's Scouts and the ford when they opened fire.

"Down! Everybody down!" Jonathan shouted.

They took cover in the tall grass and returned the volley. The gunfire precipitated action on both sides. The royal army, seeing how the little patrol was trapped, started in strength to finish them off. The Americans, in the fort above, were equally quick to grasp the situation. Lockett's company was stationed along the earthen embankment where the artillery was mounted. They now charged down the slope to drive the enemy away from the ford and open Jonathan's line of retreat.

Salcedo and Herrera had watched this chance development of battle with interest. The royal commander welcomed the opportunity for an engagement in the open, and steadily re-enforced his line as it advanced across the plain. Kirk's Scouts had worked their way slowly to the shelter of the river bank, but were about two hundred yards to the left of the ford, where Lockett's men still were holding firmly against rapidly mounting odds. Despallier was next into the action, in support of Lockett. At this juncture Kemper took over and threw Gaines and Perry forward with their companies. Except for a few outposts south of the town, virtually his entire command was now in action, advancing Indian fashion through the cover of tall grass and driving the royalists back with a steady, accurate fire. The American line continued well into the plain, covering half the distance to Salcedo's headquarters at the mission, before the enemy artillery opened up, halting them.

Now Salcedo made an effort to cut them off from the town. He sent Herrera charging forward on his left at the head of a strong column. The intention was to break Gaines's line and, circling the flank, gain possession of the ford. Here a fierce hand-to-hand battle developed. This was the Nacogdoches company, composed mostly of native Mexicans, and they gave an excellent account of themselves. They stopped Herrera momentarily, but they were unable to contain his superior numbers. The line wavered but did not break. Gaines began a slow retreat, stubbornly contesting each foot of ground yielded.

Kemper was quick to see the danger to his entire line as his right flank sagged. He ordered a general withdrawal, at the same time strengthening the menaced point with what few reserves he had available.

Salcedo was relentless. He ordered an attack all along the line when he noticed the American retirement.

Kemper formed a new line along the river bank, and from its shelter the Spaniards were driven back after two fierce charges. Both sides were fighting with resolution and with equally heavy losses. By this time the battle had been in progress more than two hours, with its fortunes wavering first to one side, then to the other. Kemper's new position was a strong one. His men were ranged around the circle of the river's horseshoe and were well protected by its cover. However, Salcedo was determined to settle the issue while he had his opponents outside their fortified positions and he dispatched couriers to the troops stationed south of the town to order an assault from that direction. This was slow in starting, but it began now. The outbreak of rifle fire from his pickets in La Bahia warned Kemper. The outposts in his rear were entirely inadequate to repel such an attack. There was nothing for him to do but order a general retreat.

This was accomplished with surprisingly small loss. Most of his force had to swim the river as Salcedo's cannon had opened up a murderous fire on the ford. Picked riflemen clung to the river's edge and held back the encroaching enemy until their companions crossed and established a new position. Jonathan's company was one of the groups left behind in this holding operation. When it came their turn to fall back he saw the white cow which had started the trouble. She had been struck by a stray bullet and had staggered to the water's edge to die.

The Spaniards already had taken the southern fringe of the town by the time Kemper was able to re-enforce his line there. A desperate house-to-house struggle began in an effort to drive them out. The cannon on the earthen embankments which flanked the fort opened up, concentrating on Salcedo's main body as it attempted to charge across the ford. They were driven back with severe losses, but the royal governor sensed that victory

was within his grasp. He detached more and more men to support the troops who had won a foothold in the town. Kemper withdrew his three six-pounders to command the streets which led to the fort. They were rendered largely ineffective, however, because the streets were in reality winding lanes, limiting the range of fire. The sun set red in the smoky haze, and in the failing light the royalists began establishing bridgeheads across the river to the north and came pouring up the slope. Herrera in person led an assault which accomplished a new breach in the lines on the western edge of the town. This flanking movement threatened to cut off Perry's company. Locket attempted a countercharge but was driven back. As this wedge grew more threatening Kemper ordered a general retirement into the fort. It was dark now. Rifles flashed like deadly fireflies on every side.

Kirk's Scouts held a position on the north wall of the fort, their fire concentrated against the ford. They were not engaged in the seesaw struggle for the town and Jonathan was unaware of the desperate stage the battle had reached until the royalists stormed and took the south wall of the fort, pouring over into the big plaza, yelling and firing as they came. When, in his effort to keep his forces intact, Kemper ordered Perry to fall back, he had not realized that they already were engaged in hand-to-hand conflict. There was an interval when the defenders dared not fire on the struggling troops for fear of cutting down their own friends. Already their stronghold was half lost.

Kemper turned to the defenders of the north wall. They were his last reserve. "The spears," he bellowed, his great voice booming above the din. "Use the spears and come on!"

The fire-hardened wooden lances, which Magee's forethought had provided, lay in forgotten stacks. There were perhaps a hundred men along that wall, up to now engaged in repelling the enemy without, with no thought of what was going on behind them. Now they turned and, following their leader's instructions, charged with these crude weapons. Jonathan's little company dashed forward in a compact body, clearing a path all the way to the gate. All about them little knots of men struggled. Scarcely a shot was heard now. It was lance and knife against bayonet, but hoarse shouts filled the air with sound. Slowly at first, and then more quickly as the tide began to turn, the royalists were driven back until the last of them were cleared from the fort. Magee, even in death, had provided the weapon that was to turn back defeat.

But the situation still was critical. With the town in Salcedo's hands the fort could not hope to hold out long. Kemper hurried from company to company, shouting encouragement. This, coupled with each man's realization of the plight, readied them for counterattack. Kemper led it.

“Go get ’em!” he roared. “Drive ’em out!”

There was a savage yell as the Americans followed him to the assault. Once more the battle swirled through the twisting streets.

Jonathan’s command advanced from house to house. This was rifle work. The spears were abandoned. Each building was the scene of a new battle, the conflict resolving itself into scores of miniature engagements. The scouts soon worked out a plan of action. From each new position a covering fire was opened on the next, paving the way for a charge.

Twice Cris had remained behind, firing, during these advances. Jonathan had ordered it so.

“I’m going too,” he shouted rebelliously when he was waved back a third time.

Jess Leeman, Giles Brady, Étienne Vauban and Tom Sartin were charging with Jonathan this time, while the deadly rifles of the others held the enemy under cover.

“No, stay there,” the leader shouted, but he had no time to look around.

Giles kicked at the door while Étienne and Jess shot through the windows. There was an answering fire from within. Étienne clutched at the stone window sill for support, but the strength was fading from his fingers, and as he collapsed, he left a crimson stain on the white wall. Sartin and Jonathan threw themselves against the resisting door and plunged sprawling into the room as it gave beneath their weight. Cris charged in over them with Giles. Their rifles blazed into the smoke-filled room.

The cornered *gachupines* fought back desperately. While Jonathan was still on his knees, he was conscious of Cris standing over him, swinging his clubbed rifle. Giles was there, too, holding the enemy back from the two men on the floor. The Spaniards had bayonets and there were six of them left. They surged forward. Jess fired through the window, bringing one down. The others closed in, with Cris and Giles still striving to drive them back. Jonathan scrambled to his feet to help. Tom Sartin, still on his knees, drew his knife, lunged under the circling bayonets, hacked viciously. Two more went down and the charge was stopped. But the outlaw fell with them, transfixed by two bayonets, his red blade still swinging.

Then Jess was clambering through the window. Gabe, O’Rourke and Pablo Savias joined them with a rush. The last resistance collapsed. They pushed on to attack the next building, leaving none behind but the dead.

House by house, street by street, the fight progressed with the same relentless deadliness, but this time the momentum was on the other side. Salcedo’s troops had been within inches of victory, but by nine o’clock they were driven almost entirely from the town. The losses had been heavy on both sides. Jonathan’s little company had been fortunate in sustaining no



losses until that final charge. In it Étienne Vauban, the little French trapper, and Tom Sartin, the outlaw, had fallen. They buried them that night in the plot beside Magee.

The Spaniards still held one foothold in La Bahia, a stone building close to the fort. With characteristic energy Salcedo established a line of outposts connecting this house with his lines. The defenders were unaware of it until the following morning, when Kemper ordered the structures nearest the fort torn down. He wanted to establish a line of fire there should his force again be driven back that far. The *gachupine* troops began sniping. The American commander retaliated by placing Kirk's Scouts in another stone house near by from which they maintained a constant fire on the enemy bastion, so hot that they were able to protect the work parties.

The following night Antonio Delgado, of a well-known San Antonio family, deserted and crept into the town. Gutierrez identified him when he was brought to headquarters. Delgado's father had been a prominent republican who had been executed, and whose severed head had been set upon a pole in San Antonio as a grim warning to all who defied the king.

"I'm surprised to see you wearing a Spanish uniform," Don Bernardo told him.

"I had no choice," Delgado replied. "The governor pressed every able-bodied man into service. I joined you at my first opportunity. There are many more who feel as I do in that camp. They await only a chance to fight the *gachupines*."

He offered to prove his sincerity. "There are two outposts connecting the stone house with Salcedo's lines. I will point them out to you," he volunteered.

His information was immediately put to test. Kemper was anxious to be rid of the Spanish bastion. Lockett's company was assigned the task. A brush fence, used as a corral, extended west of the enemy stronghold, its heavy shadow offering concealment. This approach was used in the stealthy advance upon the outposts; they were surrounded and attacked silently with knives. Delgado proved himself further by joining in the assault. The following morning the defenders of the stone house, cut off from their lines, surrendered. The town once more was completely in Kemper's hands. He mounted one of the six-pounders in the building in the hope that the enemy might attempt to retake it.

The condition of the army grew progressively worse. Regardless of the difficulty, patrols constantly attempted to get through the Spanish lines but, more often than not, they returned empty-handed. Rations were reduced. As weeks stretched into months, desertions grew in number. It became clear that the townspeople thought their cause hopeless and resented their

presence. Every precaution was taken to prevent treachery. Between casualties suffered in the Battle of the White Cow, and desertions, the force had materially dwindled. Usually there were about fifty men absent, either on foraging parties or as messengers. The force now numbered between two hundred fifty and three hundred men. Gaines's Mexican company had shrunk until he could muster only fifty-six.

To add to the discouragement, Salcedo had received re-enforcements and his long-awaited heavy guns had arrived. The siege was nearly four months old and, with Magee gone, the Americans had little reason to hope of success. And yet they were a determined, defiant lot. Their faces grew grimmer as they notched their belts tighter. Their wagons were useless, their metal parts stripped from them to feed the cannon. The enemy had captured nearly all their horses. Retreat was out of the question.

Ben Marsten finally recovered after an illness of many weeks. All through the early days of the siege he lay in delirium, unaware of the struggle around him. When finally he was able to be out of doors again, he was only a pale, shaky shadow whose garments hung in slack pleats. He was more quiet than before, and in some ways looked better, as if the long fever had refined some of the grossness from his features. The ravages of illness were there, but his eyes were clearer.

At first he busied himself with the chores of the camp, unable to share in the patrols through the enemy lines. But he was impatient of his weakness and was protesting his fitness long before he was able to be back in the saddle.

The months had changed Cris too. He no longer looked the slender sixteen-year-old who had ridden out from Nacogdoches with the scouts. He was filling out, his shoulders had broadened and his reddened wrists protruded inches beyond the sleeves of his frayed leather jacket. His laugh was not quite so ready, perhaps, but it was deeper when it came. His face wore the same resolute intensity that was beginning to mark all faces. This was man's work. He had left his boyhood somewhere behind on the difficult trail. As with the others exposure had weathered his complexion. He was almost as brown as an Indian.

Morning after morning the scouts watched the Spaniards drive big herds of horses out to graze. Each time they took the same route, which led by the now half-ruined brush fence.

"I'd like to be layin' out thar behint that brush some mornin' when they go by," Jesse Leeman once observed. "I'd shore cause 'em a heap o' trouble."

That gave Jonathan his idea. He approached Kemper for permission to ambush the *gachupines*. The men were worn with waiting. Kemper decided

that such a diversion would raise their spirits and he granted consent.

For several days there had been another cold snap but the weather moderated that night, and the morning dawned with a warm, gray mist hugging the ground, like clouds wandered down from the sky. A number of volunteers had begged to accompany Kirk's Scouts on the venture, and forty men crouched behind the fence as the Spanish *remuda* came trotting by. About five hundred horses were in the band, driven by thirty men. Jonathan waited until they were abreast of the ambush, in point-blank range, before giving the word. All but two of the *vaqueros* went down in the first volley.

Once more an isolated incident led to a pitched battle. The ambush was close to the Spanish lines and Salcedo tried to prevent their return. The Americans in the town, warned of the ambush in advance, had gathered to watch. And Kemper, to protect Jonathan's retreat, had manned the three six-pounders and trained them on the enemy line. Now these guns opened fire, driving back the first Spanish charge, but their roar sounded a challenge which echoed all along the *gachupine* line.

In its first stages the battle developed much as had the previous one, with the Spaniards attacking and Kemper throwing out strong support for the scouts. Artillery went into action on both sides, but its fire was not accurate, due to the fog which half obscured the charging men. Salcedo, to overcome this difficulty, hurried one battery up to the front line, not forty yards from the position to which Kirk's Scouts still clung. Jonathan's decision was due more to desperation than valor. If the battery went into action at this range, its effect would be ruinous. He ordered a charge and his men responded with a savage yell. They were at the throats of the surprised *gachupines* before they had time to fire a volley and the guns were captured.

From the American lines that charge was barely discernible, its objective shrouded in the mist. For an instant the army watched, breathless at its audacity. Then, with a wild cheer, it sprang to the attack and came charging across the plain. No one gave the order. It was spontaneous.

Salcedo didn't see them coming. He saw his battery captured and hurled a company of cavalry out to retake it, unaware of what was happening behind those clouds. Jonathan's command stood in a tight little knot, their rifles spitting viciously. There were empty saddles in the galloping line but the odds were overwhelming. On it came.

Then there was a wild yell. Kemper's entire army was charging to their aid. The fury of the attack caught the royalists completely by surprise. Their line recoiled from the impact, wavered momentarily, and then plunged in headlong flight.

From the town the church bells began to ring. Someone found a rocket. It exploded noisily in the air, unseen in the gloom. The inhabitants, sensing

victory, once more had grown enthusiastic. But Kemper knew the strength of his enemy and called his forces back in time to salvage a clear-cut victory. More than one hundred Spaniards had been slain and nearly two hundred prisoners were taken in the fight. One hundred and fifty of them immediately announced their desire to fight the *gachupines* and they were organized into three new companies under Antonio Delgado, Magil Menchaca and Juan Sava.

Included among the prisoners was Salcedo's band. Whoops of delight greeted the appearance of the musicians as they were marched into La Bahia.

"Let's have a concert," someone shouted.

"Make 'em play for us, Colonel," called another.

Kemper, whose humor matched theirs, had another idea. He held up his hand for attention.

"Tomorrow," he promised. "I'll give you all the music you want. But first they've got to practice up on our kind of tunes."

All that day the band was locked in the chapel of the fort where the thick walls would muffle their efforts. He wanted nothing to spoil his surprise.

For months the besieged army had been roused each morning by the sound of Salcedo's band, its solemn notes calling the royal troops to mass. It was Salcedo's turn to be awakened. Next morning the band was massed behind the earthen artillery parapet, blasting the early calm with its shrill clatter. The tune had been hastily learned, but whatever its musical deficiencies, it lacked nothing in volume. It was an air strange to Spanish ears. They were playing "Yankee Doodle"!

"Again! Play it again!" Kemper would bellow, each time they tried to stop.

The besieged army first doubted its ears. Then, as the tune was recognized, it laughed. The merriment swelled to a gleeful roar as the men swarmed to the barricades to peer across at the enemy.

The royal governor retired to his tent, but he couldn't shut out the sound of their hilarity. Nor the wheezy repetition of "Yankee Doodle," as his former band kept to its task.

Just one week later Salcedo gave up the siege. It had lasted more than four months. Once, victory had been almost within his grasp. Now discontent was rife in his army. Men who didn't go over to the Americans frequently slipped off at night to return home. His supply problem had been serious, and his repeated appeals to the governors of neighboring states for re-enforcements had brought him only a fraction of the help he asked. For the most part these were untrained and unreliable troops.

Kemper, in contrast, had been receiving substantial re-enforcements. Besides the prisoners who had enlisted under his green banner, two small forces had arrived in La Bahia since the last battle. One was headed by Captain Masicot, a polished New Orleans officer, who had raised a small company of volunteers there. The other was headed by Captain Ross who had returned with a company of frontiersmen from along the border. By the time reports reached Salcedo their numbers were greatly magnified.

The governor had constructed a permanent camp of thatched huts to house his army during the siege. These he burned before retiring. Kemper, watching from the fort, was jubilant. Perry and Lockett were ordered in pursuit with every man for whom a horse was available.

Salcedo's force was still the stronger and his retirement orderly. He would have liked nothing better than an opportunity to turn on a pursuing army, but Kemper was too crafty to give him this chance. Instead, small bands of cavalry harried the retreat, raiding his lines and, from time to time, capturing important stores.

Kirk's Scouts were with Lockett when he discovered a baggage train protected by a small troop of Spanish cavalry. They attacked at dusk, surprised the camp at supper and drove its defenders off with severe loss. The pursuit was maintained for several miles, and it was not until he had ordered a halt that Jonathan discovered two men were missing, Ben Marsten and Denis O'Rourke. He led the company back to the wagon train with a heavy heart, thinking of Cecily. How was he going to face her with this news?

They were within sight of the burned-out campfires when they first heard voices. Jonathan ordered a halt. Someone was singing in a high clear voice, interrupted occasionally by shouts of encouragement. Leaving their horses with Gabe, they approached cautiously.

"Why, it's O'Rourke!" Jess Leeman exclaimed. "Singin' his fool head off."

They watched as the Irishman lurched unsteadily about the blaze, a bottle clutched in either hand, shouting his wild melody. Propped against a wagon wheel, cheering him on, was old Ben Marsten, blear-eyed once again.

Jonathan's first feeling was of relief. Then he saw the scene through the eyes of the girl about whom he had been worrying, and he kicked the bottle out of Marsten's hand.

# Chapter 18

## *Conquest*

CECILY, waiting at Nacogdoches, shared the anxiety of the town during the siege. The messages, first favorable, gradually changed in tone. With increasing urgency they asked for more men, more supplies.

Confidence gave way to uneasiness throughout the town, most of whose men were with the besieged army. Report of Magee's death was the first stunning blow. All hopes of success were wrapped up in him. The initial rumor was received with unbelief, but when successive messengers verified it, confidence sagged.

Here and there deserters made their shamefaced appearance, furtively at first, then as their numbers swelled they walked the streets defiantly. The cause was lost, they said; any further struggle would be useless sacrifice.

Davenport returned to scour the country for supplies. "It isn't the royalists we have to fear," was his constant plea. "It's lack of supplies. We have outsmarted and outfought their army, and we'll do it again if you'll just give us the supplies. Give me corn and salt, give me powder and lead, give me the wagons to haul it in."

The couriers always rode first to Davenport's store. Cecily haunted the place, hopeful for some word. She scanned the face of each new messenger. Perhaps this time it would be one of Jonty's company, who would come to the little cottage and give her news of them all. Several times letters came from Cris and her father, always encouraging, full of hope; if there was despondency, it was never revealed. From them she gleaned scraps of information about the scouts. This day they had driven a herd of beeves through the lines. On another they had evaded an enemy patrol. One messenger brought her money after the troops had been paid. She read and reread these letters, trying to picture what La Bahia was like and something of their life there. Sometimes Jonathan was mentioned. Evidently Kirk's Scouts had achieved a reputation, and she sensed Cris's pride in it. She read those passages most frequently.

"Your green flag flies over the fort here," Cris wrote once. "Gutierrez calls us the Republican Army of the North; among ourselves the men name

it the Green Flag Army. Jonty always terms it ‘Cissy’s flag.’ ”

The messengers were apt to be more informative than the letters. “Kirk’s Scouts? Oh, sure, I know them. Why, they’ve worn a path through the enemy lines,” was the way one of them put it.

“They keep us in meat,” another said, “when there’s any to be got. I wish Jonty Kirk had a hundred men in his company.” She was proud but worried too. There was danger in their missions.

Johnny Durst told her the most, but he was pledged to secrecy on her father’s illness. He had been to La Bahia twice, escorting supplies through the lines. “They’re fit as fiddles,” he assured her. “Don’t worry. They know how to take care of themselves, and good old Jonty looks after ’em like a hen with a brood of chicks. He’s turned out a real soldier, Jonty has. There’s not a better liked man in La Bahia.”

He told her about the company’s escape from the enemy trap along the river. “Kirk’s Scouts were the only ones who got through with the warning,” he said. “The others were all captured. I tell you Jonty knows what he’s doing.”

Cecily was avid for stories like that.

Without Johnny the long winter of waiting would have been unbearable. He was at the little cottage every evening that his duties permitted. If care sharpened her face during those dreary months, he appeared not to notice. He sat often before the hearth and took pleasure in watching the blue of her eyes in the firelight. When she was most quiet his laugh was gayest, his confidence most reassuring.

Teresa de Lerdo was impatient with waiting, too. Her temper grew shorter as the days dragged out. It became increasingly difficult for Maria to please her.

Miguel stayed in Nacogdoches briefly before going on to join the army. His visit was difficult. His touch was only a cruel reminder of a desire denied her. Jonathan was much in her mind.

“What’s wrong with you?” Miguel demanded, his fingers biting at her shoulder.

“It’s this waiting,” she evaded. “Why must Magee stay cooped up in that town? Why doesn’t he go out and fight?”

Miguel pulled her to him, laughing. “Have I given you a dream that’s made you forget me?” He did not know then that Jonathan was still alive.

“Of course not, Miguel. You’re a part of it.” She submitted to his embrace and was suddenly tender, in her effort to hide her distaste but she was careful not to let him see her eyes.

She was relieved when he left for La Bahia.

Teresa grew to hate Nacogdoches. Accustomed to the frivolity of Mexico City and New Orleans, she found nothing in the frontier settlement to amuse her. Once a day she drove out into the country in her golden coach. The Yellow Pumpkin, she called it, but when Maria dared give it that derisive name, she turned waspish and slapped her soundly. She was soothed by its luxury and she dressed with care for these excursions. Otherwise she seldom left the house. Her only abiding amusement was her mirror. She had brought finery with her from New Orleans by the trunkload, and it entertained her to dress up in it. Often, she would spend hours trying on one regal costume after another, while Maria dressed her hair with some new artifice to match each gown. Her anger was quick to explode. She boxed Maria's ears on the slightest provocation.

Her longing for Jonathan made her moody and the magnificence of her fantasies emphasized the drabness of her surroundings. Only once did she hear from Jonathan. Davenport brought her the letter. It was short, there was little time to write, but she warmed herself in the glow of its words. He loved her still. Their long separation was a torment to him, too.

News that the siege of La Bahia had ended stirred Nacogdoches to an excitement all the more extravagant because it was so unexpected. The church bells rang out the message. Davenport fired off the cannon in the plaza. The streets were filled with cheering people whose faces had almost lost the memory of smiles. The importance of the triumph was magnified. Final victory seemed very close.

A small party of New Orleans volunteers had been waiting at Davenport's store for several days. Uncertain rumors had delayed their departure. When José brought word that these men would leave on the morrow, Teresa ordered her coach at once. A resolve had been born of her optimism. She was going to La Bahia. She wanted to be identified with the army. Someday it would be *her* army, and then she wanted it to remember that she had shared a part of its campaign. She pictured her arrival in La Bahia and she was sure that men would not easily forget it.

The six Americans stared with openmouthed amazement at the prancing white horses and the yellow coach. When its beautiful occupant announced her determination to go with them they did not disguise their consternation.

"I am going, either with you or alone," she announced when their leader protested. "Surely you are too generous to refuse me your company." She smiled at him, and the rough frontiersman was confused by her charm.

"But you don't know what you're getting into, ma'am," he protested weakly.

"How do you think I came here?" she retorted. "I will be ready when you are in the morning." The volunteers gawked after her coach.



José and Maria tried to dissuade her, too, but their efforts were ineffectual. Once convinced of her determination, José was able to hire three Mexicans to join the party, two as postilions and one as a footman. He planned to ride the outrider's horse and act as guard.

Her escort was inclined to resent her presence at first, but Teresa was in an engaging mood now that the long period of waiting had ended. The volunteers adapted their gait to hers and by the time they reached Trinidad de Salcedo, she had captivated them all. Her camps were miracles of comfort on that rough trail. The guards vied with one another in shy services to make her trip pleasant.

They made camp early each night for her convenience. For a time they posted sentries, but as the peaceful days wore on, this vigilance was relaxed. That made them easy prey for Salcedo's patrol which, warned by the light of their fire, swooped down upon them in the night and captured the entire party.

When word reached Governor Manuel Salcedo that a great lady named de Lerdo had been captured while traveling in her coach, he was puzzled. The de Lerdos were his kinsmen. How could one of them be in this country without his knowledge? And a woman, traveling only with servants and American ruffians—it was unthinkable! Then he heard of the weird yellow coach and remembered that Miguel Salazar was at La Bahia. That explained everything and he took a grim satisfaction from the meeting when she reached the capital.

“When did you leave Salazar?” he demanded.

Teresa knew she was recognized. Her best recourse, she thought, was her femininity. There she felt sure of her ground. Her smile was provocative.

Her beauty did not beguile Salcedo. His eyes were hard. “Unfortunately we do not make war on women,” he remarked, “but as you are known to be in league with the enemy, we shall have to hold you prisoner. This house will be yours. I've posted guards here but they will not bother you unless you try to leave. And—” he paused at the door—“you'll henceforth drop the name de Lerdo. From now on you will be known as the woman Teresa.”

He closed the door after him with unnecessary violence.

Teresa's anger flared. Then she felt an arrogant delight, for she realized how the de Lerdo name had rankled the governor's pride. She reflected upon her position. It might offer, after all, certain advantages. Kemper's victorious army would soon be here. Her captivity would be short-lived. Perhaps being a prisoner would have compensations. She pictured herself the heroine of a rescue.

When Kemper and Gutierrez left La Bahia their force had swelled to more than thirteen hundred men. Volunteers had been hurrying to join them since news of Salcedo's defeat had spread. There were nearly eight hundred Americans, besides three hundred and twenty-five Mexicans under Gaines and Menchaca, and a force of one hundred and ninety Indians met them en route. These were principally Lipans and Towakaways, recruited by McFarland. To oppose them Salcedo had assembled an army of twenty-five hundred men, of whom fifteen hundred were regulars. Kemper's scouts had informed him of the Spanish strength, and he advanced on San Antonio cautiously, remembering the trap Salcedo had tried to spring on Magee.

But there was no sign of the royalists until Kemper's patrols had sighted the mission towers, south of the Texas capital. About nine miles from San Antonio the low ridge of Rosillo Hill divided San Antonio River and Salado Creek. Its west slope was an open prairie but the side bordering the Salado was covered with chaparral. This provided good cover for the ambush which Salcedo cunningly prepared. The position commanded the ford across the creek and he hoped to surprise the approaching army. His entire force was concealed here, with his artillery massed in the center.

Kirk's Scouts were moving ahead of the army. Jonathan called a halt when he saw the stream ahead. "I don't like the looks of it," he said. "If Salcedo is going to make a stand before we reach San Antonio, this is the place."

They were already within easy range of the waiting enemy but not a shot was fired. Salcedo wasn't ready to show his hand.

Jonathan sent Kemper word of his intent and then led his little troop in a wide circle to cross the Salado several miles farther north. Slipping cautiously down the opposite bank, they scouted the ford from the rear. The horses were left with Gabe. The others advanced stealthily along the ridge until Giles Brady gripped Jonathan's arm and pointed. Ahead, in a little clearing, sat General Salcedo surrounded by a group of officers. The patrol lingered just long enough to determine the nature of the ambush and the size of the waiting force.

Salcedo, watching from his hilltop, could see Kemper's campfires twinkling like fallen stars. He might have wondered at their size, for it was a warm night.

For an hour the officers listened as Jonathan outlined the enemy position in detail, tracing a map in the dust to illustrate the location of hill and creek. After that, camp was broken. Only Gaines's company remained behind to feed the fires. Kirk's Scouts led the way as the army repeated Magee's

maneuver and marched around Salcedo's trap. Dawn found them safely across the Salado, about five miles above the ford, with Kemper devising a trap of his own.

Lockett was on the extreme right, with orders to advance along the ridge, and Kirk's Scouts were with him. Here the first action developed. Puzzled by the non-appearance of his enemy, Salcedo had ordered up a company of cavalry to cross the ford toward Kemper's camp and investigate. This troop was riding carelessly across the ridge, the men laughing and joking together. They thought themselves well in the rear of their own lines. Lockett's men opened fire, driving them back in disorder.

Colonel Montero was in command of the detachment. Instead of turning he charged, calling on his men to follow. Only a few yards separated the advancing officer from the thicket where Ben Marsten stood. The horse lunged into the chaparral. Marsten dodged back. His rifle was empty. Montero raised his sword and leaned forward in his saddle.

Jonathan saw the situation but, like Marsten, he had only an empty rifle and was too far away to do anything. As the colonel's sword descended in a swishing arc, Denis O'Rourke appeared from nowhere. His brawny arms dragged Marsten clear of the blade. Someone fired and Montero tumbled from his horse, dead.

When the others rushed up, Marsten was scrambling to his feet, shaken but unhurt. O'Rourke wasn't so fortunate. The saber had caught him at the shoulder, slashing the length of his arm. "'Tis just a small thing," he assured them, clutching at his sleeve, but his face was white. They made a tourniquet and tried to stop the gush of blood.

The firing had grown general now, all along the line. They went on into the battle, leaving their friend behind, propped against a tree. Off to their left, heavy volleys thundered above the steady din of irregular musketry, but Jonathan could see nothing from here. When they overtook Lockett, he was forming a skirmish line in the brush, facing the Spanish artillery.

"Keep those guns out of action," the captain ordered. "Pick off the gunners and we'll win this fight."

Jonathan took careful aim at the nearest cannoneer and squeezed the trigger. Jess Leeman on his left and Giles Brady on his right were doing the same thing. As their malignant fire increased, a pungent haze began to drift across the crest like an untimely fog. The carnage around Salcedo's artillery was sinister: only one cannon ever spoke, and it roared but once. A determined effort was made to man the guns but the artillerymen still living were driven back before the battle was well begun.

Aside from their own short front, Kirk's Scouts had no idea how the battle was going until the Spanish infantry began to retreat. First a thin

trickle of men appeared, followed soon by a demoralized mob. Lockett held his position, his accurate fire adding to the enemy's disorder, until he saw Salcedo trying to re-form his troops behind the abandoned artillery position. Then he ordered a charge, crushing this new resistance before it could form. Jonathan was beside Jess Leeman as they topped the crest of the hill. Here they were joined by Kemper's main force, charging from the other flank. The entire Spanish front had collapsed. The Virginian began to realize the extent of the victory as the pursuit gathered momentum. Here and there desperate knots of men stood and fought futilely, but there was no longer an organized resistance. The slaughter was tremendous.

Salcedo was grim-faced as he rode back into his capital. All about him streamed the remnants of his army. Half of them had discarded their rifles. He was not yet aware of the magnitude of his defeat.

Every piece of his artillery, which Lockett's accurate fire had rendered useless, was captured. Of the twenty-five hundred men he had led into the battle, a thousand were dead, and his remaining force was so badly disorganized that only a few companies remained reliable.

That night a flag of truce was sent to Kemper's headquarters, established at Mission Concepcion. Realizing that he could not hope to defend the walls without artillery, the governor sent an armistice proposal. He was still courageous in his demands. He offered to retire with his troops, surrendering the city, on condition that property rights be respected and the inhabitants unharmed. Otherwise he threatened he would remain and fight to the last man. His communication was addressed to whoever was in charge, without naming any of the leaders. Kemper and Gutierrez knew they held the whip hand. They refused to receive any message not addressed to them properly.

The next morning, March twenty-ninth, McFarland was dispatched into the town under a flag of truce to demand its capitulation. Salcedo still hoped for re-enforcements. He replied that no answer would be possible until the following day. Kemper guessed the reason for this delay and sent McFarland back to tell the governor that unless he surrendered immediately the town would be stormed. To back up his words Kemper ordered the captured artillery, as well as his own, drawn up in position to command the town. There was no longer any alternative. Salcedo rode out to surrender. With him came Colonel Herrera, a former governor of the province, and other leading officers of his staff.

During the battle of Rosillo, Kemper had promoted Ross to second in command, and Captain Taylor now was in charge of Ross's company, athwart the road approaching San Antonio. Kirk's Scouts were stationed far to the army's right. Dr. Forsythe had ridden out to dress O'Rourke's wound.

The Irishman would recover, the doctor said, but he had given an arm to save his friend.

“The tourniquet saved him,” the doctor was explaining when Lockett galloped up.

“Salcedo’s riding out to surrender,” he called, “and I want to be there to see it. Come on, Jonty, or you’ll be too late.”

“I don’t want to miss that either,” declared the doctor. “We’ve been waiting a long time for it.” He followed them as they galloped off.

Throughout the army, others followed this same procedure as soon as they realized what was happening. As Kemper hurried up, an orderly followed him at a gallop, carrying the army’s flag, the sun bright on its green folds. Kemper towered among his officers, talking to Ross as he watched Salcedo’s approach. Don Bernardo Gutierrez was resplendent in a blue and gold uniform, chatting with Miguel Salazar. He was in high spirits, his teeth flashing as he smiled. Salazar was saturnine. The door was only beginning to open for him; his goal was still distant. The Mexican officers stood in one group. Menchaca, square-built and swarthy, crouched stolidly beside the road, ignoring the lighter mood of Delgado and Sava.

The staff was representative of the mixed nature of the army. Captain Masicot, the polished Frenchman, wore a buff uniform with a sword hanging from his scarlet sash. He was talking to McFarland, whose blanket draped his spare shoulders. Perry and Gaines were dressed much alike. Each wore a broadcloth coat for the occasion, but Perry’s boots were scratched and Gaines’s high leather leggings were beginning to fray. Perry was tugging at his ear lobe. Captain Despallier, from some remarkable source, had produced silk stockings and buckled shoes. He was dressed as if for a formal call at some New Orleans home.

“We don’t look much like soldiers, do we?” Jonathan remarked, as he dismounted to join the group.

“We fight like hell, though,” Lockett retorted.

Dr. Forsythe laughed. “That’s what counts.”

