





*Washington Spring*

by  
Gary A. Hughes

*A study in possibility*



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To

*Will Rogers*, the friend I never met, and to

*Pastor Jack Louman*,

Who loved God, believed in prayer,

& wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty in politics.

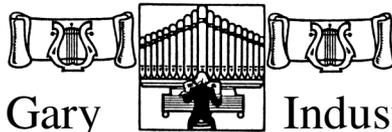
*Washington Spring* is a work of fiction and while based on contemporary political themes and calls some well known organizations by name is not meant to portray any person or persons living or dead in an identifiable manner. If you think you see yourself in any of the characters and the portrayal is less than complimentary, well shame on you! Where there's life, there's hope—please try to do better...

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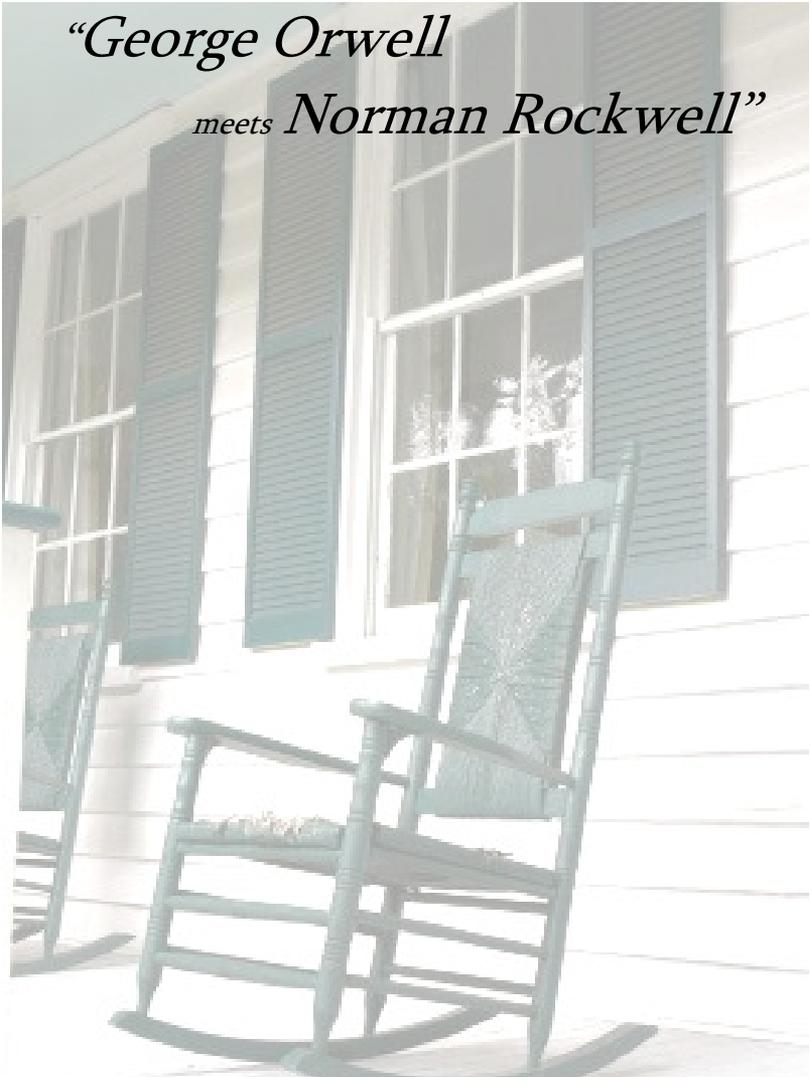


Gary Industries

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[www.garyindofor.com](http://www.garyindofor.com)

*“George Orwell  
meets Norman Rockwell”*



**I**t seems like a long way from the sleepy little town of Dexter to the movers and shakers in Washington D.C. But thoughts, ideas, and even prayers have power. Could destiny be closer than we think?

## Cast of Characters:

**Solomon Rudd**- Our host and narrator, an older, retired gentleman who loves to talk and seems to know a little about everything. Everyone likes Sol, even if they don't agree...

**Louise Rudd**- Sol's wife. Only he can call her *Weezy*.

**James Francis Kirkland**- Jimmie was Dexter's all around general-purpose handyman until he got the chance to go to Washington and do pretty much the same thing.

**Mary Jean**- She'd been almost engaged to Jimmie for over four years, but some things are worth waiting for.

**Eddie Johnson**- Spoiled brat son of a rich father, he could be obnoxious and irritating unless you had the grace to step back and view him as comic relief.

**Brogus Aldrich Lytle**- An international banking figure who stayed firmly in the shadows, or at least he should have. When trillions hemorrhaged out of the American economy, pouring down some apparent rat-hole, he was the rat.

**Alex**- A Canadian counterpart to Brogus, his heart just wasn't in his work.

**Merla**- Manipulating nations from her chateau in France, she liked her men buff, virile, and absolutely submissive (choose any two).

**Charles**- Charlie was a Harvard graduate set as a rising star on the political scene but kept winding up in the wrong place at the wrong time.

**Stephanie**- Her goal in life was pretty simple, to marry the richest man she could climb into bed with.

**Andrew Warren Siegfried Goodman**- An earnest young man, motivated to the point of obsession, he changed his name every time he moved. Or was he on a pilgrimage?

**Chaplain Gloria/ *The General*** - Prayer coordinator for the White House; the old guard found her a powerful force to reckon with.

**Jerome**- Being Gloria's husband was his primary job as he supported his wife and watched over her.

**Amos Bridger**- Dexter's crusty old barber, he had more opinions than even Solomon.

**Elizabeth**- Visiting Washington on a week's ministry trip, she wound up staying about six.

**Roland T. Jones**- He teaches economics at the local college. Imagine how it felt when some of his theories bore fruit.

**Jennifer**- A grown-up tomboy studying engineering, she can't cook, sew, or keep house but still hopes there might be a husband out there for her.

**Annie**- Solidly built with glasses and reddish hair, she's poured coffee and rung up tabs at the Rosebud Café for as long as most people can remember. She tries to stay out of the discussion, preferring to quietly referee.

**Mack Johnson**- Eddie's father's mind isn't what it used to be. But Mack hires a kid who knows more about aging than the old man.

**Virge Green**- Police chief in Dexter, he knew good law when he started to see it.

**Ernestine Harriet Lewellen**- *Hattie-Lewya*, she turned up as a skeleton out of Andy's closet, or was it just that he looked like a skeleton, back when he had a closet? Nevertheless, he was happy to see her although not so delighted as his business partner.

