

Rendezvous

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Part I - The Texan

The Texan stood alone and silently at the far end of the darkened room, seemingly suspended in time. Light from the day's sweltering sun filtered bleakly through the buildup of years of dust and cigar smoke on the single plate glass window anonymously labeled "Saloon" in fading red paint. The pale sunlight streaked past the large red letters through a pall of dust particles that floated aimlessly above the felt-top gaming tables by the window. It barely reached the end of the bar on which the Texan's glass of half-n-half milk stood tall and proud like an albino sentinel.

An empty shot glass sat beside the Texan's right hand, and a few drops of Jim Beam pooled at its bottom. The surface of the milk swirled slightly from the caramel liquid that had just been poured into its depths, and the whiskey was rising thickly to float. The Texan's head was bowed over the milk, and he inhaled deeply to relish the heady waft of the alcohol vapors just released. He grunted with satisfaction as the aroma entered his nose and worked its way to his brain.

A five-bladed ceiling fan hung on a long pole from the 12-foot ceiling in the old tavern. It spun in languid circles, just threatening to stir the stale air that penetrated every inch of hair and clothing with cigar smoke, beer and whiskey fumes, and the essence of chewing tobacco that told the folks back at the house he had been spending time in the saloon down in Deep Ellum.

But the faint breeze from the fan did not stir a single gray hair on the Texan's head. He wore a light-gray felt cowboy hat. The hat was slightly cocked back. Its brim was curved with the perfection that attested to the Texan's gentlemanly inclinations. A thin leather band circumscribed the hat and was tied in a knot to hold the hat firmly in place

A bead of sweat crept through his sideburns and down into his full and graying beard. But that was not reason enough to remove his hat. The Texan disdained those who removed their hats for such frivolous reasons. Aside from when he was in bed, he removed it only in the presence of God. It was the first thing he put on in the morning, and the last thing he removed at night. His hat was his pride, joy, companion, and protector.

The Texan appreciated the old saloon, and was glad he had picked it as the place for the meeting he had planned. He had dressed for the occasion. He wore an elegant gray western suit. The jacket had seams sewn into the back that curved from left and right to form a downward point between the shoulder blades. It was cut to perfection of the finest gabardine, and matched the trousers. The twilled ribs woven into the fabric made one want to reach out and stroke the material, or at least to sit back and admire it, and many women in the past indeed had.

The Texan's boots were those of a country gentleman, and were heeled for riding. The tops had been stitched by triple side-by-side needles to form an intricate pattern revealing an American eagle pattern; his first name was stitched vertically on the back. The uppers were made of cowhide dyed red and green, and they glowed with a patina that suggested years of comfortable

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wear. These were clearly his favorite footwear.

The leather lowers resembled pigskin but were actually from an Australian wombat. They were rich dark brown, with stitching across the foot just above the toe knuckles, and they shown with the high-gloss polishing the Texan had administered the previous night before retiring. It was skin so tough you couldn't cut it with a razor-sharp knife, so durable it would not crack in a hundred years of desert wear, and so flexible your feet felt like you were wearing gloves. The Texan had broken them in 20 years earlier by standing knee-deep in the Pecos River and letting the alkaline water soak in. He had then worn the boots for the whole day to make the wombat mold itself to the exact shape of his feet. The boots would fit no feet but his. Anyone else's feet would be in agony after an hour of wear, but to him they were sublimely comfortable, a perfect fit.

Blue-stained wombat bootstraps graced the boot uppers. Three American Double Eagles hung from thin wombat rawhide cords that were tied through the bootstrap loops, one on the outer strap of each boot. The cords were nearly as strong as steel so there was no danger they would break and lose the treasured golden coins. The coins jingled like spurs as he walked, and never failed to make the heads turn. Sometimes, as he walked too closely to a chair or as he turned a corner, the coins would slap the wood or wall and make a chinking jangle sound that sounded like money. The Texan was fond of that sound. He liked those boots.



He was sure others liked them too, for they were beautiful to look at. For this reason he always tucked his right pant leg into the boot so that it seemed to be accidentally trapped by the outer bootstrap. The inside part of the pant leg hung down properly, but the outside, being caught by the bootstrap, exposed the entire upper part of the boot to the gaze of his admirers. And there, glinting in the dint of the saloon were the three Double Eagles, making the view irresistible. The Texan was dapper by any Texan's standards.

Today the boots would be hard to miss when people entered the saloon for their rendezvous with the Texan. A 4-inch brass rail extended the length of the bar and was mounted to stanchions protruding from the bottom of the bar counter wall, about 8 inches from the floor. A shiny brass cuspidor sat on the floor unused at the end of the brass rail, seemingly glad there would never again be a slimy hock-toe of tobacco spittle to stain its finish. The rail was in the perfect position to allow a guest alternately to rest his tired feet after a hard day's work in the grueling Texas sun. Although the Texan had not experienced such a day in many years, his right foot was nevertheless solidly propped between sole and heel on the brass rail, toe tip pointed forward. Colored boot top and Eagles were fully visible.