Captain Taylor had drawn his weather-beaten company to attention on either side of the dusty road when Salcedo arrived. The governor and his staff were carefully arrayed in full-dress uniform, the sun glittering on their epaulettes. Accompanied by Colonel Herrera, Salcedo dismounted and walked up to Taylor. His face was set in somber lines, his manner severely formal.

By this time the entire army was aware of the ceremony. The principals were strained and silent, but all about them arose a babble of sound as the hurrying men pressed forward to watch. Half-naked Indians rubbed shoulders with Masicot’s New Orleans volunteers whose blue uniforms still

were bright; buckskin-clad outlaws from the Neutral Ground mingled with pioneers in homespun. One thing only they had in common. All were lank and bronzed.

Salcedo halted in front of Taylor, bowed rigidly, drew his sword, presented it to the American, hilt first.

“Not to me,” the captain exclaimed. “Colonel Kemper’s in command of this army.” Turning, he indicated his leader with a sweep of his arm.

The governor sheathed his weapon. Outwardly he remained unruffled, but his lips set in a tighter line. He said nothing, merely nodding to the captain, and then strode on to Kemper. Once more he bowed and again he tendered his blade in formal surrender.

Colonel Kemper smiled pleasantly but his hands remained behind his back. His voice boomed so that all could hear. “General Bernardo Gutierrez is the leader of this expedition. He’s the one to accept your surrender, Governor.”

Salcedo turned to look at Gutierrez and Salazar who were standing apart. Of all those here, they were the only two he bore personal animosity. In offering Magee terms at La Bahia, his one demand had been that these two rebels be turned over to him. He was a resolute and able man, facing his most trying hour. Heretofore, his face had been set. Now he flushed darkly.

This time he did not sheath his sword. As he stepped before Gutierrez he did not bow, nor did he offer his weapon as he had twice before. Instead, he thrust it into the ground with such force that when he released its hilt, it trembled there.

His eyes measured Gutierrez. They held contempt. “You accept an honor you did not win yourself.” His voice was low but the words were distinct and carried well. He bowed with stiff dignity, and then returned to his waiting horse through the silent, watching army. Only the scrape of his boots in the dust disturbed the hush. These men understood and admired the qualities that had made him a worthy opponent. They liked his bearing in defeat.

Teresa was jubilant. From her window she had watched the routed troops pour into the city. Salcedo’s might was crushed. Her ambition was one step nearer fulfillment. In her mind everything was arranged now. Only Magee and Gutierrez had stood between Salazar and a throne. Magee’s brilliant leadership had been the greatest obstacle, but he was lying in an unmarked grave at La Bahia. She did not know how he had died—there were conflicting rumors—but her instinct told her it had been Salazar’s doing.

Gutierrez did not trouble her. Salazar could manipulate him. Once his usefulness had ended he would disappear from the scene.

She was sure she had detected the one flaw in his scheme. There were nearly a thousand Americans now, fighting men who had proved their mettle. They might not follow him so readily. Teresa's full lips curved into a smile. Her heart's desire provided an answer. Let Salazar have his throne. He would share it with her. Once there, her grip on it would be surer than his. She would turn against him his own cunning. She would give the Americans an American to follow, one who had fought with them and shared their hardships.

The guard had been removed from her house and José had no trouble carrying her message through the lines. He galloped past Salcedo's returning party on the road.

"The turncoats already are busy," Herrera remarked bitterly to his chief. "Shall I stop him?"

"Never mind." The governor's voice was bleak. "It's no further concern of ours."

Johnny Durst had just arrived from Nacogdoches with supplies. Jonathan told him what had happened. "How's Cissy?"

"Prettier than ever." Durst eyed his friend steadily. "She's a girl in a million, Jonty."

"As if I didn't know. Will she be coming on here now or will you be trying to keep her in Nacogdoches?"

"She'll be here as soon as she hears the war is ended." Durst was still watching Jonathan in that peculiar fixed way when José plucked at Jonty's sleeve.

Jonathan recognized the cross-eyed Mexican at once and stepped aside to question him. "What are you doing here?" he demanded. "Where's your mistress?"

José handed him the letter. It was heavy with a familiar fragrance. He tore it open with tremulous fingers.

"My love," it read: "All of our dreams are coming true. I am waiting for you. Come to me now. Your Teresa."

He read it twice, avidly, before he turned again to the messenger. "Take me to her," he commanded. His voice was as impatient as his heart.

Luiz tried to interrupt his master's conversation with Gutierrez but the two men were absorbed. Miguel Salazar was speaking swiftly, pouring his

prompting words into the other's doubtful ears. Gutierrez seemed to hesitate. Luiz regretted that he could not hear what was said. He coughed discreetly.

Miguel glanced around sharply. "Do not interrupt us, Luiz," he commanded.

"But it's very important, señor," the servant replied.

"Later," Miguel retorted. "I'm busy now."

Luiz turned away. He had thought his information worthy of a fat tip. He had noted Teresa's messenger. Of course if his master was too busy it couldn't be helped. He shrugged.

Jonathan followed José into town. "Faster," he urged his guide, "faster," heedless of the fact that they were riding at a full gallop. Each minute dragged by endlessly, the horses seemed to crawl. Her note was crumpled in his pocket but its words were indelibly fixed in his mind. An invitation to happiness.

The war was ended, Texas was free, and Teresa's love awaited him at the end of this ride.

The sun was in the west. He squinted into its slanting rays and watched as the flag of Spain was lowered from the presidio. Kemper had sent Perry to perform the ceremony. Jonathan watched as the green flag rose slowly in its place and the wind rippled its folds gently.

"Cissy's flag," he thought, and remembered the night she had given it to Magee. That seemed long ago. "It will fly over San Antonio," Magee had promised. Jonathan wished his friend were here to see the prophecy fulfilled.

He spurred his horse.



# **VOLUME TWO**

*Dusk*

# Chapter 1

## *Salazar Shows the Way*

AS JONATHAN galloped after José he made the discovery that San Antonio was a collection of villages rather than a single town, all typically Spanish in appearance, the streets narrow, the houses squat and flat-topped. For the most part they were of a white, native stone with only an occasional dwelling of adobe. The way led first through La Villita on the east bank of the winding river. This little village lay outside the walls and yet was an integral part of the settlement. A couple of hundred yards north and on the same side of the stream could be seen the twin towers of San Antonio de Valero, surmounting heavy masonry walls which enclosed a wide area. Abandoned as a mission now, this actually was another walled town defending the eastern approaches to the settlement. Their horses splashed noisily through the broad ford, and as they cantered up the west bank they found themselves in San Fernando, the largest and most populous of the villages. It was bordered on the east by the river and on the west by the rugged walls of San Antonio de Bexar, the original walled town and presidio.

Everywhere was a busy murmur of water flowing through the *acequias*—tree-lined ditches, bank full, serving as a public water system. The streets were little more than paths, the crowded dwellings accentuating their narrowness. But the grass was vivid along the *acequias*; the kindly shade of the spreading trees and the bright carpet of wild flowers along the banks gave a festive air. Laundresses bent over their tasks; drying clothes quilted the greenery in white patches; children shouted as they splashed in play; idlers dozed in the warm spring sun along the slopes, and from them women carried homeward their dripping buckets.

Their road took them into the wide Plaza de Las Yslas where stood the cathedral built by the Spanish king, close to the presidio walls, and where the green flag of the new republic now was flying. The house which had been Teresa's prison lay north of it, fronting an *acequia*. Its exterior was drab but Maria admitted Jonathan into a patio that was a cool, green garden and here Teresa was waiting.

Teresa's eagerness was as great as his. She was unused to denial and her desire for Jonathan had been simmering overlong. And yet she had set the stage for the meeting with shrewd calculation. She was drunk with dreams, too. The throne she craved was almost within reach and Miguel was essential to this other lust.

The coming days would be swift with change if Miguel had his way. From the resulting disorder, her goal would emerge. Her purpose had crystallized. Once Miguel had made the throne possible, she would turn against him the same ruthlessness he used against others. Her Virginian would make the crown palatable to the American troops, too.

She had need of Jonathan's unswerving devotion in the coming confusion. He loved her, yes, but could she count on him when heads were falling and other greedy hands were grasping for power? She wanted to share her plans with him. It would be so simple if he were goaded by the same reckless dream. But when she had tried to tempt him with talk of a throne he had been scornful.

There was another way to bind him to her. If some odd reluctance had not held him back the night of their parting, this uncertainty would be ended. Her eyes burned at the memory. His desire had been as great as hers, she knew. She had sensed his restraint, tried to understand it, but his young idealism was strange to her.

She was determined that this meeting would be different. Once he had tasted the madness of her love, nothing could keep him from her. She was confident, and the plan seemed more sure because it matched her own craving.

She brushed aside the dainty lingerie that Maria had laid out and chose a diaphanous gown, testing its transparency with her hand.

"A night gown?" The servant laughed. "You aren't wasting much time, little sweetheart."

"There isn't much time. Who knows how soon Miguel will learn I'm here? Get me the saffron robe. It's the prettiest."

"You'd just as well wear nothing. It's as thin as this."

"Perhaps that's what I want." She studied her reflection in the mirror, remembering how her rumpled nightdress had affected Jonathan before.

"I will be taking my siesta in the hammock when he comes," she said. "Bring him to the patio and see that we aren't disturbed."

Maria wagged her head. "Then try and shut your eyes at least once, Teté. You want to make a liar of me?"

He saw her thin robe trailing from the hammock.

“Teresa!” he called.

She opened drowsy eyes that gladdened at the sight of him. “Jontee!” she answered. “Don’t keep me waiting, darling.”

Then he was kneeling beside her, holding her in his arms, their lips joined in kisses that tried to span the hunger of all their empty days. There was no time for words at first.

“Only let me look at you,” she said at last, holding him away. Her hands were clinging as she watched, hoping to surprise the desire in his eyes when he looked at her.

He was too troubled by questions to notice the enticing display she had arranged so carefully. When had she left Nacogdoches? How had she come here? He was dismayed to hear that she had been a prisoner.

“Did they treat you well? Were you frightened?”

She laughed. “I knew you would come soon, Jontee. I thought only of that.”

He kissed her again. “You were right. All our dreams are coming true. The war is ended and you are in my arms.”

She stroked his face and her hand was trembling.

“How soon can we be married?” he demanded. “There’s nothing to keep us waiting now.”

She lay very still in his arms and avoided his gaze.

“Not yet,” she replied softly. “Soon, Jontee, but not yet.”

“Why not?”

“First I must win the consent of my guardian,” she temporized. “There are many difficulties.”

“Miguel Salazar? You know how he feels about me.” Jonathan was brusque. “There’s no use waiting for his permission. It will never come.”

As his arguments intensified, Teresa’s mind quickened with the need for excuses. “Still he is my guardian,” she murmured. “If I marry without his consent, what will become of my estates?”

“The devil with your property!” Jonathan’s impatience would not be denied. “See here, Teresa. You’re the reason I came here. You know that. Why should we wait? Why shouldn’t I go straight to Don Miguel and tell him I love you? We’ve nothing to hide.”

“But what if he sent me away?” Her terror seemed very real. “If he carried me back to Mexico or some other far-off place, I’d never see you again.” She clung to him.

“You aren’t a prisoner now,” he pointed out.

“You don’t understand these things.” She nestled closer. “In this country a girl can do nothing without her guardian’s consent. He controls her estates;

he picks the man she'll marry; he can even send her to a convent if he chooses. We aren't in your America now."

He scoffed at her objections. "What's to prevent you from coming with me now? We'll find a priest and within an hour you'll be my wife. What can Salazar do then?"

"But we couldn't be married," she protested. "The banns haven't been published. For that, my guardian's consent would be required."

This argument baffled him. If Salazar could close the door of the church against them, what hope was there? His perplexity was in his eyes, and seeing it, her confidence mounted.

"You have quarreled with Don Miguel," she said. "You only know his anger. With me he's different, indulgent as a father." She held her hand against his lips to still his dissent. "Give me time and I can arrange it."

"I'm not so sure. What if you fail?"

She nestled closer to him. "Then I will come to you anyway," she promised. She ran caressing fingers through his hair. "Only now we must be careful in our meetings. He must not suspect our love—not yet."

This was like the dreams he had had of her, all the lonely months he had been gone, her lips soft against his, her body warming his hands, just as on the night they had parted. He glanced down at her, disturbingly aware of the sheen of flesh through the filmy gown.

Teresa had been waiting for this. She drew him to her tightly. Her lips slipped down from his cheek to his throat. As if to show him the way, she opened his shirt wider at the neck; her kisses nibbled at his shoulder.

"Teresa! Teresa!"

Her breath was crushed out of her at the sudden roughness of his clasp. Just then there was a distant clatter in the house. Maria came running into the garden, her eyes wide with terror. "Dear God!" she moaned, pulling Jonty to his feet. "We are ruined! Don Miguel is at the door."

Teresa gasped.

"You must go out the back gate, Jontee. Maria will show you."

"Why not face him now? I love you, Teresa. I can't leave you like this."

She kissed him swiftly. "Let me handle it. A quarrel now won't win Miguel's consent. Trust me, darling. I know best."

"But when can I see you?"

"Soon," she promised. "I will find a way. Now hurry."

Reluctantly he allowed himself to be whisked through the gate at the rear of the garden. There was time for only one hurried embrace before Teresa shut it behind him.

Miguel Salazar's fury had been blinding when Luiz finally informed him that Teresa's servant had been in the camp. "Why didn't you tell me so at once?" he demanded and cuffed him.

"I tried, Excellency—" Luiz cowered before his master's wrath—"but you were busy with Don Bernardo."

Teresa here! The suspicion that had been weighting his mind ever since he discovered Jonathan Kirk still lived gnawed at his temper. He was brusque when Gutierrez asked him to wait.

"We'll make a formal entrance into the city," Don Bernardo promised. "We shall march in with band playing at the head of our troops."

"My business can't wait," Salazar retorted angrily as he sprang into the saddle.

Only Luiz followed him in his precipitous gallop. He had no great difficulty in locating Teresa's house. Her entrance into the city had been spectacular and her presence under guard a matter of much speculation. Her door was quickly pointed out to him.

Maria had heard the bustle in the street in time to warn her mistress. Now she answered the thunder of his knocking with pretended surprise. "Don Miguel!" she exclaimed fervently and fell on her knees before him to kiss his hand. "You've come! At last we're safe!"

As she blocked his path her ears were straining for some sound that would indicate all was well in the garden.

Salazar was not to be duped by such a stratagem. He wrenched his hand free and sent her sprawling with a vicious thrust. He flung open the door into the patio.

Teresa was there, curled in a hammock, her eyes closed. The solitude of the scene did not lull the suspicion in his darting eyes. He stood there silently scrutinizing each detail to find some telltale flaw. He approached her softly and gripped her wrist with strong fingers.

Teresa opened her eyes. "Miguel!" she exclaimed. Her smile was warm; her eyes were still lazy with sleep. She would have thrown her arms about him but he still held her wrist.

"Why is your pulse racing, my love?" His tone was impersonal.

She laughed. "You're here and you ask me that?"

His probing eyes still searched her face, but when his hold on her relaxed she was instantly in his arms and her lips pressed back the questions he might have asked. He buried his face in her shining hair and surrendered to the delight she never failed to stir. This was like old times.

The restraint that had troubled him when they parted at Nacogdoches was gone. Teresa's ardor lulled his suspicions but they were not dismissed completely.

For her, this was a period of bright hopes and incessant urgings.

"When?" she would ask Miguel constantly. "How soon will we have our throne? What is there to keep us waiting now?"

"Give me time, my love. First, I must get rid of some of these Americans. They don't like the sound of a crown."

"Magee is gone," she reminded him.

"Kemper is just as difficult. Gutierrez is no problem. That's why I have elevated him for the present. Within a week," he promised, "you'll see a change. Everything is arranged."

He would tell her no more despite her pleading, but she trusted his cunning.

It pleased Miguel that Teresa had identified herself with the revolution and he aided in dramatizing the fact that she had been Salcedo's prisoner. He arranged that skillfully. José and Luiz spread their stories of La del Pelo de Oro who had been imprisoned for her allegiance to the republican cause.

The army was flushed with victory, the town rejoiced in the overthrow of its Spanish masters, and the new government was launched with every prospect of success. Miguel Salazar assumed a new prominence, but he was content for the present to manipulate his strings from behind the scene. His first step was to establish himself in a large villa on the outskirts of the town, called La Quinta. It was a large, two-story stone dwelling which, besides the usual patio, had a walled garden terraced down to the river's edge. Here he and Teresa entertained on a scale more lavish than that of the royal governors. Gutierrez came often, as did Delgado, Menchaca and Sava, all captains in the revolutionary army. Masicot, the Frenchman, was a frequent guest too. Kemper and the other American officers were not included in these gatherings, but this was not marked. Salazar's friendships among the Americans were limited. For the most part Magee's old staff formed a coterie of their own.

Bernardo Gutierrez was given the title of generalissimo and proclaimed governor of the new republic. Serving with him was a junta of thirteen. Salazar was a member of it with the other Mexican officers and a group of the more prominent townsmen. Captain Masicot, the Frenchman, was included but the only American appointed was a man named Hale who had played an inconspicuous role in the army. Some of the officers resented this exclusion but Kemper favored it.

"We're the army," he counseled. "It's best we stay out of the council. It would look too much like a military dictatorship."

Kemper devoted himself to his troops. From the confiscated royal treasure, each man received his wages and a bonus of fifteen dollars, with a suit of clothes and an order for two horses or mules out of the public *caballado*. He also made arrangements to set up an office for filing land claims. Kemper wanted his soldiers converted into settlers, and Gutierrez sympathized.

The surrendered troops were permitted to return home to Mexico after laying down their arms, but the officers, including Governor Salcedo and his staff, were detained on parole. That they were given the liberty of the town rankled with Salazar.

"I haven't forgotten the way the governor insulted you at the surrender," he reminded Gutierrez. "I remember how he refused to yield his sword to you."

"I haven't forgotten either," Don Bernardo growled. "Arrogant *gachupine!*"

"Texas will never be really free until we're rid of him," continued Miguel. "His presence here just invites trouble. Sooner or later he'll head an uprising."

"But he's given his word of honor," Gutierrez protested.

"I still recall his contempt for you." Always Salazar harped on that theme. "And I remember his terms at La Bahia. He offered everyone a safe conduct across the border except you and me. Ah, I have no doubts concerning his regard for us, my friend. He's made it very plain. Sooner or later he'll cut your throat."

Salazar discussed the same subject with Captain Antonio Delgado. "It angers me to see these haughty *gachupines* walking our streets. I've no illusions about the treatment we would have received if we had been taken prisoners. Your father had that misfortune. He was captured by the royalists in this very town—and what befell him?"

"Need you ask?" Delgado's face was contorted. "They set his head on a pole as an example to all who defied the king."

"A very distinguished gentleman." Miguel shook his head sadly. "That's the fate which awaited us had we lost. I do not delude myself. Should the fortunes of war ever turn against us, our heads will decorate the town. And yet we must watch in silence while these *gachupines* insult us with their arrogance. It's unbearable."

Salazar talked about it to Menchaca, Sava and other Mexican members of the junta. Strangely, perhaps, he never mentioned it to the American officers.

The new council met on April first.



“It is of first importance that we determine the disposition of the royal prisoners,” Gutierrez announced after calling the meeting to order. “The safety of our new government demands that their liberty be curtailed. We cannot permit this freedom.”

“Bring them to trial,” Captain Delgado was the first to demand. “My father’s only crime was that he opposed their government. Let these men suffer the same fate.”

“This is impossible.” Captain Masicot was on his feet immediately. “We accepted their parole. We pledged our words for their safety.”

“I pledged nothing,” Delgado protested.

“No one asked me,” Menchaca objected.

“Bring them to trial! Bring them to trial!” the others chorused.

“Let us not be too hasty.” Miguel Salazar’s voice was suave. “Of course there can be no doubt of the fate in store for us should we fall into royalist hands. There isn’t a man in this room who wouldn’t be beheaded instantly. Salcedo is both arrogant and ruthless. He would not hesitate to condemn us.”

A mutter went around the council table.

“And yet—” Salazar appeared not to notice it; his voice purred softly on—“I sympathize with Captain Masicot’s view. Let’s not be hasty, no matter how dangerous these men may be.”

“Vote,” Menchaca demanded angrily.

“Bring them to trial,” shouted Delgado.

The vote stood ten to two. Only Masicot and Hale voted against it. Salazar did not vote.

Masicot informed Kemper immediately, and he hurried to the governor’s palace in search of Gutierrez. With him came Ross, Perry, Lockett, Gaines and Jonathan Kirk.

“What’s this I hear about a trial?” he growled angrily, thumping the table with his fist. “You were present when we agreed to parole Salcedo and his officers. You understood the terms.”

“It was the vote of the junta,” Gutierrez shrugged. “If you have a protest to make, you should appear before it.”

“You’re the governor and your word is pledged for the safety of these men, just as mine is. I’m not going to appear before anyone. I’ve come to warn you. These men are not going on trial and if anyone attempts it I’ll march in here at the head of my men and set them free. Do I make myself clear?”

The new governor hesitated. He was not lacking in courage, but the angry officers surrounding him represented the bulk of his army. “Have you any doubt what your fate would be if you were at their mercy?” he asked.

“I’d accept Salcedo’s word any time,” Kemper rejoined bluntly. “He accepted mine and I intend to see that it’s kept.”

“I don’t like the temper of the junta,” Gutierrez temporized. “What would you think of sending the prisoners to New Orleans? That would remove them from the council’s reach and your pledge for their safety would be vindicated.”

“How could they be sent?”

“There are two ships loading for New Orleans at Matagorda Bay right now,” replied the governor. “I could send them there under guard. As a matter of fact—” he shrugged—“I’ll feel better when they’re gone. It’s a situation fraught with trouble.”

“Maybe that would be best.” Kemper wanted to avoid a clash with the council if possible.

“The ships will sail within a week.” Don Bernardo showed his relief. He smiled affably. “I can keep the junta in hand that long.”

“I’ll hold you personally responsible for that,” declared Kemper.

# Chapter 2

## *Massacre*

LAND was the obsession of the whole army. Singly and in groups men explored for miles in quest of likely homesteads. Lush farms surrounded the missions which lay along the river banks to the south. Kemper was interested in the Colorado River country and was organizing a group of friends to establish a settlement there. A group from Lockett's company planned to settle along the Guadalupe. Kirk's Scouts were thoroughly familiar with the San Antonio River section. They had scouted it ahead of the army for a hundred miles between La Bahia and San Antonio. They liked the territory south of the Flores *hacienda*, about forty miles down the river.

"Here's where I'd like to build my house," Jonathan had once declared when the company was camped under a group of gnarled oaks which shadowed the crest of a hill. At its base the river coiled lazily. It was open country, the gentle undulation of the hills merging gradually into the plains on the far horizon. It was spring and the slopes were bright with color. Wide acres of blue lupines were like vagrant patches of color fallen from the sky, and over them the wind swept in ripples. Primroses quilted the grass with pink. Gaillardias grew wild, their flame dancing along the ground endlessly, and verbenas nestled everywhere.

"It's a good country." Giles Brady stared at the land-bound rainbow which reached toward the horizon. "Worth all the trouble it took to win, ain't it?"

"The good Lord must have gone on a spree when he made this place," O'Rourke replied. "Oi've niver seen the loik of it."

"I choose the land yonder." Ben Marsten pointed across the river. "I'll build my house on that hill where I can look across here and see your lights of an evening."

They had carried this memory with them through the remainder of the campaign, and now they decided to return. O'Rourke was still unable to travel and Ben Marsten was unwilling to leave his friend alone. "You know

the place I want,” he told Jonathan. “Mark it for me. I’ll bide here with Denis.”

With the coming of peace, his first thought was for Cecily. When Johnny Durst returned to Nacogdoches, Cris went with him to fetch his sister.

“By the time she arrives, we’ll have our homesteads staked out,” Jonathan promised. “Tell her she’ll have to hurry if she wants to get here before we’re already settled.”

Jonathan was restless because he couldn’t see Teresa more often, and he speeded their preparations. Several times he’d seen the yellow coach but only once had they talked.

“How much longer must this go on?” he demanded. The coach was halted before a shop on the Plaza de Las Yslas.

Teresa glanced about uneasily. “Soon, Jontee,” she promised. “Only be patient. I long for you, but we must not be seen together yet. I’ll send José to you with a message as soon as it can be arranged.”

The trip eased Jonathan. He welcomed the long days in the saddle, and the land was as promising as their memory of it had been. For two days they explored the chosen site, selecting homesteads for the absent members of their party as well as for themselves. The land lay on both sides of the river, and Jonathan sketched a crude map of it. They were not equipped to make a survey, but they estimated the distances as best they could and marked off corners. They were away five days.

Gutierrez was troubled by Kemper’s resolute attitude toward the prisoners. He carried his worries to Salazar.

“The Americans will not tolerate a breach of the parole,” he declared. “Salcedo can’t be brought to trial before the junta.”

“Kemper?”

“Yes. He threatens to march in at the head of his troops and rescue them if we attempt it. If we start fighting among ourselves, it’s the end of our republic. But I have a solution.” The governor shrugged. “I’ll send them to New Orleans for safekeeping. At least we’ll be rid of them here.”

“Salcedo is a dangerous enemy—” Miguel settled back in his chair comfortably—“and we both know his hatred for you. Leniency ceases to be a virtue when it’s rash. For your sake I’m sorry it has turned out this way.”

Gutierrez paced the floor. “What can I do? Shall I get rid of one enemy only to make another? Kemper doesn’t make idle threats. The Americans will follow him.”

“I’ll be glad when we’re free of Kemper and his kind,” retorted Salazar impatiently. “They’ve served their purpose. Now if I were governor—” he

spaced his words slowly—"I'd find a way to arrange this. I'd never let a man as dangerous as Salcedo slip through my fingers. Kemper wouldn't worry me too much.

"Sooner or later he'd hear of it, of course, but by then it would be too late for him to interfere." He smiled. "Who knows? He might even go back across the border where he belongs when he discovers the difference between our ways and his. Yes," he mused aloud, "that's probably what he'd do, and I can't say I'd regret his departure."

Gutierrez had stopped his restless pacing. "If this could be accomplished without open conflict," he began doubtfully, "it would solve my problems. How could it be done?"

Miguel's fingers drummed on his chair arm. "You suggested the plan yourself," he replied finally. "Kemper is satisfied with your order for the deportation of the prisoners. I think Antonio Delgado would be an ideal man to escort them to Matagorda. Like you and me, he has no love for these *gachupines*. We could depend upon him to carry out any instructions."

Don Bernardo pondered the advice in silence. "Who would give Delgado his orders?" he asked presently.

"You're the governor," his friend pointed out. "However, I know him well. I would undertake to emphasize them properly if they were ambiguous."

Kemper was present at the governor's palace when Gutierrez issued the order canceling the paroles. It directed that the prisoners be taken under guard to Matagorda Bay where they would board ship for New Orleans.

There were fourteen prisoners: Governor Manuel de Salcedo of Texas; Colonel Simon de Herrera, governor of Nueva Leon; Lieutenant Colonel Geronimo Herrera; Captain Juan de Echeverria; Captain Juan Ignacio Arambido; Captain Miguel de Arcos and his two sons, Luis and Francisco, one a lieutenant, the other an ensign; Lieutenants Gregorio Amado and Juan Caso; and four citizens known for their royalist sympathies, the most prominent being Antonio Lopez and Francisco Cordero, a nephew of the governor of Coahuilla. The captives were assembled in the long dining room of the governor's palace under heavy guard. Salcedo asked to see Kemper.

"I have your word that my officers are to be treated as prisoners of war," he reminded the colonel. "Parole was binding on both parties, yet you find us captives here. What is the meaning of it?"

Kemper reassured him. "You're being given safe conduct to New Orleans. Once aboard ship, you'll be released."

"Whose idea was this?" Salcedo demanded.

"Don Bernardo thought it best in order to avoid any conflict with the junta," the American explained. "They voted to bring you and your officers

to trial, but we could not tolerate any such procedure.”

“Gutierrez!” the royal governor exclaimed. “I thought so. Let me remind you, sir, that it was you who routed my army at Rosillo. I consider myself *your* prisoner.”

“You have my assurance that there will be no trial.” Kemper turned away, irritated by the implied rebuke. “I think Don Bernardo has made a wise decision.”

Captain Antonio Delgado was the only guest at La Quinta that night. Salazar was genial and Teresa’s spirit as effervescent as the wine which was constantly replenished in the captain’s goblet.

“To a day of reckoning!” Miguel proposed the toast. “Those that live by the sword shall perish by the sword.”

Delgado drained his glass.

“You should be a happy man, knowing that your father’s death so soon will be avenged and that you can witness it.” Salazar smiled.

Luiz was attending them. His chubby hand shook so that the wine bottle chattered against an empty tumbler.

“I haven’t forgotten my father,” the young officer promised darkly. “The *gachupines* can expect the same mercy they showed him.”

After the guest left Miguel threw off his restraint. “A very satisfactory way to settle an old score,” he said, clasping Teresa to him. “Our day approaches, my love.”

She frowned. “You avenge yourself upon Salcedo. I don’t blame you for that. But haven’t we greater plans?”

He tilted her unruly head toward the light and studied it. Then he threw himself back in the chair and laughed. “I thought you guessed my design. The time of waiting is over. I’m beginning to abandon the tools which have grown useless. By permitting this vengeance, Gutierrez has ruined himself. The Americans will depose him, and—” he grew sober—“if I am fortunate in my handling of this, we’ll dispose of some troublesome Americans, too.”

He kissed her fingers. “Can you already feel the weight of a scepter in these pretty hands?”

Teresa twined her arms about him.

It lacked an hour of dawn when Delgado started the prisoners for Matagorda Bay. There were twenty in his company, all native volunteers. His lieutenant, Pedro Teran, was picked for his hatred of the *gachupines*, and he had made sure that each man shared this antipathy. Governor Salcedo objected to the prisoners’ feet being lashed together under their horses’ bellies, but the captain only shrugged.

"I've seen how prisoners were bound when they were brought before Your Excellency," he mocked. "Colonel Herrera will remember how my father was treated, and consider himself lucky."

The royal governor was not dressed for a journey, but arrayed in full-dress uniform. Herrera had followed his example. The two men rode knee to knee as the cavalcade passed through the narrow streets and turned south on the road to La Bahia. The guards began jesting noisily among themselves. The captives rode in silence.

Not more than ten minutes out of town, Delgado deserted the road, turning sharply right to where trees, dark against the sky, outlined the river's course. Here was a ford on the road to the missions. Delgado called a halt before the journey was fairly begun.

"Is this the road to Matagorda?" Salcedo demanded.

"It's the nearest you'll ever come to it," the captain replied.

The prisoners were removed from their horses one at a time and bound securely. "Prop them against the trees," Delgado ordered, "where they may watch. It suits me that they should know our plans."

Morning was close; its creeping gray matched the mist that veiled the river. At a word from their leader the guards drew their machetes, long, heavy knives with broad ugly blades.

"Some sharpen their knives with a stone," Delgado remarked, "but I think there's nothing like leather to give them an edge." Slowly he whetted the weapon against his boot sole.

The guards chuckled among themselves and followed his example. "His Excellency has a soft throat," said Pedro Teran. "May I test it, Captain?"

"I care not," was the reply. "Herrera is the man for me." He grinned across at the helpless colonel through the growing light. "I don't want my blade too sharp. I want you to feel it as it saws through the gristle. Maybe it will remind you of my father. Remember how you had his head thrust on a pole? You may be sure I've reserved the same honor for you."

"I'm beginning to think these dogs howl too much to be vicious," the doughty Herrera retorted.

"I expected this when I learned it was Gutierrez' plan," declared Salcedo. "He picked a choice crew of cutthroats for his mission."

"Let's get on with it," growled one of the guards. "I don't even like the sound of their *gachupine* voices."

Delgado glanced eastward. "I'm waiting for the sun," he said. "I intend to enjoy this morning's sight and we'll need light to see it all."

"This is cold-blooded murder," one of the civilian prisoners whimpered.

"Quiet!" Salcedo commanded sternly. "They want to hear you snivel." Then he continued in a gentler tone, "There's only one hope left us,

gentlemen: that we may die like men.”

Delgado set the stage with care. The four civilians came first. Dragged to the water’s edge, they were stripped of their clothing and stood shivering in the wan morning, as their captors argued.

“This one’s mine,” cried a guard, slapping Antonio Lopez across the thigh with the flat of his machete. “By all rights, Captain, each of us should claim the clothes of his victim.”

“There aren’t enough to go round,” another complained.

Delgado sat cross-legged and aloof, observing the scene. His steel whispered harshly as it rasped against his boot. “We’ll draw lots for it,” he decided. “And each man may keep his victim’s possessions.”

The lottery proceeded noisily while the stripped captives waited. Once the winners were decided, they led their prizes into midstream. The ford was shallow, scarcely knee-deep. The risen sun already flirted with the ripples that followed their splashing progress.

“Watch,” Delgado advised the remaining prisoners, “and remember your time’s coming.” Then he gave the signal and the butchery began. As each throat was slashed, gushing blood painted the body of the murdered man, but by the time he was dragged ashore the swift water had cleansed him again.

The four subalterns came next and the savage ritual was repeated. Lieutenant Colonel Geronimo Herrera and the three captains made the third group. The procedure did not vary. Each assassin stripped his man before leading him into the stream.

The place of honor and special hatred was reserved for Salcedo and Simon de Herrera, governors of states.

“A very fine uniform, Colonel,” Delgado commented as Herrera was being stripped. “It will fit me nicely.”

Herrera stared at him coldly. “It will take more than gold epaulettes to make a soldier of you,” he said.

Delgado’s eyes narrowed. He tested his blade with his thumb. “For that insult,” he declared, “I have fined you two ears. Your head will be hard to recognize when it’s placed on a stake.”

Herrera made no reply, nor did Salcedo speak when Teran taunted him. Side by side they marched into the water. The last act of the grisly business was completed.



# Chapter 3

## *Aftermath*

JONATHAN KIRK and his companions were returning to San Antonio that April morning. They had chosen the mission road and had camped on the way because these lands had been under irrigation for a hundred years, and Jonathan wanted to inspect the dam and ditches. This slowed their progress and it was midmorning before they turned their horses into the shallow sparkling ford.

“Good God! Injuns!” Giles Brady exclaimed, checking his horse and pointing across the stream at the litter of bodies half concealed in the tall grass.