**Maybelle**- Working her way down from almost a quarter ton, she's hoping there might be life after diet.

**Jarvis Burkett**- A political strategist from way back, he knew lots of things, including when it was time to retire.





## Washington Spring

Prelude-

### Meet Mr. Rudd.

**From the oral recollections of Mr. Rudd, transcribed by someone who knew how...**

*Ya' know, we've been talking here maybe ten minutes and I haven't even introduced myself. The name is Mr. Solomon Aloysius' Rudd. You don't have to ask me what I do 'cause I'm retired which means I'm always doing something but I don't have to do anything. A great many days I'll just sit on my front porch, read my paper, and wonder what Weezy is coming up with for lunch.*

*Weezy is my wife; that's short for Louise. She don't necessarily like to be called Weezy but she puts up with it when I do. I suggest you call her Mrs. Rudd and if she figures she knows ya' well enough to call her Louise or Lou, she'll let you know and friendship can develop naturally from there, don'tcha see?*

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\* (Al-oo-ish'-us)



## Gary A. Hughes

*But this story isn't about me or Weezy, it's mainly about my friend Jim. His full name is James Francis Kirkland and we always joked that with initials like that he should've run for President. Well, to make a long story short (a practice I avoid whenever possible) he never ran but got appointed. What do you think the odds are on that?*

*Jim was our man of all trades around here. He had some legal training but wasn't a lawyer. He sold real estate but not full time. He wrote for the paper but not every week 'cause we're a small town and we don't have news every week, if you know what I'm talking about. In the meantime he did carpentry and landscaping and anything a guy could do to stay busy and keep an income trickling in.*

*Can't say we valued Jim that much when we had him here. He did what he did so good we just took him for granted, the way you do people that does what they're supposed to and don't give you no trouble. But we sure missed him when he was gone. That's the worst thing D.C. ever did to us was to take Jim away. But I guess it had to be.*

*However, it's consolation to know that our sacrifice weren't all in vain for nothing. Unlike many good men that go to Washington, Jim stayed good. Some say he got better with time.*

*Speaking of time, you should have seen Jim fix a clock. I saw him with one spread all over the dinner table and when the*



## Washington Spring

*pieces was back together they was working. Not only that, all the pieces were together, there weren't nothing left loose.*

*You see, Jim studied things, figured out how they worked and when he knew that he could fix 'em. But what none of us realized was he could do the same thing with government. He not only read *The Constitution*, he studied the back-story, the men who wrote it and why they wrote what they wrote.*

*Since he knew it so well, it was funny to hear him talk about current events and especially what this court or that court said about things. He'd usually call the judge an ignorant fool, needing to be kicked off the bench. He'd shake his head over the mess they made with precedent, which he described as generational mischief and inbred ignorance. I think that's why he didn't go all the way with his law degree; he was too much of an idealist to play the game as skewed as it was. But just the same he was smart, he knew people and he loved truth.*

*Once in a while he'd say what he'd do if he had the chance. I know there's a Man Upstairs who hears everything but sometimes we wonder whether He still intervenes or not. At least I used to wonder. But not any more. I saw what He did for Jim and how it worked out for all of us. I believe a whole lot more than I used to...*

*And before we get too deep into things, there's one other character you need to know about too and that young man was*



Gary A. Hughes

*about as unlike Jim as you're gonna find. I think in those days he called himself Siegfried...*



Chapter 1-

## Flyover Country



Dexter is a little town where nothing happens and the people who live there like it that way. It's a good place to be from 'cause that means you grew up with good folk and good friends and some of that no doubt rubbed off.

The best thing about being from Dexter is you aren't there any longer because it's hard to make a living where nothing happens. Money is best earned in the midst of sweat, toil, and competition, where you get the best out of everyone.

However, if you go out and make your pile it might be a good place to come back to because if you can afford to just sit on your porch, it's nice to have someone walk by who knows your name and might even like to sit a spell with you.

Not that it isn't growing. The population sign where the highway branches off into the main part of town had to be repainted just last year because of all the new people. In fact,



## Gary A. Hughes

there was talk in the council meeting of having the newcomers pay for the update but that didn't pan out. One of the guys flat refused to pay and the other claimed the sign needed repainting anyway, which it did, and as the paint in the can was still good, expenses were minimal.

The town seems to get older and slower all the time. Most kids are stir-crazy by the time they get through school and by the time they've had a college education they have little intention of returning. The ones that try seldom stay long unless they like living with their folks and don't get kicked out for it's hard to make a living in Dexter.

There's farming, some packing sheds, a couple closed factories, some good hunting and fishing, and a small business district. Nothing however, that pays very well and what money there is gets fought over and recycled without mercy.

At the same time it's a nice place to live with quiet streets and well-kept yards. Houses tend to be small, most of them around a century old. People take pride in who they are and they all seem to know their neighbors. One of the best neighbors in town is old Sol, *Mr. Rudd* to the kids who've found he's always good for a warm hello and a piece of candy.

Short and scrappy, hair getting white and rather thin, he still seems able to do just about anything he sets his mind to. He'll grasp you firmly by the hand and look you in the eye like



## Washington Spring

he's delighted to make a new friend, which he is. Then he'll nail you with his glance and tell you what's what but you can't feel threatened because he obviously likes you so much. Older folks know he's always good for a warm hello and a running commentary on just about anything that's happening anywhere.

"All I know is what I read in the papers," he laughs as he leans back in his porch rocker, said paper spread across his lap. "I know that's Mr. Will Rogers' line but it's still true today and old Will aint used it for a while."

Jimmie, pushing a hand mower around Sol's handkerchief sized front lawn, paused for a grin at his host and employer *de-Jur*. "You pick up on more than they intended you to. I never saw such a guy for reading between the lines."

Jimmie was in his mid-thirties, tall and dark haired, with a flash of gold in his eyes that made them arresting. That was hard to see though because he was extremely bashful and had a hard time even looking close friends in the face.

Sol laughed again, "*I know rabbits, and I know rabbits' habits*. That was one of Ethel Waters' sayings."

Jimmie nodded, "She was another sharp one. You've certainly helped broaden my outlook."

"Yeah, must be why you hang around so much, that and Weezy's cookin'..." Sol's words trailed off as he saw Ed, another local figure come running down the sidewalk. Ed was the



## Gary A. Hughes

youngest son of Mack Johnson, who used to own the little factory on the edge of town. Actually he still owned the building and some of the equipment was still there but it had been closed for years.

*Johnson Precision Parts* made specialty items larger manufacturers incorporated into their goods. So a Freightliner truck, an Irwin-Hobson window, or a Ryerson re-loader might have all contained a piece or two made at Johnson's. But as manufacturing fled American shores the orders dried up and Johnson closed his factory, keeping the building and a few tools as his personal machine shop.

The man hustling down the street was somewhat unkempt, overweight, and nearing the start of his fourth decade of life. His brown hair had lightened as gray began to appear and it was creeping back from his forehead, leaving that much more space to sunburn.

From the timeworn streets, front porches were close enough for easy conversation with passers-by. "Well hey, Ed, what's yer hurry?"

Ed pulled up short, seizing a couple planks of the white picket fence as if to steady himself and arched his back, overcome with the importance of his message. At times like this he still reminded Sol of the curly-headed brat everyone said was



## Washington Spring

spoiled rotten. While the curls were long gone and his middle bowed out a ways, not much else had changed.

“I see you aint been paying attention to the news today, Sol. Big terror strike in Washington. They blew up the Capitol building!”

Sol and Jimmie looked at one another, trying to decide how much of Ed’s story to accept at face value. Feeling like he was losing points, Ed volunteered more information,

“I think they got the government shut down!”

“That’d be an improvement!” Sol nodded as he folded his newspaper. “Well, if it’s that big we better get the television warmed up and see what they’ve got to say for themselves.”

The three of them trooped into the house and Sol ceremoniously picked up the remote and switched on. “Weezy, we got company.”

Louise leaned through the doorway to give her guests a quick nod and returned a few minutes later with a pitcher of lemonade. She wore faded cotton print dresses around the house with an apron normally in place, proud of her domestic skills. Her hair was colored a dark blond and sensibly permed. She looked every inch a lady in the classic southern sense of the word.

By this time the picture was on and they were watching a view with the Capitol building in the background. It stood but



## Gary A. Hughes

smoke drifted out some windows in the left wing while the commentator droned on and on about who they thought might have been in the room when the bomb exploded.

