

The Alamo Visage
By Danny Cove

It was the first time I had ever experienced this strange new holiday, for it was the first time I'd ever been in Texas in April. The skies were clear and the weather humid, though not as bad as it could sometimes get back home. There were flocks of people flying about, dressed in traditional Mexican garb and speaking in fluid Spanish, of which I didn't understand a single word. Every now and then, a Mariachi band played music loudly while tourists watched in glee, and signs colored in solid bars hung from streetlights advertising the festivities. *This is Fiesta*, I thought to myself as I walked alone through the crowds. *This is what everyone's been talking about for the past week.*

Across the street from me was the remaining wall of the Alamo. I'd never had the opportunity to go inside because it had notoriously long lines and I had notoriously little patience; one look at the people snaking and coiling around its entryway told me that today would not be the day to see what lay beyond its gates. So I took a break on the outside of the wall, resting in the shade of a nearby tree. I nearly jumped into the air when I noticed the man standing immediately beside me, his dark eyes scanning the crowds like a predator seeking his prey. The man had a pointed nose and long, dark hair, and instead of being dressed like a Mexican or a tourist, he was wearing worn leather that looked like it had been hand-made. It was in an old style, and I came to realize that he must have been some sort of reenactor, dressed like the pioneers and early settlers who were killed here.

"Big crowd today," I said, trying my best to be friendly.

His eyes stopped scanning the crowd and came to rest on me. "That is true," he said in an accent that I couldn't quite place. It sounded like a mix of a redneck and an Englishman. "You don't appear to enjoy the celebration."

"I don't really understand it," I answered him. "I'm a Hoosier." He stared blankly at me. "It means I'm from Indiana," I explained. "My name's Andy."

"David," he responded as he shook my hand.

"Like I said, it doesn't make sense to me," I went on. "From what people have told me, Fiesta's a celebration of the Battle of the Alamo, when Mexican soldiers slaughtered everyone here. So why are there mostly Mexican traditions? I mean, are we on the side of the Mexicans here?"

"Walk with me," David commanded enigmatically, and he set out along the road. I kept up beside him, and as we walked, his whole body seemed to flicker for a moment, like when you shut off your TV and the screen goes dark, and then you turn it back on real quick. Ice ran through my veins as it started to dawn on me who this "David" really was: he was a dead man walking the place where he'd died long ago. My realization must have been obvious, because David began speaking under the assumption that I accepted his true nature. "The night the fort fell, there was no gunfire, only silence out beyond the walls. The men and women inside were sleeping, getting the rest they'd been missing for so long. And then, there was the eruption of battle, everyone scrambling for their weapons, men dying everywhere. After waking, I made sure that those who were defenseless were safely hidden where the church kept its holy garments. They doused the lights and I knelt in the chapel, saying my last prayer before I went out into the fray. Only an hour later, I fell while swinging my rifle like a club, my blood watering the ground before the church."

I was stunned at hearing his story, this first-person account of one of Texas' most famous battles. "How...how are you here?"

"Each year, I walk these streets during the festivities. Most people choose not to see me, but I am spotted by those who are lost."

"Is this like a curse?" I ask. As I spoke, my thoughts fell on the celebration around me, and my blood began to run hot. "Have you been cursed to see how they remember what happened to you? All of these Mexican traditions, celebrating your death, siding with those who killed you, it's downright disrespectful! But it makes sense in this country. After all, we have two parties at each other's throats, splitting the country in half, manipulating us at every..." I stopped, realizing that I was letting my anger take control. "Sorry. I got a little carried away."

"Do you want to know what I prayed about before the fight?" David asked, seemingly ignoring my tantrum.

"That you would win?" I asked, hoping not to disappoint the ghost.

"That the fighting would cease."

We came to a stop in the middle of one of the bridges which spanned the Riverwalk, and we stood in silence, staring down at the waters for a moment. "Look at the water flowing under this bridge. It never stops, never slows, always flows. This was my dream: a bridge between two peoples, with the waters of life flowing beneath it. I don't hate what I see in this celebration; rather, I embrace it, because what we see is unification, two groups of people getting past the old hurts and finding joy together." He smiled as he looked down upon the waters, noticing the Mariachi band serenading a young couple sitting at a café beside it. "This melting pot was the American dream, and it was my dream for Texas." With that, David turned and began walking away from me, back toward the Alamo, to the ground which he'd watered with his blood. And the further he walked away from me, the harder it was to see him. Before long, he'd vanished completely.

I kept my eyes on the water of the Riverwalk for awhile, then eventually turned my gaze to the festivities around me, seeing no longer the callous Fiesta but a new, better celebration. And now whenever I think of the things happening in my new home, and in my country as a whole, I look back with a renewed hope, brightened by the encouragement my lost heart received on the day when I walked with the ghost of Davey Crockett.