There had been no previous Indian trouble, but the circumstances of the massacre inclined them all to agree with Giles until they got a better look at the bodies. None was scalped.

“Look, ain’t this the royal governor?” Jess Leeman called suddenly.

Jonathan knelt beside the sprawled form, stunned by the sinister gash which almost severed head from shoulders. Even in death there was no mistaking the stern defiance of that face. It was Salcedo.

The repellent details of the crime were obvious. Death had visited each man in the same way. They lay in grotesque attitudes just as they had been abandoned, their arms still bound behind their backs.

War had familiarized them with violent death but it had not prepared them for anything like this. Jonathan turned away, fighting nausea. Jess Leeman cursed savagely. Giles Brady was on hands and knees scrutinizing the path. There were unabashed tears in Pablo Savias’ eyes.

“Who done dis, Mist’ Jonty?” Gabe demanded. “Whoever done it, dey ain’t *men*.” He shook his head dazedly and repeated over and over, “Dey ain’t *men*.”

“They spent some time hyar,” Giles announced finally, “but it warn’t a camp. Thar’s been too many hosses on this trail for me to read it good, but the damned murderers rode right back to town.”

“I’ll go straight to Kemper,” Jonathan decided aloud. “The rest of you stay here and see that nothing is disturbed till I get back. I want him to see

this for himself.”

Jonathan rode fast but his mental turbulence made the ride seem long. So bitter were his thoughts, he was astonished to find the familiar town unchanged as his galloping horse stirred dust clouds in the winding streets.

He found Kemper at headquarters. “What’s wrong, Jonty? You’ve the look of a man running from a ghost.”

“From fourteen of them!” the Virginian said, and poured out his story.

“Damnation!” The colonel’s angry roar echoed in the street outside and brought Ross running.

“Get Perry. Tell Lockett. Send for Gaines, Masicot and Despallier,” Kemper shouted his orders. “I want them to see this, too.”

Ross sent messengers scurrying to round up the leaders while the colonel was ordering horses saddled, including a fresh mount for Jonathan whose animal was spent.

Masicot was attending a meeting of the junta but the others speedily assembled. Their faces grew bleak as Kemper explained their errand. He left orders for a wagon to follow to bring in the bodies and then they galloped away.

Between them they were able to identify most of the corpses. Kemper paced the river bank restlessly, peering into the face of each victim. He helped arrange them in an orderly row but would not permit the ropes which still bound them to be removed.

“I want everyone to see how the crime was committed,” he growled.

“Take them to the Plaza de Las Yslas,” he commanded when the wagon arrived. “I’ll have a guard there for them.” He turned to the officers who had followed him through the campaign. “We’ll hold a staff meeting in my quarters immediately,” he continued. “You can be thinking it over on the way back. I know I need a little time.

“A pack of damn butchers!” he exploded again. “I want no part in this bloody business. Salcedo may have been a king’s man but his little finger was worth more than a regiment of the scoundrels who did this thing.”

Nine were present at the meeting. Kemper was at the head of the table. Perry sat at his right, pulling thoughtfully at his ear. Jonathan was there beside Captain Lockett. Ross, Gaines and Taylor were seated on one side. Despallier had found Masicot, who hurried in last, as stunned by the news as the rest.

“I didn’t invite any Mexican officers because I don’t know which of them is involved,” Kemper explained. “Gutierrez gave the order for the removal of the prisoners himself.” He described his interview with the Governor the day before.

“This mess stinks to the sky,” he continued. “Gutierrez and whoever else is responsible for it should be hanged.” He spoke slowly, his temper on uncertain leash.

“Menchaca’s troops are under arms in the presidio,” Despallier declared. “We can’t move against Gutierrez without provoking an open battle. I feel exactly as you do, but there are too few of us to reduce a hostile country once we’re split up.”

“Let ’em fight. We’ll teach ’em a lesson,” Kemper growled.

“Yes, we can whip them but it won’t be easy.” Lockett spoke deliberately. “We’ll be going up against the stone walls of a fort. It will be costly fighting. It’s what happens afterward that bothers me. How can we hold out against the royalists if the whole country turns against us? We can defeat one side or the other but what chance have we against both? We’re too few and we’re hundreds of miles from the border. How many of our men will we be able to lead back? I’m trying to look ahead.”

Kemper strode to the door and glared toward the town, in silent rebellion against this counsel. “You’re right,” he conceded at last. “I’ve no right to throw away an army.

“A pack of damn hyenas!” His fury shattered the thin veneer of his control. “I’ll never trust Gutierrez or his kind again. What’s the good of conquering a country that whelps such curs?”

He glared around the table. “I don’t know how the rest of you feel, but as for me, I’m through with the whole rotten affair. I know many of the men will feel the same way. If I wasn’t responsible for the army, I’d hold a public hanging before I leave.”

“Wouldn’t we accomplish more if we stayed here and cleaned up the mess some other way?” asked Ross. “We fought hard to win this land and I’m not in favor of backing out so quickly.”

“What are you going to do? Execute the whole native population?” Lockett sided with his commander. “I’m sick of the whole business. I’ve seen enough this morning to last me the rest of my life.”

“My mind’s made up,” Kemper declared with heavy finality. “I’m going back home and fight the British. From all accounts, General Harrison needs fighting men. If it wasn’t for the navy, and such ships as the *Constitution*, the Redcoats’d be in Washington again. Each of you is free to do as he pleases and the men in the army must get the same choice. I’m going to put it up to them. Assemble all companies in one hour and march them to the plaza. Let them see the victims first.”

When Gutierrez heard that the Americans were marching into the town, he was panic-stricken. Menchaca’s native company was assembled in the

presidio, and he ordered the gates closed and the guns commanding the plaza manned.

“You’ve nothing to fear,” Salazar commented. “Kemper isn’t such a fool as to put his forces right in our line of fire if he wants to make trouble.” He clapped Menchaca on the shoulder. “Here’s the best officer of them all. I put my trust in him. If the Americans make a move toward the gate, he’ll cut them down. They’ve placed themselves in a trap.”

“Then what is he planning?” Gutierrez asked anxiously.

“I hope he’s planning to leave here,” Miguel answered. “And the more men he takes with him, the better I’ll be pleased. They’re trouble makers.”

“And leave us without an army?” Don Bernardo made no effort to hide his dismay.

“We have Menchaca and a strong native army now. The Americans won’t all leave, and that won’t bother me as long as Menchaca outnumbers them. It must be our army, not theirs.”

Kemper addressed his men, telling what had happened. Then he marched each company past the mutilated corpses.

“I’m going back home,” he said to them all. “I’ll have no more truck with murderers. Any of you who want to come along are welcome. Some of your officers are going to stay and try to straighten out the mess. This is a thing each man must decide for himself. That’s why I’ve brought you here. You can stay or go, as you please. It’s up to you.”

A muttering began among them when he paused to stare up and down the lean, bronzed ranks.

“I’m moving to the mission across the river,” he continued. “Every man who wants to go with me can report there. We’ll leave in the morning. Those who decide to stay here should remain where they are. Major Ross will be in charge.”

He left a bewildered force behind him as he rode away.

Cecily Marsten arrived when affairs were at this crisis.

“Look, there’s your flag, Cissy.” Cris pointed at the green banner floating over the presidio as they rode into the town. They had no inkling of the trouble until they arrived at the house in La Villita where the company made its headquarters. Cris halted the wagon, piled high with the familiar furniture.

“Where is everybody?” he called.

“Look who’s here,” Jess shouted, as they all came hurrying to welcome her.

Jonathan threw his arms around her. “This is going to be like old times, Cissy.” He gave her a hug which left her breathless. “Wait till you see the land we’ve picked out. Your place is right across the river from mine.” He gave the others a warning glance. He didn’t want her greeted with bad news.

Her smile was warm as she stepped back to search his face with friendly eyes. “You haven’t changed a speck,” she declared finally. “From all accounts we heard about Kirk’s Scouts in Nacogdoches, I expected to see some distinguished men. But this looks just like the same bunch that used to clutter up my house of an evening. And I’m glad of it,” she added laughingly.

She wanted to know more about the settlement.

Her father hesitated. “Maybe there won’t be any after all, Cissy.” He told her what had happened. “We’re just talking things over, trying to decide what to do.”

Cecily measured her father as he talked. His clear eye and bronzed complexion answered the questions in her mind.

“What have you decided?”

“We’re disgusted. We don’t like being linked up with a gang of cutthroats,” Marsten spoke slowly. “But it’s a good country. I like its prospects. It goes further than that.” He hesitated for an instant and then glared at them defiantly as he continued, “I’m a better man than I’ve been for years. I’m doing my full part now and I like the feel of it. I don’t want to go back.”

It was true. It was hard to recognize in him the rheumy-eyed derelict who had joined up a few months before.

Cecily turned to Jonathan. “What have you decided?”

There had been no question in his mind. He was as revolted by the butchery as Kemper had been, but Teresa was here.

“I’m staying,” he replied. “With you it’s different. Perhaps you should go back, Cissy.”

“Why?”

“You’re a woman. This—well, it’s still a savage country. We’ve learned more about it in the past few days.”

“And you think I’m afraid? Do you think I enjoy sitting, waiting, while someone else runs all the risks?” She was rebellious. “You won’t get rid of me as easily as that. In a way I’m glad this happened. Now, whatever you do, whatever we build here, it will be partly mine.”

Of the officers, only Lockett and Despallier threw in their lot with Kemper; the others, with Ross as their new leader, elected to remain. The

men in the ranks were about equally divided. Throughout the day more and more of them shouldered their belongings and trudged across the river to join Kemper's faction, which was four hundred strong by nightfall. Teams were plentiful and the mission plaza stirred with the bustle as wagons were loaded and harness was checked. No bitterness accompanied the division. Rather, each group watched the other with secret envy. Those remaining thought of the land they had left behind; those preparing to depart looked back with reluctance. There was much visiting back and forth.

While Kemper had his troops massed in the town its doors remained closed and Gutierrez prudently held Menchaca's troops in the presidio. After he crossed the river, however, curious throngs began to clutter the streets in uneasy groups. A constant procession moved toward the plaza where the corpses lay. The crowds were quiet at first but as the afternoon wore on their temper began to change.

Jess Leeman sought out Jonathan.

"How 'bout takin' a walk, Jonty?" he queried.

"What's on your mind?"

"I can't figger out what's goin' on." The ragged scar that distorted the scout's face looked red today. "I wish you'd go for a prowl with me. It's beginnin' to look like a holiday over thar."

Together they crossed the river, jostling their way through crowds that grew more dense as they approached the main plaza.

"See yonder. That's what I mean." Jess pointed toward a wine cask, propped on squat trestles. A fat Mexican passed battered cups to the reaching hands that encircled him.

"And it's all for free," the scout continued. "You can have all you want."

"*Vino*," the man at the cask was chattering amiably. "*Vino* for everyone. Just hold your cups, señors."

There was something familiar about that voice. The Virginian was sure he'd heard it before. He elbowed his way forward.

"Here's an *americano* wants to drink with us," someone called. "Give him a mug, *amigo*."

The fellow turned from his cask. Jonathan peered across a dozen intervening shoulders and recognized Luiz, but by the time he had crowded to a place beside the spigot, the servant's lumpish figure had vanished.

"Who's in charge here?" he demanded.

No one knew.

"It's free, señor. Just help yourself." A dented cup was handed him. These were smiling, friendly people but they had no answers for his questions.

There were other casks dispensing wine, one at each corner of the plaza.

“Somebody’s mighty free with his money,” Jess observed.

“But why?” Jonathan couldn’t understand it.

They visited each place and asked many questions but could find no one to answer them. At the fourth, Jonathan glimpsed another familiar figure. There was no mistaking the vender’s twisted glance.

The Virginian took his place in the jostling crowd and worked his way to the cask. Then he gripped José by the shoulder.

“Who sent you here?” he demanded.

The servant cocked his head to one side, to see him better, and smiled in recognition.

“Señor Jontee! Will you have wine?”

“Whose wine is it?”

“Everybody’s, señor. It is free.”

“Yes, but who’s furnishing it? Someone’s paying the bill.”

“*Quien sabe?* Why ask, if it is free?”

Jonathan tried another tack. “Who sent you here, José?”

The Mexican grinned. “I don’t have to be sent to a fiesta, señor.”

“Did Teresa tell you to come?”

José shrugged. “If you tell her about me, she will understand. It isn’t every day a poor man can drink his fill without emptying his pockets.”

Jonathan found no answer to his question. “If I could find out who’s being so generous, maybe this would make sense,” he told Jess.

He didn’t tell him the suspicion that was forming in his mind. Luiz and José had served at two of the casks. Both were from the same household.

At dusk the mutilated bodies of the massacred men were removed to a near-by house, ostensibly in preparation for their funeral. As still more wine was opened, the crowds grew boisterous. Men who had been white-faced at earliest news of the tragedy now shouted defiance of the *gachupines*. More and more of them trooped through the house where the bodies lay, jeering at the still forms of leaders before whom they had once cringed.

Presently torches began to appear. A hoarse voice rasped out a bawdy chorus and the refrain was picked up by a hundred throats. A procession started to form. Soon hundreds staggered along in it. The reeling figures cast weird shadows in the sputtering torchlight. The remaining Americans clustered in calm islands, here and there, watching the frenzy. Jonathan stood in one of these groups with Jess Leeman and Giles Brady.

“My God! Look there!” Jess Leeman pointed toward the top of the column.

From somewhere long poles had appeared and each was tipped with a grisly object that Jonathan could not make out at first. Then as the torches flared, he saw with loathing that it was a human head!

To the Americans, the ferocity of the wanton celebration and the mutilation of the massacre victims were as revolting as the original crime. All through the night men went over to Kemper's ranks at the mission east of the river.

When Jonathan returned to his quarters he found Ross, Perry, Taylor and Gaines waiting. "I've changed my mind," Ross declared. "I'm going with Kemper. These people aren't worth fighting for."

Perry tugged at his ear. "Not me. I'm here to stay. I'm not fighting for that mob anyway. They aren't worth the powder to blow 'em up. We came to settle a new country, didn't we? And we licked the Spaniards. I'm not going to turn back now."

Ross stood in the door, listening to the distant revelry. "What's happened to Magee's splendid dream?" he finally asked. "Maybe if he was here he'd know what to do. I don't understand these people, and if tonight is a fair sample, I don't want to." He turned to face his friends. "Salcedo was a better man than any of them. I'm beginning to think we fought on the wrong side."

"That isn't the choice." Captain Gaines spoke for the first time. "I'm fighting on *our* side. Let's set up our own government and forget the whole lot of them. I'm from Nacogdoches," he reminded them; "my company was recruited there. We've got to carry through. If we stop now we'll be wiped out. It's all or nothing, as far as we're concerned."

So the argument went. McFarland, like Gaines, lived in Texas and nothing but complete victory would satisfy him. Taylor and Perry felt the same way. They would not leave.

There were six hundred and fifty men in Kemper's departing column. With him were Major Ross and Captains Lockett and Despallier. Only a hundred and fifty Americans remained in San Antonio.

Miguel was exuberant when he told Teresa the news. "The Americans are leaving this morning," he gloated.

"All of them?"

"A few may stay. Not more than a handful, not enough to challenge Menchaca's authority. This is just the beginning, Teresa. Things will move fast now."

With the strong American force gone, little remained to check Salazar's ambitions. She grasped the significance of the news but fear took the edge off her triumph. What of Jonathan? Would he turn back with Kemper? It was unthinkable. She must see him—quickly.

"Why don't you say something?" he demanded.



“I guess I’m dazed.” She forced a smile to her lips. “I’ve been dreaming of this for so long, it’s hard to realize it’s actually happened.”

To herself she was thinking: “Why doesn’t he go? Dear God, why doesn’t he? I must see Jonathan! I must get to him before he has time to leave.”

Miguel laughed. “I don’t wonder you’re stunned. It’s unbelievable, how everything’s turned out just as I planned it. Even that brawl last night! It couldn’t have gone off better if I’d made them rehearse it.” He paid scant attention to her. He was engrossed in his own cleverness.

She still wore that set smile. “Everything is settled, then?”

“Almost. The rest will be simple but it will take some handling. I’ll be busy the rest of the day.”

He kissed her hand with exaggerated courtesy. “Your Majesty,” he said, and burst into roars of laughter as he hurried away.

As soon as he was gone Teresa ordered out the Yellow Pumpkin.

“You know where El Rubio lives?” she asked José.

“It is in La Villita, señorita. I have passed the house many times.”

“Take me there—and hurry.”

Cris came grinning into the room. “Come to the door quick, Cissy. I’ll show you one of the sights of the town.”

They all looked up curiously.

Cecily was in the back. “I can’t come now. I’ve got my hands in the bread dough. What is it?”

“Hang your hands! Come look! It’s that woman in the God-awful yellow coach. I wonder where she ever got hold of such a thing?”

“Oh, I’ve seen *her*.” His sister emerged from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron. She frowned. “Come in the house and shut the door. I’ll not have you gawking at such a woman!”

Jonathan had taken no offense at Cris’s remark. He felt the same way about the grotesque coach. This was different. His face burned red.

“The lady is Don Miguel Salazar’s ward,” he broke in hotly. “You don’t know what you’re saying. She’s a friend of mine.”

The carriage had stopped outside. There was a rap at the door.

Cecily looked at him in astonishment. “So I see,” she retorted stiffly and walked out of the room.

Jonathan looked at the glittering coach with more distaste than ever when he went to Teresa. “I wish you wouldn’t ride in this thing,” he told her abruptly.

“Why not? I think it’s beautiful.”

“It’s in bad taste.”

Teresa lifted her chin proudly. “It might belong to a queen.”

“Not here! Your head’s still filled with that royal nonsense.” Memory of Cecily’s words made his protest more emphatic. “When we’re married, that’s the first thing that’s going on the junk heap.”

“And I suppose I’ll have nothing to say about it?”

“Don’t you understand, Teresa? It gives people the wrong impression of you. It makes you look like—like—”

“Say it,” she commanded.

“Like a kept woman!”

Teresa stared at him in angry silence.

He wished there were some way he might recall the words. “I’m sorry,” he said finally. “But it’s an awful coach.”

“And it makes me look like a trollop,” she added harshly.

“No. Nothing could make you look different, Teresa. Not to me.”

It seemed to Teresa then that her day had been spent in concealing her thoughts from those about her. First Miguel, when she had been harried by the thought of Jontee’s leaving; now the man she loved, who must not guess her present bitterness. She felt tired.

“No matter.” She turned to her errand. “I had to see you. I heard the Americans were leaving.”

“Not all. I’m staying.”

“I had to know, Jontee. I couldn’t bear it if you left.”

“And yet you keep putting me off, keep me waiting.” He voiced his growing impatience. “What’s the point of it? I might as well be leaving. I never get to see you.”

She smiled then. He was hers, still, and the tiresome wait was nearly ended. “It won’t be much longer,” she promised. “Just a few more days, Jontee. And I’m as impatient as you, darling. Remember that.”

He tried to pin her down, make her be more definite.

“All right—a week,” she declared finally. “Give me one more week. If our path isn’t smoothed by then, I’ll come to you anyway.”

He stood looking after her as she drove away. It was not the despised coach he saw, but Teresa herself, Teresa in his arms again. She was wearing a saffron robe that was tissue-thin.

Gutierrez came to Miguel for advice. “The American officers have demanded an interview,” he explained. “They want Delgado and his company of guards arrested and brought to trial.”

“What American officers?” Salazar asked.

“Perry was their spokesman.”

“And it was a demand?” Miguel shrugged. “They could afford to be insolent when they were backed by eight hundred troops. It’s different now. This has become our government, Don Bernardo, not theirs.”

Still the governor hesitated. “Their army was only a hundred and fifty strong when it first crossed the Texas border. Such men are not to be despised.”

Salazar smiled. “Then they were led by Magee. He’s dead and Kemper’s gone. Today we have an army of our own. If you want my opinion, I suggest that this is the time to deal firmly with these men. Handle them properly and they’ll make you good troops; once you permit them to dictate your policies, the government will be theirs, not yours. No, my friend, this is no time to temporize. This is the time to be resolute.”

He smiled to himself as Gutierrez hurried away.

In reply to the demand of the American officers, Gutierrez declared that he would refer the matter to the next meeting of the junta, the properly constituted authority, and that any action deemed necessary would be taken by that body. Perry called a meeting of the officers. Captains Menchaca and Sava were included in the invitation. Menchaca went to his good friend Salazar for advice.

“By all means attend,” Miguel suggested. “The crime should be avenged. That is the proper way. I’m anxious for you to have a part in this, Captain. You will be one of the leaders of the new nation. I see this very clearly even if Gutierrez doesn’t.”

There were eight officers on the board. Perry, elected a major to succeed the absent Kemper, presided. Jonathan was a member with Gaines, McFarland and Taylor. Captain Masicot was present, and Menchaca and Sava represented the native troops. In order to avoid the appearance of factional conflict, Delgado was arrested by Gaines’s company of native Nacogdochens. Gutierrez immediately called a meeting of the junta, which the officers refused to attend. Delgado’s release was demanded but the military board ignored it and proceeded with preparations for the trial. The governor then sent for Menchaca but without success. Instead, that officer went to Salazar who suggested his course of action.

“I’m a soldier, señors,” was Delgado’s defense. “I only obeyed orders.”

“Whose orders?” Perry demanded.

“Don Bernardo Gutierrez is the governor,” the accused officer replied. “The executions were carried out by his authority.”

“Then Gutierrez is the one we should try,” exclaimed Gaines angrily.

When Don Bernardo ignored the court’s summons, Taylor went after him with a company. They found him in the governor’s palace. “This is an

outrage,” Gutierrez exclaimed. “I am generalissimo of the army and head of the government. When officers question their superior, it’s mutiny.” He rattled the desk before him with his plump fist.

“Worse things than mutiny have been going on here. I have orders to bring you before the court on a charge of murder.”

“I’ll not come.”

Taylor turned to his men. “Bring him along,” he ordered gruffly.

Rough hands seized the protesting governor. “Mutiny!” he bawled at the top of his lungs. “Menchaca! Delgado!” He called in vain for the native officers. When he realized that nothing could spare him this ignominy, he made an effort to salvage his dignity.

“Tell them to take their hands off me,” he pleaded. “I’ll not be dragged through the streets like a burro. Remember, I’m the governor. I give you my word I’ll appear before the board.”

“Your word!” the captain scoffed. “You’ll come now if we have to drag you by the heels.”

The governor marched to his trial between two files of determined men. His face was scarlet but his bearing haughty as he trudged the dusty street.

At first he arrogantly denied their right to try him, but he was unnerved by the presence of Menchaca and Sava on the tribunal. Masicot, his best friend there, sat grimly among his accusers. “It was Delgado,” was his next defense. “The man exceeded his authority.”

“Bring in Delgado,” was Perry’s blunt reply to this.

“It was by your order, Excellency,” the frightened executioner exclaimed when he was brought in.

“It’s his word against mine then.” The governor took a high tone.

“I’d have more confidence in your word if you had taken some action against Delgado after you learned what had happened,” Perry retorted. “When we demanded that he be brought to trial, you put us off by declaring it a matter for the junta to handle. It seems to me that you’d have wanted him tried if he’d committed the atrocity on his own responsibility.”

Don Bernardo sensed the telling effect of this argument. He glanced swiftly around the room and read no mercy in these stern faces. His arrogance faded. “It was my compassion for Antonio Delgado,” he explained. “I could not find it in my heart to blame him. His father was beheaded by Herrera’s order. Is there anyone here who would not avenge his own father?”

“And you knew this?” It was Masicot who asked.

“Of course. All men knew it.”

“You damn yourself,” Perry exclaimed impatiently. “You entrusted the prisoners to this man, knowing how he felt. After the crime was discovered

you took no steps to avenge it.” He turned to his fellow officers. “I’m satisfied we have the straight of this now. Are there further questions?”

“This has been hard for me to believe, Don Bernardo,” said Masicot. “I have known you as a gentleman of high principle. And yet when you failed to punish Delgado’s act, you condoned it.”

“I’ve explained that,” the governor pleaded. “My kindness betrayed me.”

The officers were of one opinion. They had no doubt of Gutierrez’ guilt. Some favored his execution, others a more temperate course. Masicot was one of the latter. “There’s been enough bloodshed,” he argued. “The land’s red with it. For once, let’s demonstrate that we can depose a leader without it.”

Gutierrez was declared guilty of complicity in the crime and removed from office. Delgado was relieved of his command. Pedro Teran and the others present at the executions were banished from the colony. The junta was dissolved. The officers had lost all confidence in it.

Perry ordered that the massacre victims be buried with military honors. All troops, both Mexican and American, were massed on the Plaza de Las Yslas for the ceremony.

Don Bernardo again turned to Miguel Salazar for advice. “What’s to become of our new nation with all its leaders gone?” he questioned. “The men with the capacity to govern are disappearing one by one. Magee is dead, Kemper is gone and now I—” he tapped his chest dramatically—“I, the natural leader, am deposed. Only ruin and anarchy can follow.”

“It’s unfortunate, Bernardo, but at least you have your life,” was the cool retort. “If I were in your place, I’d make for the American border. These are dangerous times and—who knows?—perhaps your enemies are planning a more deadly revenge on you. These Americans are hard to understand. They seemed actually to like Salcedo.”

“But this revolution was my dream,” Gutierrez protested. “I was the general of the army of liberation. Shall I turn my back on all this?”

“And Salcedo was a royal governor,” Miguel reminded him. “Today he is dead.”

# Chapter 4

## *Don Miguel Exposes His Hand*

JONATHAN had a week stretching before him, an endless week, before Teresa made her decision. He was impatient at the wait and proposed a trip to the site of their settlement. Cecily greeted the idea with delight.

“I want to see the country I’m going to live in,” she declared.

“Of course,” Jonathan agreed. “What’s keeping us? We can leave tomorrow.”

Time dragged for Teresa, too. It was hard to wait, knowing that all her desires were nearing realization. She’d promised Jonathan an answer in a week and she was sure this time was ample. By then, Miguel would have won his throne. Her hour—and Jonathan’s—was very close.

She expected Miguel to act when Don Bernardo was removed. He did nothing.

“Are you going to let this moment pass? This is the time!” She turned on him in swift fury.

“I have my plans.”

“Your plans!” She spat scornfully. “When will they end? It’s time for action now. Are you going to sit here and let the country fall to pieces? What will be left to rule?” Her voice grew shrill. “A few towns lost in these endless plains? A few thousand half-starved people?”

“That’s the way all thrones look from the bottom, peering up,” he retorted. “You don’t glimpse the grandeur of the Spanish crown in the dusty streets of villages like Motin and La Bahia, but they’re where it has its roots. It’s the toil of thousands of these little people that makes the splendor possible.”

“But why wait longer? What’s there to gain by it?” she persisted.

He laughed. “I like the fire of your temper, darling. Let’s see if your kisses are as stormy.”

He pulled her down into his lap but she turned her head away from him.

“I’m tired of waiting,” she repeated.

“Napoleon set the pattern for me,” he explained. “The French were tired of disorder and bloodshed. They don’t mind if he wears a crown because he restored sanity to their lives.

“I could seize the country today,” he went on, “and be just another governor. That isn’t what I want. With me it’s a crown or nothing.”

She relaxed as he outlined his schemes.

“Today there’s no governor, no council, not even a court. The officers are distrustful of the mess Don Bernardo made of things. That suits me. I’m going to teach these people a lesson in what it means to be without discipline. Already my agents are busy. Robbery—murder—they’ll be so common here that men will long for some authority—anyone who can restore order, no matter how.”

He laughed. “I’m fitting a yoke for them, Teresa, and first I want them in a mood to wear it.”

“But how long will it be?” She returned to her invariable question.

“I can’t risk waiting until someone else tries his hand at ruling. There will be a week of this violence. It’s already organized. The climax will come in a crime so shocking that the whole colony will be revolted. They’ll long for a man strong enough to put an end to lawlessness. That’s when I’ll step in.”

“Just a week then?”

“That’s a short time to wait.”

“And this last brutal crime—what’s it to be?”

“I haven’t decided yet. Don’t worry. There’s too much at stake. I won’t fail.

“Now run along.” He spanked her playfully. “I’ve guests coming—future ministers of mine, but they don’t know it yet.”

Miguel had two guests at the table. There was one empty chair. “I had hoped that Captain Delgado would join us, but he’s been detained,” Salazar explained. “However, I have his assurance he’ll stand with us in any action we take for the benefit of the colony.”

“Good man,” Menchaca grunted. “A real soldier. Nothing chicken-hearted about him. That’s been the trouble here, too many yellow-livered gentlemen and not enough red-blooded men.” He glared fiercely around the table, and tugged at his straggly new beard. “*Por Dios!* Whoever heard of a soldier who couldn’t stand the smell of blood? It’s good we’re rid of the old women.”

He had the swart face of an Indian. High cheekbones emphasized its width. His dark eyes glittered from beneath shaggy brows, and his coarse

mouth was only half hidden by the mustache, a badge of his new authority. A dank lock of oily hair tumbled across his low forehead. His scowl was truculent and his voice loud, as he thought fitting to a man of growing importance. His shoulders were wide and bulky, and his sleeves strained tightly around the sturdy arms spread negligently on the table before him. His awkward arrogance was new, worn like a challenge.

“For my part I’m glad we’re rid of the *americanos*,” Salazar replied. “What has been the result of their interference? We overthrew tyranny; now we have anarchy. They deposed Gutierrez and offer nothing in his place.”

“Don Bernardo is still here,” Captain Sava volunteered. He was a slender man, more Spanish than Indian in type, and older, his hair beginning to frost at the temples. He was tight-lipped, with large eyes that burned with zealous fire. “Why not restore him as governor? There aren’t enough *americanos* left to oppose us.”

Salazar appeared to study this proposal. Finally he shook his head reluctantly. “I’m sorry. Bernardo is my friend, but he hasn’t the strength we need and he’s too much under the influence of the foreigners. Only consider. He allowed himself to be deposed when an aggressive man would have defied them.” He glanced at his companions. “We would have stood by him if he had shown such character.

“One thing I can’t forgive,” he continued: “he did not support Delgado after the executions. How can a leader expect loyalty from his friends unless he shows them the same faithfulness? I have firm convictions about fidelity. I’d never abandon one of my lieutenants; I’d never fail to regard an obligation.” He glanced from one man to the other. “After all, that’s what makes for strength in government: absolute confidence among its leaders.”

Menchaca’s fist rattled the dishes. “We don’t want Gutierrez.” His voice was a surly growl. “We had him once and where did it get us?”

“Exactly,” Salazar agreed. “And yet we must choose someone. Robbery and murder are habitual on the streets. Even the most ordinary business has become a dangerous enterprise, and we have no courts and no law. The people are wretched and frightened. There’s no one in authority to whom they may look for relief. Daily this condition grows worse.

“The *americanos* I distrust. This is our land and I want no alien ruling it.” His scrutiny was on Sava now. “I’ve asked you here to discuss these things because you’re the leaders in whom I have greatest confidence. If we act together now, we can build a strong government. There are rich rewards ahead for the men who accomplish this. Wealth—power—honor! I see a prosperous nation here, but it takes planning. We’ve already felt the disastrous result of incompetence and weak wills.” He shrugged. “It’s either real rulers or ruin now. We can drift along the way we’re going and let the



results of our victory slip through our fingers, or we can unite and create a rich nation. Which is your choice?"

Menchaca's eyes had turned into slits of cunning. "A strong man would be needed to head our army," he suggested. "Do you have anyone in mind?"

Miguel's smile was disarming. "I have a very strong man in mind," he replied. "His name is Menchaca." Then turning to Sava, he continued, "A minister of finance would be needed. It has occurred to me that you are ideally fitted for this important post, my friend. Of course, first we must find the chief, and we must make sure he is one who won't forget his friends."

"I'd trust you," declared Menchaca bluntly. "You're my friend. Why should I support someone I don't know and who might not appreciate me?"

"Minister of finance," Sava tested the title on his tongue. "I think I'd like that. I agree with Menchaca. Who else but you could be our leader?"

Salazar shrugged. "Of course I'm familiar with your capabilities," he replied. "If I were the head of state here, you'd be the men whom I'd most honor and depend on. This talk of freedom and democracy has turned my stomach. All around us we see its results. We'll need a stern hand to restore order. The orators who stir mobs with their promises don't feed the army or fill the treasury. There'd be no more of that kind of talk."

"I hope so," Sava agreed. "We've had enough of it."

"And the stronger the ruler, the greater will be the rewards for his assistants," was Miguel's suave suggestion. "He can't make his friends powerful unless he has authority himself."

Menchaca hunched forward, blinking at his host. He was dazzled by the vista opened before him. Sava's speculative gaze was on the candles. Their nodding flames were the yellow of gold. Observing the two, Salazar silenced the triumph singing within him. He had gauged these small minds well and was shrewd enough to let their soaring dreams enforce his argument.

"Think it over, gentlemen," he suggested. "The whole course of our future depends on your decision. We have an opportunity such as comes to few men. Tomorrow night we'll meet here again, and then we can determine our action."

"I already know what I want," Menchaca declared positively as they parted.

"I knew you were capable of quick decisions," Miguel assured him.

Sava did not commit himself so readily. "Until tomorrow night," he said.

Salazar had the trick of dramatizing himself. There were always histrionics under his cloak, ready for display if occasion demanded. "History will be waiting on your decision," he assured Sava.

Luiz had not neglected his opportunities. He had long been aware of his master's interest in Jonathan Kirk, and he had made it his business to scrape up an acquaintance with Pablo Savias, of Kirk's Scouts. Through him he had learned of the settlement planned along the river, and he had kept Salazar informed. Tonight, his piggish eyes were gleaming with excitement as he sidled into the room. Miguel frowned.

"Did I ring?" he demanded. "Or have you brought another of your worthless scraps of information?"

"I have news, Excellency," the servant whined. "You can judge of its worth yourself. It's about the *americano* scout, Jonathan Kirk."

Salazar's lids narrowed. "What are you trying to tell me?"

Luiz moved a step nearer the door. "He leaves at dawn for a trip down the river. There will be only nine in the party and one of them is the Marsten girl."

Miguel had noted the servant's cautious retreat toward the door. The fellow was ready for flight. "That isn't all you came to tell me." His voice lashed out abruptly. "Let's have the rest of it."

Luiz gulped. "Señorita Teresa—" He hesitated.

"Well?"

"Today she visited his house in La Villita. I have seen them together before."

"You're slow in telling me," his master retorted. His hands tightened until the knuckles gleamed white in the candlelight.

