

By a quirk of fate, a staggering amount of cash is given to a ministry in a southern state. A pastor has divined its purpose: to enable his state's secession from the Union. The results are jaw-dropping, chilling, and outright hilarious.

Righteous Rebellion

By James Hooker

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JAMES HOOKER



RIGHTEOUS



REBELLION

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Foreword

"Nations deserve the governments they get."

-18th-Century Savoyard Jurist Joseph d'Maistre

"Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want and deserve to get it good and hard."

-H.L. Mencken

Author's Note

During the creation of this novel, I deliberately used several terms and words incorrectly.

I apologize in advance, but please grant me a moment of patience while I explain.

The first of these words is “capitol” punishment. The correct word, of course, is “capital” punishment, meaning imposition of the death penalty for a crime committed. A “capitol” is a government building and has nothing to do with punishment of any kind unless you’re being forced to watch a legislative caucus.

Another word is “marshall” law. The correct word is “martial” law, meaning the replacement of civilian government by police or military authority. “Marshall” law may be the name of a sheriff somewhere, but this has nothing to do with a military junta.

Finally, the three branches of the U.S. government are the Executive, the Legislative, and the Judicial, as defined in the Constitution, and as understood by every middle school student in the country. They are not “the House, the Senate and the Executive,” as I’ve defined them in this story.

I bring these to your attention, citizens, for one simple reason. Several legislators currently serving in the United States Congress have been quoted using these same ludicrously incorrect terms and definitions.

The U.S. Senator who botched the definition of the branches of the U.S. Government also claimed that his father fought in World War II “to free Europe from socialism.” This is the most absurd of any of the other misstatements I’ve noted. Hitler was a fascist, not a socialist, as everyone on the planet knows, except, apparently, the esteemed Senator.

As much as I'd like to take credit for creating such comical idiocy, alas I cannot.

On another topic, as I write this novel in the spring of 2024, I must admit that it is not a work of pure whimsy. Currently, there are three states in the Union that are home to movements advocating secession: Texas, California, and Alaska. No doubt more will follow.

Finally, in late February of this same year, a neo-Nazi "National Socialist Club" distributed flyers outside a small-town library in rural Rhode Island advocating that the six New England states be "formally recognized as a white homeland and a sovereign state." The "club" also called for a ban on all non-white immigration.

I'm a storyteller, and so may impose literary license as I see fit.

However, some things *just can't be made up*.

Perhaps, when it comes to governance, and with credit to Mr. Mencken, we "deserve to get it good and hard."

Ah, America.

God help us.

Chapter 1: Revelations

Huey Ray de Long, or as he was commonly known, Pastor Gabriel Horne, leader of the Jubilee Church of Revelation, had opened his heart to the *Word*.

Tonight, he would speak to his entire congregation, and, as always, he prepared by looking inward for inspiration that would allow him to “set the house on fire,” meaning achieve the active participation of the entire congregation in a raucous and rapturous celebration of Jesus, the End of Times, and the Second Coming of the Savior.

If he had done the Lord’s work well, the church’s entire gathering would erupt in a weeping, wallowing mass of passionate fervor that would be recorded and broadcast on radio stations throughout the state.

The pastor was usually excited in anticipation of this event, but today, the little gray man with dark, intense eyes was unusually agitated. Words sputtered like sparks in his brain, and he didn’t understand what he was being told.

He had spent the afternoon watching the America First Network, a small enterprise of the ultra-conservative Christian right, which railed against all things evil and corrupt, from drug mule immigrants to baby-eating socialists. What he’d seen that day disturbed him deeply.

“Dear Lord,” he prayed furiously as he watched, “smite thine enemies!”

America, he believed, was going straight to Hell. But what really bothered him that day was the swirl of thoughts in his head, like a swarm of bees. As he did often when confused, he picked up his Bible and turned to the Book of Revelations, which he read often and believed in passionately.

That evening, as he ascended to the church's podium, his attention was drawn to the Confederate battle flag that was tacked to the wall at the back of the large hall. He had never paid attention to it before, but now, he couldn't stop staring at it as he approached the pulpit.

The entire congregation was silent, watching him intently. They were simple people, and they waited to be led. He adjusted the microphone slowly and cleared his throat.

He gripped the edges of the pulpit and began to speak, first, as always, invoking Jesus to join them in prayer.

His next words were faint at first. "The country is in the midst of moral decay!" he declared.

Then, the message became clearer. "The slime and filth of disease, of Yankeedom and the socialists in the federal government, is seeping through the body of the nation, destroying it slowly from within!"

The bees in his brain buzzed louder, and he began to tremble. He looked skyward, held his arms aloft, palms outstretched, closed his dark eyes, and prayed passionately for guidance and divine inspiration.

The crowd uttered a muffled roar. "Amen!" They, too, lifted their arms in supplication.