Jimmie laughed, “Did you ever hear so many politically correct ways to say I don’t know what just happened?”

Ed stared, “The way I heard it, half the city was leveled.”

“That’s how rumors grow.” Sol nodded, “I’m sure it’s goin’ to be bad enough.”

“I’ve been especially worried over this last go round,” said Jimmie. “It’s like nobody’s even paying attention to the Constitution any more, except to misquote it and try to make it say things it was never meant to.”

“Come on Jimmie, it’s a *living* document.” Eddie looked especially mischievous, “It’s supposed to mean something new and fresh to every generation!”

Jimmie narrowed his eyes at the screen. “Say, I think that’s where they’ve been having the impeachment hearings. This could involve the President.”

Ed sneered, “Aw come on, Jimmie-Boy, don’t you want that guy out of there?”

Sol nodded. “That’s the chamber. This could be interesting.”

“And the VP resigned last month and hasn’t been replaced yet.” Louise leaned against the doorframe as she observed the events.



## *Washington Spring*

The scene changed and a senator from Michigan addressed the country. In so many words, damage was being assessed and plans were being made to deal with the emergency.

“Who in the world was that?” Louise looked from face to face.

“Oh, I forget his name, he’s only in his second term,” replied Jimmie. “He said some pretty good things in his first campaign but his voting record’s been disappointing.”

Next up was a congressman from Vermont. Damage was being assessed and plans were being made to deal with the emergency.

“That’s what the last guy said.” Sol chuckled. “Looks like all they can say is what somebody decided on—oh, here’s the governor of California.”

The Governor gave the easy smile he was so famous for, made a few perfunctory remarks and then delivered the gist of his speech: “Damage is being assessed and plans are being made to deal with the emergency.”

“I guess we’ll learn that one by heart.” Sol held up the remote as he muted the sound. “We can check back from time to time. Anything new that comes up they’ll repeat a hundred times. We’ll learn more with the sound off than by letting them drill their mantras into us.”

“The wisdom of Solomon,” chuckled Jimmie.



## Gary A. Hughes

“Well it just goes to show.” Sol shook his head. “They spout so much foolishness from that box, I’ve learned more listening to you, James, than I ever did off the air.”

The phone rang and Louise went to answer it. Returning, she made an announcement. “That was Reverend Phillips and we’ll be having prayer at the church tonight for our nation.”

Ed leaned back in his chair, a cynical smile on his face. “I guess if it makes you feel better.”

Sol sat up a little straighter, “Now Eddie, I’ve done my time in Doubting Castle too but I’m sold in the other direction. Things change with prayer.”

“Yeah, sure...”

“I know, you hardly even vote either ‘cause you know each one counts so little. But I want to cast my vote for the best man even if he don’t get in ‘cause I’ll know I did the right thing. Now prayer is a lot like casting that vote. It may not decide the election but each one counts and I feel I’m a better man for having gone on record and saying *this is what I’d like to see*. There aint no higher authority than God and I’d at least like to tell him what I want.”

Eddie threw up his hands as though he were about to explain something to a child, “Okay, so what would you want? What would you ask for if it all depended on you?”



## Washington Spring

Sol stopped and took a breath, looking from face to face. “If I had my way we’d send Jimmie here to Washington and put a big stick in his hand. Him and his *Society* friends would sort that mess out in a hurry.”

Jimmie stared back like a deer in the headlights. Ed broke into laughter, “I think they already have someone to mow the lawn at the White House. And as for society, even in Dexter Jimmie don’t cut no mustard. Grass, yes; mustard, no.”

“That’s not what I meant, Eddie Johnson. And to me it’s no disgrace to do whatever needs to be done for a suitable remuneration. To me that’s the guy we been needin’, one that knows how to work and aint afraid to roll up his sleeves and get the job done!

“There’s too many of these cuckoo birds already (there comes another on the TV now who’s probably going to tell us damage is being assessed and plans are being made to deal with the emergency). What we need is not another parakeet but someone who knows what to do and has the guts and brains to do it!”

“Well that lets our Jimmie out!”

Sol shrugged. “I don’t think so ...”

Eddie chuckled as he put down his lemonade glass and stood up. “Oh Solomon, you’re always talking but fortunately nobody’s listening.”



## Gary A. Hughes

“God hears me!” Sol poked out his lower lip in good-natured defiance.

“Nobody important!” Eddie turned to Jimmie, “So how ‘bout it, *Lawn Boy*, ready for a turn at the big time?”

Jimmie rose from his chair, looking bashful and awkward, “W-well I’m n-not much for public speaking or anything, but I could tell them some of what they’re doing w-wrong.”

“You could, could you?” His adversary’s eyes lit up, the triumph of the bully with a new victim, “Since when have you ever stood up to anybody about anything?”

“W-well everybody says we w-want to see something different and our c-country needs a new direction. I think we really need to r-rediscover our roots. M-most people have c-completely forgotten what r-really made America great.”

“You think you’re the one to tell them?” Eddie began advancing, stepping Jimmie backward. “You don’t even get paid for your work half the time, people jerk you around and then laugh about it behind your back. What do you think would happen to you in the big time?”

Jimmie tried to speak but couldn’t, collapsing back into his chair and burying his face in his hands.

Eddie’s laughter was cut off as the screen door sighed to a close.



## Washington Spring

Sol looked at Jimmie. “Ya know, he was almost too insistent in his denial. I certainly wouldn’t try to draw a line in the sand with The Almighty.”

He lowered his hands, revealing eyes wet with tears. “You’re still out there a ways on your limb, Solomon.”

“I know, Jimmie; I know.” Sol nodded, turning off the television. “This is a big enough crises. It’ll take care of itself for a while. Time I was back on the porch.”

“How many guys need to show up and say the exact same thing?” Jimmie shook his head as they walked out of the house.

“Been plenty of ‘em.” Sol nodded as he got into his favorite chair. “They see it as a power vacuum. First guy steps in that can stay there gets to be *it* for a while. We may see some strange sights in the next few days.”

“I’ll start with seeing a mowed lawn.” Jimmie chuckled as he took hold of the little push mower.

Sol nodded agreement. “That’s what I like about you, Jimmie, you keep your priorities straight.

“Just the same, Sol, I couldn’t imagine myself handling a job like *that* one!”

He shrugged, “Never said you could *handle* such a thing, just that I’d like to see you try. At least you have some kind of idea that holds water.”



## Gary A. Hughes

“Yeah, but just the same,” Jimmie thought out loud as he pushed the mower around the yard, “I’m not even sure the President is the man to make the difference we need. The real change needs to come from Congress. If anything, the President needs to become less powerful and more of a leader than anything we’ve been seeing.”

“Takes a strong man to do that.” Sol nodded as he rocked. “Takes a real strong man to point to what’s needed, name who needs to do it, and just stand back and let them.”

“Well that lets me out!” Jimmie grabbed the mower to carry it around to the shed. “I’ve failed at pretty much everything I’ve tried to do. I failed at law, I’d fail at news reporting if they were paying me, it’s been six months since I sold any real estate and I’ve been on food stamps twice, once because of a nervous breakdown. The only politics I’ve had was running for Town Council and I got beat pretty bad each time! Nobody wants a thing to do with any idea they know is mine!”

Sol continued to rock and nod, listening to what he could of Jimmie’s dissertation as he walked out of sight and then returned. “Up to this point I was having my doubts. But when you list your achievements in such an exemplary fashion you remind me of another politician nobody wanted.”