"She didn't go to his house before, señor. There was little to tell until today."

Still Miguel sat motionless, his brows knotted in thought. The servant shifted his weight from one foot to the other, uneasily.

"I came straight to you—" he began.

Salazar stopped him with a gesture. "I'm expecting a visitor," he said. "Pedro Teran. When he comes, bring him in here."

"Yes, señor."

Teran the executioner, Salazar mused when he was alone. Well, why not? News of such an atrocity would ring from one end of Texas to the other.

Lieutenant Pedro Teran's visits had been infrequent in San Antonio since the furor created by the assassinations. As Delgado's second in command, he had been banished and he risked the journey only at night. This was not his first call at La Quinta, and his pockets were heavy with silver after each interview.

"You sent for me, Excellency?"

Miguel's fingers ceased their drumming. "I need a man," he began quietly, "a man both brave and ambitious. Brave, because there's some

danger in the job, ambitious because riches and honor will be his reward.”

Teran moistened his lips. “How can a man earn these things, Don Miguel?”

Salazar poured out two tumblers of wine. “Sit down,” he invited. “A thing of this sort requires understanding. Tomorrow some *americanos* ride down the river. Their destination is the land beyond the Flores plantations. There will be eight men and a woman in the party.” His tone grew more casual as he shoved the red tumbler toward his guest. “It would require at least twenty men and a skillful ambush, Lieutenant. None of them must come back.”

Teran thrust back his glass. “It was an affair like this that ruined me,” he said.

“If there are no survivors, who will there be to accuse you?” Salazar smiled and his voice was smooth. “This time the reward is greater than silver, although there will be plenty of that. There’s more at stake than you know. In a few days there will be a new government here. I will be the one who names its officers and I shan’t forget my friends. It would be nice to walk the streets of San Antonio again, *amigo*. And if you were again an officer of the army . . .” His shrewd eyes were calculating the expression on the visitor’s face.

Teran gulped of his wine. “Who will be in this company, Excellency?”

“Jonathan Kirk and his scouts. I warned you it would have to be a skillful ambush.”

“And the girl?”

“She is an *americano*, too, and young—but remember there must be no survivors.”

The lieutenant drank again, this time sipping slowly. “I have the twenty men who were banished,” he mused. “Would they be welcomed back too?”

“As you please,” Miguel agreed. “When you are once more an officer, you may enlist whom you choose in your company.”

“When does this party leave?”

“Tomorrow they ride down the river. They’ll camp there at least one night. It should be easy. They suspect nothing.”

Teran held out his hand. “It shall be done,” he said. “What have I to lose?”

After he left, Miguel refilled his glass and drank a silent toast. Now his plan was perfect. He had found a suitable climax for his era of crime.

# Chapter 5

## *A Delaying Action*

THE spirits of the nine were gay as they left San Antonio behind them and headed down the river to show Cecily the land selected for the settlement. It was early June, and by noon the landscape would be shimmering under a hot sun, but the dawn was cool and there was a breath of wind rustling the trees that bordered the river. It was Denis O'Rourke's first return over the country they had scouted, and obviously he was enjoying the feel of a horse between his knees once more. He was learning to ignore his empty sleeve.

Cecily was wearing a leather skirt which Giles had tanned himself. It had a fringed jacket to match. She rode sidesaddle beside Jonathan Kirk, just behind her father and O'Rourke. Cris ranged far ahead with Giles Brady and Jess Leeman in the hope of finding game, while Gabe plodded along in the rear with Pablo Savias.

They enjoyed pointing out the familiar country to the girl who had listened to their stories of the campaign.

They took two days to the journey. These memories and Cecily's delight in the new home country made them genial. They were glad to leave the uneasy town.

Cecily was plied with questions. They'd been in Texas for a year, with little word from home. Her news was old, but fresh to them. Part of the Louisiana purchase had been admitted as a state a few weeks before they left. The West Florida territory had been added to it, she told them; the first steamboat had made its way down the Mississippi since they'd been gone.

"'Tis just a fiddle-faddle contraption," O'Rourke protested. "Not practical. Shure, they'll always need boatmen, to pole the heavy loads."

They'd heard of the war with England, declared in June of 1812, but Cecily's stories of the naval victories were new and they took pride in them. Things hadn't gone so well with the land campaign.

"Soon's we git things settled hyar, we'll go up thar an' give 'em a dose of what we gave the *gachupines*," Giles promised confidently.

Jonathan was more silent than the rest, his mind troubled by the confusion in San Antonio and the suspicion forming in his mind. The wine

distributed so freely on the day of the massacre suggested that the disorders had been planned. Someone had paid for it. Why? The presence of Luiz and José at the casks suggested Miguel Salazar as the man responsible. He didn't understand that. Magee had discussed his arrangements freely with the young Virginian. He was aware of the Spaniard's financial stake in the venture.

Ben Marsten noticed his quiet. "What's troubling you, Jonty?"

"Maybe you can help me." Jonathan had a new respect for the older man's judgment these days. "Why should a man fight on our side throughout the war and then turn against us after we've won?"

"Spanish gold might be the answer."

"It's ambition, more likely," declared Cecily, who had been riding beside them in silence.

"Are you sure he was on our side?" Ben asked.

"He financed Magee. I guess he risked a fortune, backing us. Men don't throw money away for nothing."

"There you are," Cecily nodded, positively.

"It doesn't seem so simple to me."

"But you just gave the answer yourself," she insisted. "Men don't throw money away for nothing."

Jonathan frowned. "We've won our war. We hold Texas. What more could he want?"

"I think that's the answer you're looking for, Jonty. What does he want? Whatever it is, he hasn't got it yet. Otherwise he'd be satisfied."

What did Salazar want? Puzzling over it, Jonathan was surprised to realize how little he knew of Teresa's guardian. He wondered if his misgivings were prompted by dislike. He didn't think so. He became convinced that Cissy was right. But what was the fellow's ambition? Not money, surely. He had plenty and spent it too freely. The answer eluded him.

Once, Cecily and Jonathan deserted the others for a gallop to a hill commanding a far view. It was on the second day. They could trace the path ahead by the fringe of trees which outlined the river's winding course.

"That's your new home off yonder." Jonathan pointed toward the horizon. "We'll be there before sundown."

Cecily's cheeks were flushed from the brisk ride and her eyes shone as she peered to the south. To her it seemed as if she were looking into the secure life she had come so far to find. Her eagerness was printed on her face. Turning to look at her, silhouetted lithe and vivid against the blue sky, Jonathan was astonished at the realization of her beauty. He had carried Teresa's image so long in his heart that he had shut out this other picture close at hand. His friendship with Cecily had been a comfortable

companionship. He noticed now the vigor of her slender young body, the blue of her dark fringed eyes and the softness of the curls which blew about her face.

“I’m surprised that Johnny Durst isn’t here,” he said abruptly.

She looked at him in astonishment. “Why? He’s pretty busy, you know.”

“If I were in his shoes,” the Virginian persisted, “no business would be so important as being with you.”

She was smiling and her searching gaze was warm when she faced him. “That’s the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me, Jonty, but you’re mistaken about Johnny and me. Oh, I like him—a lot—but not in the way you seem to think.”

“He’s a fine fellow—” Jonathan was warm in his loyalties—“and he’s well established. Why, he’s Davenport’s right-hand man now. Someday he’ll probably be the wealthiest man in Texas.”

“Yes,” she agreed. “If money’s the most important thing, I suppose he’s a very good match.” She was staring off toward the horizon once more. Again he had a chance to observe her, and in this new awareness of her charm he liked what he saw.

“I think perhaps you’re making a mistake, Cissy,” he resumed presently. “You have your own future to think of.”

She did not turn her head. Her eyes remained fixed on the distant plains. “And you think that’s where my happiness lies?”

He nodded. “You’ve thought of others too long. It’s time you remembered yourself for a change. Don’t think I haven’t noticed, Cissy. You’ve had to be the head of your family. It was you who brought them out here. You were the one who was determined to salvage a new life from the wreckage back there. Cris was just a boy, and your father—well, he’d lost his grip.

“I can speak of that now,” he hurried on, “because Ben has changed. The campaign came near killing him but in the end was the making of him. You’ve no cause to worry about him, and Cris has grown up, too. You’ve been used to doing their thinking for them so long that you haven’t realized it, but they can stand on their own feet.”

Still she did not face him. “They are changed, both of them,” she agreed. “I owe a lot of that to you, Jonty. I didn’t realize what a responsibility I was asking you to shoulder in taking them with you. I’m afraid Father only increased your difficulties for a long time.”

He didn’t deny it. “The result was worth it, wasn’t it? I’d try to do anything you asked of me, Cissy.”

Her eyes were quizzical when she finally turned. “I guess I felt that when I asked you to take them along. I’ve always had so much faith in you,

Jonty.”

He grinned. “Shucks, that’s what friends are for. You’re just like a sister to me.”

“Well, don’t assume the privileges of a brother and try to marry me off,” she retorted. “Not to Johnny Durst or anybody else. I’ll do my own choosing.” Her tone was tart.

They were still on the hill when Jonathan’s trained eyes detected the horsemen on the opposite side of the stream. It was the dust that first attracted his attention. With a scout’s wariness, he gazed until the party emerged from a shallow fold of hills. They were a couple of miles off but from this vantage point easily discernible. Twenty men were riding south, paralleling their own course and some distance ahead of them.

The Virginian studied the moving miniatures intently. Then he scoffed at a momentary uneasiness. McFarland, with a strong body of scouts, was patrolling far to the southwest to guard against a *gachupine* invasion. Aside from that threat, the country was at peace. There was no cause for alarm. Yet he could not quite dismiss his uneasiness as they rode back to join the others. A party that numerous was not common; its strength hinted at some purpose he could not guess. They were headed in the same direction, which could mean only that they were from San Antonio. If they had been so close for the better part of two days, why had their presence not been discovered before? He discussed this with Giles.

“From San Antonio?” the Kentuckian scowled. “I don’t like it. Thar’s been some queer goin’s on thar lately. You reckon this bunch air a-watchin’ us?”

“But why?”

“Wal, we ain’t totin’ silver but we’ve got horses an’ guns. Thar’s been many a killin’ for less since Kemper left.”

They were within two hours’ ride of their destination and Jonathan had confidence in the ability of his company to take care of itself, but Cecily’s presence was a complication. He made his dispositions precisely as if the war were still in progress and they were scouting enemy territory. Giles and Jess were sent across the river to reconnoiter the strange party. “We’ll be camped along the river between Marsten’s hill and mine,” he explained. “Report there as soon as you can.”

Pablo Savias and Gabe were sent ahead as an advance patrol. “Stay on this side of the river and scout out the camp site,” they were instructed. “Report back at once if you notice anything suspicious.

“We’re probably just borrowing trouble,” he explained, glancing at Cecily to see how she was taking it.

Her presence was troubling him and he didn't want to alarm her. Her manner reassured him. Her eyes were sparkling and her teeth flashed in a smile. "This is just like being on the march with Kirk's Scouts."

At first Gabe and Pablo galloped briskly, not checking their gait until they had left the main party more than a mile behind. After that they alternated between a walk and a slow jog, their alert scrutiny searching the terrain ahead. It was a familiar routine to them both and the country was open, affording little cover for an enemy. There were occasional copses of live oaks, however, and these were subjected to search in a method long since perfected by the company. One scout would dismount at a safe distance, ready to cover his companion's retreat should it become necessary, while the other advanced to explore the thicket. The river, of course, afforded ample concealment for an army, but it lay a full mile to their left. Jonathan had chosen a more direct course which would cut the winding stream near their destination. The two men performed their task thoroughly but saw nothing to excite alarm. The sun was still an hour high as they approached the twin hills that marked the spot chosen for the settlement. The river twined between them. Trees screened the crest of the slope on the right. "Jonathan's Hill" they had named it. They searched this place without result before turning toward the river. They alternated their duties, and this time it was Pablo's turn to investigate while Gabe stood guard. The Negro watched his companion until he disappeared in the thick foliage massed along the bank.

Pedro Teran had not reckoned on any such cautious approach. His ambush had been well planned. He had observed the course of the advancing party, noting where it would intercept the stream, and had rightly chosen the spot for his trap. It would be an easy task for his marksmen to pick off the unsuspecting travelers as they rode down the open slope. His men were well concealed.

He had watched with dismay when Gabe had scouted the trees on the hilltop with the alert Savias in reserve. This was not to his liking and his quandary was increased when he saw the precaution with which they started to reconnoiter his own position. He did not fear an open conflict; he had all the weight of numbers. Yet this was becoming an affair different from an ambush, and his instructions were to get the whole party.

"Hold your fire," he whispered when Pablo approached. "The knife will do for this one. He must not sound an alarm."

As the scout entered the fringe of shrubbery, his quick eyes were alert but there had been nothing yet to arouse suspicion. He heard the rustle of leaves, and whirled to face the danger. A knife slashed cruelly at his shoulder. He hammered his antagonist back with his rifle barrel. He was too



close for a shot. Again he struck. The blow echoed sharply as it crushed the skull of his opponent. But the odds were too great. Unseen hands snared him from behind and dragged him down. He struggled vainly until another blade was buried in his back.

Pablo had only one thought as he felt himself sagging into oblivion. Gabe must be signaled. His rifle seemed very heavy in his hands now. It was an effort to reach the trigger. The world about him already was dimming when, with his last conscious exertion, he pulled the trigger. The explosion sounded faint in his ears. There was a savage curse and he was buffeted by blows he never felt. Pablo Savias was dead.

Gabe heard the shot. Anxiously, he scanned the foliage for sign of his friend. Orders for such emergencies were explicit. He must cover his companion's retreat if possible, but failing that, his first obligation was to keep the column informed. He was holding both horses and he looped the reins through his left arm while he checked his priming. "Pablo," he called uncertainly. No response. He lingered, reluctant to desert his friend.

Teran hoped he would follow into the trap, and held his fire. As he waited, he noticed a dry gully where rains had washed a path at right angles to the stream, and he sent several men scurrying in that direction to cut off the Negro should he turn back.

Gabe swung into the saddle. The thing to do, he had decided, was to inform Mist' Jonty.

"Shoot!" cried Teran. "Don't let him get away." There was no further use for concealment.

The range was long. Gabe got away unscathed but his horse fell. He flung himself from the saddle and jumped for Pablo's mount. That was when the fire opened up from the gully. The frightened animal lunged away and started to run. The Negro saw the smoke and, realizing his plight, dashed for the nearest cover—the trees on the hilltop. There he turned. From the height the figures in the gully could be made out. He took careful aim at the nearest of them but he was too far away. He shook his head when a puff of dust marked the bullet's impact. He was sure of Pablo's fate now. I got to warn Mist' Jonty, he thought. He reloaded his rifle before starting his retreat. His course carried him at an angle over the shoulder of the hill and out of range of the hostile rifles. At first he ran too fast, but he was quick to know it and soon settled down to a long, shambling stride.

Teran perceived his purpose. Gabe had scarcely disappeared before three horsemen were after him. He heard them coming and quickened the pace again.

"I jus' got to git to Mist' Jonty," he kept repeating as if to urge on his tiring legs. "I jus' got to warn him."

His breath was a sobbing pain. A bullet whined overhead; another slapped at the ground viciously to his right.

“Dey cain’t aim whilst dey’s ridin’,” he muttered and, glancing back, counted his pursuers. “Only one more wid a loaded gun,” he noted. He turned on them. “One shot apiece,” he told himself as he aimed at the nearest horseman. He was slow in shooting; his panting bothered his aim, but when he finally pressed the trigger a horseman fell, and he grunted in satisfaction. The answering bullet went wide and his remaining antagonists, cautious now, circled around him. Gabe loaded again hastily, but now he saw that his enemy was ahead of him. His safest course was to remain where he was. If he made them come to him he had a chance. “But I got to warn Mist’ Jonty,” he mumbled, and once more started running.

Teran’s men guessed his intention and were waiting, prone in the grass, at the brow of the next hill as he came lumbering toward them. He was an easy target. Both rifles blared at once.

“Got to warn Mist’ Jonty,” the Negro still was muttering when the end came.

But he did warn Jonathan. The party was too distant to hear Pablo’s warning shot, but by the time the Negro made his stop to fight off pursuit, they were not so far away.

“Sounds like trouble.” Jonathan’s first uneasiness revived. “The rest of you wait here. I’ll ride up and see what’s going on.”

He saw the two horsemen dismount behind the crest of the hill ahead and thought they were his scouts. He speeded his gait as he watched them take their positions in the grass. “They’re being pursued,” he thought, and hurried to join them.

The soft turf muffled the hoofbeats, and they were intent on their target. Only after they fired did they take alarm at his approach. He was scarcely fifty yards away when one of them started scrambling for his horse and he saw, with astonishment, that they were strangers. The other was trying to reload with frantic haste. Jonathan’s rifle was ready; he jerked it to his shoulder as he left the saddle. Certain now that he guessed the meaning of the shots, he picked the man who stood his ground. At this range he couldn’t miss. Before he had time to load again, the other had escaped.

The Virginian pushed on beyond the hill, warily now, in quest of his missing men. Almost immediately he found Gabe’s body and knew what was up as clearly as if the devoted slave had reached him with the message.

He was tight-lipped, his expression dour, when he rejoined the others. “They must have picked Pablo off first.” He reconstructed the scene. “Gabe died while he was trying to get back to warn us.”

“ ’Twas loik him,” O’Rourke muttered. “His skin may have been black, but thim that shot him was black clear through.”

The sun was setting, a red flame in the west. Cecily said nothing but Jonathan noticed her eyes glisten in the fading light.

“I wish Jess and Giles were here.” Ben Marsten glanced uneasily toward the river.

“They were to meet us up yonder. That’s where they’ll be,” declared Cris.

Jonathan was thinking of the absent men, too. There might be desperate need for their rifles before long. If it had not been for Cecily, he would have attempted to reunite his little force. He knew his enemy’s whereabouts and his strength, and the loss of two scouts would not have gone unavenged in normal circumstances. Her presence altered all that. He had with him now just the two Marstens and the one-armed O’Rourke. Their only wise course lay in flight, and yet he hesitated to leave without further effort to get in touch with Giles and Jess. If any two men were competent to look after themselves, these were, but he knew that they would not abandon him if the situation were reversed. His decision was swift.

“We’ll have to turn back,” he began. “These are orders. Cris, you’ll ride about a hundred yards in advance, O’Rourke with Cecily, Ben as the rear guard but not more than a hundred yards back. Keep close together. You’re to stay on the trail we followed today and hold the best possible pace. Alternate between a walk and a canter. Your horses will keep going longer that way. If you hear anyone on the trail, either ahead or behind, pull aside and wait as quietly as you can. Keep out of sight. You’re too small a force for a fight if it can be avoided. But above all, keep moving.”

“What about you?” Cecily demanded.

“I’m going to find the others if I can. I may have to wait till morning. We’ll be behind you but don’t count on it being us if you hear someone. Stay hidden until you’re sure you recognize us.” His tone tried to conceal his anxiety but his words betrayed it.

“I don’t like the idea of you staying here alone,” Ben Marsten objected. “Let me join you. Two rifles are better than one.”

“I’ll stay.” Cris was quick to volunteer.

“Why don’t we all stay together?” Cecily asked. “I don’t want you to divide your force because of me. I’m not afraid when I’m with Kirk’s Scouts.” Her voice sounded almost blithe.

Jonathan laughed but without mirth. “Then you’re the only one who isn’t, Cissy. These are orders. You’ll do as I say. Now get going.”

When Cecily looked back, Jonathan had turned off the trail and was riding toward the river.

He had no preconceived plan. He knew only two necessities. He would protect the back trail should pursuit come soon, and he would try to find the scouts he had sent across the river. He moved a hundred yards from the trail toward a thick copse, about an acre in extent. The trees were live oaks, surrounded by a miniature jungle of chaparral. He broke his way into the heart of the thicket where he tied his horse before returning to its edge. From there he watched.

Teran was slow in organizing his pursuit. What had appeared an easy ambush had turned into something entirely different, and his men were sullen at the prospect of a long night ride. Three of their outfit were dead. Instead of an easy prey they had met a determined foe, and Teran's troop had less stomach for this type of fighting. He was still confident, however. He was determined to win the reward Don Miguel had promised him. A red afterglow was burning in the sky as the company approached Jonathan's hiding place.

The Virginian's frosty eyes glinted as he counted them. Cecily and her companions had scarcely more than thirty minutes' start. Their plight was desperate unless something were done. It would soon be dark. If he could delay the pursuit here, his friends would have a better chance. He checked the priming of both his rifle and his pistol, planning his action as he did so. Only the rifle would be effective at this distance but he hoped to give the impression that he was not alone. His aim on the first rider was deliberate. "This one's for you, Gabe," he promised as he squeezed the trigger. He followed this with a quick shot from the pistol to add to their confusion, and reloaded both weapons feverishly while the surprised column was scattering out of range.

That second shot performed its purpose. Teran was convinced that several men were there; he hoped he had trapped the whole party. He dismounted his men and ordered the copse surrounded. He kept them safely out of range; he could afford to wait.

Giles Brady and Jess Leeman had made a wide detour until they picked up the trail they were seeking. This they followed until it turned toward the river.

"'Pears like thar's two parties plannin' to camp in the same spot tonight," Jess observed, reining in his horse.

"I reckon we'd best have a look," Giles suggested. They left their horses beyond the hill and circled cautiously till they struck the river well below Teran's ambush. Under cover of the thick undergrowth they were approaching silently from the south when Pablo met his death. They heard

his shot and it increased their stealth. There was another rattle of musketry. They were too far away to see what happened and the cause of the shots puzzled them, but they decided Jonathan should be warned without further delay. Their retreat was as furtive as their approach, and by the time they had made their way back to the horses, it was nearing sunset. This perturbed them both.

“We’ll have to hustle,” Giles observed. “Jonty cain’t be far from the river by now.”

“Best thing is to cut across and head ’em off,” Jess suggested.

They forded the river to accomplish this, but were uncertain which way to turn. “I ain’t sure whether they’ve passed this point or not. What do you think?” Jess inquired.

“You ride one way and I’ll ride t’other,” his companion suggested.

Their decision was delayed by a party of horsemen heading north at a slow gallop. They watched it pass, from the shelter of the river bank, spotting it as the company they’d been scouting. Jess thought he knew what had happened. “Pablo and Gabe have discovered the trap and carried Jonty word,” he said. “Our comp’ny is halted somewhar up the trail. The thing for us to do is to git back thar and jine ’em.”

Sure that this was what had occurred, they waited until the cavalcade had gone by, and then followed, clinging to the shadows along the river. They were not far behind when Jonathan opened fire. “I don’t like it,” Giles said. “They’ll rush ’em soon as it’s dark. Why didn’t Jonty pick a spot along the river whar they couldn’t be surrounded?”

“I reckon havin’ Cissy on his hands troubled him right smart,” Jess offered. “It’s troublin’ me, too. I reckon the next move is up to us.”

They left their horses tethered by the stream and crept silently forward. The movement of Teran’s men was guarded, but they were no match for these two frontiersmen in stealth. Giles agreed to a plan Jess outlined. A path must be cut through that narrowing circle so that their friends could be guided to safety. Each carried his rifle in his left hand and gripped a knife in the right.

In surrounding Jonathan’s retreat, Teran had spread his line thin. His men were spaced at thirty-yard intervals, which would narrow as they converged. Each of the scouts chose a victim and stalked him craftily. Jess reached his man first. There was no outcry, just the swift thrust of a blade and a stifled groan. When he continued his advance, he left a still form behind. He met Giles at the border of the chaparral. “If they move quick, they can ride out now,” he said. “It’s plumb dark and we’ve cleared a path nigh a hundert yards wide.”

Jonathan was startled when he heard someone cautiously calling his name. He gripped his rifle, ready for an enemy trick. Then he recognized Jess's voice, and answered.

"Tarnation! I thought we'd never find you," the scout complained. "Whar's the others?"

Jonathan explained. "I'm sorry you got drawn into this trap," he concluded.

"Trap, hell! Git your horse. We've got us a trail blazed out o' hyar."

Sound of the horse would draw fire, of course, but it could not be effective in the dark. It was agreed that the other two should go first and get as far through the lines as possible before Jonathan's dash warned the enemy. They were to meet on the river bank where the scouts had left their mounts.

Jonathan watched as his friends quickly vanished into the screening night, and waited for fully five minutes before mounting. Then he dug in his spurs and thundered out the same path. Several rifles flashed but their aim was erratic. As he drew near the river, he checked his speed and heard Jess's voice calling.

# Chapter 6

## *Approaching Decision*

ALL that night Jonathan and his companions rode hard to overtake the rest of their party. They evaded Teran's force by crossing the river and riding up the east bank until satisfied they had outdistanced pursuit. Then they recrossed and picked up their old trail. Their concern was to make sure that they were between Cecily and the bandits. If the chase was maintained, they were determined to be in a position where they could take a hand. Feeling sure their gait had not been matched, they called a halt to breathe their spent animals.

Teran was in a frenzy when he discovered his prey had escaped. More than an hour elapsed before he fully realized it. He supposed that the beleaguered party was still trapped in the motte and that they had dispatched a messenger for help. Only one horse had been heard. Not until his men rushed the empty thicket did he discover his error.

Teran had difficulty with his men. They wrangled over the best course to follow. Some were reluctant to continue before daylight, afraid of being ambushed in the darkness; others, inflamed by the death of comrades, favored pushing on at once. They were slow in starting pursuit.

Dawn found the three parties strung out along the trail. O'Rourke and the two Marstens, guarding Cecily, came first. They had kept strictly to the gait Jonathan had set them and while they had lost ground, their horses were the freshest. Jonathan's stand in the copse had given them a good start. He and the two scouts came next. They had ridden much harder but their course had been circuitous and they had not gained on their friends. They were husbanding their horses now, walking them thirty minutes at a time.

"A lot may depend on their condition before the day's over," he cautioned.

They had an hour's start on Teran but his route had been more direct. He had set a plodding pace. He didn't want to close in until daylight, when there could be no more stealth and he could make best use of his numbers. With

only brief interruptions, all had been in the saddle for twenty-four hours. If anything, the scouts were the more weary. They had been under a greater strain.

With the coming of daylight this increased. Jonathan was constantly peering back for signs of pursuit and straining for a glimpse of his friends ahead. "Let's get off and walk," he advised when it came time to breathe the horses again. "It will rest our mounts and take some of the kinks out of our legs."

They were still leading their animals when they spied the bandit horsemen coming up rapidly on the back trail. Teran had lifted his pace. The party was silhouetted against the pale horizon.

"They haven't seen us yet," said Jonathan. He led the way around the shoulder of a hill, dodging the ridge which would have revealed their whereabouts, still preoccupied with his study of the ground ahead.

"We might slow 'em up by makin' a stand up yonder." Jess indicated the hill's crest with a wave of his hand.

"We've got a score to settle for Gabe and Pablo," Giles added grimly.

Jonathan shook his head. "Too easy for them to surround us there," he objected. "We've got to keep between them and Cecily. We'll check them when the time comes."

Presently the Virginian found the site he was seeking. Here was another low ridge, sloping gradually toward the river to the east while, on the west, it continued its ascent, culminating in a high hill. "This will do," he decided. "The river will slow them up if they try to circle us in that direction and the hill will block them over there." He indicated the advantage of the position with a sweep of his arm. "Spread out a little," he urged. "Keep an interval of at least twenty yards. It will make our force seem bigger. Fire as soon as you're certain of your target. That'll give us time to reload for a second volley if they try rushing us."

The horses were left in the rear and they crept to their positions. It was a tactic familiar to them all. Anxiety over Cecily had crowded Jonathan's mind. Now that a decision had been made, the nagging worry was gone; he suddenly felt calm and as he lay there in the tall grass, his thoughts reverted to Teresa. Her picture was vivid before him. He saw the glint of the sun in her hair and felt the softness of her lips against his.

"Give me a week," she had said, and the week was nearly gone. Soon he would have her answer. No doubt clouded his mind. He was smiling as he watched the horsemen approaching, and he counted their number—fourteen. His grip on the rifle tightened as he selected a target.

The blast from the hillside threw the bandits into confusion, but Teran rallied them. "Charge!" he shouted. "Charge them while their guns are



empty.” He knew well the advantage of his odds. They started up the hill in a ragged line, horses at gallop. But the scouts’ guns were ready before half the distance was covered. The second volley was equally deadly. Teran’s horse went down and two more men fell.

The attack broke. Teran, afoot, had been left behind and the leaderless outlaws scattered. More than half their company had been lost. The survivors needed no further discouragement.

“We’d best start ridin’,” Giles suggested.

Jonathan was ramming home another bullet. “Their leader’s afoot,” he declared. “I’m going to get him. Keep me covered, in case his friends turn back.”

He started down the hill, running easily. Teran was trying to catch a riderless horse when he saw him coming.

“*Por Dios!* He’s alone!” The bandit raised his rifle quickly but his shot was too fast.

As the bullet droned harmlessly by, Jonathan laughed. He was remembering his duel and Magee’s advice. It had been good so many times.

He stopped and took deliberate aim.

Teran had started to reload hurriedly. Now he saw there wasn’t time. Turning, he tried to escape, twisting and dodging as he ran. The bullet was slow in coming but it was accurate.

His friends peered down curiously as Jonathan walked over and turned the dead man on his back. He stared at him silently.

“Did you know him?” Jess asked later.

“It was Teran, one of the gang who murdered Salcedo. I thought I recognized him but I had to be sure.”

“Odd, ain’t it? One gang seems to be behind all the devilment hyar.”

“Very odd,” said Jonathan.

He had little to say during the remainder of the ride. They reached San Antonio that afternoon, stiff with weariness, to find that their friends had preceded them safely by only an hour.

Cecily flung open the door at the sound of their horses in the street. She was haggard and her eyes were dark. “Jonty,” she cried, running to meet them, the others crowding at her heels.

Jonathan threw a weary arm about her shoulders as he slid from his horse. “I reckon you’re a full-fledged member of the scouts now, Cissy.” His face was bleak, his eyes restless. Gabe’s lifelong constancy would never be replaced. There had been other losses but none as poignant as this. The home-coming reminded him of that black face, so often wrinkled with concern for his safety.

Miguel looked up from his breakfast when Teresa entered the room, his brows lifted in astonishment. “What brings you downstairs at this unearthly hour?”

She kissed him. “I can remember when you never got up before noon, either.”

“I’ve work to do. The time’s growing short. What’s your excuse?”

“I think you ask just to hear me say it.” Laughing, she sat on the arm of his chair. “How can I sleep when I know what’s going on? I haven’t your patience, Miguel. I couldn’t wait much longer.”

“You won’t have to. The stage is set for the final act. Sit over there and I’ll tell you about it.”

“Let me sit here.” She pulled his head against her shoulder and rubbed her cheek against his forehead as he kissed her throat. She remembered the tricks that pleased him and used them to hide the change in her feelings.

“There’ll be no talking done if you keep this up.” He laughed. “Either you’ll have to sit across the table or go back to bed.”

“Whatever you want, darling.” She sat across from him. “Now will you tell me? What is this last step?”

“You remember—I wanted one final crime, worse than the rest; something to shock the people and make them clamor for someone to rule them.”

“And you’ve found it?” She leaned forward eagerly.

He nodded. “It must have taken place by now. We should get word of it today.”

“Miguel!”

She started toward him but he waved her back. He wanted to see her face when she heard the news. The irony of the situation pleased him. “Don’t you want to know more about it?”

“I can hardly wait.” Her eyes were glowing.

“Nine *americanos* rode down the river three days ago, eight men and a young woman. Teran has orders to ambush them. None will escape.”

Teresa felt no twinge of pity, no hint of resentment at Miguel’s calculation. “I wish there were more,” she said. “Nine lives seem hardly enough for the sensation you want. There were fourteen in Salcedo’s party.”

Miguel was sardonic. “Nine will do. At least one of them is well known. I selected them with care.”

His manner of telling her, the things left unsaid, put her on guard for the first time. His face gave no hint and yet she was filled with foreboding. “Well?” she finally asked.

“Only have complete confidence in me,” he assured her. “The incident will be horrible enough to excite everyone.”

His reticence was a challenge, she realized, and she was defiant of it. Long experience with Miguel had taught her to suspect his traps, but her interest, once whetted, gave her no peace.

“Do you think I’d back out now?” she demanded. “Don’t I want this as much as you? Why don’t you tell me more?”

“I wonder,” he said, his eyes intent on her face. “It’s someone you know.”

She realized then; he hardly needed to fill in the name.

“Jonathan Kirk! A very nice touch, don’t you think? The fellow never liked me. Now, by his death, he’s helping me more than he’ll ever know.” His smile was frozen on his lips. “Jonathan Kirk has been of great service to us both, my dear,” he concluded.

Teresa clung to her composure until Miguel left. Long after he was gone, she discovered she was staring at the wall with blank, unseeing eyes, her face still a mask to conceal her emotions. There was a dull, hopeless pain within her. What was it Miguel had said? The massacre had occurred by now. It was too late to intervene. Her thoughts were a bitter succession, each a wound. Love, anger, hate, vengeance and even ambition engrossed her in turn. Her eyes grew misty as she thought of Jonathan and she held a silent funeral in her heart. When finally she went to her room, her eyes were bleak. Ambition was left. At least that should not be denied her. That, and hatred.

When Jonathan awoke his weariness was gone but his first thought was of Gabe, and mingled with his sorrow was a cold anger. The persistence of the attack indicated calculation. His recognition of Teran linked it with the violence that had unseated Gutierrez and driven most of the Americans away.

Cissy was cooking breakfast. He stood in the doorway, remembering the sureness of her answers when he had been puzzled over Miguel Salazar’s role in these strange events.

“The man who led the attack on us was an officer of the company that murdered Salcedo,” he began abruptly.

She looked up, frowning. “You think it’s all part of the same business?”

“I’m sure of it. Ordinary robbers wouldn’t have followed us so far after their first attack failed.”

“This man you suspect—he must think you stand in his way, Jonty. That’s the only answer.”

He shook his head. “But I don’t. At least I didn’t.” He corrected himself. “I intend to make it my business now.”

She wiped off her hands and came to stand by him. “Haven’t we talked in riddles long enough? Who is he?”

“I’m not sure. I can’t prove anything yet.”

“You said he risked a fortune backing Magee.” She would not be put off. “I can find out who that was.”

“You’d best keep this to yourself till we know what it’s all about,” he cautioned. And then, because she already knew so much and because he needed someone in whom he could confide, he identified Salazar and told her his suspicions.

“And you recognized two of his men at the wine barrels,” she mused, when he finished.