But he didn't pray quietly. He raged against the bees. He spoke first in loud phrases, waiting for the Word to come. As it did, he reverted to jabbering in tongues, the language of the Lord, and beseeched guidance from The Almighty.

And in time, God answered, as He always did.

“Yahweh!” the Pastor sputtered. Tears filled his eyes, and he swayed his bony arms above his head.

The bees were suddenly gone. The voice he heard now was strong and clear, and it jolted through his body like an electric current.

“There is no nation! Only the word of God!”

The small pastor shuddered and cried out in pain. The words were sparks that seared his brain. His body stiffened and shook as the message pulsed through him. The audience shuddered, and a collective gasp rose from their midst. Cries rang out.

“The flesh of what was once a pure nation has been corrupted!”

He shrieked at the power of the voice, crying openly as he screamed the words to the congregation.

“There must be a sanctuary for the holy!”

His body shook, and again he shuddered, sputtering and wailing in tongues so the Lord could hear.

“A New Canaan must be brought forward!”

“But how?” he jabbered, drooling in agony and divine ecstasy. The colors of the Confederate flag blended and burned into his eyes like fire, blinding him. Superimposed on the flag was a red Christian cross. He covered his eyes with his palms, trying to shield them from the light, but the image remained before him.

“You will be shown the way!”

He tumbled to the floor, covering his head from the fearsome sound. The audience wailed, and a multitude of voices echoed from the crowd, also in tongues. A small mob had surged forward and

surrounded the stage and podium, crying out rapturously. Several of the parishioners rushed forward to surround him and protect him, including a slight, slim woman with mad, dark eyes and a jagged grin who cried desperately with him.

“I will bring unto thee a messenger! He shall be my instrument and my clarion!”

The words seared into his brain and deafened him to all sound but the voice of the Lord. He convulsed as the shock passed through him again, and he screamed to the heavens.

“Bring me thine messenger!” he wailed, again in tongues.

And then, sprawled across the floor, he lost consciousness.

When at last he awoke he lifted his head slowly. The dark, toothy woman cradled his head in her arms, rocking him furiously.

“Marjorie?” he whispered, exhausted.

“Yes, Pastor, I’m with ya,” she soothed.

He had pissed his pants and still had the last traces of the first erection he’d had in thirty years.

The Voice was gone now, and he was conscious only of that flag and a name that echoed in his ears. The instrument and the clarion. The name of a Savior.

Margaret Wurmser had an uncommon gift for being able to spot opportunities.

As she walked slowly down the long stretch of desolate and pristine beach that morning, her head was full of thoughts—no, more like

images—but they spoke to her clearly. She could *see* the future, and it was all around her.

Margaret had only been in the state a few days, but in that brief time, an idea had begun to form. She'd been involved in other similar projects, like the ones on that little island in North Carolina where she had single-handedly transformed a redneck fishing village into a thriving resort town. At least until a recession had nearly ruined it.

What she imagined now had a similar feel but on a much grander scale. On that barrier island, she'd only been able to develop a mile of beachfront, and as small as it had been, the project had made her millions. It had also changed her life, transporting her from a small-town southern mayor to a major developer.

“This could be... so much more.” The thought caused her breath to catch.

She stopped and turned toward the azure Gulf before her. She jutted her slim, delicate jaw out thoughtfully and inhaled. She could almost smell the dream. The promise. And the money.

“I’ve never seen so many miles of rural beach,” she thought. If she could get her hands on even a small portion of what was around her the possibilities were endless.

The images that filled her head were of a string of glittering beachfront casinos and resorts modeled on the high-end glitz of Las Vegas. Or perhaps Cuba in the fifties.

But first, she had to get that land. The rest would follow, she was certain of that.

Because she knew exactly how to do it.

“If you’re gonna dream, girl,” she told herself, smiling, “dream big.”

The idea continued to take shape over the next few days, as she drove around and through the surrounding towns and beside the acres of pristine beaches.

What she saw was encouraging. The local linthead rednecks she'd seen were more gullible than the ones she'd known in North Carolina. They were passive, pleasant, and simple.

They'd answered her questions about the land clearly, but there was that light of suspicion in their eyes as they talked. She'd expected that, too. As much as she'd dressed down and reverted to her island twang, they weren't accustomed to talking to a strange woman. What she needed, she knew, was a *good 'ol boy* to front her ambitions. Someone malleable and hungry, and who would do as he was told. A politician. Or someone... influential?

She received her answer the following evening as she waited for her supper in a local café. A battered old radio boomed from behind the counter, and she was listening to the music absently, swirling a tumbler of scotch between her smooth, slim hands.

An old man sitting at the counter summoned the server. "Almost time for the pastor," he whispered, just loud enough to be heard by Margaret. The server nodded pleasantly and rolled the dial on the ancient radio's face.