“And who would that be?” Jimmie stood at the gate, ready to end the conversation and move on to his next job.



# Washington Spring

“Abraham Lincoln!”



Chapter 2-

## Smoke & Mirrors

**P**riorities were on a great many minds. Balances of power had shifted and enormous quantities of talk were required to reestablish stasis, or the point of equilibrium.

The line of presidential succession was indeed broken, something that had never happened before. The remnant of Congress started taking roll, assessing who was left and what they could do with the people they had.

State legislatures convened and wondered how the turmoil in Washington would ultimately affect them. Over the years they'd seen their authority erode as the Washington establishment fed them crumbs from the federal budget, all the while making them dance for their supper. For the most part they loved the game, concerned only with how to advance within the power structure. But as the system was shaken some began to wonder. Thinking however, was painful. Most of them hadn't done it for a long time.



## Washington Spring

In national capitols around the world, leaders pondered. For some it was a time of fear. Could elements of this attack be traced back to their country? What reprisals might there be? Others felt the misgivings of those financially over-extended. If Wall Street sneezed, how much of the world would catch cold this time?

Dictators large and small leaned back in their chairs, staring at the world through half-closed eyes. Was this their moment? Here was a window, possibly of opportunity. What could they do that would leave them with more power when the dust settled? What could they get away with, while the giant with the big stick was lying helpless on his back?

The Premier of China reclined in his office chair, tapping fingers against his cheeks. Two video screens played before him, a live feed of the events in Washington and his favorite story of all time, the collapse of the two towers of 9/11. He gazed from one to the other, chuckling.

\* \* \*

**more from Mr. Rudd...**

*Terrorism has always been an unknown factor and lots of attempts have been directed at none other than the US of A. This one was no exception. It didn't help that it came right in the middle of an impeachment hearing.*



## Gary A. Hughes

*It involved the President. Politicians are not models of integrity but this guy beat them all. He swore an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States when by the plain words of said document he wasn't supposed to be President. Nobody seemed to very much care, at least to start with...*

*But truth comes out, no matter how bad we want to suppress or ignore it. First there was little squeaks here and there from these far-right types who're always squeaking about something. People chortled and nodded but the timbre of the squeaking went into lower and deeper registers as discontent moved leftward across the political landscape.*

*It didn't help that "our hero" continued to spend huge piles of money that wasn't there in the first place, appointed his friends to all the good jobs, and started throwing people in jail on his say-so alone. By that time the squeak had deepened and matured into a bi-partisan rumble, something any politician should know is dangerous.*

*The showdown of course was another impeachment hearing. And it was right in the middle of that, the bomb went off. Bang! What a mess!*

*Reverend Phillips was preaching last Sunday that all things work together for good. I can't say that applies to every case as there's provisos with the promise but they sure did this time and*



## Washington Spring

*we had an adventure, me and the whole United States of America.*

*Ya' see, there's a line of succession for President of the United States. You don't have a job that important without somebody knowing who's going to take over if you're suddenly unavailable. The first pick of course is the Vice-President. That's his job really, just to be there in case he's needed.*

*With such a loose and open-ended job description Vice-Presidents have a knack for getting into trouble. This one was no exception. Not only was he secretly on the board of three defense contractors including Halliburton no less but his extra-curricular salary was four million dollars a year. Now I know the dollar wasn't buyin' what it used to but that's still a lot of money when so many people was out of work.*

*Folks tend to be forgiving over a lot of things but that aint one of them. So the double-dipper plus had been run out of office with no time for replacement, the President was up for impeachment and all his appointments, who were a good share of the line of succession, were disqualified. They'd been appointed by a man who shouldn't a been appointing 'cause he shouldn't a been President to start with. Get it?*

*The American people were finally starting to get it and they were in an ugly mood, which aint the best for good decisions. James Thurber once said, "You can fool too many people, too*



## Gary A. Hughes

*much of the time.” That’s certainly true but the sad fact is, once fooled they tend to go back and re-purchase the same lie all over again. It’s a phenomenon.*

*That’s what made the events that followed so remarkable. In one blast we lost The President, Speaker of The House, President of The Senate, and other various and sundry persons, some of whom were important. The rest of the line was either disgraced or disqualified.*

*In any other circumstance, chaos would have ensued. Choices could have been made that would have cost us our liberty, property, and all of our personal security. There was certainly a fair amount of uncertainty and even fear. But it’s like Brother Phillips preached, all things did work for our good.*

*Things don’t just happen in politics; they’re planned, staged and orchestrated. But not this time. The bomb blast not only caught the planners off guard, things began to happen that weren’t in their script...*

\* \* \*



In a country retreat office in upstate New York, a sleepy-looking, petulant autocrat put down his telephone receiver and stared up at the ceiling. No need to apologize if Brogus



## Washington Spring

Aldrich Lytle is not a household name to you. He prefers to work in the shade and he's rich enough to make that happen.

It's not that he never touched your life. You started the day brushing your teeth with his toothpaste. Your morning newspaper was part of his syndicate and even if it didn't happen to be his editorial policy would have reached clear over to where you stood. You tapped your feet on the way to work to music from his media conglomerate. Your kids learn his thoughts and values in your local school regardless of what the teachers or the PTA try to do about it. And ninety percent of the votes you cast are for men of his, if not choosing at least sufferance. Whoever gets in, you get his program. But you don't know his name. That's the way he wants it.

Brogus networks and knows how to delegate. His counterparts are scattered throughout the world, unfathomably rich and completely depraved. They call the shots for nations, raising up, casting down, directing prosperity here, engineering bankruptcy there, starting wars and milking them for profit. They see people as commodities, to be exploited as ruthlessly as any other natural resource. Hell yawns beneath their feet, fired up and ready to receive them but not just yet for this is their hour and the power of darkness.

When people speak of intrigue and conspiracy they use terms like CFR, Bilderberger, RIIA, Illuminati, or such. Brogus



## Gary A. Hughes

knows about all of these, in fact he and his cabal is the secret power behind the secret power of these shadowy groups. But people with wild glints in their eyes point fingers and name names of the fronts, the shells, and the decoys, never Brogus. And that's the way he likes it.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness the devil appeared, offering the nations of the world in exchange for bowing and submission. Christ, knowing the nations to be his regardless turned the old boy down. Other men received the same visitation and some accepted.

What reward do they reap? Satan is treacherous. Many received the success they craved but not the happiness. Karl Marx died in obscure poverty, revered as a master economist after he repeatedly went broke playing the stock market. John Lennon captivated the world through music and died a lonely rich man, gunned down by a deranged, devoted fan. Hitler seized half the world only to have his empire crumble. Stalin's empire stood but he died in fear and torment, a prisoner of his own success.

So Brogus had a master, an agenda larger than himself, and other players to contend with. It was an uneasy alliance for like Hitler and Stalin, their ultimate loyalty was each man to himself. Brogus would have been all too happy to swallow up any of his associates, just as they would have done for him. And beneath



## Washington Spring

everything Hell still yawned, waiting for the one appointment none of the schemers could break.

He brought his eyes down and seized the phone again. Hitting speed dial and entering a password he prioritized his way to the attention of another master planner. “Alex! You let this one slip by! No, don’t give me that. You’re supposed to be riding herd on your camel-jockeys, not letting them take unauthorized projects!”