“Someone paid for that celebration. I intend to find out why.”

“Was Teran also Salazar’s man?”

“I can’t be sure. He was from San Antonio, though.”

Her next question surprised him. “What really happened to Magee?”

He was pledged to secrecy on that. “Didn’t you hear?”

“I heard all sorts of stories—that he died of pneumonia—that he took his own life——” She shrugged impatiently. “That isn’t true. I knew Magee.”

“No,” he answered slowly. “That isn’t true, Cissy, but I’ve given my word. I can’t tell you about it. That all happened long ago. What’s it got to do with what’s going on here now?”

“Just this. Magee is dead. Gutierrez is deposed. Of the three men who started out together, only Salazar is left and he seems to be the man behind this violence. Does that make sense?”

“Salazar didn’t depose Gutierrez.”

“No,” she admitted. “But if Teran was Salazar’s man he was implicated in the massacre. That’s what brought it about.”

“Salazar didn’t kill Magee.”

“Then who did?”

“Listen, Cissy, you’re trying to worm something out of me that I’m not supposed to tell. I’ll say this much, and you’ll just have to take my word for it. I was the one who was supposed to die that night.”

She looked at him searchingly. “You were supposed to die yesterday, too, Jonty.”

He laughed grimly. “I’m still here.”

“Don’t be so confident,” she warned. “That makes me afraid for you. This is a time for caution.”

He sniffed. “You’d better quit worrying about me and mind the breakfast.”

He grinned as she turned in dismay to the stove. The biscuits were burning.

Cecily continued to worry about him, though. She found time for a word with Jess.

“Don’t fret, Cissy. I’ll keep an eye on him,” the lank scout promised.

And when he was ready to leave, Jonathan found her waiting for him. “I’ll walk a way with you.” She waited until they were outside before asking, “Have you figured out the reason for the free wine?”

“Something to do with getting rid of Gutierrez, I guess.”

She shook her head. “The massacre did that. This was afterward.”

“Have you an idea?”

“I’ve been thinking. What happened after that?”

Jonathan frowned. “Nothing, except more of our men got disgusted and left with Kemper.”

She laughed and her fingers tightened on his arm. “That’s it.”

He stopped and stared at her. “You think that was part of the plan, Cissy?”

“Let’s not make it too hard,” she replied. “If that was the result, let’s take it for granted it was the aim.”

“It still puzzles me,” he declared, after a moment’s frowning silence.

“Me too,” she admitted. “I’m only sure of one thing. Whatever Salazar’s ambition is, the Americans won’t like it. That’s why he’s taken so much pains to get rid of them.”

She turned back then. She was glad to see Jess idling along, not far behind Jonathan. She had a lot of confidence in the scar-faced scout. He winked at her as she passed.

Jonathan went straight to Perry. McFarland was still away on patrol but Gaines and Taylor were summoned. He told them what had happened. “Kemper was right,” Jonathan declared. “We won the war but we’re losing the peace. Unless we set up a safe government, sooner or later we’ll have to follow him back across the border.”

“I agree—” Perry pulled at his ear reflectively—“but after our experience with Gutierrez whom can we trust? Time’s on our side. Dozens of Americans are coming in every day. We only had a hundred and fifty men when Kemper left but our force has doubled. We’ll soon have a real army again. Let’s bide our time till we’re stronger and then set up our own government.”

“Why wait?” Jonathan protested. “Let’s act now. Once the word spreads that we’ve set up such a nation, settlers will flock in. We can’t afford to go on this way.”

All four were of the same mind as to the goal; their only difference concerned the need for immediate action.

Jonathan hesitated to voice his suspicions of Salazar till he had more proof, but prospect of delay forced his hand. He plunged into his story, beginning with the wine casks. "I don't know what he has in mind," he concluded, "except it's something we won't like. I'm sure of that. He's taken a lot of pains to get rid of us."

Gaines whistled softly. "Some of these damn fool things begin to make sense," he said.

Taylor frowned at the table. "Jonty's right," he growled. "It's time to act."

Perry wasn't so sure. "If we can put off a show-down for a few weeks," he objected, "we'll be too strong for 'em. Let's wait and keep our eyes open."

They put it to a vote. Gaines and Taylor voted with Jonathan. It was decided to call a meeting that night at which Perry should preside. At his suggestion, Menchaca and Sava, in recognition of their rank, were to be invited.

"If they're here they can't argue that they didn't have a voice in it," Perry declared. "And it may avoid trouble. We don't want to start our republic with a civil war if we can help it."

"There won't be any trouble," Taylor promised grimly. "I'll have my company ready."

Jonathan next turned toward La Quinta. He must see Teresa.

Miguel told Teresa his plans before he left the house. This was the day. As soon as Teran brought word of the massacre the play would begin. Menchaca would declare martial law and hold his troops ready to strike at the Americans should they cause trouble. Sava's smaller company would patrol the streets. The proclamation placing Salazar at the head of the government was prepared. In it he was styled generalissimo; "king" would come later, but the power was already assured. The only uncertainty was the attitude of the Americans.

"If there's any trouble it will come quickly," he had told her. "Some of them may leave as Kemper did." He smiled. "I hope so. If they resist—well, Menchaca has a thousand men."

To stir up the enthusiasm of the people, Salazar planned a thanksgiving service at the San Fernando church—"where they can rejoice at their deliverance," he said. There was to be an interval of two hours between the proclamation and this service to make sure of the American stand. If nothing

occurred to delay the service, Teresa should attend in her gold carriage. "It will give them something to cheer," he added.

"And don't forget I'm popular with the American troops," she added. "I can win you friends."

"Let me choose my own friends," he retorted dryly.

This was her great day. Teresa dressed for her role. The clinging yellow silk molded her figure. Maria was completing her coiffure when word came there was a gentleman to see her. Teresa supposed it was a messenger from Miguel as she hurried down the stairs. She had no thought of Jonathan. He had had his hour of sadness in her heart. Great things were doing. She hurried, impatient for the news.

Jonathan was waiting in the hall. He heard the rustle of her gown and stepped out to meet her.

"Darling!" He hurried toward her.

Teresa halted abruptly and clutched the railing for support. She stared at him. "Jontee," she faltered. For a moment she seemed suspended there, her cheeks drained of color.

When she started to speak her lips were dry and she had to try again. "Is it really you?"

The words were a release for long-pent emotion. She groped her way toward him, for tears blinded her eyes and her body shook with the violence of her sobs. "Jontee! Jontee!"

He sheltered her in his arms. "What is it, Teresa? Tell me."

She could not be soothed. Her emotion was too complex. Mingled with her joy at having him was frustration when she realized what his presence meant. She had composed herself to accept his death but there had been no time to steel herself against this new disappointment. The restless horses were harnessed to the coach which was to carry her to the church. Were he not here, the bells would soon be ringing to proclaim the reign of a new ruler, and she would share in the triumph. All her hopes seemed to totter around her.

She could not tell him these things. There was no answer to his questions. Her arms were tight about him but her tears wouldn't stop.

"I've come to take you away from here," he told her finally. "You can't stay in this house any longer."

"Not yet," she managed to say.

"Yes, now."

"I can't." She quivered in a new outburst of weeping. "Not now."

When he insisted she pushed him from her. “Not now,” she repeated. “I’ll send for you tonight if I can.” She fled up the stairs.

He stood there waiting and baffled, hoping in vain for her return. Finally he turned and silently left the house.

Miguel Salazar waited in the presidio for word which would set his plans in motion. With him were Menchaca and Sava. Everything was in readiness. Powder had been issued the native troops who lounged about the plaza expecting orders. The governor’s palace, vacant since Gutierrez had been deposed, had been taken over as Salazar’s headquarters. The smart precision of the sentries was novel after weeks of carelessness.

“What are we waiting for?” Sava was growing restless.

“My men are ready,” Menchaca grumbled. “Say the word and I’ll act now.”

Miguel’s fingers twisting behind his back were the only sign of his nervousness. “No. I’ll give the word.” These lieutenants knew nothing of the incident he had planned.

First hint of disaster came, not to the presidio, but to Perry’s headquarters in La Villita. The shots were heard throughout the town as two horsemen galloped in on lathered animals, firing their warning as they came. They were the only surviving members of the guard in charge of the American *caballado*.

“The *gachupines!*” cried one. “There’s an enemy army at our heels.”

They told their story breathlessly. A strong enemy patrol had attacked them, killing their three companions and capturing the American horses pastured south of the town.

“How many were there?” Perry demanded.

“About fifty in the bunch that jumped us,” was the reply, “but we were chased by two other patrols. There must have been a hundred men in one of them.”

“This is a job for you, Jonty,” the major declared. “Take what’s left of Lockett’s old company and reconnoiter. We’ve got to know what we’re up against.”

The warning shots were heard in the presidio. “That’s it,” Salazar thought. “Someone’s brought word of the massacre.” Surely that furor could have but one meaning. Eagerness overcame his caution for once. “Have the bells sounded, Sava. We need wait no longer.”

His aide hurried to set in motion the machinery that would crown the long months of planning. Salazar stood watching from the long windows. He was tempted to send Teresa word but he knew she would be listening as



impatiently as he. She would know their meaning when the clamor of the bells began. He was still standing there when Major Perry galloped up, accompanied only by Gaines. He smiled as he noted their haste. "Excellent," he thought. "If they have any objections to my plan, they can be detained here. The Americans will be leaderless."

Their news stunned him. "There's a royalist army right on top of us," Perry began bluntly. "They've killed most of the men guarding our horses. A couple escaped to bring me word. I've already sent Kirk out to ascertain their strength and location. We have a fight on our hands."

Salazar sat down slowly. For the moment his wits were numbed.

Just then the bells began their startling clangor. "Someone else has heard the news," the major remarked, not realizing the significance of the signal. "Good! That alarm will save us time. Muster your troops, Menchaca. Issue powder and ball. Masicot is already posting sentries around the town. I have Taylor assembling the rest of my men."

"How can this be?" Salazar's mind was beginning to function again. "I thought McFarland was patrolling the south to guard against any such surprise."

"He was," Perry admitted, "but we haven't heard from him. Either he was cut off or wiped out. This is no time to wonder about what's already happened. Our job is to plan what happens next."

Jonathan rode straight west from San Antonio, his force thirty strong. With the enemy to the south he intended to get on the flank where he would be least expected. He maintained this course for nearly an hour, then turning sharply to his left he began angling back toward the river. He saw the dust of the enemy column long before he glimpsed any hostile troops, but the length of the cloud gave some indication of their strength. His advance was more wary now. The company fretted when he kept it inactive and hidden, while a *gachupine* patrol trotted by not a quarter of a mile away. "If I attack now," he reasoned, "I'll simply drive them back to their main body. I want prisoners." He let them pass and then took up their trail. He wanted to cut them off.

They circled behind the enemy party. Once between them and their army, caution was abandoned. Evidently thinking the Americans were friends the lieutenant in command obligingly halted to wait for them, and they were within fifty yards before he discovered his mistake. Then it was too late.

"Fire!" shouted Jonathan.

They were still at a gallop and the volley lacked accuracy. Only a few men fell. It was the surprise that was effective. The enemy bolted in panic, the Americans at their heels. Seven prisoners were taken, including the officer in command. This achieved, Jonathan promptly headed his troop back for San Antonio, riding swiftly now and detouring, as formerly, to avoid further contact. He knew the course of the hostile army and depended on the captives for more detailed information.

The story told by the prisoners was not reassuring. The royalist army was nearly three thousand strong and commanded by Colonel Ignacio Elizondo, notorious for his ruthlessness. "He's the renegade republican who betrayed Hidalgo to his death!" Menchaca exclaimed. According to the captives, his force was half regulars, half militia.

A council of war was called immediately. It met in the governor's palace. Salazar was present with Menchaca and Sava, representing the native troops; with Perry were Gaines, Taylor, Masicot and Jonathan Kirk. There still was no word from McFarland. Of the force available, Perry had three hundred Americans now, Menchaca a thousand Mexicans. There were still about fifty Lipan Indians available from McFarland's old command.

Sava counseled falling back but Perry vetoed this. "The odds have been worse than this before," he commented dryly. "What we need is unity of command. That's the only way we can act effectively. Our second problem is the panic in the town. They think we're already beaten. I'm more afraid of treachery in our rear than I am of the enemy in my front. That's why I've posted guards around the place. No one moves in or out. Those are orders."

"Menchaca leads most of our troops," Salazar suggested. "Why not unify our command under him?"

The swart Mexican captain rolled expectant eyes at Perry.

"I've been fightin' under Perry a long time." Taylor's voice was brusque. "I know what he can do. The Americans will follow no one else." The captain had one drooping eyelid. It gave his face a saturnine cast when he glared at Menchaca.

"*Por Dios!* Where will you be without me and my men?" Menchaca demanded.

"Where will you be without us?" Gaines retorted.

The two factions, whose open conflict had been interrupted by this emergency, faced each other defiantly.

Masicot was the peacemaker. He was the one man who commanded the respect and friendship of both sides. "How can we expect to defeat an enemy while we're quarreling among ourselves, gentlemen?" he questioned.

Salazar had hoped to entrench his position by the selection of his candidate, but he was too shrewd to permit a deadlock. After all, this battle

must be won or all his schemes would be nullified. “Captain Masicot is right, as usual,” he said suavely. “The solution is to let Menchaca command his troops and Perry lead the Americans, but they should both be under the direction of a leader in whom we all share confidence. I suggest Captain Masicot for that position.”

Perry was quick to agree, even though this placed him under one of his own officers. “I’m satisfied with that,” he assented.

“Wait!” It was the nominee himself who objected. “It is admitted that part of our problem is the wavering loyalty in the town. I suggest we choose a man who can cure that. In this emergency we must forget all prejudice. Gutierrez is the man. He led us before. The people have confidence in him.”

There was a chorus of protests from the Americans but Masicot was firm.

“You’re forgetting all his good qualities in the memory of his crime,” he said. “I’m not condoning what he did but I’m calling your attention to the fact that he can unify the command at a time we must have unity or perish. First, let’s win this victory. He can help us do it. After that, do what you please.”

Salazar listened intently. He liked the suggestion. It would suit him to have Gutierrez more than any other because he could be so easily removed when the emergency had passed. “It’s a splendid suggestion,” he agreed.

The Americans finally yielded but only with reluctance and with the stipulation that Masicot should act as the new generalissimo’s aide. This would provide them with a safeguard which they felt they needed.

Perry and Taylor were named to notify Gutierrez of his restored authority.

# Chapter 7

## *The Battle of Alazan*

DON BERNARDO GUTIERREZ made an auspicious start. He approved Perry's action in establishing a strong guard around San Antonio to avert traffic with the enemy from within. He issued a proclamation, signing himself generalissimo, in which he pledged that order would be swiftly restored and called upon the citizens for support. To occupy them he set them the task of making hundreds of spears in imitation of the weapons designed by Magee at La Bahia to take the place of bayonets.

There was considerable artillery in San Antonio, including the pieces captured there and at La Bahia, but ammunition was lacking. Perry ordered a thorough inventory. The four best guns were selected and the rest spiked. Elizondo's patrols had captured the American *caballado* on June eighteenth, but his main force did not arrive opposite San Antonio until the next day. He chose for his camp a low hill of slight elevation, lying between the San Pedro and Alazan creeks. They roughly paralleled the course of the river, the San Pedro in the middle, Alazan farther west. The royalist leader immediately prepared for battle. He threw up two large earthen bastions about four hundred yards apart, at either extremity of his camp, and connected them with a trench less formidable in character. He was within plain sight of the presidio walls but beyond gunshot. By nightfall his position was ready. An attacking force would have to cross San Pedro Creek at the foot of the slope and storm straight into his fortifications. He was sure of his strength but careful to yield his opponents no advantage.

Inside the town the defenders were as ready as they ever would be. Gutierrez called a conference. McFarland's patrol had slipped in that afternoon. Cut off and pursued by enemy cavalry, he had traveled a roundabout trail to the east to join his comrades.

"We could repel a force twice as strong," Gutierrez said. "We're fighting behind stone walls."

"Another siege!" Perry objected, remembering La Bahia. "I don't like it. I'm for surprising them and fighting it out in the open."

McFarland supported him. "If we wait," he asserted, "Elizondo may have a force twice as large. Arredondo is collecting an army at Laredo. Let's whip them now before they have time to get re-enforcements."

The stolid Menchaca had remained silent. Gutierrez turned to him. "What is your opinion, Captain?"

"I don't talk so well," the Mexican grumbled. "Let others do the arguing. Fighting is my business. Only tell me what you want and I will tear these *gachupines* apart. You will see." He thumped his chest pompously. "Menchaca is the man who will win your battle."

His arrogance was received in silence. Taylor would have replied but Masicot checked him. This was no time for argument. One thing all the officers shared—confidence. None wanted to follow Don Bernardo's plan and await the enemy attack. Finally it was agreed that Elizondo's camp should be stormed at dawn.

The preparations were thorough and every step was taken to make the surprise complete. The Americans were organized into two companies, Gaines commanding one with Jonathan Kirk as his lieutenant, Taylor heading the second, backed by McFarland. They were to fight as a unit under Perry. Menchaca formed his regiment into three battalions commanded by Sava, Delgado, who was restored to command in this emergency, and Francisco Ruiz, newly promoted to a captaincy.

The plan of the assault was fully discussed. The largest of the *acequias* flowed in a southwesterly direction after leaving the town, its course concurring with that of San Pedro Creek at a distance of about a hundred yards, although it veered away at a point almost opposite the royalist camp. The little army was to use this stream to mask its movements that night and wait for the assault along its wooded banks. The necessity for silence was impressed upon every man. The departure was fixed for ten o'clock in order to give the troops time to get in position before the late moonrise. Gaines's company was to lead.

It was a stealthy advance, with the commands whispered, the men marching in a single file, and each carrying both a rifle and a lance.

Denis O'Rourke insisted on accompanying his comrades. "Oi've not missed a foight yet and Oi've no moind to start now," he retorted when Jonathan demurred.

"I'd feel safer if there were someone here with Cissy," Jonathan said, reluctant to mention the Irishman's missing arm.

"It's me empty sleeve you're thinkin' of," O'Rourke replied, "but Oi'm a better man with wan hand than many a man with two." He pulled back his coat to display two pistols thrust into his belt. "Oi've been practicin'," he

assured his leader. "If it takes me a bit longer to load, shure Oi've got an extra bullet to make up for it."

Jonathan objected no further. The rest of his old company were with him.

Soundlessly, the entire force crouched in its new position. Elizondo's sentries heard nothing to cause alarm. The long wait was difficult. Some succeeded in sleeping, but for the most part the army huddled in the shadows and strained its eyes toward the royalist earthworks where the guards were clearly discernible in the bright moonlight. It had been agreed that there would be no vocal commands. Gutierrez, far to the right with Sava's company, would give the signals to advance and these were to be transmitted down the line from officer to officer by the clasp of a hand. The army was to move to its final position at the first signal, attack at the second.

The initial warning passed down the silent line at four o'clock. The army crept forward with furtive silence, hugging the ground as the friendly cloak of shadows was left behind. The tall grass rippled with secret movement. It was a cautious, squirming progress until the creek was reached and more trees spread cordial arms to shield them from the moonlight. The men waded the shallow stream and lingered in the prudent gloom of the far bank. From here the enemy line was less than thirty yards.

Elizondo's bugles sounded at five o'clock, calling his men to matins. Once more the signal passed from company to company. Crafty Indian fighters stalked the sentries in the final advance. Jess Leeman's knife silenced one guard, Giles Brady pounced on another. All along the front the pattern was the same. Gaines's company was opposite the south bastion of the royalist camp where a flag was flying. Elizondo's first warning of the attack came when he saw those colors hauled down by Ben Marsten.

The whole line of his fortifications was swarming with men. He had prudently assembled his troops for prayer under arms and his response was immediate. A shattering volley halted the onset, and he followed this with a bayonet charge. The first impact was at the south bastion. Gaines's company had held its fire till now. The Spaniards wavered under the blast of their lead but they kept coming. It was wooden spear against bayonet. Elizondo lashed his men forward mercilessly. The Americans were driven back. Along the breastworks the conflict resolved itself into a series of battles. Taylor's men clung to a length of trench. Menchaca's battalions were split in two. Sava reeled back from the north bastion. Menchaca was trying another charge.

From his position on the left, Jonathan could see the wavering lines, but their pattern was confused. He helped Gaines re-form the company along the creek. They charged again, holding their fire until they reached the bastion and blasting its defenders out as they topped the parapet. Elizondo's cavalry

countercharged, beating the Americans back with sabers. There was no time to see how the battle went elsewhere. Jonathan followed Gaines in four charges. Each time they were driven back.

“Their countercharge always catches us with empty rifles,” Gaines counseled. “This time we’ll drive ’em out with the spear. We’ll be ready for ’em when they come back.”

Jonathan was at his side as they dashed forward. Close behind came his old company, merged with the new command and still intact despite the heavy losses of the day. The men yelled lustily as they ran. The Spanish fire was ragged; they were handicapped by the same oversight against which Gaines was guarding: too many of their rifles were empty. Gaines was the first to scramble up the earthen bank but there were a score of men at his heels. He fell in that last blistering volley. The attack wavered. Jonathan saw Jess leap into the bastion and followed after him. For a moment they were alone there, pressed back by a ring of bayonets.

“What are we waitin’ for?” yelled O’Rourke as the line faltered. He could not carry a lance. Drawing the first of his pistols, he blazed at the nearest target. “Drive ’em!” he yelled. “Drive ’em! Come on, Jonty’s already inside.”

Ben Marsten and Giles Brady were right behind him. Their rush rallied the others; the moment of hesitation was past; the company swarmed over the bastion, shouting as they came.

“Spear and bayonet!” Jonathan warned as the *gachupines* began to yield. “Save your fire.”

Fully half his force was wielding captured weapons, their steel more deadly than the wooden lances. The enemy was driven back.

Elizondo watched the changing tide and again hurled cavalry forward to check them, but this time they were ready with loaded rifles.

“Pick a target,” Jonathan ordered. “Don’t shoot till I give the word. Make it count.”

He waited until the *gachupines* were at point-blank range before giving the command. The Spanish ranks shuddered. Horses and men were tangled in the carnage at their van, slowing those in the rear who still struggled on. The column recoiled.

“Load! Load!” Jonathan shouted. “They’ll be back for another dose.”

Elizondo threw another charge at them but by now they were firmly established in the position and the enemy faced a storm of hot lead. Again they recoiled.

The Spanish leader was determined to crush this flank. Jonathan could see the position more clearly from here. Elizondo was pulling troops from other points to strengthen his offensive. Masicot, at the opposite end of the

line, was quick to grasp the situation. "Charge!" he ordered, striking the weakened enemy viciously with Sava's battalion. The royalists' left flank crumpled under the double impact. Elizondo tried to re-enforce the weak point too late; his militia already was falling back. The panic spread to his center and even his seasoned veterans retreated. The troops poised for a blow at Jonathan's men were turned against Masicot in an effort to bolster the shattered line. Taylor's company, firmly entrenched along the parapet, caught them in flank with a murderous fire. Jonathan opened up in their rear with a captured cannon. The advancing ranks buckled, increasing the disorder among the royalists. Then the whole republican line charged. Elizondo's regulars, assailed on three sides, fought grimly, but their comrades were already in flight and their obstinacy served only to increase the slaughter. The battle was lost.

For six hours the struggle had swayed back and forth with dogged resolution. Now the end came quickly. The last Spanish resistance collapsed. Elizondo succeeded in cutting his way through the overlapping lines with a small body of cavalry. Here and there, other groups forced their way out of the melee but these were few. More than a thousand of the best Spanish troops lay dead. Four hundred others were captured and the army's remnants were scattered in every direction. Elizondo found himself at the head of only eighty men when he left the field, although later he was able to rally four hundred of the fugitives in his retreat to Mexico.

Losses had been severe on the republican side, too. Masicot was shot down leading the final charge and lived only long enough to learn of the victory. Gaines was dangerously wounded but he would fight again. Of the three hundred Americans, nearly a third were dead and a like number wounded, the heaviest casualties having been sustained by Gaines's company which had borne the brunt of the fighting. Menchaca reported three hundred and thirty-one dead and more than five hundred wounded. It had been a great victory—the royalist army was hacked to pieces—but a costly one. As the *gachupines* retreated, many of them were trapped along the banks of Alazan Creek. Here their losses were heaviest and here most of the prisoners were taken. The battle took its name from this creek.

It was the first battle in which Salazar had borne anything but a passive part. He served as Gutierrez' personal aide throughout and was with Menchaca during the final charge. "It was you who won the battle, Captain," he said as they returned from the carnage. "You've justified my faith. You've shown the *americanos* the quality of your fighting men."

Menchaca was drunk with success. "Together, you and I can rule this place, *viejo*," he said familiarly. He measured the little column of returning



Americans shrewdly. “They can’t muster a hundred able men now. Say the word and I’ll finish them off.”

Salazar shrugged. “There aren’t enough of them left to worry us. It’s Gutierrez whom we must watch. The fellow will claim credit for your victory if he can. He bothers me more than the others.”

The captain’s eyes flashed dangerously. “Everyone should know it was Menchaca who won the battle. Let Don Bernardo keep a civil tongue in his fat head or he’ll meet Salcedo’s fate.”

The town was converted into a hospital for the wounded. With more than six hundred patients to attend, there was scarcely a house which wasn’t pressed into service. Of Jonathan’s original company, Cris Marsten had a bullet through his shoulder and Giles Brady a bayonet slash in the thigh; both wounds were painful but not dangerous.

Gutierrez properly made the wounded his first consideration before calling a meeting of the officers. Salazar was there and Menchaca, backed by Sava, Delgado and Ruiz. There were four Americans, Perry, Taylor, McFarland and Kirk.

“This time we’ll make good use of our victory,” Don Bernardo began. “First, we must restore order and appoint officials to maintain it. Civil government must guarantee the privileges for which we fought.” He was sure of their support. Success had restored his old self-assurance.

“Who will name these officials?” Menchaca demanded.

Gutierrez looked at him in surprise. “That’s the purpose of this meeting,” he explained. “As your leader, I’m asking authority to put the government on a substantial and permanent footing. We can’t afford to repeat our mistakes.”

Masicot’s death had made Gutierrez’ position with the Americans equivocal. They had agreed to his leadership conditionally. Their trust in Don Bernardo was gone and with the second in command dead, they were reluctant to proceed. “The emergency is past,” Perry asserted. “I agree that a strong civil government is necessary but you were named to head the army. We’ll have to hold another election to name such a leader.”

Gutierrez looked to the Mexicans for support. His glance fell upon Salazar but he made no response.

“I favor Don Bernardo.” Francisco Ruiz was the only friend he had there.

“I nominate Major Perry,” declared Taylor. “He’s a man in whom we all have confidence.”

“He’s an *americano*.” Menchaca’s tone was challenging. “Shall a handful of foreigners rule us? My army wouldn’t like that. Don Miguel Salazar is my choice.”

“Where would we find an abler man?” demanded Sava in support of his chief.

Gutierrez had not anticipated this opposition. He hesitated. “Perhaps we should give the matter more thought before voting,” he suggested. He wanted time to discuss this with Miguel. If he helped, the dilemma could be solved easily.

“There’s no point in waitin’,” the droop-eyed Taylor insisted. “We’ve already had too much of that.”

“Vote now,” Menchaca insisted.

Reluctantly, Gutierrez put the question. The names were offered in the order of their nomination. Don Bernardo had one vote. Perry’s name was next; Taylor, McFarland and Kirk supported him. Casualties had thinned out his following. There were also three votes for Salazar, Sava and Delgado joining Menchaca.

“The decision will have to wait,” the chairman decided; “the vote is a tie.” Still hopeful of resolving the deadlock in his own favor, he refused to voice his choice. The meeting was adjourned.

His hope of discussing the matter with Miguel alone was frustrated. He found Menchaca already at La Quinta when he arrived.

“We’re very busy, Bernardo,” Miguel greeted him coldly. “The captain and I have matters of importance to discuss.”

The governor could hardly credit his ears. The uncouth captain and the suave Salazar made a strange combination, and he was affronted by his friend’s manner. But his need was desperate and he forced himself to smile. “My business is of the utmost consequence,” he declared. “Surely you can spare me a few minutes.”

“Speak quickly then.”

“Perhaps Menchaca will excuse us,” Don Bernardo suggested.

The stolid captain looked to Salazar for his cue.

“I have no secrets from the new commander of the army. Whatever you have to say to me may be said here.”

Gutierrez saw that his errand was useless. Still he made an effort. “It was I who persuaded you to come here. You are my trusted friend, Miguel. I thought I could rely on you.”

“If you’ve come to remind me of an old friendship, your errand can wait.” Miguel turned once more toward Menchaca. “We are discussing affairs of state.”

“Then you must have forgotten that I am the governor here.”

“We’ve made other arrangements now, Bernardo. Your usefulness is ended.”

Gutierrez restrained an angry retort, realizing its futility. He turned silently to leave but was halted at the door by Miguel's parting remark.

"If you need money—" the tone was patronizing—"I'll advance you enough to get your family across the border. It would grieve me to see your head upon a pole."

Menchaca laughed as the departing governor slammed the door after him.

# Chapter 8

## *Checkmate*

JONATHAN tried to see Teresa that afternoon. When he appeared at the door, his absence of caution alarmed her. She was certain of Miguel's success now and unwilling to run any public risk that might anger him. First let her have her throne. After that . . . She sent down a note by Maria.

"It is dangerous to meet here," it read. "Come to me in the garden tonight at nine. Come by way of the river and be careful you aren't seen. All my love." It wasn't even signed.

Her caution troubled him, hinting at peril he didn't understand. He was impatient of the wait, too, but the promise of the meeting stirred him. Tonight at nine he would see her, hold her in his arms. This time they would reach a decision. He was determined on that.

Next he went to Perry's headquarters. McFarland and Taylor were there.

"Looks like you called the turn, Jonty," the major greeted him. "Salazar has exposed his hand."

"What's to stop him?" Taylor demanded. "Masicot's dead; Gaines is wounded. We left too many votes on the battlefield."

"That's why I'm here." Jonathan paced the floor nervously. "We can't let that happen. Think what it would mean to have a governor who'd been behind all the lawlessness here. I'd sooner have Gutierrez, with all his faults."

"I'm with you," Taylor growled. "I'll fight, if necessary, to keep Salazar out."

"What with?" Perry tugged at his ear. "A third of our men are dead and half the rest are wounded."

"I've been thinking about this." Jonathan halted in front of the table. "As long as it's one of them against one of us, they'll stick together. But suppose we unite behind some Spaniard. Then we might have a chance."

Taylor laughed. "Menchaca, I suppose. He's Salazar's man."

"How about Ruiz?" Perry sounded doubtful.

"Don't know enough about him," McFarland grumbled. "And he's the only one in the lot who isn't in Salazar's camp."

“I’m thinking of Toledo. Everyone respects him and he’s certainly had nothing to do with Don Miguel.” The Virginian urged his choice. “He fought with Gaines and me. I’ll vouch for his courage.”

The suggestion was greeted with silence. Jonathan grew uneasy. “What do you think?” he demanded of Perry.

“I think we can elect him,” the major finally replied.

Don José Alvarez de Toledo had arrived in San Antonio only a few days before the battle of Alazan. Born in Santo Domingo of a notable Spanish family, he had been a deputy to the Spanish Cortes at Cadiz. However, his sympathy with the Hidalgo Revolution got him into trouble and he had been forced to flee the country. By birth and education, as well as by instinct, he was probably the most distinguished of the Mexican republican refugees and had attracted considerable attention in New Orleans where he had made his home. He had supported Gutierrez and Magee from the start of their venture. Even during the army’s darkest days at La Bahia he had labored in its behalf, forwarding men and supplies to the best of his ability.

At San Antonio he had been confused by his reception. Gutierrez, who had welcomed him warmly, was at that time outside the confidence of the leaders. Salazar regarded the newcomer with distrust; a man of such attainments might interfere with his ambitious schemes. The other native leaders were dominated by Miguel and took their cue from him. There had been cordial messages to Masicot from mutual friends in New Orleans. The distinguished recruit had gravitated to the circle of Americans rather than to the company of his countrymen.

He was a slender, nervous man whose nimble energy was smoothed by urbanity. His was a rare blending of the idealistic and the practical. The position he had sacrificed for his beliefs and his record of past services recommended him, too. He had won American confidence. During the battle he had fought in the ranks under Gaines, and he had remained aloof from the factional struggle for control of the new government.

Before the meeting ended, the Americans agreed to unite behind Toledo.

It was a clear night. There was no moon but the stars were bright, etching the white buildings with deceptive friendliness. The streets were narrow canyons, shadowy and deserted, for in these uneasy times the town barred its doors early. The Virginian’s steps clumped briefly on the wooden bridge that spanned Concepcion *acequia* and then were deadened by the soft turf as he turned toward the river. There was an open field here, encircled on three sides by the tortuous stream, and on the opposite shore stood Salazar’s villa with its terraces climbing the bank. Jonathan knew the path well—he

had walked it often—and his impatient eyes, longing for a sight of Teresa, had memorized each detail of the walled garden. He was early for his tryst but further waiting had grown intolerable. The stout walls were impassable; the only available approach was from the water, but there was a fisherman's boat in a clump of willows near by. He had discovered it on one of his excursions, and had played with the thought of using it for just this purpose.

From the sooty shadows which wrapped the bank, three men watched his progress. "It's an *americano*," whispered one.

"Their pockets are heavy with silver and they wear fine clothes," another muttered. "This is a rich prize."

"Your words are always brave, Luiz, but where are you when there's work to be done with a knife?"

"I find you victims with money. You do not waste your time," was the aggrieved reply.

"Quiet. Do you want him to hear us?"

Luiz backed cautiously away. He had no stomach for the deadly work to follow. His task was to foment disorder and it had a double reward. As the growing violence terrorized the town, his master's generosity increased. And he shared in the spoils when the assassins had a prosperous night. Now he was seized with weakness. He clenched his teeth to stop their chatter, and he shivered in the cold of sudden perspiration. This was the moment he always dreaded, when fear rattled him until his blubbery chins quivered. Cupidity lashed him into each new enterprise and nothing had gone wrong so far. It was his custom to linger in some remote shadow until the violence was ended and it was safe to creep out and share in the booty. But never before had he been trapped so close to the actual scene of the deed. His feet fumbled in nervous haste, a twig snapped beneath his weight and he scraped against a tree with a noisiness that his terror magnified.