In a moment, an announcer solemnly said, "Welcome to Pastor Gabriel Horne's Moment with the Lord." A trumpet blared in the background. "And now, from the state capital and the Jubilee Church of Revelation, please welcome Pastor Horne into yer hearts."

"Shit," she mumbled to herself. "Do I have to listen to this crap during supper?"

But then she noticed something odd. Every one of the diners in the restaurant, twenty in all, had stopped eating and were listening solemnly to the program. Several hung their heads reverently. Others folded their hands on their tables and closed their eyes.

“I’ll be damned,” she muttered under her breath as she turned to face the radio.

“Amen,” someone in the diner muttered to the voice coming from the radio.

“Amen, indeed,” Margaret whispered. And the vision of that string of casinos came to her even more clearly.

“I knew the Lord would deliver you to me,” the Pastor said, a fervent gleam in his dark eyes. He’d folded his hands under his chin and leaned toward her, his gaze fixed on her eyes.

Margaret sat across his cluttered desk in a ramshackle office at the back of the large church hall. She watched him carefully. The content of the speech she’d heard on the radio was deeply unsettling to her. She’d never been exposed to such hateful intensity before, even though she’d been raised on an island steeped in Southern Baptist dogma.

Margaret was a strong and driven woman who was not easily intimidated. But this man made the hair on the back of her neck bristle. When she’d first entered the cluttered office, he reminded her of the Middle Eastern ayatollahs she’d seen on television. Humorless, passionate, and dangerous, with deadly stares only found in religious zealots and madmen.

But if she could harness that intensity, he might prove to be a formidable ally.

“So, Pastor Horne...”

“Please. Pastor Gabriel,” he corrected her sharply, but with a slight smile.

“Pastor Gabriel, it is.” She returned the smile. “Please tell me why you thought I was being guided to you?”

“The Lord is preparing me for a great battle,” he replied, his hands still folded under his chin. “He will give me the weapons to fight the plague of evil in this world.”

“I see...” she answered, tentatively.

“The time has come,” he said, his gaze unwavering. “All has been revealed to me.”

Then, suddenly, he shifted in his chair, leaned an elbow on the battered arm, and tucked his hand under his chin. He was relaxing.

“So, tell me...” he invited, “What brings *you* here today, *Margaret*?” The way he said her name felt like a puff of frigid wind blowing down her spine.

“I’m evaluating a project to develop a portion of the beachfront,” she said, carefully, watching his eyes.

“Mmm-hmm,” he replied, a corner of his mouth twitching slightly. His narrowing eyes showed his interest, and Margaret relaxed slightly. He had just told her everything she needed to know.

“It’ll be a major undertaking,” she continued. “And I’ll need support and some... guidance in procuring land along the beachfront.”

She stopped herself from saying more.

The Pastor smiled openly and nodded. “Yes, I see.” His heart was beating faster.

“And what would that ‘*guidance*’ involve?” he asked before Margaret could respond.

“*Move carefully, girl,*” she thought.

“I’ve asked around about you. You’re a popular man with a large... *following*. I believe you may have *connections*.” She paused a beat as his eyes widened slightly. “Shall we say, for some ‘*financial*’ consideration, you might be able to help me acquire the land I need?”

“*Thank you, Jesus!*” the small Pastor thought, nodding slowly. “*A Victory of Faith!*”

“The Lord has brought me many gifts,” he continued, calmly. “People like yourself who know how to get things done, according to His plan.”

Margaret smiled as she leaned toward the little gray man. “Interesting...”

“As I said earlier, all has been revealed to me. With some of your resources, perhaps we could help with your plan.”

“We?” Margaret asked.

“Yes,” he replied, calmly. “The Senator and myself.”

“Senator?” Margaret asked, suspiciously. “A *state* Senator?”

“A *United States* Senator,” he replied. “My congregation helped elect him.”

“I see,” Margaret said flatly.

“We have a plan. And we’ve been waiting for the Lord to bring you here.”

“Well, I hope I can justify your faith in me,” she said, smiling as earnestly as possible. “Perhaps as a show of faith, I could assist with a donation to your... *cause*?”

“Now that would be a gift from the Lord,” the Pastor whispered.

She had him now. “And some funding for more radio broadcasts. Even a series of televised sermons?”

His heart was racing now.

“Of course, that would just be the start...” she added, and she could see him tremble slightly.

“And then, you could help me with *my* undertaking?”

“Yes, Margaret, of course!”

The Pastor leaned forward on the desk again, and it was hard for him to contain his excitement. He continued to tremble slightly as he spoke.

“I told you all has been revealed to me, Margaret,” he said, in a soft, reverential voice. “I’ve spoken with the Lord, and he has given me the plan, and has given me the Savior. And now you.”

Margaret nodded slowly. “Savior?”