From the other end of the line came protests and recriminations. Brogus shook his head. “Now come on, I’m holding up my end. I’ve been keeping banking going. We siphoned off another trillion just last month and stifled two attempts to audit the Fed. We weren’t due for another terrorist attack till fall, to help disrupt the elections. You know the rules!”

Brogus paused to allow his fellow to stammer and sputter a bit longer. “Now we need to get together ASAP and figure out what everyone needs to do. Stuff’s happening. We need to make sure it lands our way.”

Another pause while Alex vented a few more thoughts.

“Now, I suggest you get together with Merla over there in Europe. The things she’s doing with her African niggers are a study in geopolitics. They don’t do a thing she doesn’t tell them but they all think they’re running the show. It’s a sight to behold!”



## Gary A. Hughes

Alex protested but Brogus cut him off, “Now look Junior, everyone knows Arabs are nothing but sand-niggers. I know they’re hard to control but it’s better letting them do the dirty work than having anyone figure out what we’re up to. We need to be the good guys. Get it?”

Again Alex took a moment to respond before Brogus jumped in again. “Our main issue though is to replace some hired help there in D.C. and we weren’t anticipating the turnover.”

“It can’t be that time critical.” With the focus off himself, Alex became much more centered on the conversation.

“Oh, this couldn’t have come at a worse time.” Brogus chortled and waved his hand through his hair. “There’s another trillion due to change hands this month and it takes the right men to squeak it through.”

“How much can their economy take?”

“I don’t know. This could be the big one. But before we sink the boat we want to get everything we can out of it!”

“With you it’s always money!”

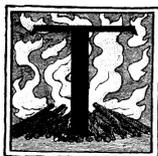
Brogus laughed. “And I suppose you’re in this for your health? Just because you deal in control, influence and armaments? Bottom line of everything is money. It’s the distilled essence of a man’s life, the blood and breath of everything he ever works, hopes or dreams for.”

“And when you finally have enough?”



## Washington Spring

Brogus laughed again, “How could you *ever* have enough?”



\* \* \*

he young man tossed beneath the covers, tormented by dreams, his life’s ambitions mocked once again. Visions challenging what should have been a perfect world invaded the temple of his mind, waiting until sleep held him captive and bringing ideas he couldn’t disprove.

Marx appeared—the grand old man of Communism had laughed in the young zealot’s face. It had to be the book he’d fallen asleep reading, the one that spoke of *Socialism, as dreamed of by Karl Marx*.<sup>\*</sup> And yet, after the tower had risen clear to heaven here came Marx himself with a phrase that rocked the foundations:

**My heart’s desire would be to send the whole world into  
Hell and follow after them laughing!**

What’s wrong with this picture? Marx the materialist, the consummate atheist not only calling Hell real but the gracious

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<sup>\*</sup> *Philip Dru: Administrator*, written by Colonel Edward Mandel House in 1912. An indifferently written novel and never widely circulated it was nevertheless one of the more influential books of the twentieth century. Taken to heart by FDR’s cabinet it was an unseen cornerstone of The New Deal.

<sup>\*\*</sup> paraphrased from *Oulanem*, anagram of the messianic title *Immanuel*, a blasphemous drama written by the young Marx.



## Gary A. Hughes

benefactor of mankind unmasked as an agent of evil, a deceiver who knew exactly what he was doing and saw mere mortals as bugs, trodden underfoot at will.

It spotlighted troublesome details the young man's tormented brain had been trying not to see but excuse. Why did the pink, cotton-candy ideals of youth morph into blood-red *Revolution* and create misery? Unless the enlightened remade nations, petty men would continue to lavish their ill-gotten gains on homes, children, churches, whatever causes shortsighted and self-serving fools might deem worthy. But what a cost to set things right!

Disrupting society had to be rationalized, a necessary sacrifice, birth pangs of the glorious age to come. But almost a century of blood, sweat, and tears had failed to bring the wonderful new world to Russia, except in the glowing reports of professional liars. Of course, the Russians hadn't gotten it right, the bungling Russians never got anything right; they hadn't produced *real* Communism at all! Only pure and selfless Socialism could bring universal, worldwide harmony but nobody seemed able to make it happen...

The incongruous quote put everything into a different light, casting eerie shadows across the young man's imagination. What if Marx and the highest levels of leadership were blatant hypocrites? What if iron fisted control *was* the point? What if



## Washington Spring

the shell or image of Communism was *bait* for the ultimate and most vicious brand of *Capitalism* in which a very select, very few, and very wicked elite *enslaved* everyone else, totally, utterly, and hopelessly? What if all the shortages, ration queues, forms, permits and interference were not an unintended consequence but the actual program, men and women locked in subjugation, bound hand and foot to a system that did not love and exploited as ruthlessly as evil minds lit by the fires of Hell could scheme up?

The tormented soul on the bed thrashed, wrestling helplessly, unbidden thoughts torpedoing his plans, values, and view of life itself. At such a desperate moment the warrior trains himself to seek *pure* knowledge, hidden truths, the ultimate quest. He bowed his head, quieting his heart, preparing his mind. Only communion with a higher power, the ultimate authority would suffice, answering questions, settling doubts. Opening a laptop, the glow of the screen illuminating his face, he typed in the incantation, a password known only to him.

Successfully linked to the infinite resources of broadband Internet he began his pilgrimage, ignoring blogger's rants and the siren call of the wikis to enter the very plane of enlightenment, carefully seeking that elusive altar of truth, the only place his tortured soul might find rest. Might. The first, overall, and burning question was the quote itself. Did Marx really say that?



## Gary A. Hughes

Perhaps an hour later a light tap derailed his deliberations and the door clicked open. “Can I join you?” One of the two girls he roomed with stuck her head in.

He looked up, resentment making him scowl, “Look, I’m having a really hard time here. I need ...”

His voice trailed off as he saw how distressed the other was. “Bad customer?”

She nodded, slipped into the room, and closed the door. A professional playmate whose figure sold itself, the filmy nightgown veiled her charms only slightly. “I can’t stand that guy, even when he’s asleep. Don’t know why I keep doing this.”

“The money.” With a disgusted look he buried his nose back into the laptop, “The ever-loving, *you sell your soul, I’ll sell mine* root of all evil! The buck stops here, but it sure doesn’t stick around very long...”

A grimace twisted her face. “I charge *him* double but it doesn’t make me feel any better.”

He climbed out of the covers without taking his eyes off the screen. Draping the expensive negligee over a chair she slipped into the space the young man had just vacated, an auburn haired Venus who’d qualify as just about any man’s fantasy. For a moment she lay towards him, savoring the warmth he’d left under the covers.



## *Washington Spring*

He continued to stand, tapping keys on the computer. Scrawny limbs, bare torso, a mop of dark hair, and an absence of muscle tone, his bikini briefs made him look more like a kid brother than the twenty-something he really was.

“I won’t be long. Just need to find out a few things.”

“More dreams?”

“Uh huh. Every time I get it all figured, somebody punches holes in everything I believe in.” Keeping his eyes glued to the screen, he slipped next to her in the little single bed.

“And it reminds you of a woman?” A note of accusation crept into her voice.

He sighed, her pursuit making the space feel even smaller than it was. “Someone I used to know. Long time ago, another life. Don’t feel bad, she was older than my grandmother...”

“But she knew how to mess with your mind...”

“Wasn’t always dreams either. Things would just come. Each time I hoped it wouldn’t be true.”

“But they are?”

He nodded. “So far. It’s a little too weird.”