Jonathan heard the faint sound and stopped short, his senses alert. That spared him from the first knife-thrust which only clawed at his coat. He had time to strike out savagely at his unseen assailant as he staggered back, half tangled in the groping arms of another antagonist. The man yelled as a second blow, reaching for Jonathan, slashed him instead. The Virginian fought desperately, his fists crunching against the man who clutched him. He was backing away, trying to fight free of the menacing shadows and into the open, when he tripped over a root. His arms were still flailing as he toppled backward.

Since Cecily's warning, Jess had been Jonathan's shadow. When the Virginian left the house, the scout turned his scarred face toward the door,

his frown puckering the old wound into a grimace. Perhaps none there knew the menace lurking in the lawless streets like this man who had been an outlaw. For a discreet minute he waited and then slipped unobtrusively into the night.

His was the silent, shuffling gait of the trained woodsman. He made no effort to overtake Jonathan, but he kept his figure in sight, and he made sure that the knife was loose in his belt as he slipped cautiously along. When the path led across the open pasture he dropped farther behind to avoid discovery, but his step quickened as his friend vanished into the dark curtain of trees. Then he heard the shout and started running.

“Hold on, Jonty, I’m comin’,” he yelled, and the starlight glinted on its blade as he freed his knife.

The attack ended as swiftly as it had begun. Surprised by the unexpected interference, both cutthroats took to their heels, crashing panic-stricken through the tangled brush. Pursuit was out of the question. Too many thickets offered concealment along the river bank.

“You all right?” Jess queried anxiously.

“I think so.” Jonathan scrambled to his feet. “You came just in time, though. They nearly had me.”

“You ought to know better than go traipsin’ ’round hyar in the dark, times like these.”

“You were here,” Jonathan reminded him.

“I was trailin’ you,” was the simple reply. “If you’re too careless to look whar you’re goin’, somebody’s got to. Come on, let’s git out of these woods.”

“I’ve got business,” the Virginian explained. “I’m looking for a boat. I’ve seen it tied in a clump of willows along here.”

“All right then, let’s git busy.” Jess started down the bank. “But loosen your knife in your belt. This ain’t a healthy place to be.”

They passed so close to the bushes where the trembling Luiz cowered that he could easily distinguish their words above the pounding of his heart. Salazar’s terrified servant buried his face in the moldy turf and waited breathlessly.

“This is a trip I’ll have to take alone,” Jonathan was explaining. The boat had been found. “I’m going to meet someone across the river.”

“I’m goin’ along,” Jess insisted. “When we git thar I’ll wait in the boat, but I ain’t goin’ to turn back now.”

Jonathan hesitated. He had no wish to share the secret of this visit with anyone, and yet his friend’s caution had already been proved right.

Jess pushed the boat out into the current. “Whar we headed?”

The Virginian grinned, yielding to Jess's obdurate determination not to be left behind. It would harm nothing if he waited in the boat. "Pull close to the opposite bank and then drop down with the current," he directed. "We must be as quiet as possible. I'll tell you where to land."

They found a small wharf at the foot of the garden, and Jonathan left his companion behind while he cautiously ascended the terraces. A candle flickered in the square lantern by the patio gate, and there Teresa waited.

She flung her arms about him. His kisses seemed dearer to her because so recently she'd thought them lost. She pulled him deeper into the shadows. "We must be careful. Miguel may return."

"I wish he would," Jonathan replied. "I wish he'd find you in my arms like this. I've nothing to hide, Teresa. Why should I skulk around in the night, like a thief?"

She halted his outburst with a kiss. It soothed her, gave her more assurance. "You think this separation isn't cruel for me, too?" she murmured.

"That's all ended, darling. Tonight you're leaving this place."

She tried to interrupt but he shook her by the shoulders. "Listen to me! I listened to you before. I know what I'm saying. Miguel Salazar is my enemy. He always will be. If you think you can change that, you're only fooling yourself."

"You don't understand, Jontee."

"I understand I love you and nothing can keep us apart. It's torture watching this garden for the sight of you; you're here and I can't see you.

"I can't let you stay any longer in this house. Why does Salazar hate me? It started when he found me kissing you, remember? He tried to kill me then. Think, Teresa! Why? It's because he loves you."

He still gripped her shoulders, holding her at arm's length.

"And I love you, Jontee—only you—surely you know."

"Yes."

She slid back into his arms. "I love you! I love you!" She repeated it over and over.

"And you're leaving with me tonight?"

Words wouldn't put him off now. She realized that. In a way, she was glad. He was no longer a boy, to be satisfied with promises. But just a few more hours and Miguel would have his throne. She couldn't give that up. After all, she wanted it for Jonathan too. Didn't she plan to share it with him?

"If I go with you, we can't be married. The priest wouldn't do it without Miguel's consent. Still you want me to go?"

"I can't let you stay here."



She was through with waiting. Give her this hour and Jonathan was hers. He'd never get her out of his blood. "Then take me—now."

She pressed her body closer.

His arms tightened about her, then dropped to his sides. "Let's get out of here." His voice was unsteady. "I've a boat at the foot of the garden."

"No, here, Jontee. Take me now."

He frowned, puzzled. "Are you crazy? I want to marry you."

How could she manage him? He still was younger than she thought. She leaned against him, her lips close to his ear, her hair brushing his face. "Perhaps. But isn't it good to be when you're in love?" she whispered.

Teresa quivered under his kisses and threw back her head, arching her throat to his lips. "Don't stop, darling! Don't ever stop!"

She pulled at her dress, baring one shoulder, and he found it unbelievably soft.

"Darling," she crooned. "Darling!" Fingers twined in his hair, pulling him closer.

He was startled by the sound of ripping silk and stepped back, thinking he had done it.

"Darling!" Her whisper was hoarse.

Jonathan stared at her in consternation. Her hands still gripped the torn bodice, freeing her breasts.

For a moment he couldn't take his eyes off them. Then he turned away. "Good Lord, Teresa!"

"No, Jontee, look at me!" She caught his hand and pressed it against her. He could feel her heart beat.

"Have you lost your mind?" he muttered.

"Yes, Jontee, yes! What is love but madness?"

Her lust turned him cold. He had never seen a woman throw away all restraint before and it disgusted him. He had already had to make excuses for her, for the grotesque yellow coach, for Salazar, whose travels she shared. At first he had not questioned her explanation of the Spaniard's position in her life. Now all these things tormented him. He'd been blind. Even the boy Cris had giped at her. Everything fitted too well.

He tried to shut out his doubts. "Are you coming with me or are you staying with Miguel?"

She was too immersed in her need to note the change in his tone. Her body pressed against him.

"Kiss me, darling. Don't talk."

His indifference surprised him. The fever was ended. A woman he could have anytime for nothing, anybody's woman—she must have been amused

by his high-minded talk of marriage. To think he'd fought clear across Texas for this!

He loosened her arms and held her helpless while his eyes searched her face. There was one last question and he wanted the answer.

"What was the reason you cried when I came to La Quinta the other day?" he demanded.

"I was so glad to see you."

"Was that something to cry over?"

"You'd been away . . ." She groped for an answer. "The times are so dangerous. I was so worried."

"I might have been ambushed. Was that it?"

"Such things happen every day."

He pushed her away. She had shared Miguel's knowledge of Teran's errand. He had his answer. "Good-by, Teresa. I'm leaving—this time I won't come back."

She stared after him, dully. He had taken half a dozen steps before she could force herself to believe he meant it.

"Jontee!" she called. "Jontee!"

He did not turn.

She wanted to run after him, hold him so he could never leave her. Instead she stood looking after him until he was lost in the shadows.

Menchaca raised his shaggy brows in surprise on discovering Gutierrez present when the meeting convened the next morning. He had miscalculated Don Bernardo's courage. "No matter," thought Menchaca, "Ruiz will never vote for an *americano*. We still can outvote them."

The Mexican faction assembled early. Salazar was sleek in white stockings and richly embroidered velvet, as if dressed for triumph. Delgado and Sava were beside Menchaca, whose impatient stare turned frequently toward the door. Ruiz sat frowning and aloof, mindful that his vote would settle the issue. He faced the door and was first to see the approaching Americans. He sprang to his feet, his wide eyes revealing his astonishment. The others turned to gape. The late arrivals were bearing a cot on which lay the wounded Gaines. It had been Cecily's suggestion, after Jonathan told her how much each vote was needed.

"*Por Dios!* What is this?" Menchaca demanded.

"Captain Gaines didn't want to miss the meeting," Taylor said laconically.

Salazar sprang to his feet. "This is ridiculous," he objected. "Only the active officers of the army are participating in this election. Captain Gaines

is in no condition to execute such responsibilities.”

“None of us has a better right to be here,” Perry retorted. “Gaines will vote.”

Salazar eyed Ruiz. “Five Mexicans against five Americans.” His tone was suggestive.

“Let’s get on with the election,” growled McFarland. “I want to propose a man who hasn’t been mentioned before. A Spaniard—” he stressed the word —“whom we all admire. I nominate Don José Alvarez de Toledo.”

The move caught Salazar completely by surprise. He sat down abruptly.

“There seems to be some feeling here that the Americans are trying to elect one of their own number,” Perry remarked. “For this reason I withdraw my name. That will leave the selection among Gutierrez, Salazar and Toledo.”

Miguel made an effort to check the move. “The nominations were closed yesterday. It is too late to enter another name. If Major Perry wishes to withdraw, the only remaining candidates are Don Bernardo Gutierrez and I.”

“Oh, no, you don’t.” Perry turned to Gutierrez as the presiding officer. “We’re here to choose a leader and there must be no trickery about it. We’re all free to vote for anyone we please.”

Don Bernardo knew where he stood with Salazar. “Major Perry is right,” he decided. “Nothing was said about closing the nominations.”

“Vote!” McFarland demanded impatiently.

Toledo was elected. Francisco Ruiz would not have voted for an American but he preferred Toledo to Salazar.

Dazed by this quick change in their fortunes, Menchaca turned to his leader, his face dark with anger. Miguel’s inner turmoil was as acute but he concealed it better. He had cunningly contrived each step in the long path that led to this moment. These men were all pawns in his strategy and he was measuring their weight as the design of his plan took a new shape.

“The *yanquis* win after all,” he said. His smile was deceptive. He wanted none to guess his intention until after he had struck. “They have no further need for us here, Captain.” He pressed Menchaca’s shoulder as he passed.

Waiting wore at Teresa’s nerves. The clatter of a passing horseman sent her scurrying to the window but he did not stop. She halted her pacing to glare at the clock’s dragging hands. Again she flung herself on the bed. “I’ll wait here till he comes. I’ll not stir till I hear his step.” A moment later, driven by her anxiety, she was once more flouncing from window to window. The quiet of the deserted street outside amazed her. She resented its calm.

Her eyes were bitter when Miguel flung himself from his horse. “He has failed me.” She uttered it aloud in a brittle, dead voice and shivered in spite of the midday heat.

She waited for him and searched her angry mind for words stormy enough to suit her temper. When he failed to appear she thought it another trick of her overwrought nerves. “Time isn’t passing,” she assured herself, straining to catch the sound of his tread on the stair. “He just stepped in the door. It only seems long to me.” Then she listened to the steady ticking of the clock and knew it was no delusion.

Her first impulse was to make him come to her, but when the crawling minutes became intolerable she went to him.

“You needn’t tell me,” she blazed; “I know. You’ve bungled it again.”

He stared at her silently.

“I should have been warned. Plots and schemes! They sound fine enough but when the time comes for action you offer nothing but excuses.” Her voice rose in a frenzy of scorn.

“Shut up!”

“Listen to the king,” she mocked in the same shrill tone. “Don’t shout your orders at me. I don’t believe in them any more.”

His fingers bruised her shoulders as he shook her. “Shut up,” he repeated. “I’ve too much on my mind to be bothered by you now.”

She started to renew her abuse but was interrupted by a sharp slap across the mouth. “Quiet,” he admonished. “I warned you. A fine queen you’ll make,” he added contemptuously.

Menchaca’s arrival interrupted the scene. “Show him in here,” Miguel instructed. He seemed to have forgotten her presence.

“You took a long time.” Salazar’s eyes were searching. “Did you stay to make your peace with the *yanquis*?”

The captain growled in protest.

“You come fresh from a great victory that couldn’t have been won without you,” Salazar reminded him, “but I seem to be the only one who remembers your distinguished service. You would have been in command of the entire army now, if I’d been elected.”

“We were tricked,” Menchaca complained.

“Yet you control the army. I doubt if the *americanos* could muster a hundred able-bodied men. Shall we let them snatch this power from us when we should be the masters? They’re powerless if we choose to act. What’s your answer, Captain?” He filled Menchaca’s glass from the decanter on the table.

The captain raised his goblet in a powerful paw. “I will crush them—like this.” There was a tinkle of glass when his grip closed, vicelike, on the

fragile crystal. Red wine dripped from his clenched fist. “Only tell me what to do,” he urged. “They can’t cheat us.”

Miguel smiled. “Tonight we’ll seize control. You’ll muster your entire force under arms in the presidio. I’ll be with you. First, we’ll arrest Toledo and Gutierrez and proclaim the new government. Then we’ll move against the *americanos*. They must go. We’ll risk no more of their trickery.”

The plan was developed in detail. They felt sure of Sava’s loyalty. Menchaca’s army would overcome other opposition. The blow was timed for six o’clock, the supper hour. While the arrests were being made, other troops were to seize the presidio arsenal where the powder was stored and issued to the army only before impending action.

“With that in our hands the *americanos* will have no powder for their artillery and only a few rounds for their rifles.” Menchaca chuckled. “They couldn’t oppose us if there were five times as many.”

Neither of them heeded Teresa’s presence. She listened in silence as their coup was outlined. Miguel seemed to have forgotten her. His plan entirely engrossed him. Each man must understand his role in the events to come.

She stood by the window as they rode away. Her bruised lips were forgotten. The hurt went deeper than that. And if her hope had been rekindled by the intrigue she had overheard, its memory was jostled aside by the resentment which scorched her.

Toledo listened to Jonathan. While he depended on the Americans for initial support, he knew the insecurity of his position as long as the government was split into factions.

“Salazar is dangerous,” the Virginian warned. “He isn’t through. He’ll stop at nothing.”

“Then we must draw his fangs,” the new governor agreed. They had no hope of winning the disgruntled Menchaca’s support. It was different with Ruiz, Sava and Delgado. To each of these Toledo promptly gave an office. Francisco Ruiz was appointed alcalde of San Antonio, responsible for the restoration of order in the capital. “You’ll have a free hand in civil affairs,” the governor promised. “With a battalion at your disposal, I’m sure there’ll be no further disorders. In addition, you will hold court each morning at ten until our new form of government is functioning.”

“This will win back the confidence of the people,” the new mayor promised.

Delgado was summoned next. “You played a valiant part in the Battle of Alazan,” Toledo complimented him. “I feel that you’ve earned the right to be restored to your command permanently.”

The captain thanked him.

“But you must continue to earn this confidence,” the new governor went on. “I am dispatching you to La Bahia at the head of a hundred men.” He explained the duties imposed upon Ruiz in San Antonio. “You’ll function there in the same way,” he continued. “Disorder must be stamped out immediately, but there must be no ruthlessness. Remember our first interest is to win the trust of the people. Nothing else will unite them so quickly.”

Sava was sent to Nacogdoches on a similar mission.

The troops not accompanying their commanders on these hurried expeditions were transferred to Ruiz’ battalion. “You will quarter your men across the river in the mission,” the governor instructed. “It is best that we make no greater show of force in town than necessary.”

He sent for Don Bernardo Gutierrez, but too late. The deposed governor, infuriated by his removal, had already departed for the American border.

Perry was appointed commander of the army. His first act was to station Taylor’s company in the presidio to replace the native troops.

“I’ll feel better with the ammunition and cannon in our hands,” he told the captain.

All these arrangements were accomplished within a few hours. The strong points were in the hands of men whose loyalty was beyond question; those of whom there was less certainty were transferred. Delgado was pleased with his new responsibility. He had expected no more from Salazar.

Sava was more hesitant. He rode first to La Quinta in the hope of consulting Don Miguel, but was unable to see him. Salazar had left word he was not to be disturbed during his conference with Menchaca. Sava proceeded on his mission, unaware of their plot.

Salazar and Menchaca rode to the presidio in search of their confederates. They discovered the new dispositions when they were challenged at the gate by an American sentry. The captain was angered at this impertinence.

“I’m Menchaca,” he growled and started to ride on through.

The guard raised his rifle. “I don’t care who you are, you’ve got to have an order to pass here.”

The captain lost some of his assurance. These *americanos* were unpredictable. “I’m in command of these troops,” he snarled irascibly.

“I take my orders from Captain Taylor.”

“Send for Captain Sava,” Salazar suggested. “He’s the man we want to see.”

“He ain’t here.”

“Delgado then.”

"I don't know where you'd find him." The American was friendly enough, as long as they made no effort to proceed. "You might try 'crosst the river. Thar's troops over yonder in the old mission."

The two conspirators sought out Ruiz in his new headquarters. Once their identity was made known he came out at once. His greeting was affable. "There are great changes in the making," he said. "It's what we've needed for a long time."

"Where's Sava? What's become of Delgado?" Menchaca was in no humor to exchange pleasantries.

"They're on their way to their new posts by now." The alcalde explained what had happened.

"What!" The captain's voice was a surly roar. "These officers were under my command. Who dared send them away without consulting me?"

"Governor Toledo ordered it." The questioning antagonized the mayor. "Major Perry is in command of the army. If you have any complaint, I suggest you take it up with him. I'm principally concerned with civil matters."

"These *americanos* have lost no time in seizing control," Salazar interrupted, anxious to divert the conversation before his companion affronted Ruiz further.

"*Americanos*?" The question was filled with surprise. "Is Toledo an *americano*? He's our governor. Am I? I'm the alcalde of San Antonio. Are Sava and Delgado? They hold similar positions. Major Perry is the only *americano* who has been recognized at all, and where could we find a man who has done more to earn his honor?"

Salazar listened with foreboding. The success of his cabal depended on the missing captains and their troops. Even the arsenal was in Perry's hands. While he had been devising, Toledo had acted. Unless Menchaca could reassert his authority over the troops, the cause was hopeless.

"Has Toledo gone mad?" he demanded. "Has he rewarded everyone but the man who defeated Elizondo? What of Menchaca? What's his position in this new government?"

"We all fought Elizondo," the alcalde reminded him. "These are questions for you to ask Toledo himself. You'll find him at the governor's palace."

"But Menchaca still commands all the Mexican troops," Miguel persisted. "You are still subject to his orders."

"Only the governor can answer your questions," Ruiz maintained.

"Damnation!" Menchaca's furious bellow arrested the attention of half a hundred soldiers who turned to watch curiously. "These are my men just as you're one of my captains. Do you deny that?"

“I’m the alcalde,” Ruiz repeated abruptly. “These men were placed at my command by Toledo’s orders. I recognize no other authority.”

The irate commander turned to the troops who were edging closer to witness the dispute. “Arrest this man,” he shouted, pointing at Ruiz.

Menchaca’s popularity had waned recently. His men had taken pride in the fact that he was one of them, and in his undisputed courage, feeling that it reflected credit on them since he was a man of the people. But he had been quick to forget his origin. He wore silk stockings now and swaggered about in a uniform of sorts. Deluded by his egotism, which Salazar cunningly fanned, he had long since ceased to be the friendly fellow they had known.

They hesitated, uncertain of their duty.

“Arrest him, I say,” Menchaca roared again, glaring at them through bloodshot eyes. His bluster was his undoing; it emphasized his impotence when contrasted with Ruiz’ authoritative dignity.

“Remove him,” Ruiz ordered abruptly.

They hesitated no longer. They wore derisive grins on their faces as they advanced. Menchaca stared incredulously and braced himself for the conflict, but Salazar had no intention of permitting him to be so discredited before the army.

“Come—” he took his companion by the arm—“this is not the time to dispute them. It isn’t our day.”

In spite of his apparent calm, Miguel’s step faltered as they walked away.



# Chapter 9

## *Invasion Ends an Idyl*

LAWLESSNESS ended abruptly. Toledo's energy did not falter. The junta was revived as a lawmaking body, courts were established and a land office again set up to record the soldiers' claims in fulfillment of Magee's promise. There was some hesitancy over the form the new government should take. Many considered this a revolution in behalf of popular rule but were not ready to declare their complete independence from Spain; others—and the Americans were chief among these—wanted to set up an independent nation at once. In recognition of this, Toledo styled all his appointments temporary and promised a general election within three months to determine the government's final form. Each settlement was to share in the voting.

News of his successful administration spread across the border. Once more there was an influx of Americans. For the most part they were adventurers, hardy men lured to a new border; but there was a sprinkling of settlers among them, men whose families came with them over the long trail. This new tide reached its crest in late July when seventy-six Americans arrived in a single day. "We'll have more Americans than Mexicans by election time," Perry assured Jonathan. "The republic will win. There's no longer doubt of it."

With the return of peaceful times, Cecily's thoughts again turned to the projected colony. The grants had been duly registered at the land office and she was keen to start. Three wagons were stored with their necessities. Cecily's long-cherished furniture shared space with the tools they had collected and a generous store of supplies. This time they meant to stay. The wagons formed a slow procession. Cecily was seated in one beside her father. Cris and O'Rourke drove the others. Jess and Giles rode ahead with Jonty as they left San Antonio.

Cecily first glimpsed the place when shadows lay on the hills and the long day's haze touched the wide plains beyond; a strip of green marked the river's lazy course.

"That's Marsten's Hill." Jonathan pointed out the landmarks. "I'll be right across the river from you. That grove of oaks yonder is where I'm

going to build my house.”

Cecily took a deep breath. “No wonder you wanted to come back.” Her eyes eagerly explored the scene. “Sometimes I’ve had my doubts about this country,” she added; “we’ve paid such a price for it. We’ll have to make a good life here, Jonty, if it’s going to be worth its cost.”

“Someone paid that price for the land we left,” he replied. “It wasn’t always so safe. Men died to win it, and they fought again to keep it free.” He paused, groping for words. “My father’s house is called Redfields. Most people think it’s named for the color of its fields, but he says not. He hopes future owners will be reminded of the blood it cost. He was with Morgan’s Rifles at Saratoga and fought all through the war. ‘It’s a good land,’ he says, ‘because men were willing to die to make it so.’

“Here we’re living through the violent times. I suppose someday it’ll be hard for people to realize this was once a frontier.”

They decided to join together in building one cabin which would serve them as headquarters. This would be the Marsten house, situated on its hill facing the river. It was heavy work but there were six of them to share it, with Cecily relieving them of the camp chores. The timber was cut along the river bottom, the dressed logs dragged to the site by straining horses. O’Rourke was the teamster, his missing arm no handicap at this task.

They used a design familiar along American frontiers. Actually, they built two cabins, eighteen feet square, set in a line twenty feet apart, and covered with a single roof so that, when completed, the rooms were separated by a covered gallery. The timbers were square hewn and notched to fit snugly, and there was a fireplace at each end. One room was the kitchen, soon made homelike with Cissy’s familiar furniture. It was the dining and living room too, as well as Ben Marsten’s bedroom. The second chamber was Cecily’s. There were pallets for the others in the long loft above, reached by steps from the kitchen.

They were hard days but they were filled with planning and doing. San Antonio and the long campaign seemed very far away, until suddenly their work was brought to an end by the arrival of a messenger. The men were in the river bottom cutting timber when he galloped in. Cecily summoned them with a rifle shot. They came hurriedly.

“It’s a messenger from Perry,” Jonathan declared when he saw the drooping horse outside the cabin.

“Bad news,” Jess added glumly. “He’s ridden hard.”

He was right. A new Spanish army was invading Texas under General Arredondo. Toledo was gathering his forces for the struggle. Messengers

had been hurried to La Bahia and Nacogdoches to call in every available man, and the outlying settlements were being warned. McFarland, whose scouts had reported the advance, sent word that the Spaniards were destroying every house in their path.

“Better take along what you can,” the messenger advised. “It probably wouldn’t be here when you get back.”

In spite of his warning, they decided against trying to remove their belongings. Time was too pressing and wagons would delay them. Equipment they could not store in the house they concealed with the vehicles in a brake along the river bottom. Their preparations were speedily completed; within two hours they were riding for San Antonio, driving the spare horses before them.

Memory of Teresa still bothered Jonathan. Not in the same way—his craving for her was gone—but he found it impossible to close his mind to all his recollections. She had loved him. Even her hysteria when he escaped from Teran’s trap attested that, although it convicted her of guilty knowledge.

One question remained uncertain. Was she Miguel’s mistress? If not, had his departure caused her to turn to the Spaniard? The thought tormented him.

Sometimes he jeered at himself. “You still want her, you can’t forget her,” he’d say then. Yet he knew that wasn’t true.

“It’s just that I can’t abandon a girl I once loved to a man like Salazar,” he finally concluded.

He had money. He had scarcely touched the gold in the belt his father had given him. He would give her enough to get back to New Orleans, he decided. She need not depend on Salazar for anything.

This was in his mind when he went to La Quinta the morning after his return. Maria answered the door, and tried to close it when she saw who it was.

“She is not home, señor,” she protested, when he pushed his way in.

“She’ll see me this time.”

“No, señor, she is—she is riding in her coach.”

“At this hour? I doubt if she’s finished breakfast. Tell her I’m here,” Jonathan insisted.

The voices were clearly audible in the dining room. Teresa knew who it was. For an instant hope flamed in her eyes, and then she bit her lip, conscious of Miguel’s searching stare.

“Sounds like you have a caller,” he said. “Who can it be?”

“I don’t know.”

“You know very well and so do I. Come here, Teresa.”

She stood up, facing him sullenly. “What do you want?”

He eyed her sheer breakfast robe. She wore little else. He could tell by the way it clung to her. “I’m not going to beat you—though you probably deserve it. Come here!”

She hesitated, uncertain whether she dared defy him.

“Do I have to make all the advances?” He chuckled as he rounded the table. His fingers closed on her wrist. “I only want to kiss you.”

He sat in her chair and pulled her after him, into his lap. Then, before she could guess his purpose, he jerked open her gown and stripped it from her shoulders.

“In here, Maria!” he shouted. “Show the fellow in here if he wants to see my wench.”

Jonathan halted in the doorway. Teresa was sprawled in Miguel’s lap, his kisses covering her body. Her eyes blazed, she writhed and her hands were clutched in his hair. Trailing on the floor was the saffron robe that once had haunted his memory.

He didn’t wait to see more. He turned quickly and strode from the house.

“Damn you! Damn you!” Teresa finally managed to jerk back Miguel’s head. She beat her fists against him and cried in her fury.

He shielded his face from her blows and laughed.

Toledo raised a formidable force, numbering more than three thousand men. There were eight hundred and fifty Americans under Perry, a larger force than Kemper had commanded. McFarland was sent among the Indians again. He raised six hundred warriors, most of them Lipans. The bulk of the force was Mexican. Since the institution of the new government the native population had grown strong in its loyalty. There were seventeen hundred of these volunteers.

Each of the old leaders was in a place of authority. Delgado and Sava had been recalled, and Menchaca restored to a command, his doughty services at Alazan not forgotten. The native troops were divided into two regiments, Menchaca heading one, aided by Sava, Ruiz leading the other, seconded by Delgado. McFarland’s Indians were organized as a separate unit. An American named Young, from Taylor’s company, proved himself expert in the handling of cannon and was elevated to a lieutenancy in charge of artillery. Ammunition was short and again only the six best pieces were selected for use. Another American, a newcomer named Bullard, whose

abilities had attracted attention, was promoted to the rank of captain and made Toledo's aide.

The Americans were formed into two battalions under Taylor and Gaines, now fully recovered from his wounds, with Jonathan once more his second in command. Wooden lances were a thing of the past; there were bayonets to spare from the spoils of past victories.

Miguel Salazar glumly watched the bustle of preparation in which he had no part. His schemes had all collapsed in the face of Toledo's energy. At first, contemptuous of other men's abilities, he regarded the setback as only a temporary interruption against which his superior talents would prevail. Menchaca was bewildered by the swift events which had tumbled him from authority, but Salazar returned to his devices. Pedro Teran was gone but his cutthroats were loosed again to spread terror in the outlying districts. Once more he used the sly Luiz as an emissary to stir up lawlessness. But Ruiz organized a posse that ran the bandits down. Three of them were slain in the battle that followed and the others faced immediate trial in the newly established courts. Justice was summary: the were hanged. Luiz' fate was even more swift. He was shot down while trying to escape from the scene of a robbery.

"Just as well," mused his master when he heard the news. "The fellow was a coward; he would have talked too much."

But as frustration followed frustration, Miguel grew more saturnine. Teresa contributed to his vexation. She alternated between sullen discontent and stormy rebellion. One day she was a sharp-tongued vixen reminding him of failure. The next, she would turn her back on the wreckage of their dreams, begging him to take her back to New Orleans.

"Even if you were a king here, what would you have?" she demanded. "I'm sick of the squalid place. Take me back, Miguel, back to the cities again." From her windows she caught glimpses of a life which reminded her too much of Motin.

When Menchaca was restored to command, Miguel took new hope. "This is our opportunity," he told the captain. "With an army at your back, who's to prevent us from seizing power, just as we planned?"

"First, we defeat Arredondo," was the practical reply.

"But after that," Miguel insisted, "will they forget you again? They call for Menchaca when there's a battle to be won, but they forget him when the fighting's over. That must not happen again."

The captain scowled at the wine, red in his glass. "You're right, *viejo*. This time there'll be a different end to the matter."

Toledo had no intention of waiting to be attacked. It had been the revolution's misfortune to lose its most aggressive warriors, but the new

governor, while not a soldier, possessed the spirit of Magee. He was determined to drive the invader out. Perry agreed in principle but he wanted to delay. Each day re-enforcements swelled his command. When a scout reported the enemy only a long day's march away, the governor took immediate action. The word came at midmorning on August seventeenth; by noon the army was marching south.

Kirk's Scouts had returned to their old quarters in La Villita. There was scant time for good-bys before they were off.

"We'll be back in a couple of days," Cris assured his sister. "They've never whipped us yet."

"You'd think they'd be gettin' a mite discouraged by now," Giles Brady added. "If somebody had licked me three or four times, I'd be a leetle leary of pickin' a scrap with him. Won't these *gachupines* ever larn?"

"Oh, I'm not worried," Cecily replied. "This will surely be the last of the battles. Soon we'll all be going home again."

To Jonathan she revealed more anxiety. "Take good care of them, Jonty. That's what I asked you before, isn't it?"

"I'll do my best," he promised. He was as sanguine as ever. "Don't you go worrying about us."

"I can't help it, but I'll feel safer knowing they're with you."

"Shucks, we're the ones that look after him." Jess derided her fears. "Don't you fret, Cissy; we'll all be back. I reckon we're too mean to die."

"He's right," Jonathan said. "You wait right here for us. We'll be headed back for Marsten Hill before you've had time to miss us." And then, surprisingly, he kissed her on the lips before he turned away.

Jonathan crossed the Medina River with twenty men and rode some miles south in the hope of capturing prisoners, but without success. He saw enemy patrols but each was too strong for him. He reported back at sunset.

"It's as large an army as we met before," he told Toledo, "and they're better led. There are no stragglers and cavalry is alert on their flanks. This Arredondo seems to know his business."

"Where are they?" the governor demanded.

"I'd guess their camp isn't more than five miles from ours tonight."

Toledo had halted his army on the north bank of the Medina. Every precaution was taken. Pickets were thrown out across the river and the sentries were on the alert. The army's appearance was more martial than at any time since Magee's death, and this encouraged Jonathan.

"I believe Toledo knows what he's doing," he told his companions before departing for the meeting of officers which the governor had called.

It was a council to determine the plan of battle. The governor made his proposal first. "I want to trap them when they're crossing the river," he

began. “The passage is narrow. If they try to widen their front they’ll hit deep water. We can command the ford with artillery and open up on them after half their force has passed. We’ll divide and destroy them piecemeal.”

He outlined the details of his suggestion. Strong companies of riflemen up and down the stream would cut off any support Arredondo might try to lend his advance elements.

“What becomes of the others?” Menchaca protested. “That still leaves Arredondo to deal with.”

“With half his army destroyed he won’t be such a dangerous foe,” Toledo explained.

“I don’t like it.” The captain was blunt in his protest. “It leaves us two battles to fight instead of one. I favor pouncing on them at once, destroying their whole army. That’s the way we did at Alazan . . . but of course you weren’t there.” His manner was truculent. He would have opposed any plan endorsed by Toledo, but he found unexpected support for his views.

“We’d still have to cross the river to get at Arredondo, no matter how successful our trap proved to be,” Perry said. “The dangers of that crossing work both ways. If his advance is as careful as Jonty describes it, he’ll throw his cavalry across first. We’d still have his artillery to deal with and it could cut us to pieces in the ford.”

“There would be no necessity for charging the river,” Toledo pointed out. “That would be the enemy’s problem in trying to reach us.”

“He’d have too much sense to try it again after one taste of it,” Menchaca growled. “He’d turn around and head back for Mexico. I don’t want him to escape.”

“In that event we could pursue and destroy him,” Toledo persisted.

“Menchaca is right.” Perry twisted his ear thoughtfully. “I don’t want to lead my men across a stream in the face of enemy artillery.”

“Don’t you see? You’re arguing for my plan. I want to place Arredondo in the very position that has you worried. Have you a better suggestion?”

“I’d advise crossing the stream at dawn,” the American replied, “and advancing until we find a suitable spot for this ambush of yours. I like the rest of your scheme. Once we trap the head of their column, it’ll be Rosillo and Alazan over again. We’ll teach them a lesson they’ll never forget. It will put a stop to these invasions.”

Toledo stared in perplexity at his officers. “And if anything goes wrong,” he said uneasily, “we have the river at our backs. Ours will be the force that’s cut to pieces.”

“Those of us who’ve had experience aren’t looking for a road to the rear.” Menchaca’s voice held a jeering note. “Perhaps you’d better leave the fighting to soldiers.”

The governor flushed but restrained his temper. “We’ll put it to a vote,” he decided. “I still favor the plan I’ve described. I believe we should take every sensible precaution to make victory certain.”

“Don’t worry, governor, we have the measure of these *gachupines*. We aren’t taking unnecessary risks.” Taylor expressed the feeling of the American veterans. They had faced desperate odds on more than one occasion, but always they had won. None doubted their ability to do so now.

Only Bullard and Ruiz voted with Toledo. Menchaca had his way. None of them thought the plan rash.