The Texan reached a veined and wrinkled hand gracefully for the glass of milk laced with Jim Beam and shoved the glass gently forward. The bartender returned from the kitchen and with one fluid motion cracked an egg on the rim of the glass with one hand and slithered its contents to the milk's murky bottom. He had done this for the Texan before in bygone years and was glad to see the Texan after nearly three decades of absence. The Texan had often befriended him and

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had never been stingy with kind and encouraging words, a debt that could never be repaid.

The Texan nodded his head in acknowledgement and lifted the glass to his lips. As the rim touched his lower lip, he tilted his head back, opened his mouth, and dumped the glassful of milk, whiskey, and egg neatly down his throat. He did not bother to sip or swallow. He just downed it in one full shot, as he always had. He would have done the same with everything he drank because he loved the efficiency of it. He had been fond of RC Cola in the old days and would drink a 12-ounce bottle in one tilt, but never in one shot the way he drank the milk. The RC had given precious relief to a parched throat, and the kids at the icehouse had loved watching his Adam's apple bob up and down as he guzzled the refreshing cola.

The kids. They would be arriving soon, all grown up and full of questions and comments for their rendezvous. The Texan loved those kids as he had loved his own life, and God knew he had missed them during his long years away. He had called each one of them out of the blue and invited them to meet him down in Deep Ellum, a now all-black district in Dallas that he had haunted when a kid and young man. The only thing remaining from the old days was the Saloon, and still some of the old timers showed up for a round of poker and a cigar.

Today, however, it was empty, by design, except for the Texan. He had returned from time to time as his adventures took him to the area. Each time the bartender Jimmy had welcomed him with effusive greetings and hugs the way Texans do each other. Each time Jimmy would make him a "Begmilk" as he called the concoction he had just drunk. Jimmy called it the Perfect Texas Breakfast.

The Texan uttered a guttural "Aaahhh" as he set the Begmilk glass back down on the bar. He folded his hands together before him as Jimmy carried the glass back to the kitchen, leaving the Texan alone in his thoughts of his own childhood, his failed marriage, his 6 kids, and his desertion of the family. He knew well that some of them loved him and let him know it often, but some would just as soon see him dead and gone. The pain, sadness, emptiness, and longing they may have felt was nothing compared to his own, but they had all turned out to be good people.

The Texan knew that good genes always make good people, given half a chance, and he was proud of each one of his kids. They could do no wrong as far as he was concerned. And, he knew what wrong they had done in their lives, as well as what right they had done. His investigators and informants had kept him posted of their family and work situations, and he had often watched them surreptitiously from a nearby vantage point. He knew their likes and dislikes and somehow managed to see to it that opportunities befell them seemingly by magic when they were most needed. None of the kids had the slightest inkling except one who had caught him observing and had disappeared to observe him back.

It was to that one that he had confided about the history of their mother, a dark history that only he, his father, and their mother's father had known about. Everyone had thought she was just the youngest child of a schoolteacher-come-farmer, when in reality she was the daughter of gypsy and Cherokee parents who had been murdered in Italy while effecting her escape in the heat of World War I. And, she was 7 years older than everyone thought, a fact that the kids'

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grandfathers has cleverly camouflaged so others in the family did not know of it. The history was told to the Texan by his alcoholic lawyer father on his deathbed in Mississippi, and the Texan had told no one but his one child who had been clever enough to observe the observer.

It was no matter now. The other kids would never know the story, at least not from the Texan. All the kids had thought he himself had been dead since 1988. He had conspired with his new cowgirl wife to fake his death for a variety of reasons, the biggest of which was to bring a kind of closure to his relationship with the kid's mother, the only woman he had ever, in spite of his peccadilloes and deeper sins, truly loved with all his heart. As it was, none of the kids attended his funeral nor had any idea of where he was supposedly buried. His chapter in their books had been closed... until he had started calling them to arrange this, his last rendezvous with them. And, they had all agreed.

The Texan noticed the light in the room change from behind him. The mirror behind the bar reflected a figure entering the swinging barroom doors, and the creak of its springs announced the first of his guests. He could not make out who it was because the light was at the person's back, but he did not turn around. The guest just stood there taking in the place and its atmosphere. Then the guest took a few steps forward and spoke.



The Texan

About the Author

Bob Hurt was born on 29 May 1943 in Houston, Texas to a pair of salespersons. He did a 9-year stint in the U.S. Navy as a Fire Control Technician, dabbled in university studies of history, music, engineering, and computer science, and worked variously as a technical writer, product manager, programmer, design engineer, marketer, salesman, and head as his own PC diagnostics company. He authored <http://cancercure.ws> in the hope he could help heal people, and <http://evangelist.net> in the hope he could help enlighten them. He is an ardent student of the Urantia Book, and sees himself as a truth seeker. He resides with his wife Maria in Clearwater, Florida. He is the family chef, and spends a lot of time studying nutrition. He exercises and catches an occasional movie with Maria, his darling. He occasionally plays guitar for her or friends, just for fun. Bob likes to write. Visit his web site and write to him if you liked this article. <http://bobhurt.com/>.