“Weird to me too. None of it is stuff I’d even care about.”

“I’ll be done in a minute. I know you work tomorrow.”

She sighed. “And you said a whole new job might open up for you?”



## Gary A. Hughes

Raising the possibility made him look up, eyes glittering, “Yeah. Anderson got killed in the blast and that leaves a vacancy at The White House.”

“You really think you have a chance?”

“There’s a new feeling in the air, it’s like just anything might happen. Even the big boys are scrambling!”

“Yeah, but Siegfried, we’re talking The White House!”

The bed shook as he stifled his laughter. “You’re not the only one making points with guys you can’t stand!”

She groaned and turned her face to the wall.

He folded the laptop and cuddled. “Angry again?”

“I want you to like me!”

“I like you.”

“Not the way a young man should!”

Sidling closer, he spoke right in her ear, “Well I don’t know whether you can feel it too but my body’s getting ready to give you something that aging stud next door wouldn’t even consider.”

“What’s that?” There was no mistaking a rising in her voice that spoke of hope, anticipation, even desperation as she half-turned towards him...

“A good night’s sleep!” He rolled again, chuckling as he turned his back to her.



## Washington Spring

She cuddled tight, knowing he wouldn't resist as she burrowed her face into his hair and let tears fall onto the pillow. He allowed himself to be drawn closer and even threw an arm around, holding her like the little girl she wanted to feel like for a few hours. Perhaps that was part of the attraction, that after all the men captivated by her body only he seemed to understand her true self or at least, could tell when the woman inside was hurting.

It rocked her gently each time his lungs filled with air and she could feel the rhythm of his heart. It was a lonely heart, no mistake about that but it still didn't beat for her. And however close she watched, she'd never seen her womanly charms provoke anything approaching physical desire within him.

He just didn't seem wired that way for in the cramped space he couldn't have kept such a secret hidden from her ... As if he was bound up, sealed and kept for some unique and special destiny...



Chapter 3-

## The Lottery

**Mr. Rudd's narrative resumes...**

*Well, I reckon by now you're starting to get the hang of all the crazy things that happened. Some of the facts was self evident so to speak, just where the bomb was placed and who all died when it went off. Some of the other things wasn't so easy like who was trying to do what and who succeeded and who didn't and some of that we just kind of pieced it together after the fact.*

*But bottom line (here I go making a long story longer again) is that since we did put some pieces together, we have a story to tell. That's what I'm going to do—try to tell the story.*

*So here was a job opening, for President of the United States. Now of course the usual way of filling the vacancy would be for several candidates to start getting the word out about their suitability and availability in hopes of getting themselves nominated at a big disreputable convention. The finalists would tour around making speeches and ribbing one another which is*



## Washington Spring

*embarrassing after one of them gets into office and people discover he didn't mean any of the nice things he promised.*

*Well about the time they'd wore out their welcome as candidates someone would have the bright idea it was time for an election which is sort of a national beauty contest for politicians. It always struck me why they didn't have candidates pose in bathing suits like they do the women but I guess if they did that nobody would vote for them unless they was women which might be a nice change after all. Maybe we better think about that a while. A long while. Perhaps the longer the better.*

*Problem was, all this election stuff takes a couple years to go full cycle. It's not like you could plant a candidate today and harvest a President tomorrow.*

*Someone else thought of using the Electoral College. The system was set up so we elect the electors who actually elect the man. It was pointed out the electors from the last election were still available, and could do their thing and tell us who it would be just fine.*

*Well you know, that would have worked pretty good and there was even precedent from the days of like, George Washington but the people on account of having been bamboozled so many times weren't about to put that kind of trust in men forty-nine percent of the country hadn't voted into place anyway. Not only that, now the luster had kind of worn off*



## Gary A. Hughes

*the new guy it was felt they hadn't done such a good job with him after all. So there we was, leaderless.*

*And of course, just as we all suspected there were those that tried to rise up but those around knew better than to let it happen and of course they tried to appoint committees but for once the American people were too smart for that and headed 'em off 'cause they were well aware that things aren't done by committees but in spite of 'em.*

*I don't know who came up with the lottery idea but finally that's what everybody hit on. Just take one of those air-ball machines and draw out nine numbers and whoever's social security number it is gets to call the shots and referee the dogfight so to speak.*

*Perhaps I should say the first qualified candidate for after all, drawing random numbers could bring up someone who was either too young to leave home or dead too long to even vote in "Good-Ole-Boy" County. Now I think there probably should have been better ideas and there's certainly been worse ones but that's the one they hit on and what could have been a complete tragedy actually worked out pretty good.*

\* \* \*



## Washington Spring



rogus looked around the table of the hotel conference suite. For matters this urgent and important they usually picked neutral ground, a place where no one felt they were working within another's power base. Alex was here, swarthy and shifty-eyed, Merla in her pinstriped suit, dark hair pulled back to a severe bun, Moe from London, and Basel from Switzerland. Others were connected by videoconference, not really participating but monitoring, lest anyone should become what the others construed as out of line.

Off to the side, a cloth covered something bulky. Brogus made eye contact around the circle and resumed his presentation. Somewhat less than six feet, he looked very much like a banker, not the local branch manager but the silver-haired guy at the top who knew how to make everyone else grovel.

As such he wore, not a suit but top-flight casual attire, subtly telling the world it needed to dress up in order to meet with *him*. There was nothing casual about his face though; it had an ugly forcefulness that totally matched his relentless ambition. He was with his peers this day and arrogance resonated within the room like an electric current.

“Now we know we need a leader in a hurry. Everyone seems agreed the governor is too headstrong right now. If he thinks he has a mandate and starts going off on his own the



## Gary A. Hughes

assassination would be counter-productive even if it was necessary.

“Of the two senators, neither has the popular support to really carry things. The movie actor just discovered he has cancer and the TV host doesn’t want to talk about it now her ratings are back up. In short, the whole front line has been eliminated.” He glanced around the circle and nodded again.

“Well really Brogie,” Merla lit a cigarette in a jeweled holder and stared through the smoke, little puffs coming out of her mouth like a dragon’s, “we know we’re going to sell ‘em one of the newbies. It’s just a question of how, isn’t it?”

Although she lived in France her accent was more cosmopolitan, international. Members of this particular group each had their sphere of influence but it went beyond national boundaries, they were citizens of the world. National borders represented something between irritations and targets as the conspirators sought to remake the world into their plaything.

Brogus’ face lit up. “Merla, you always get right to the point. I believe the thing to do is sell them Charlie here, shove him down their collective throat and let them think it was their idea all along.”

The indicated young man smiled. He was somewhere in his mid-twenties, fair-haired, well built, and carried a sweet innocence to his face that would let him get away with just about



## Washington Spring

anything for a while. He'd just graduated with honors from Harvard after five and a half years worth of escapades that held him on the brink of expulsion the whole time. He was technically expelled in his second year but he had connections. He should have been arrested and be serving prison time but he had connections. He nodded his head in deference to those connections, wearing his most angelic face.

Merla narrowed her eyes and swept them over the profligate hunk, "Wouldn't mind giving him a little post-graduate work myself." She looked every one of her forty plus years as she blew another plume of smoke in his direction. The young man returned her gaze with a shrug and a quirky smile.

Merla sighed. "Smart, too. A little too smart if you ask me."

Brogus leaned forward, "We need someone smart in the right ways, smart when he needs to be. What I was thinking was a lottery. Just let them start picking numbers and let that lead to Charlie here."