# Chapter 10

## *Thinning Ranks*

WHILE TOLEDO'S officers argued, a similar council was held in the royalist camp but there Arredondo's authority permitted no dispute. His two principal aides were Elizondo, who had a remnant of only four hundred men left from his defeated army, and Major Manuel Zambrano, who had wrested San Antonio from the republicans in the early days of the Hidalgo Revolution and was familiar with the territory. Arredondo had chosen the site of battle on favorable ground, and throughout the night his army was busy setting up concealed fortifications. These took the form of a V, open on the side facing the Americans. He intended that the bulk of his troops should fight behind an impregnable abatis. Along the walls of the V a breastwork of logs was constructed, bristling with sharpened stakes. Freshly cut brush cunningly masked these defenses.

He had eleven pieces of artillery, most of them heavy, concealed where their cross fire would be concentrated on a foe at the mouth of his ambush. His problem was to lure Toledo's army into the jaws of the trap, and this was the subject of discussion.

"You will advance with your full force until you make contact with them," he told Elizondo. "Once you meet their main army they'll be too strong for you. That's when you'll fall back. Your retreat must be orderly; they must be drawn into the snare."

"There's danger that I'll be cut off," Elizondo objected. "My force is too small for the role."

"It will be Zambrano's task to support you. He will prevent that," the commander continued. "I have held back two pieces of light artillery for him. When they open up, you'll know you're directly in front of the main position. That will be your last determined stand. As you withdraw, your troops will swing to the right, Zambrano's to the left, letting the enemy charge through. From that point the battle will be in my hands. Do you understand your orders perfectly?"

Each officer repeated his instructions and the details were rehearsed once more before Arredondo was satisfied.

Toledo advanced with caution. The crossing of the Medina was accomplished uneventfully at dawn. A thin line of scouts under Jonathan Kirk led the way while the main force, organized in battalions, followed in four columns. The American battalions protected the flanks, Gaines on the right, Taylor on the left. The center was divided also, for readier handling, Menchaca commanding one half, Ruiz the other. These were the Mexican troops, seventeen hundred strong. Young's artillery was directly behind them. In support came McFarland with his six hundred Indians.

The first contact was between the opposing picket lines. Jonathan advanced cautiously after apprising Toledo of the situation. The commander hurried forward. With him were Perry, Bullard, Menchaca and Ruiz. The site seemed favorable to them, with the enemy concentrated in a shallow valley to their front.

"We have the best position," Perry declared. "We'll drive 'em down the slope." The ground ahead was fairly open, the opposing skirmishers firing through the tall grass. About a mile beyond stood a dark wood and, advancing from this direction, came Elizondo's main force. The Texas army had advanced about a mile south of the river.

"Engage them now," Perry advised, "where we have them in the open. You can watch developments from here and keep us informed."

From the vantage of the high ground the battlefield would spread before Toledo like a chessboard.

The skirmishers were drawn in and attached to Gaines's column as the action began; the disposition of the troops was otherwise unchanged. Young's artillery opened fire from the hillside. The Spaniards fought stubbornly, but were outmatched. Menchaca and Ruiz pressed them back while the Americans threatened their flanks. The retreat became more rapid. When half the distance to the forest was covered, Toledo saw Zambrano hurrying up re-enforcements. The *gachupines* had been compelled to alter their plan in order to avert catastrophe for Elizondo. The supporting force had been drawn out of its fixed position.

"They have artillery!" Bullard exclaimed. "This is their main body."

With Zambrano's help, Elizondo made a determined stand. Their artillery halted Menchaca until it was silenced by Young's accurate fire. The Texas leaders were convinced they now were engaging the full enemy power, and the royalists were wavering.

Menchaca ordered a charge as soon as the cannon before him were put out of action. Ruiz was quick to support him. The two columns surged forward with fixed bayonets, unchecked by the scattered volley which greeted them.

“They run! They run!” Menchaca shouted. “Keep after them.” He was determined the shattered line should have no time to re-form. He was at his best in such headlong action. His bravery was conspicuous as he led the advance. Ruiz had asked the privilege of carrying the green flag into battle with his column and it fluttered forward now, as his line matched Menchaca’s rush. The enemy fell back rapidly; their artillery was captured.

Zambrano rallied his forces at the forest’s edge. This had been the position originally chosen for his stand. The fight here was brief. Menchaca, tasting victory, had not halted his drive; his bayonets ripped at the tottering ranks. The *gachupine* flight grew precipitate. Toledo’s entire army joined the charge, the units not yet in action eager for a part in the triumph. All caution was abandoned. McFarland’s Indians broke their formation and bounded forward, lusting to be in at the kill.

Arredondo’s careful plan had been disarranged in the early stages of the battle. Zambrano had been drawn out of position, and what had been meant for a stubborn retreat had turned into a rout. But the royal commander refused to forsake his fortifications to rescue his subordinates and their panic helped rather than hindered him. The Texas force, hurled forward to cut down a retreating foe, headed straight for his ambush.

Only Toledo still clung to the caution for which his officers chided him. All his intelligence had warned him against a far stronger force than any he had engaged. He galloped forward now, trying vainly to check the scrambling assault.

“Halt your men!” he ordered Menchaca. “They’re getting out of hand. Re-form your line.”

If the captain heard him he gave no sign. He was gripped by the fever of conflict. He stared blankly at his commander from smoke-reddened eyes. “Follow me!” he roared, and lunged on in pursuit.

“No! Back! Back!” Toledo strove in vain to turn them.

In converging upon the scurrying enemy, all four Texas columns had advanced straight into the mouth of Arredondo’s trap. The general had watched imperturbably while a part of his army was cut to fragments. Now he claimed vengeance. His artillery erupted deafeningly, drowning the harsh rattle of musketry with its blast. Hot metal flailed the Texas ranks from the whole length of the hidden abatis. Flame spewed as the Spanish guns continued their deadly coughing. The charging line faltered. Death blazed from both sides. There was no want of bravery here but the orders were conflicting.

“Fall back! Fall back!” Toledo shouted.

“Follow me!” cried Menchaca.

Each commander sought to rally his own company. The wisdom of Toledo's counsel had been proved but his efforts resulted only in confusion. Taylor, on the left, obeyed the command. His company fell back in good order, extricating itself from the trap. Menchaca tried to charge and Ruiz supported him. Perry joined Gaines's column on the right. "Retreat, hell!" he roared. "We've never been licked yet and we won't start now." The company held its ground but the cross fire plowed gaping furrows in its ranks.

Menchaca led straight for the abatis, heedless of the metal that buzzed around him, tearing at the shrubbery which concealed the enemy bulwark as he strove to pierce the line. His men followed. Momentarily there seemed to be a chance of success until the captain fell. Then the charge wavered, its first ranks vanishing under the searing fire.

Ruiz tried. Men rallied to his green flag as it gallantly advanced, but there was too much death in that ghastly angle. The ground was slippery and red now. The column reeled under the hammering, swayed uncertainly as it tried to close up the shattered ranks, and then broke. The thunder followed them as they fled. Toledo was there, trying to check their panic, but his mounted figure made an easy target. Bullard extricated him from beneath his dead horse and tried to drag him to safety.

"How badly are you hurt?" he asked.

The governor himself did not know; one arm hung useless and there was blood on his tunic. "Rally the troops," he ordered. "Re-form them beyond the woods. I'll look after myself."

Bullard tried. But it was too late. He was able to gather only a handful of dazed men.

When Taylor saw the center crumple, his men had withdrawn to safety, obedient to orders. There was no longer anyone in direction of the field. He could see Perry and Gaines standing their ground on the right. He had no idea of abandoning his friends. The disposition of the enemy was now clear. He ordered a charge in an effort to sweep around the left end of the royalist breastworks and roll up their line. His company was intact and his men went forward with a wild yell.

McFarland charged too, his Indians proving unexpectedly stanch. With them came Young and his artillerymen, and Bullard with his rallied few. They forced their way to Perry's side and the battle resolved itself into two separate conflicts. Perry's mixed force on the right and Taylor's on the left were two islands of resistance in a hostile sea, for, by this time, Zambrano and Elizondo had their troops in hand again, and had closed in on the rear, making a triangle of the V and engulfing the Americans. It was the *gachupines'* turn to charge. Men fought with every weapon at hand, first

with rifles, then bayonets, finally knives. Kirk's company was on the right, grimly fending off the crowding enemy.

"Stick together," Jonathan cautioned, "and we'll come out of this all right. We've been in tight spots before."

They fought in a grim little knot. Giles Brady had been the first to fall. That was early in the battle, under the scourge of the gachupine artillery.

When Perry realized that the unequal odds threatened to overwhelm his command, he decided to join Taylor. He ordered a charge straight across the base of the bloody triangle. Its audacity was aided by the fact that Arredondo could no longer use his cannon without endangering his own swarming infantry. With their forces united, the Americans took heart, but once more the determined foe closed in. McFarland's Indians, steadfast until now, measured the hopeless odds and began to fall away. Their leader tried to rally them but a bullet ended his effort. Soon there were none left but Americans, and half of them had fallen.

O'Rourke, his pistols empty, was savagely swinging a broken rifle against the advancing ranks. Its butt crunched as it found a target, but other bayonets pressed forward before the Irishman could recover his balance. Ben Marsten saw his peril and lunged to clear a protecting path before his friend, until the red blades felled him. O'Rourke saw it happen. He was a snarling, howling madman as he straddled his fallen comrade and tried to buffet back the cruel tide. The long bayonets were resistless. They cut him down there.

Young was dead. Bullard and Gaines were both severely wounded, and blood trickled unheeded down Perry's face. More than five hundred of the Americans had perished on that grim field and still they resisted stubbornly. But the issue was no longer in doubt. The attack was pressed relentlessly, and each time they shook it off their numbers thinned.

Until Marsten fell, Jonathan resisted with unshaken resolution. "How can I face Cissy now?" he asked himself in despair, and for an instant her eyes seemed to reproach him through the red mist of battle. He fought then with a stormy fury and the grisly havoc seemed to fit his relentless temper. Once Cris exposed himself needlessly and Jonathan thrust him back. "Stay behind me," he barked, and to himself he added, "I've got to take one of them home."

The desperation of their position had become clear before Perry reluctantly gave his final order. "It's time we cut our way out of here," he shouted. "Stick together and follow me."

Jonathan glanced about to locate his friends. Jess Leeman still fought steadily on his left, but Cris had disappeared. "Cris!" he yelled. "Cris, where are you?"

The boy's reply was inaudible above the din. It was Jess who saw him on the ground, his shirt slowly turning red.

"How bad you hurt, boy?"

Cris' face was white but he was able to sit up. "Not too bad, I reckon, Jess."

Jonathan dragged the lad to his feet and slipped a supporting arm under his shoulder. "Can you walk?"

"I think so."

"Then hang on to me. We're getting out of here."

Their final dash clove through the surprised royalist line, unprepared for such weird tactics from a tottering foe. Perry led the way with berserk energy, followed by a thin, determined rank of demons. They tried to carry some of their wounded with them. Gaines was supported between two of his men; Cris staggered behind Jonathan, clinging to his belt. The woods extended westward toward a curve of the river in a widening strip and they clung to its cover as they retreated, sullenly driving off the first hurried efforts at pursuit.

It was noon when the battle was broken off. The first skirmishers had engaged before six that morning and Zambrano had been driven back at seven. The battle at the scene of the ambush had begun at seven thirty and lasted four and a half hours. Casualties in all units had been heavy, but the American losses had been staggering. Of the eight hundred and fifty men Perry had led that morning, more than seven hundred were left dead on the field, and the long afternoon was before them with a relentless foe at their heels. Of the Texas leaders, Toledo had fallen and his fate was uncertain; Menchaca, McFarland, Young and Sava were dead, and most of the others wounded.

Aware of the extent of the catastrophe, Perry's first thought was to save as many of his men as possible. The survivors were too few to make a stand. Moving as a unit, they would invite attack. He directed them to break up into small groups, believing in this way they had the best chance of eluding pursuit. These bands were to make their way to the river, hide until nightfall, and then begin their flight to Nacogdoches. None of them was mounted, there were no provisions for the long trip, but it seemed the only desperate chance of escape.

A number of the fugitives made their way toward San Antonio, some hoping to rejoin the remnants of Toledo's army in defense of the town, others in search of horses and provisions.

Jonathan and Jess remained together, half supporting the stumbling Cris. They were part of a larger group for a time but Jess counseled against this. "I'd ruther we took our chances by ourselves," he told Jonathan. "I can hole

up in these woods for a month against the whole royal army. I can hide the three of us, but not this many. Let's split up."

They left the others at the river's edge and scurried along its winding bank until the woodsman found a hiding place that satisfied him. It was under a shelving bank which protected them from above, its approach screened by a clump of willows. They bandaged Cris's wound with strips of his tattered shirt. A musket ball had pierced his left shoulder but the wound was high and they were encouraged by its appearance.

"Shucks, I've had skeeter bites worse'n that," Jess declared, dampening the bandage to ease the fever.

All through the afternoon there was sporadic firing through the woods as Arredondo's cavalry hunted down escaping men. Once a troop galloped close by, on the bank above, but it did not stop. Far to the north the volleys persisted with greater regularity. That was the route to San Antonio and they tried to understand the sound.

"I guess someone's still fightin'," Jess suggested hopefully.

Jonathan was tortured by the thought of Cecily waiting for their return. It was going to be hard to tell her about her father. But a girl alone in a captured city! He must find a way to reach her.

"I've got to get to town, Jess," he announced. "I'm thinking of Cissy. We've got to get her out of there."

# Chapter 11

## *The Rape of San Antonio*

ARREDONDO'S pursuit of the broken army was swift and deadly. There was much to avenge and he was savagely determined that the retribution be indelibly fixed in the minds of traitorous subjects everywhere. No quarter was given. Searching parties scoured the field to bayonet the wounded. Elizondo was hurried forward on the trail of the scattered army at the head of a strong force of cavalry. Zambrano ransacked the woods as far as the river to hunt down stragglers.

The stubborn American resistance gained time for the fugitives and spared many from the butchery. But Elizondo's advance was rapid, and he took stern satisfaction in settling the score for his humiliation at Alazan. The Medina ford was a funnel through which the disorganized retreat trickled, and there were no unwounded officers left to restore order. Hundreds of leaderless men were still on the south bank of the stream, awaiting their turn to cross, when Elizondo fell on them. More than two hundred fell here under the sabers.

Each fugitive was executed where captured. Salcedo's fate dictated the procedure: the prisoners were beheaded and then hanged by the heels from the nearest tree. "It will remind them of the fate of better men," Elizondo said.

Not more than a dozen Americans died this way. They were still dangerous in their dogged retreat and the only stragglers left behind were the wounded who could travel no farther. The fate of the Mexican regiments was different; more than four hundred headless bodies marked their trail.

San Antonio awaited news of the battle with confidence. Faith in Toledo was great, and buoyed up by the conviction that the Americans were unbeatable. "Before, we've always been outnumbered," was the current of opinion, "but look at our army this time. It's more than three thousand strong."

The battle's first refugees reached the town on lathered horses before the obstinate Americans had left the field. Numbed crowds thronged the streets, saying little at first, unable to comprehend the disaster. They grew



clamorous as bedraggled troops began to follow the first messengers, and panic spread. Each new arrival added somber details to the story: Menchaca was dead; Sava and Toledo had fallen; the *americanos* had fought bravely but all had perished. No leaders were left to rally them.

Cecily waited with the rest. She didn't credit the early rumors fully. There had been no Americans among the fugitives. She took heart from this. Menchaca had been defeated, certainly, but Perry had eight hundred and fifty men; a smaller force had won the Battle of Rosillo. She warmed her courage with the hope. A few other American women were waiting, too. She found consolation in their company but as the heavy hours dragged on and she saw the general terror mount, her fear grew.

"Jonty will bring them back," she kept assuring herself. "He always has."

Near sundown Toledo arrived. He had three wounds and was borne on a crude litter. The crowds were silent as he was carried to the governor's palace. Here was one who was better dead on the battlefield. Others might be spared but execution would certainly be the fate of the rebellious chief.

He knew their thoughts. He had no illusions about his fate should he fall into Arredondo's hands. He ordered a carriage at once.

"But you aren't able to travel," the physician protested. "You'll die on the road."

"Then I'll die trying," was the retort. "If we can rally a force at Nacogdoches, we haven't lost yet. What's the news from Perry?"

There still was no word from the Americans.

Toledo penned a letter to General Arredondo. "You have won an honorable victory," he wrote. "I ask you in the name of the king you represent not to tarnish that honor by revenging yourself upon a helpless population. As the head of this government, I accept full responsibility for all that has occurred.

"Let our destinies be settled between the leaders and their armies. I entreat you to spare an innocent people from a punishment they do not merit."

He left the note on his desk before he was driven away. He was mercifully unconscious by the time the carriage had bounced a mile over the long, rough trail to Nacogdoches.

Salazar expected victory. "Menchaca will come back a hero and I'll be master of this place yet," he told Teresa. "The collapse of my lieutenants frustrated me before. With him strong again I'll overthrow Toledo and drive out the American rabble regardless of the cost. This is our chance, Teresa. Arredondo doesn't know it but he's fighting for me."

Her petulance was soothed by his expanding mood. She began to hope again, and masked her hatred with laughter, though her gaiety sometimes grew sharp with suspense. First news of the disaster stunned them.

“No, no, it can’t be true,” Teresa cried.

“Menchaca dead!” Miguel went stiff with shock. As soon as he could pull himself together he slipped out into the crowd and was gone an hour, hunting further information. When he returned he seemed not to notice the storm of Teresa’s bitterness. Once he interrupted her to say wearily, “You’ll get your wish now. We’ll return to New Orleans.” Already refugees were speeding from the town, many in creaking wagons, lashing their teams into a gallop once the crowded streets were left behind. Miguel watched them go, dully. He seemed unable to shake off his lassitude.

“Shall I tell José to harness the horses?” Teresa paused in her frenzied packing to ask. He was at the window staring at the confusion in a daze.

“Later,” he said. “There’s no need for haste.”

She hesitated. His inertia was more difficult to oppose than his anger would have been. But she ordered the carriage. Time was slipping by.

It was six o’clock when the Americans came. The news rustled through the town from lip to lip. Cecily heard it and forced her way through the mob. Perhaps Jonathan was there; she would hear word of her father and Cris.

But she saw no familiar faces. Her trepidation increased as she noted how few they were—only forty-six and fully half of them wounded—survivors of Taylor’s battalion who had joined in Perry’s final charge.

“Where are the others?” Cecily asked a soldier. The bandage on his arm was caked with dust.

“Thar ain’t many others,” was his grim answer. “After we cut our way out, Perry ordered us to split up so’s we’d have a better chanc’t to git away. I reckon the others crossed the river and headed for Nacogdoches. We come this way hopin’ we might find the rest of the army.”

“How about Kirk’s Scouts? Did you see any of them?”

“They war with Gaines. That’s all I know. I was too busy to see what was goin’ on somewhar else. If any of ’em got away they crossed the river and headed east with Perry.”

Cecily repeated her questions over and over. But the answer was always the same. When she turned away she stumbled and her eyes burned with unshed tears. Some of them must have escaped, she kept telling herself. She clutched at this straw. That was it: they were with Perry falling back toward Nacogdoches. And yet she couldn’t convince herself. “They wouldn’t have left me here alone. If any of them are alive, they’ll come back for me.”

The few American families were joining the flight. Two women invited Cecily to go with them but she shook her head. “I must wait,” she answered.

"I must be here when my men come back. How else could they find me?"

The woman at the reins started to remonstrate but seemed to realize how futile it would be. "I wish I felt that way," she said compassionately. "Maybe you're right in waitin'." Then she flicked the team with her whip and her voice lost its gentleness. "Giddap," she croaked.

Salazar threw off his lethargy when he learned of the leaderless Americans.

"It's time we started," Teresa urged. "Until I heard the Americans were cut to pieces I still had hope, but that's gone now. We must get out. The Spaniards will be here any moment."

"How far do you think we'd get?" Salazar's smile was derisive. "Arredondo's cavalry will catch these fugitives and herd them back like so many sheep. There's no escape that way."

"What are we going to do? What mercy do you expect from the *gachupines*?"

"I think I know the answer now." Miguel's confidence was returning. "Leave everything to me." He hurried from the house.

His was the first authority displayed in San Antonio and it inspired confidence. "Retreat is out of the question," he told the American company. "The *gachupine* cavalry would cut you down. What's needed is a strong defense until Perry has time to rally the army. We'll fight behind stone walls. Remember how we turned Salcedo back at La Bahia? There are hundreds who will join us if we make a firm stand.

"It's our only hope," he added. "If they catch us in the open we haven't a chance."

His final argument was the most persuasive. The men had been fighting and marching since dawn; they were too weary to go on.

"If we just had enough men to hold the presidio, they'd never drive us out," one replied. "But there are only forty-six of us."

"I've got a better position than that," Salazar promised. "La Quinta is just as strong, and smaller. Fifty men could stand off an army. If we can hold it a week Perry will be back to help us."

Thirty-two survivors of Menchaca's command took courage from their resolution and joined them. The crowd cheered feebly as Salazar led the little force away.

Teresa watched them occupy her garden with consternation. "Have you lost your mind?" Her voice was shrill with panic as she faced Miguel. "What chance have these scarecrows against an army?"

"None," he assured her. "No more than we'd have, had we joined the panic-stricken throng on the road to Nacogdoches. But their presence will

save your pretty neck.” He was his old assured self. “Where’s José? I want him to saddle my horse at once.”

To the men he had offered shelter he explained that he hoped to rally other groups to aid in the resistance. They watched him ride away with no misgivings.

Elizondo was within sight of San Antonio when he halted his cavalry. He had unpleasant memories of the resistance encountered there before. The narrow streets and stone buildings offered traps unless he was wary. A royalist picket raised his weapon as a horseman came galloping toward them.

“Hold your fire,” the colonel instructed. “This seems to be a friend. The rebels are all traveling in the other direction.”

“*Por Dios!* I’m glad to see you,” Salazar exclaimed when within hailing distance. The commanding officer was easy to identify and he spurred toward him, introducing himself before he dismounted. “I’m Miguel Salazar of Mexico City. These rebellious dogs have held me prisoner because of my loyalty to the king.”

“Very surprising.” Elizondo’s shrewd eyes measured his visitor. “How did you keep your head on your shoulders? I thought the loyalists all were murdered with Salcedo.”

“A terrible business!” Miguel exclaimed. “I was spared only because my niece was with me. I insisted on bringing her to Mexico and the others were being sent to New Orleans. I’m sure it was she who saved me.”

“I expect to find many new loyalists,” the officer commented dryly. “Our swords are very persuasive.”

“If necessary, my connections in Mexico City will vouch for me—” Miguel betrayed no uneasiness—“but my actions are the best witness. I have trapped the remaining garrison in my house. You will meet no resistance elsewhere and I have come to turn these men over to you.”

“Excellent! How strong is this force?”

“There are seventy-eight in all, forty-six Americans and thirty-two Mexicans.”

“In one house?” Elizondo looked skeptical.

“There’s a walled garden where most of them have taken refuge, but it is exposed on the side facing the river,” Miguel explained. “As for those in the house, I told them I was going in search of re-enforcements. They’ll suspect nothing when I appear with some of your men. We’ll be admitted without question.”

The chill of Elizondo’s manner grew less marked. “You have done well,” he admitted. “I hardly think you’d have dared come to me with any trickery. First, we’ll arrange to surprise your house.”

One hundred men were placed at Salazar's disposal for the task. They entered town from the east, the direction the fugitives had taken. Sixty men were dismounted with instructions to proceed down the river bank until opposite La Quinta, where they could pour a destructive fire into the garden. Forty rode boldly to the house with Miguel in the lead. When he was recognized, the door was thrown open. They thought he brought help. The dozen Americans in the hall were overpowered and the house captured before the defenders realized what was going on. The men in the garden were trapped. From the front, their position was commanded by the building, while their rear was exposed to the rifles across the river. The stout walls at the sides, which they had hoped to defend, penned them in. When the hopelessness of their position was made clear, they surrendered. There was no resistance elsewhere. The only men remaining were too old to bear arms.

Arredondo's orders for the punishment of the town were ruthless. Except for two families whose loyalty to the crown was beyond question, his wrath was to be visited on the entire community. Pillage and burn! The women were to be abandoned to the lust of his army. No restraints would be imposed save those necessary for victualing, for he intended to use this as a base while he rid the rest of the province of rebels. Three hundred women were wanted to grind corn. That order was specific. As for the others, he was merciless. "We shall teach these rebels an enduring lesson in vengeance."

Zealous Elizondo loosed his troops on the town before his chief arrived. A large share of them had been recruited from the half-tamed Indian tribes of northern Mexico. The atrocities began at once.

Before the soldiers reached La Villita, the frantic screaming of women warned Cecily. A terror-stricken girl who had fled across the river gasped out the story. "They're coming! They're coming!" she sobbed. Behind her rose a barbarous din, hoarse shouts mingled with wailing.

"I'll hide you." Cecily dragged the girl indoors. "You can't escape by running."

There was a trap in the ceiling, giving entrance to a tiny loft. The two girls reached it by placing a chair on a table, but this marked their hiding place too well. Cecily clambered down for a broom. The brutish noise drew closer. She climbed back to safety, then leaning down through the aperture, she sent the chair spinning with her broom before she closed the door.

It was dark here. The Mexican girl stifled a sob at the anguish of a shriek close by. Cecily clamped a warning hand over her mouth. "Why, this is only a child!" she thought, and cuddled the slim, shivering body to her. They sat breathlessly while heavy boots clattered through the room below.

Hours passed before the frightful noise outside ebbed away. Occasionally it broke out anew, only to dull again into a muffled whimper.

Miguel and Teresa were made prisoners as soon as Arredondo arrived. “The Americans wouldn’t have sought refuge in your house if they hadn’t trusted you,” was the inexorable retort to Salazar’s protest. “You can’t save your neck by turning your coat.” Teresa was protected from the orgy, however. They were hustled off to a neighboring house, turned prison to accommodate the horde of captives.

Elizondo chose La Quinta for the general’s headquarters but Arredondo rejected it. “Herd the commissary women here,” he directed. “It’s the largest house I’ve seen and that walled garden will make an excellent prison.” Soon, hundreds of frightened creatures were herded there. The labor was apportioned among them. Corn was dumped there by the wagonload. Some were set to shelling it; others ground it into meal on stone metates, while still others baked the meal into tortillas over a hundred fires which ruined the beauty of the garden. They were kept busy. Relentless guards were ready with whips when any hands lagged.

Fires were started in a dozen sections of the town and the air was pungent with smoke. They did not spread rapidly, however, because so many buildings were stone. Cecily had begun to hope as the clamor of agony began to decrease, that she and her companion might somehow get away undetected, but she grew conscious of a new menace. The smoke that had hung in the air became stifling. She feared their choking would betray them. Then she heard the crackling of flames. A red glow filtered through the cracks in the puncheon floor. The house was on fire!

The blaze ate its way slowly forward. At last one section of the loft was aglow, but their avenue of escape still was safe: the flames had not reached the trap door. The two girls retreated before the heat. Cecily was not yet ready to quit her refuge but terror seized the Mexican girl.

“It is to die here,” she cried in her broken English.

Cecily heard her drop safely to the floor below and listened with dismay to the jeers that hailed her as she darted from the house. They strengthened her resolve to stay where she was. She retreated to the farthest corner. The flames were red in the open trap; it was too late to escape that way, even if she wanted to.

The row of buildings faced a small plaza, with no exit to the rear. She knew the house was watched from the front, but at the back she might have

a chance. She tore at the thatch above her. It was tightly bound but her energy was desperate and once the first straw came free, the rest yielded to her tugging fingers. She burrowed the opening wider, gulping at the fresh air. The loft had become an oven. Her body dripped with sweat and she was so weak she could barely squeeze through.

The thatch was ablaze at the far end, smoldering here. In the ruddy glare her eyes scanned the avenue of escape. No one there! With a sob of relief she slid from the eaves. She clutched at the stone wall as she dropped, trying to break her fall, but this threw her off balance and she fell backward as she hit the ground. Her head struck something sharp. A thundering sounded in her ears; the flames above seemed to spin dizzily. Then she lost consciousness.

# Chapter 12

## *In Ruthless Hands*

JONATHAN'S anxiety over Cecily made the sweltering afternoon seem to last forever. Cris grew feverish from his wound. Occasionally he babbled incoherently and then one of his companions would creep to the river's edge for water to saturate his bandages and moisten his lips. He fell asleep finally but even then his rest was uneasy.

Jonathan's anxiety over Cecily grew. "The *gachupines* surely won't harm women, will they, Jess?"

"What do you think?"

"I think I'd better get started," he said. He was afraid to think.

He was forced to wait until the intermittent firing ebbed into the distance as the pursuit gradually pushed northward, however. The sun was still three hours high when he left.

Jess was loath to see him go. "You wait with Cris," he urged. "I'm like a cat in the night. You know that. I'll fetch her through the lines. I'll have her here by mornin'. Then we can head for the Louisiana border."

Jonathan wouldn't agree. "In some ways you have the hardest job," he said. "Just waiting here, not knowing what's going on and unable to do anything about it is tough—tougher than having something to do."

The scout gave him advice and warned him to be careful. "Smear mud on your face to darken it. San Antonio won't be a healthy place for Americans right now. And don't take off that hat. Whoever heard of a redheaded Mexican?"

It was agreed that unless some word came from Jonathan, Jess would follow him the next night. "Don't waste time hunting me," the Virginian added. "Getting Cissy out of there is the important thing."

The woodsman had another suggestion: "If you don't find Cissy right off, go to the Savias' house. I reckon that's whar she'd go if she war huntin' friends. Pablo's folks will help you, and if you don't show up, that's whar I'll come fust."

Caution slowed Jonathan. He avoided the path of the Spanish army, skulking furtively from cover to cover. Twice he glimpsed enemy patrols in



the distance. The first time he crouched in a thicket and watched them pass; the second, he was caught in the open and lay prone in the grass, not even daring to raise his eyes until the sound of their horses died away. He had no hint of the carnage which marked the pursuit until sunset; by avoiding the trail he missed the butchery.

He was skirting a copse of oaks when he saw them: seven headless bodies dangling by their heels from the twisted branches! He was gripped by such a rage as he had never known. It shook him like a fever. Fear of what he might find in the town hurried his steps. After nightfall there was less need for prudence, and soon there was a red glare in the sky to guide him. That whetted his concern. Where would Cecily turn for refuge if they were burning the town? His impulse was to throw aside all wariness for speed, but what help could he bring Cecily if he were caught?

Concepcion *acequia* had its source at La Villita where it tapped the river and flowed almost due south. It offered the most direct approach, its friendly bank a screen for his movements. He had to increase his vigilance. Flames spangled the sky, lighting his way too well for safety. Sounds reached him, wails mingled with the stridency of male voices. Although waiting shredded his patience, there was nothing he could do until the streets were deserted. He was not close enough to note the extent of the savagery, but his apprehension mounted as the minutes passed.

It was after midnight before the hubbub gradually subsided and he crept from his hiding place. Half the houses were blackened skeletons, with windows blank like eye sockets. Those spared the flames had their own desolation: doors swung crazily from broken hinges, and furniture abandoned by the looters littered the street. Nowhere was there a sign of life. As he searched the wreckage where he had hoped to find Cecily, each ravaged detail seared his mind. He whispered blasphemies.

Presently he heard a whimpering and he felt his way through the shadows to locate it. The plaintive sound guided him to the rear of a ruined house where he found a girl sobbing on the ground.

“What is it, child?” His voice was gentle.

She cowered at the sound, and clutched her torn garment to her.

“Don’t be afraid. I won’t harm you.”

His English reassured her. “An *americano*! They weel keel you if they find you here.”

He knelt beside her. His face grew stormy as she stammered out her story in broken words.

He was silent when she ended. He looked across the river toward San Antonio. “Can you walk?” he asked at last.

“I weel try, señor,” she promised.

He instructed her how to escape. She must get to the *acequia* and follow the path he had come. “Get as far away from town as you can. Hide in the woods along the river. I think you’ll find others there to keep you company.”

He watched her go before he turned toward the town. To use the ford was to invite trouble. Instead, he slipped silently into the stream some distance above, holding his rifle and powder horn above his head to keep them dry if he should have to swim. His choice of a crossing was fortunate; the water came only to his armpits. The mud blackening his face had cracked in the heat and he stopped at the river’s edge to renew it before he went on. He was glad he had done so when he saw the sentry seated on the bank above the ford. Jonathan loosened his knife and left his rifle behind as he crept forward. He made no sound save the swish of his weapon as he buried it between the shoulder blades of the nodding soldier. His strong fingers closed about the throat to prevent an outcry.

Jonathan dragged the body down the bank and dumped it into the stream. Then he retrieved his rifle and went on.

The Plaza de las Yslas was the heart of San Antonio. Here stood pretentious homes, the church, several shops. But on the east side was a row of humble dwellings and the Savias’ house was one of these. Once inside the town, Jonathan encountered no more sentries and he hugged the shadows as he made his swift way toward the plaza. The house was dark, its door barred. He tried it cautiously before tapping on the weather-beaten panels. No response.

“Inez!” His voice sounded loud against the stillness. “Inez Savias!” he called, and rapped again. Still no answer.

Two soldiers clumped diagonally across the plaza and the Virginian huddled in the doorway till they had passed. Then he turned to the long Spanish window defended by twisted bars, projecting like a bay. “Inez!” he called again. “Inez Savias!”

“Who is it?” a voice finally challenged.

Jonathan pressed closer to the bars and whispered. “It’s Jonathan Kirk. Let me in, before I’m seen.”

The door opened quickly. Pablo’s mother was an old friend. Her withered frailty had spared her from the day’s excesses.

“I thought you were dead,” she whispered. “You will be if they find you here, señor. You must not stay.”

“I’m hunting Cecily,” he explained. “Have you seen her?”

“I have not seen her,” she said at last, “but if you knew the things that happened here, you wouldn’t ask.”

“I’ve got to find her,” Jonathan groaned. “I’ll search every house in this town until I do. I’ll kill these *gachupines* one by one if I have to.”

Inez agreed to help him. She could pass about the streets freely, and it should not be too hard for her to locate an American girl. She knew the risk of hiding him but did not hesitate. He should stay in her house. There were only two rooms and there was no loft in the flat-roofed building, but there were several sacks of charcoal in the kitchen and a few others of corn. The charcoal would be all right but there was danger that the food would be requisitioned for the army. So they removed the top layer of ears from each sack and spread fuel over the top. They stacked them in the corner in such a way that a niche was left where a man might crouch with safety. One sack covered the entrance. The space was cramped but it was the best they could arrange, and it was meant for use only in emergency.

Cecily was still unconscious when two soldiers found her. "Here's another woman," one shouted gleefully, but the other looked down in scorn.

"Someone's abandoned her here. You're too late, *amigo*. By the looks of her she's fit for no further pleasure tonight."

"An *americano* too, and young. What a pity we didn't find her sooner!"

The night was bright from the flames crackling in the thatch, and they were looking down at her admiringly when she opened her eyes. Dazed from the fall, she did not remember at once what had happened. She was conscious of terror without remembering its cause, and she glanced first at the curling blaze above her. It was their voices that recalled the point of her fear. She tried to scramble to her feet, escape her one frantic thought. Rough hands seized her before she left her knees.

"I like her looks," the man who had discovered her decided. "I'll take her with me. I'd like to have an *americano* girl." Cecily didn't understand their Spanish but their intent was clear enough. She struggled to free herself. Her captor struck her a blow that bruised her cheek and sent her reeling.

"I like 'em wild," he assured his companion. "I know how to tame 'em." He lurched into the street, dragging the dazed girl after him. Their appearance was the signal for loud jeers.

Elizondo was collecting prisoners. The first fury of the debauchery spent, further vengeance was to be of a military nature. "Arrest every person of prominence!" Arredondo instructed. "Particularly Americans. I want captives."

The colonel's patrol encountered Cecily's captor. "Is that an *americano* you have?" the officer demanded.

"*Si*, señor. I'm keeping this one."

Elizondo crowded his horse forward. "We're making prisoners of all *yanquis*," he retorted. "You'll have to find another woman."

Cecily was herded roughly among other hostages between two ranks of bayonets. The family of Captain Antonio Ruiz, the alcalde, was there—his father a bent, gray man in his seventies, and his wife a plump, tearful matron.

There was no jail big enough to hold them all; eight hundred citizens had been placed under arrest. Three adjoining houses were selected at random to serve as their prison. All were crowded and Cecily was assigned to the worst. Reeking air assailed her when the door was opened. “No more, no more,” the captives protested.

“We’re suffocating now!” groaned one.

She stumbled across the threshold and collided with a human wall. “That is 228,” someone counted aloud before the door was closed. The room was twenty-four feet square, its windows were tightly shuttered, and its heat was almost beyond endurance that sweltering August night. There was no space to sit down, and still they thrust more prisoners in. Each new arrival was given a number; by the time the count had reached three hundred the guards could not squeeze in another. No eye could pierce the blackness, but there was no need to see; none could move. The place grew dank with perspiration and fetid with its odor. The whole tight room seemed to gasp as tortured lungs sought air.

Cecily fought against the dizziness which came and went during the early hours. Later she welcomed it; half-conscious, she could more easily endure the suffering. Someone collapsed against her shoulder. “He’s fainted,” she thought; “he’ll be all right presently.” She tried to stretch an arm around him but it was pinned to her side. Her clothes were sodden. A sharp pain burned in her chest; breathing grew more difficult. Her head throbbled. Time seemed interminable.

“Surely another day has passed,” she said to herself once. “It’s just this blackness. We can’t tell day from night in here. Perhaps it’s been two days.”

They blinked in the unaccustomed light when the door was finally opened, and their breath rasped as they gulped in the fresh air. It took time to get them out, so closely were they packed. They were dazed and many fell when no longer supported by the wall of flesh about them. There were some who didn’t rise; eighteen had died during the night but, sustained by the mass of their fellows, had been unable to fall.

All prisoners were marched to the plaza to witness the executions Arredondo had ordered. Fortunately it was close by or they never would have made it. The troops and the prisoners were practically the only audience. The rest of the wounded town was in hiding. Cecily listened dully while the drums rolled. A sergeant stepped out to read the names of the day’s victims. There would be a public execution each day, he announced, as

a warning of the fate which awaited all rebels. Eight names were called; five were Americans trapped at La Quinta, the other three natives of the town who had been too old to fight. The alcalde's father was one of these.

The victims were lined up against a building, their hands bound behind them. They expected a firing squad but the execution had been planned differently. A company of soldiers with fixed bayonets was called forward. Bullets were reserved for honorable enemies. Cecily closed her eyes when the order was given, but she knew when the cruel blades reached their marks by the shudder of her neighbors.

That was not the end. Arredondo had taxed his ingenuity for further indignities. Each body was dragged around the plaza behind a mule before dismemberment; the heads, arms and legs were ordered displayed in prominent places where all might see the vengeance of the Spanish king.

The prisoners were silent, their senses numbed by successive blows, but one woman screamed when the bayonets cut down her husband, and, here and there, sobs wracked a reluctant witness. Some, like Cecily, closed their eyes to shut out the bestial scene.

The Savias' house fronted the plaza where the executions were staged. Jonathan and Inez lurked behind the window. He scanned the prisoners herded before the bayonets. His eye missed Cecily. She bore scant likeness to the girl he remembered—her face smudged with dust and soot, her hair hanging in a forgotten tangle, her dress still dank from the Black Hole. Even her walk deceived him; there was none in this stumbling throng with Cecily's alert step. She could not be one of these weary, shuffling creatures.

He recognized some of the doomed men and, as he saw them die, new furrows tightened about his bloodless lips and his blue eyes were deadly cold.

The women were being separated from the men. Jonathan had a chance to search their ranks again as they were driven past his hiding place. His eyes darkened when at last they found her. Could that bent, faltering figure be Cecily? Inez winced as his fingers clutched her shoulder.

"You must find out where they're taking them," he whispered.

# Chapter 13

## *Changing Masters*

SERGEANT JESUS GONZALEZ liked his job. It was not every soldier who lived in a great house and slept on linen sheets. He strutted about La Quinta's apartments, wallowing in their luxury, but the thing that gratified him most was his new authority, three hundred women subject to his discipline. He was a cruel overseer, ready with the lash. It wasn't just that the army had two thousand stomachs waiting for his tortillas. There was something about the sting of a whip on quivering flesh that gratified his jaundiced spirit. He occupied Teresa's room. The contents of her trunks were strewn about it. Their silken texture titillated him; his gnarled fingers pawed the fripperies and his eyes gleamed at their intimacy.

He had one resentment. The women here were old, his selection limited. When his first choice resisted him he had her flogged as an example for the rest. The next one came cringing at his call and he garbed her in Teresa's finery. It was designed for a far daintier figure but his blunt fingers ripped at the fragile gown, and he guffawed at her unexpected bulges, protruding through the torn silk.

His pleasure was interrupted by the late arrival of fresh prisoners and he felt irritated as he shuffled down the stairs. There were seven of them, whom Elizondo had sent because there was no more room elsewhere. The sergeant was grumbling, impatient to end this business, as he ordered candles brought.

When the lights were fetched and he could look the group over, his sly eyes grew round and he moistened his lips. He was no longer in a hurry to return to the cowering woman who waited in his bed. This slender girl with the yellow hair was more to his liking. Her chin was lifted proudly and her amber eyes were scornful. She would need a lesson in servility perhaps, but he didn't mind that. On the contrary.

For hours Teresa had shared Salazar's cell. They were not alone: Elizondo had a list of the more prominent families and these were being

brought in as fast as the troops could find them. There was no room for recriminations in that crowded place. Miguel was composed, depending now on the power of his despised father's name. Uneasiness made Teresa sullen. When the women were called out to make room for other men, her hope revived; after all, the royalists would not make war on them. Her confidence mounted when she was escorted to her own house. She didn't understand why the others were brought here too, but she was too concerned to give them much thought. The guards in the hall dismayed her, and she recognized the lustful gleam in the sergeant's eye. She clutched at her pride, trying to show her contempt, but the emptiness of fear was inside her and her legs trembled with weakness.

"Your name?" the sergeant barked at the nearest prisoner.

"Doña Amelia Ruiz." This was the alcalde's wife.

Jesus Gonzalez plucked at his lower lip; his eyes squinted at the proud lady who faced him. His mind was on the taming of the girl with the yellow hair and this seemed a good chance. "I do not like your tone," he grumbled. "It lacks the proper respect. Thirty lashes for this one."

Teresa watched incredulously as two soldiers started to drag Doña Amelia away.

"No!" shouted the sergeant. "Flog her here. It will teach these others not to defy me."

Brutal hands tore at Doña Amelia's dress, ripping it from her back. She tried to shield her nakedness with her hands, gasping her indignation. They wrenched her arms free and forced her toward the stairs where they bound her wrists to the banister above her head so that her toes barely touched the floor. Each blow of the whistling whip left its raw mark on the smooth flesh. As they fell the sergeant numbered them aloud without once looking. His beady eyes were on Teresa whose teeth nibbled at her lower lip. He could mark each bite of the lash by the quiver of her hands.

"Does anyone else doubt my authority?" Jesus Gonzalez demanded after the unconscious woman had been cut down. He glared at the pale faces before him. None answered. "Take 'em away," he continued gruffly. "Make sure they each shell a bushel of corn before they go to sleep."

Teresa would have followed the others but the sergeant caught her by the wrist. "Wait!" he ordered, and tested the softness of her hands with his thumb. "You've never shelled corn, have you?"

She shook her head.

"Within an hour these pretty fingers will be as raw as that woman's back. And if you slow up, there's always a guard ready with a whip to keep you at your job. Not a very nice chore for one as pretty as you.

“I’m the master here.” His mouth grew slack. “I can make life very pleasant for those I like. You’ve nothing to fear, if you are—obedient.”

His words filtered through her stupor. She was not outraged by his suggestion: all her luxury since the old squalor of Motin had been bought by her body. But her fastidiousness was offended. His cruel eyes, glittering through the shaggy disorder of oily hair, the disarray of his stained uniform and the reek of stale sweat revolted her.

“There’s the whip for those who defy me,” he reminded her. With a swift movement his rough fingers bared her back. “Such a smooth, tender skin!” His voice purred. “It would be a pity to tear it with a scourge. The scars never go away.” He wrenched his gaze reluctantly from her enticing softness to nod toward the alcalde’s wife. “It’s too much for the tender ones. They usually die. You can see for yourself.”

Teresa stared in silence at the raw ribbons streaking the unconscious woman’s flesh. She grew queasy and the smile she turned on him was a conscious effort; he must not guess the repugnance she felt.

She leaned against him as they slowly climbed the stairs. Her strength seemed to have vanished; the climb was difficult. He mistook her lassitude. His eyes were bloodshot; his blood was singing. She stopped at the door of her own room. In the sick light of a single candle the chaos of her finery appalled her.

The sergeant advanced toward the bed. “Get out,” he ordered its cringing occupant. “I want no more of you.”

Teresa watched dully as the woman fled, recognizing the torn apparel as her own. But it didn’t anger her; nothing seemed to matter.

“Here, put this on.” The sergeant tossed her a filmy garment. “Maybe it will fit you better.”

Then she started to laugh, wildly, her voice mounting in shrill, mirthless spasms until she had to clutch the bed for support. He was indulgent; he liked her better merry, but his patience snapped when her hysteria showed no sign of slacking.

“Here,” he said, “that’s enough. Stop it!” He had to cuff her before he could still the shattering racket.

Life was very full for Sergeant Gonzalez. He had authority, luxury and a straight-limbed girl in his couch whom a colonel might have coveted. But he lacked an opportunity to display his good fortune before his fellows. He pictured their awe when they saw him with that golden creature at his side. The public executions would have given him this very chance, but he had to stay on his job. Corn had to be ground, tortillas baked and his weary



captives had fallen behind schedule. He had been promised more workers. The prisons were to be emptied of women for him. When they arrived things would be easier, but now he fumed.

He paid little heed to the new arrivals, satisfied that there were none among them to match his girl, though he noted with approval that many were young. It would speed up the work and give him more leisure. Consequently, he was delighted by the announcement that more prisoners were to be slaughtered publicly that afternoon. This was his opportunity.

He ordered Teresa to choose from the litter of garments the one best calculated to exhibit her charms. The whole army should see what an important fellow Sergeant Gonzalez had become. She shrank from the thought of this display. Her distaste for him was acute, but she knew better than to defy him. There was no longer a Maria to comb her hair and her own fingers were unfamiliar with the chore. It took long; her thoughts had ample time to probe a bleak future. What did it hold? Even if Miguel won release, could they make their way back to safety? The ambitions they had shared seemed very remote now. She thought of Jonathan for the first time in days. Things might be different if he were alive. It was odd how so much of her fate had been influenced by him. Once his death might have given her a throne; he had died too late to help her and too soon to save her from this ignominy. She was sure no Americans had escaped.

She turned her uneasy mind to the present. Officers were here who would eventually return to Mexico City. There, she'd be on familiar ground. Perhaps the sergeant's eagerness to parade her before his friends had its merit. Other eyes would recognize her perfection. What could the sergeant do if an officer demanded her? Her eyes brightened; she selected each detail of the costume with care.

Once more the plaza was thronged. The prisoners, in dense ranks, silently watched the little knot of the doomed who had been plucked from among them. Soldiers off duty pressed against the guards, shouting taunts at the men whose deaths they had come to witness. Sergeant Gonzalez elbowed a path through the crowd, proudly conscious of the stir his companion was creating. Teresa clung to him for protection, angered by the coarse jests. One pinched her arm and another spanked her—liberties they would not risk if she were with an officer.

"Let's stand there." She indicated a spot in the front row beyond reach of these familiarities; but that was not the only reason she chose it: how could an officer be expected to discover her among the pushing soldiery?

From here she could view the men awaiting death—twelve of them, ranged against the wall of a building, the certainty of their fate stark in their

faces. Her eyes did not linger on them. They hunted for the glitter of a uniform.

Miguel saw her before she saw him. Her dress was a vivid splash against the motley crowd. He measured her escort with bitter eyes. She'd lost no time in finding a protector. His scrutiny informed him she was back at La Quinta; how else had she recovered her wardrobe? The sight of her prodded his defiance. The futility of this wretched end had overwhelmed him; now his pride revived. At least she should see how he could die. He tried to assure himself that he had only loathing for her fickle selfishness, but he could not turn his glance from her.

The end drew close. The file of soldiers fixed its bayonets and their steel clatter interrupted Teresa's quest. She turned and her glance was no longer casual. The victims were scraping up their courage now, trying to bolster the dignity of their final minutes. It was revealed by their stiffening backs and the tightness of their paling faces. Some of them wore stained bandages and their clothing was in tatters, except for one whose neat raiment drew her gaze. The silk hose attracted her attention first. She lifted her eyes and then clutched at the sergeant for support.

"What's wrong now?" her escort growled. Queer how pinched and sharp her features looked out here in the sun. He hadn't noticed it before; she must be older than he thought.

Miguel saw her stagger. It helped him summon a shadowy smile at the end. He was watching her instead of the approaching bayonet.

The captain missed the execution. His attention was fixed on the girl in the yellow dress. How came such a lovely creature here? She was breathtaking and the richness of her silks was unmistakable. Look how she grasped that sergeant's sleeve. How had such a prize fallen into those coarse hands?

Closer inspection whetted his desire, but still he hesitated to step in. The girl was leaning on her escort's arm; perhaps she was really enamored of the fellow. It didn't make sense, but you could never tell about women. He followed the couple, tempted by her beauty but uncertain.

Teresa had forgotten her errand. The sight of Miguel, ranked in that desperate company, had staggered her. She felt no pity. She had hated him too long for that. Her face was stony when she saw him die.

The blow was to her hope. Until that moment she had clung to the belief that this was only temporary. She did not have to share this wretched people's fate. There would be a way out. It helped her bear the sergeant.

Now she wasn't sure. Miguel had become just a sodden bundle in the dust. She was desperately afraid.

She heard the jingle of a sword behind her and looked back. Then her sudden weakness passed. She was smiling again and her eyes warmed at the captain's bow.

He lacked experience. Teresa read his confusion and her assurance quickened. This should be easy to manage.

"Why, Captain!" she exclaimed. "When did you arrive? Why didn't you call on me at once?"

"I didn't know where to find you," he replied lamely.

"You know him?" Sergeant Gonzalez demanded uneasily.

The captain kissed her hand. "My dear cousin," he murmured, "I hope this fellow hasn't annoyed you."

The sergeant held his breath.

"He has been very kind," Teresa replied, "but I'll no longer need his protection now that you're here."

Sergeant Gonzalez watched them go. "I might have known it was too good to last," he muttered. It did not help his temper when she sent for her wardrobe. He didn't believe it was hers, but since an officer was waiting, he dared not protest.

Jonathan saw Teresa pass his hiding place. He had imagined her secure in Salazar's protection, but the swaggering sergeant's possessiveness was too obvious. His eyes narrowed. This was no hapless victim. She swayed too confidently on the arm of her burly soldier, her head was held high. He saw the captain's bow and guessed her change of escorts before it happened.

"She'll manage!" he muttered. "She'll always manage. Slut!" The taste in his mouth was acrid, but he watched as long as her bright hair was visible.

# Chapter 14

## *At La Quinta*

THE stooped and shabby figure flitted unheeded through the streets. If any eyes were curious the sleazy shawl disclosed her wrinkles. No one troubled Inez Savias. Jonathan couldn't have found a better ferret. She was watching when Cecily was crowded through the doors of La Quinta with the other prisoners, and she had no trouble discovering the use of this new prison.

The word she brought cheered the Virginian. However hard the labor, he felt that Cecily would be safe from the soldiery there and he was encouraged by his knowledge of the place. His visits to Teresa had familiarized him with its plan, and the river still offered access to the garden.

Arredondo ordered another search of San Antonio, trying to unearth more victims for his executioners. The soldiers were thorough. Inez' eyes revealed her alarm when she brought the news.

"I'll be safe enough," Jonathan assured her. "As soon as I'm hidden you must leave. Stay away until the hunt is over. I don't want them blaming you if I'm found here."

She protested but he explained why this was necessary. Retribution would be swift for anyone found harboring an American. "I don't want you taking risks," he told her. "You must be here to guide Jess if anything happens to me."

He concealed his rifle in the chimney. If caught, he must rely on his knife. Inez piled the last sack of charcoal over the entrance after he squeezed into his niche. Then she departed.

Soldiers searched the place cursorily. From his refuge he heard the crash of breaking pottery and the ripping of bayonets as they prodded the shuck pallet. The bare rooms offered scant shelter except for the sacks piled in the corner.

"What's this?" a trooper demanded, and tilted a sack so that charcoal cascaded to the floor.

Jonathan held his breath to keep from coughing as the black dust choked him. He gripped his knife more tightly.

"Shall we move them all?" someone asked.

“It’s too hot for that,” another answered. “This is an easier way.” He thrust a bayonet between the sacks, grunting with each jab. The bags were a thick bulwark, but once the prying blade found its mark—its sharp point sliced his thigh. He clenched his teeth. If there was red on the withdrawing blade, the sacks wiped it clean. The searchers left, satisfied the house was deserted.

Jonathan moved a bag cautiously till he could peer out. The door stood open, revealing the room to any passer-by. He dared not shift his cramped position. A warm trickle bathed one leg. The wound began to throb. He shoved the sack back hurriedly when a soldier, beckoned by the swinging door, came prowling to look for loot. It didn’t take him long to see there was none here.

The day smoldered slowly to an end. Jonathan’s thirst became a torture.

When Inez crept back, the tousled room threw her into panic. She rushed to the heaped sacks. Jonathan’s sweat-streaked face and the red puddle in which he crouched added to her fright. “What have they done to you?” she cried.

Jonathan limped across the floor, testing his leg. “I can still walk,” he told her; “it can’t be serious.” But he winced with each step; the muscles were stiffening.

Inez did what she could for him. She dared not call aid, but she heated water and the steaming cloths assuaged the pain and relieved the rigid tendons. At his urging she wrapped the bandage tight for greater ease in walking.

Sergeant Gonzalez’ inflamed eyes peered sullenly at the soldiers who crowded the smoke-filled *cantiña*. He did not join in their hilarity, but drank alone and cursed his loss. His temper was on edge when he finally reeled homeward. He was the last to leave and the streets were lonely.

“Where are the new women?” he demanded of the guard in the hall. “Fetch ’em in where it’s light. I want to look ’em over.”

“They’re scattered all over the place and everyone’s asleep by now,” the sentry protested.

“No matter. Bring ’em in!” The sergeant banged the table angrily.

It was necessary to awaken half a dozen soldiers for the task, and they vented their irritation on the sleeping captives, kicking those who stirred too slowly. There were nearly two hundred of the newcomers, herded through the house in batches for Gonzalez’ surly inspection. They had endured much and fear added to their bedraggled appearance. The sergeant’s spleen mounted; there was nothing in this drab batch to suit him.

Cecily marched with the last dazed lot. The sergeant's story was well known among the women. She tried to hide behind them, shrinking against the wall.

Gonzalez' eye spotted her and gleamed. "That one." He pointed at the frightened girl. "Drag her out here. I like her."

When they seized her, Cecily tried to cling to her neighbors but the soldiers only laughed at her struggles. She faced her tormentor defiantly.

"She'll do," Gonzalez approved. "I like her better than the other. She has more fire."

"No, no, I'll not go." Once more she writhed futilely.

"Shall I bring the whip, Sergeant?" a soldier asked hopefully.

He shook his head. "And ruin the only pretty one left? Leave her to me. I'll break her in."

Jess arrived at midnight. Jonathan was watching from the window and had the door unbarred before he knocked. "How's Cris?"

"Better. 'Twarn't much more'n a scratch. Thar ain't nothin' wrong with him that a little time won't mend. He wanted to come along till I told him two of us had a better chanc't than three, 'specially if one had a hole in his shoulder. When I reminded him we war thinkin' of Cissy, he calmed down. Have you found out whar she is?"

Jonathan told him what he had learned and outlined the plan he had been formulating. "That's the garden you and I visited once by boat and we'll go back the same way. Once we're past their guards the rest should be easy."

They offered to take Inez with them but she shook her head. "With me it's different. This is my home and these are my people. It's too late to transplant a tree with roots as old as mine."

"Someday we'll be back," Jonathan assured her. "The next time we'll come to stay. This isn't good-by, Inez, it's *hasta la vista*."

"May it be soon!" the woman replied as they slipped out the door.

Jonathan had said nothing about his wound, but Jess noticed his limp. "What's the matter?" he whispered as they slunk through still streets.

Jonathan told him. "It isn't bothering me much now but it had me worried for a time."

They headed due south, keeping in the lee of the buildings until the town was behind them. This took them past La Quinta's front, where they could see sentries lounging against the walls. Clearly, they considered the enclosure barricade enough.

There was a ford two hundred yards south of the house. They crossed the river there and doubled back toward San Antonio, gliding noiselessly

through the thickets. They were using all their woodcraft; stealth was essential but time was short. There was much to do before dawn. Jonathan was elated when they found the boat still hidden beneath the willows. So much had happened since he had tied it there that he half expected it to be gone.

They decided against using oars; the splash might betray them. Instead, Jess gave the skiff a powerful shove, hoping its momentum would carry them across the narrow stream. Their glide was quiet, but they had not reckoned on the current. They were forced to pole the last half of the distance.

They were now on the right side of the river and about a hundred yards above their destination. The moon was sinking and the west bank was matted with shadows. They relied on these to shroud them as they began their wary drifting, hugging the bank, their eyes straining against the gloom. Their rifles were propped in the bow, useless until this part of the adventure was ended: a shot would bring an army swarming about them.

Moonlight warned them when their goal was close. The sheltering trees stopped abruptly at the garden. Jess grasped an overhanging limb, halting the boat. Beyond, a sentry paced the water's edge, clearly discernible in the pale light. They waited till he turned at the wall, then stepped noiselessly ashore. This guard was easy to elude but he might prove dangerous. Should an alarm be sounded, he menaced their retreat. They crouched in the cover of the shrubbery and waited, knives in hand, for his return.

His deliberate steps crunched on the gravel path. As the sound grew louder, Jonathan tensed for the final lunge. Five more steps and he would be abreast of them. Crunch—crunch. Then the sound stopped.

Jess raised his head. The sentry had discovered their boat. He was slowly raising his rifle.

It might have been only the wind rippling the leaves. Except for the muted blow and the scrape of boots on the path as Jess eased the inert body to earth, there was no sound.

Their attack had not gone unobserved. "Have you come to free us?" A whisper from the terrace above startled them. None of the captives was asleep. The confusion of Gonzalez' midnight search had just subsided. Many had watched the scouts' entrance with prayerful hope.

"If any of you want to go I'll show you the way," Jonathan replied guardedly. "But I'm not sure it's wise unless you have a good hiding place. You're safer here than in the town." He explained their errand. "We're looking for Cecily Marsten. Who can tell me where to find her?"

A hush followed his question. "That's the American girl," one woman finally replied. "You've come too late, señor. She's not here."

“Where is she?”

The woman nodded toward the house and explained. “If you had only come a few minutes sooner!” she concluded.

In his fury, Jonathan was ready to storm the house. Jess restrained him. “Gittin’ kilt won’t help Cissy,” he cautioned. “We’ve got to git her out of thar.”

The women answered their abrupt questions as well as they could. There was a sentry in the lower hall; once past him they thought there would be no obstacle, as most of the guards were asleep. The scout pointed to a low wall which divided the patio from the garden. “Look up yonder,” he suggested. “We don’t need to go through the house.” It would be no feat to reach the windows above from the top of this barrier.

Jess scrambled up with ease but for Jonathan it was harder. The effort reopened his wound and he could not have made it without help. Soon they were skulking through a corridor where only a feeble light strayed up the stairs from below. The sound of voices drifted from the same direction.

Cecily was backed defiantly against the wall and the sergeant lurched toward her. They were alone. He had dismissed the guard and his senses were blurred by wine.

“Get upstairs!” he mumbled.

When she did not budge, he clutched at her. She was eying him warily and her movement was too swift for him. Dodging past his fumbling reach, she leaped for the door, intent on flight. It rattled against her weight but did not yield.

Gonzalez laughed. “There’s no escape, my pretty one. The doors are bolted.” Again he approached, more craftily this time, his arms outspread to trap her.

Cecily was familiar with the houses of San Antonio—the grills that defended their lower windows, the unbarred casements of the second floor. Once more she evaded him and darted for the stairs.

He grinned as he watched her go. Willing or not, she had obeyed his command.

“Cissy,” someone whispered from the gloom of the upper hall. A strong hand gripped her. In a panic, she tried to wrench free.

“It’s all right, Cissy. This is Jonty.”

“Jonty!” She clung to him, unable to control her sudden trembling.

The befuddled sergeant climbed slowly, supporting himself against the rail. Jess Leeman’s hand, reaching from above, tightened against his throat,



snapped back his head, strangled the scream he tried to utter. A blade slid silently between his ribs.

They left the way they had come. Cecily whispered, "How did you find me?"

"Later," Jonathan replied. "There's no time to talk now. We'll tell you all about it when we get back to camp."

That encouraged her to hope: back to camp surely meant there were others waiting.

Three women lingered by the boat. Jonathan's warning had discouraged the rest, but these were determined to leave and they could not be refused. The tiny skiff would not hold them all, so Jess swam at the stern while Jonathan poled across the stream. Once the far bank was reached, the party divided, the escaping captives heading west for the ranch of a kinsman while Cecily and the scouts turned south, intent on reaching Cris's hiding place before dawn.

Again they kept to the shelter of the river as much as possible. Speed was more important than caution now. They knew they would be hunted once the escape was discovered. They walked in single file, Jess leading, Cecily next, Jonathan bringing up the rear. Little was said until the town was far behind. Cecily dreaded to ask the questions which were troubling her, and the news he had to tell kept Jonathan silent. His wound was bothering him again. Each limping step increased his pain and it grew increasingly difficult for him to maintain the swift pace. In spite of his dogged persistence he began to lag. Jess noticed it and called a halt.

"Better let me help you," he suggested. "We'll make better time."

Jonathan wanted Cecily under cover before daybreak. "You two go ahead," he suggested. "I'll cover the back trail. I'll be all right after I've rested a spell."

"We'll stick together," Cecily insisted.

Jess agreed with her. "We ain't goin' to split up now. We all go or we all stay. I reckon I can find us a spot close by whar we can hole up for the day if you're played out."

"We'll keep going," Jonathan replied grimly. "I'll be all right after a few minutes' rest." He leaned against a tree to ease his throbbing wound. "We can't leave Cris alone."

The instant he said it, he realized what he had done; now Cecily knew. He had been groping for a way to tell her more gently.

"Where is he? Is he safe? . . . Father? . . . Tell me," she urged.

"Cris is all right." Jonathan's weary voice was expressionless. "He has a wound but it isn't serious."

“Jonty brought him back,” Jess interrupted. “Thar warn’t many of us left when we cut our way out.”

“And the others? . . . Father?”

“I’m sorry, Cissy—” that same dead emptiness still marked Jonathan’s tone—“I failed you. There weren’t any others.”

After the first bruised silence she wanted to know more, and they told her how Ben Marsten had given his life for Denis O’Rourke.

Soon they resumed their plodding march. They left the river, veering westward toward the Medina, quickening their gait across the plains. Even in the dark they felt exposed when they left the shelter of the trees, and they took advantage of every cover that offered. This almost brought on disaster. They were heading for a motte of oaks when Jess suddenly gripped Cecily’s arm and forced her to the ground. Jonathan was down instantly. Jess left them there, worming his way forward through the grass to investigate, and when he returned he led them silently back a hundred yards before he whispered his explanation. “That’s a *gachupine* patrol camped yonder. It was one of their hosses I heard.”

They evaded the enemy by slipping around their flank, and soon they were shadowed by the woods which followed the Medina’s meandering course. To Jess’s skilled eye the landmarks were clear. “Cris is just round the next bend,” he said.

The refuge was undisturbed but there was no sign of the wounded boy. “Do you suppose he tried to follow you into San Antonio?” Cecily asked uneasily.

“He’s probably crept down to the stream for water.” Jonathan tried to express an encouragement he did not feel. “If he heard us coming, he’s waiting to make sure we’re friends.”

“Cris,” Cecily called in a low voice.

Jonathan limped down the bank, the others at his heels. The gloom was piled too thick for him to see the path and he was feeling his cautious way among the trees when he bumped into the swaying body.

“Wait.” His voice was sharp as he identified it. “Take Cissy back,” he ordered.

Jonathan told her what had happened but would not let her see her brother’s hacked body. He would spare her that; he could not halt her tortured imagination. Anguished, she awaited their return in the dank gloom.

“I’ll come back for you when it’s time,” he promised.

“I reckon I know who did this,” Jess growled as he helped Jonathan scoop a shallow grave for Cris’s body. “It war that gang of cutthroats we dodged a while ago. They must have surprised Cris when he crept out for water. I’m goin’ back an’ settle for this. Thar’s jist ’bout time afore sunup.”

“We’ve got Cissy to think of,” Jonathan replied. “It’s their horses I want.”

He returned to Cecily as soon as their task was finished. His steps lagged. He was fumbling for something to say, and failed. Words were empty now. Instead he took her in his arms and held her silently. Her eyes were dry, her body rigid. It would be better, he thought, if she could cry.

“It’s time we started, Cissy,” he said at last.

“I want to see his grave.” Her voice was as dreary as the drip of rain from sodden boughs.

She followed them woodenly and sank to her knees by the heaped loam. Then at last her endurance crumbled; the sobs so long choked back shook her body as her fingers moved over the damp mound.

Jonathan’s hands were clumsy with tenderness when he drew her gently away. “We can’t wait any longer, Cissy. We’ve got to get out of here.”

She was too preoccupied to notice that they were retracing their steps until they reached the point where the trail left the river. Here Jess scouted off alone for a few minutes. “I found you a hideout,” he told her when he returned. “You must wait thar till we git back. It won’t be long,” he added grimly.

She grasped Jonathan’s hand, trying to stifle her panic. “Where are you going?”

“After horses,” he replied, “and that Spanish patrol we dodged an hour ago has them. There isn’t much time. It’ll soon be light.”

“Take me with you,” she urged. She could not be alone now.

“We can’t do that. You’ll be safe here.”

“But what if you don’t come back?” Her fingers were tight on his sleeve.

“Trust me, Cissy. I’ll come back to you. There aren’t enough *gachupines* in Mexico to stop me.”

The two men approached the sleeping camp with patient stealth. Jonathan had his pistol and rifle; Jess had Cris’s weapon and his own. They hovered in the shadows until the position was thoroughly scouted. One sentry was posted at the edge of the thicket but his vigilance did not match their craft. The horses were tethered in a clearing about twenty yards from the sleeping men and their number revealed the strength of the party. Twelve. The odds were not too great. The Virginian selected three saddles and began his cautious preparations while his companion slunk off to silence the sentry. Two animals were saddled by the time Jess reappeared; there had been no sound. Wan light was beginning to seep through the leaves by the time their task was completed.

Jess wanted to invade the camp itself and take the stacked rifles. “We could capture the whole bunch,” he whispered. “I’d make ’em pay for what

they done to Cris.”

Jonathan’s fury was just as great but his first thought was for Cecily. What would happen to her if something went wrong? “That’ll have to wait till Cissy’s safe,” he declared.

They mounted quietly. Jonathan was leading the spare horse and the other animals had been cut loose. There should be no pursuit from this party.

“One shot apiece,” he cautioned. “Save your other weapon against the time you’ll need it if we run into trouble.” He selected a mark and leveled his pistol. Jess aimed at another.

“For Cris,” Jess said, before he fired.

The shots helped them stampede the horses. They were well away before the startled camp was fully aroused. Several bullets whined after them harmlessly, but by then they were almost beyond range, still yelling as they drove the herded animals. Their opponents were afoot; immediate danger was past. Now they had horses they could manage. They would get away.

Someday they would come back. It might be ten years—fifteen—but they would come back. Cissy was alone now. Jonathan decided he would take her to Natchitoches or even Natchez, and they would make a home there until another Magee rose up to lead them.

Cecily heard them coming. She ran toward them, forsaking her shelter.

“She hadn’t ought to do that,” Jess complained. “How’d she know we warn’t Spaniards?”

Jonathan didn’t answer. He understood her eagerness. It matched his. His eyes kindled as he realized that coming back to Cecily would always be his most urgent concern. He spurred his horse into a gallop.

The scout’s mount would have followed, but he checked it and continued his slow jog. His scarred face softened in a smile when he saw Jonathan leap to the ground and take Cecily in his arms.

“Reckon he woke up,” he said aloud, “an’ high time!”

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Sun in Their Eyes: A Novel of Texas in 1812* by Monte Barrett]