"I hope you know what you're doing," Alex pursed his thin lips and spoke in a whiney voice. "We've had too many setbacks and things that didn't work right lately."

"Setbacks in *your* department." Brogus glared at Alex, "I warned you about those rag-heads you're working with. They come up with too much on their own. You've got to keep them



## Gary A. Hughes

busy and out of sight 'till they're needed. That's the golden rule of terrorist management."

"So you're telling me you've got a rigged lottery."

"Of course. It's been rigged a long time." Brogus beamed, "You don't think I'd let them lose their money honestly, do you?" He walked over to the shrouded assembly and pulled the sheet off. It was one of those ball machines they use to draw lottery numbers. He turned it on and the balls began to whirl in the chamber.

"Come here Alex." Brogus beckoned the other man over. "You draw."

Alex flicked the levers that allowed balls to pop into the receiving tubes. When he had nine, Brogus motioned to Charles. The young man took out his Social Security card and laid it on the table. The nine digits matched.

With a grin, Brogus opened a panel in the base that didn't appear to contain anything. Inside was a laptop with the magic number displayed on the screen. "Since when have we ever fought fair? The American people are a sucker for the outsider, the underdog, Mr. Smith goes to Washington. Instead we give them Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and a host of slick operators they just, by some coincidence have never heard of before."



## Washington Spring

Brogus glanced around the table again. As his gaze met each delegate there was a trace of a nod. Parliamentary procedure would continue a few more minutes but the plan was set.



\* \* \*

The actual lottery took place on a Tuesday about a week later. The rigged machine was moved to Washington D.C., to the floor of the House, just to make things more official. The pro-tem speaker got to turn the little levers and read off the numbers that came up.

Brogus was at his country estate for the week, his young protégé guest of honor. As the numbers were drawn, Brogus videoconferenced with Alex and Merla. The guest had brought a guest of his own and was down next to the hot tub with her. Brogus glanced over to the security monitor and switched it off. Some things were best not spied on.

As the speaker reached for the final lever the screen flickered and the picture rolled. In the murmur of the partially muted sound came the phrase *power surge*. It only occupied the attention of the commentator for a moment, then he went back to announcing the final number.



## Gary A. Hughes

Brogus wrote the figure on the pad and drew his breath. Grabbing the phone, he selected intercom. “Charlie! Charlie! Charlie! Get your *corpus delecti* right up here, NOW!”

Within moments the young man dashed in, girlfriend trailing behind, both apparently naked beneath their bathrobes. “You called?”

Brogus stabbed the desk pad with his finger, “Is this the number?”

Charles bent over the desk, “Well, yes, uh, no. It is, all except for the last number.” He stared back at Brogus, open-mouthed.

Brogus seated himself at the desk. “You just had the most expensive screwing of your life. I hope you enjoyed it!”

“Well, it’s a mistake!”

“A mistake that went out on video coast to coast and around the world!”

“But it’s a mistake!”

“Yeah, but we can’t admit it’s a mistake ‘cause that gives the whole show away.”

“Brogus!” Merla was shouting over the video link, “That wasn’t the same number!”

“You blew it this time!” Alex was making up for every bit of humiliation he’d endured too.



## Washington Spring

“Better find out who’s got the other number,” said Merla, “and hope it’s a little old lady in a nursing home!”

“I’ll do that!” Brogus grimaced as he terminated the conference. He glared at his protégé.

“Uh, if there’s nothing for me here, uh, you know, I was doing something kind of important, uh, I’d like to get back to it, you know?” Charles glanced from Brogus to his date.

She looked back and forth between Charlie and Brogus, becoming angrier with each turn of her head, going from indignant to disbelief to disappointment to rage. “Well, ... Well, ... Well! Of all the air brained, silver tongued, all take and no give losers I ever met ... After all the promises you gave me! ... All the wonderful things you were going to do ... I think I went out with the last gig too. You’re on your own, *Stud!*”

Charlie held out his arms, “Stephanie ...”

Turning, she stomped out of the room, slamming the door. A moment later she popped her head back in. “By the way, Charlie boy, all that money I loaned you? My hard earned savings you cleaned out? It’s due and payable, now!” The door slammed a second time.

Brogus leaned back in his chair and laughed. “You know, Kid, women do prefer a man with a job.”



## Gary A. Hughes

“Yeah, but I’m stuck here the rest of the week with that bean counter. She doesn’t have a heart, it’s a cash register. This is not fair!”

“Oh no,” Brogus leaned forward, tapping his nose with a pencil, “You’ve got packing to do. I think you’re going to Europe to assist a forty-year old woman. It’ll be a decade before we can get you in as Governor of Connecticut or some such. Don’t want the line of unhappy girlfriends to be longer than we can deal with...”

Charles gritted his teeth and stepped backward, a pained expression twisting his face.

“Oh don’t give me that, there’s still enough legal dynamite in the files to put you away if you don’t behave. You’re paying your school bill, one way or the other!”

With a look somewhere between anger and tears, Charles stormed out the door. Brogus leaned back in his chair and chuckled.



\* \* \*

It was a quiet party in Solomon’s living room that evening. Sol, Jimmie, and Louise watched the drawing. Jennifer was there too, a young lady from their church who needed



## *Washington Spring*

encouragement as she tried to make sense of the pieces of her life. She'd found Louise to be a valuable friend.

Sol shook his head. "Of all the ways we choose a leader, I think this sets a new low, although thinking back to some other elections it's not lower by much."

Louise rocked placidly. "I'm just glad we got the prayer time in. Gives me a little more faith for ... whatever's coming."

Jimmie sat and stared at the television, becoming more and more focused as the numbers rolled out. At the last number his eyes bugged and he sat there entranced.

"Are you all right, Son?" Sol noticed him after a moment.

Jimmie broke free of the glowing screen. "I think that was my number..."

"What?" Sol was speechless.

"Yeah, I think that's my num-" He paused as the announcer read the nine digits a second time. "That's it. They picked me!"

"Well if that don't beat all!" Sol was still grasping for words.

Louise leaned back and laughed, fanning herself with her apron.

Jimmie looked from face to face, his own countenance registering shock. "Well, it's a mistake, of course. Even if they did come and say it was me, I couldn't just go there and think I'd make any kind of a difference."

Louise shrugged, "Why not, Jimmie?"



## Gary A. Hughes

He glanced around again, looking for a sympathetic eye, someone to agree with him. “Well, nobody listens to a thing I’ve got to say. And if I do get a chance to speak I stammer and stutter until people look for a polite way to escape. I couldn’t function in a place like that!”

She beamed. “Sol listens to you and he’s the wisest man I know.”

Sol nodded. “What if this was your chance?”

“Huh?”

“We’ve been praying and you’ve been praying for things to change. What if this is part of it, that there’s something here for you to do, that you’re finally connecting with the destiny all those years of failure have been setting you up for?”

“You know, I’ve been watching and it’s been a long time since you’ve lashed out in anger about anything. And in all these years of trouble and heartbreak, I’ve never seen you cheat or otherwise take advantage of another human being. Not even in real estate! Not even when those with far fewer scruples than you swooped in, stole your sale, and then stood up in church to testify how *The Lord had blessed them!* If ever there was a man I’d trust with high office, it’s you, Jimmie!”

He shook his head. “It wouldn’t work. How do you make something out of nothing—somebody out of nobody?”



## Washington Spring

“Now you’re talking like Gideon. That just about clinches it for me!”

Jimmie stared back at his friend, searching for a reply, but as he did a flash of hope ignited in his eyes, a fragile, desperate embryo of something barely glimpsed that might never be. But his heart leapt, daring to realize he really did want it, wanted it because he might be the only one in the world who could pull it off because he might be the only one foolish enough to try!

His eyes fell on the clock, pushing right up toward seven. Grabbing the phone, he dialed from memory. “Well hey, yes, it’s me. Are you about off work? Okay, wait for me, I’ll be right down. No, no, it’s important. Uh, no, it’s real important, I mean, I’ve got to see you tonight, it’s that important, it has to be tonight! Okay, I’ll be right over.”

He paused at the door, glancing over his shoulder, “Gideon needs a fleece. Pray for me!”

Sol raised his eyebrows as the door swung shut. “Rather excited, for his *society* friends.”

Louise chuckled. “I think we’re looking at an affair of the heart. Wish I could eavesdrop.”

Sol growled, “Some things are none of your business!”

Louise got up and snuggled into her husband’s lap, “You aren’t the one been praying for his love life all these years!”

Sol made an exasperated noise. Darn right he hadn’t!



## Gary A. Hughes

Louise turned to Jennifer, “Are you taking notes?”

The college age girl smiled, a wan gesture that didn’t have much hope in it. “Well you have Sol and Mary-Jean sort of has Jimmie but what guy would even want me?”

Although a woman’s figure filled out her pullover shirt little else in her attire or demeanor spoke of femininity. Sol and Louise had seen her grow up as essentially *one of the boys*. Most of her peers had paired off and vanished, reappearing in her world only as vignettes speaking of husbands and children, leaving her out in the cold. She wondered if there could possibly be anyone in her future.

Louise crawled off Solomon’s lap, seating herself across from Jennifer now the television no longer had center stage. “Don’t forget, we’ve been praying about this and I certainly won’t give up.”

Jennifer shook her head, brunette hair barely long enough to feel the movement. “I see your housekeeping and I can’t do anything like that. I hate cooking and you saw what happened when you tried to teach me ironing the other day.”

Solomon shrugged, “I needed a new shirt anyway!”

Louise took a breath. “Didn’t you see what the Lord just did for Jimmie? All the millions of numbers and they picked his?”

“But that’s just politics! And it’s Jimmie’s blessing. What could possibly be in it for me?”



## Washington Spring

Louise stood up and went to the closet for her coat. “I don’t know honey but I call it a miracle just the same. You’ll have to excuse me but I feel I’m needed elsewhere.”

Jennifer got up for an embrace before they walked out the door together.



Chapter 4-

## Jimmie's New Job

Mary-Jean counted out the till and locked the money in the safe. It was her night to close up the hardware store. Everything was normal and familiar but the phone message still rang in her ears. He'd been so anxious and insistent. That was strange. Jimmie was never in a hurry.

They'd been kinda sorta pre-engaged for at least four years now. In fact, Mary had pretty well made up her mind to tell him it was over so she could pick up the pieces and get on with her life. A girl can only wait so long. It was a joke to her friends and Mary was tired of being made sport of. But she did like him and more than that, she saw the integrity that wouldn't ask for her hand until he'd built a life worth sharing.

He came running down the street as she was locking the door. He didn't say much, just put his arm around her shoulder and pointed to the Rosebud Café next door. They went in and



## *Washington Spring*

took a seat. This time of a Tuesday night the dining room was almost deserted.

“I might have a job.” He stared into her eyes like a drowning man, “But I don’t know yet. I’ll know what happens in a day or two.”

“A job?” She stared back uncomprehending. “You’re the most hard working, always doing something guy I know of.”

“Yeah, but this is special.” His eyes stared into hers. “If I wind up taking it I’d have to leave here and be gone for quite a while. I’d want to take you with me.”

“So is that...?”

“Yeah, I’d want you to marry me. But only if I really get the job.”

“And if you don’t?”

“Well, I’d still want to marry you but I wouldn’t have the job, so it might not be such a good idea.”

“What if I say no?”

Jimmie gave her a sick, desperate sort of look, “Then I’d have to say no to the job. I don’t think I could do what I need to as a single man all alone in a strange town. But I can’t tell you what it is just yet either, it’s all too crazy right now.”

“A strange town? Where would we live?”



## Gary A. Hughes

“Well, now honey, there is a house—it goes with the job. We wouldn’t exactly have the place to ourselves but it’s pretty good size.”

“And what about my job? I can’t just up and move!”

“Oh, well, if I get the job just being my wife would be full time for somebody. I’d need a lot of supporting!”

“Oh Jimmie, this doesn’t even sound honest! Would you be taking over from some big crook?”

“Uh, yes, well, uh, sort of, yeah, there’s been problems—”

“It is crooked! How could you even think about this?”

“No, no honey, the crook is long gone, they’re all gone. I get to start the job with a clean slate. Be just me and you and a few dozen of my closest staff.”

“You aren’t forgetting there’s a mission call on my life?”

Jimmie stared at the table, “This would probably be the hardest mission you ever went on, honey. We’d be alone in a strange town filled with hostile natives who were always talking behind your back. You wouldn’t have anyone you could really trust ‘cause if they didn’t hurt you to your face, they might just let some embarrassing fact slip to someone who’d hurt you behind your back. I can’t tell you how hard it would be.”

Mary’s eyes filled with tears, “So this is a town or a village we’re talking about, not a city.”



## Washington Spring

Jimmie nodded. “Yeah. It’s bigger than a village, but a lot smaller than New York City.”

“Do you think we’d get along with the chief?”

This brought a smirk to Jimmie’s face, “There’s some discussion about who the new chief’s going to be. But with your help, I think we’d get along.”

“Not only a husband but the mission field...” Her eyes glittered with tears.

“You’d have to view it that way. It’s not what people normally think of when they say missions but I think it qualifies in every way. I can’t tell you what a sacrifice it’ll wind up being.”

“Oh, James!” Mary started to lean over to throw her arms around him when she noticed two men in suits slipping up from behind. They seized her friend’s arms and flashed a badge in his face.

“James Francis Kirkland?”

Jimmie nodded.

“You’ll have to come with us.”

“Just a moment.” Jimmie struggled against the grip, “I need to finish this conversation.”

“No time,” growled the lead abductor. “We need to get you back right away.”

“Mary,” Jimmie cried in desperation as he was dragged across the floor, “Yes or no!”



## Gary A. Hughes

“What’s going on?” She gazed helplessly, “Where are they taking you?”

“Yes or no!” Jimmie paused at the door, struggling against his captors. “Mary, yes or no!” she heard trailing from outside as the door swung shut.

She sprang to the door and poked her head out. The men were just forcing Jimmie into the back seat of a limousine. “Yes Jimmie, it’s yes!”

He stopped struggling so fast one of the men fell down into the gutter next to the automobile. Jimmie’s hand reached out in a thumbs-up gesture. The two men climbed in and the limousine was gone.

Mary stared open mouthed in the direction the taillights had disappeared, not sure whether to laugh or cry. A hand on her arm was Louise Rudd.

“Louise!” Mary’s eyes swept up and down, her mouth working soundlessly. “I think I might have just got engaged ... maybe!”

Louise laughed, wrapping her arms around the younger woman. “I’ll bet he didn’t even tell you what it was all about.”

Mary shook her head.

“He wasn’t sure himself until those guys showed up.”

“Louise, what’s going on?”