“Yes,” the Pastor replied, smiling as he pressed the palms of his hands together. “The Senator. He shall be the tip of my spear in the coming conflict.”

Margaret listened intently.

“With your resources and the help of the Savior, we can get you as much land as you’ll need. The Lord provides for all.”

She couldn’t believe it could be this simple. “I’m ready to help you and the... *Savior*... in any way necessary.”

The Pastor edged forward in his chair, folded his hands, and lowered his head as if in prayer. “That is just as the plan has been revealed to me by the Lord.”

Margaret gazed at him blankly. “*How did it all tie together?*” she wondered.

“Now, tell me, child,” the Pastor whispered, “are you familiar with the word ‘*secession*’?”

“*Jesus Christ!*” Margaret thought as she swung wearily into the front seat of her rental car. She was sweating, and her head was spinning. She felt... unclean. She badly needed a drink and a shower. Under her breath, she whispered, “He’s crazy as a shithouse rat!”

A few moments passed. *But was he mad?*

What had he called it? A “New Canaan?” A “holy land” where the state now existed? And led by a *Savior*, a United States Senator?

“Well, whatever,” she told herself, unconcerned. “He had an audience large and powerful enough to elect a Senator. And that translates to power, which is exactly what I need.”

“This might just be crazy enough to work,” she whispered to herself as she started the car. “As much beachfront as I want, all free of regulation and red tape. And all in a free Republic led by some redneck U.S. senator. But if I can pull this off...”

She whistled softly at the thought, then her mind turned back to reality.
But who exactly was this guy? And who was the Senator?

Margaret laughed loudly.

“Savior, my ass!”

Chapter 2: “Tuber”

Freshman United States Senator Loomis Gruber was having a particularly good day. He loosened his belt, belched, and leaned back heavily in the enormous leather chair in his office at the Philip A. Hart Senate Office Building in Washington D.C.

Senator Gruber was a man with a large appetite for all things. He had just finished his usual lunch of an enormous rack of pork ribs and a quart container of “Southern style” mac ‘n’ cheese from a local BBQ shack.

He was flipping through the thin sheaf of papers containing his speech for the fourth time, and he remained mightily impressed. The Pastor had been on fire when he’d written it. As the Senator scanned the pages, he sipped his third tumbler of bourbon.

When he’d spoken to him earlier in the day, the Pastor had been more animated than he’d seen him in years. Loomis knew that this was because they now had the financing they’d needed to move ahead with their plan, thanks to a land developer who’d been “sent by the Lord.”

Gruber fought hard to contain his own excitement, just as he’d had to do as head coach of the high school football team before the state playoffs.

He swiveled his chair to face the wall behind his desk. At the center of the wall was a large Confederate battle flag that had hung in his offices for years. To the left of the flag were shelves of trophies from the games his team had won, including the two most recent and largest trophies he’d been awarded for winning the state championship two years in a row. Each playoff trophy flanked a framed front page from the local newspaper with the large banner headline “Touchdown for Jesus!” that celebrated his second playoff victory.

This was a ritual he performed several times each day. Those two trophies and the recognition he'd received had helped propel him into the U.S. Senate three years ago, with, of course, the help of the Pastor. These awards and the flag they surrounded were his talisman. They shielded him from evil and reminded him of the importance of the Lord, patience, and perseverance.

He'd need them all now. Very soon, he, the Pastor, and that mysterious land developer would enter the biggest game of all. He must be ready.

At the end of their conversation earlier that day, the Pastor had admonished Gruber to "smite thine enemies!"

"*Oh, smite them I will,*" Gruber thought, smiling and taking a long sip of his bourbon.

When he gave the speech to the full Senate tomorrow, *he* would be the one to set the house on fire.

As the saying goes, "Behind every successful man, there's a surprised woman."

So it was with Loomis Gruber and his wife.

The arc of Loomis Gruber's life had been unremarkable and flat.

He had always been well-muscled and large, but uninspiring and bland in a quiet way. He had few friends, the closest being his teammates on the high school football team. For years, they'd called him "Gruber the Tuber," after his bulbous nose, which resembled a large pink yam in size and shape.

That had made him self-conscious of his looks. He'd compensated for that by playing football not with skill, but rather with an intensity that was rare in boys his age.

As he became older, he turned inward. It was then, following a winning game, that he had been introduced to Pastor Horne, the Lord, and salvation. Knowing that he finally had someone on his side, he began playing football with a new focus and determination, secure in the Lord's guidance.

When he first met Sugar as a sophomore, he'd been shy and awkward around her, not knowing what to say or how to act.

She'd been an aspiring southern belle but without the money or charm to cultivate what little she had. And so far, her high school career prospects had not been promising. She was flat-chested, slightly pear-shaped, and had been plagued with acne that had threatened to spoil her looks. She'd had to admit to herself that she would have to settle.

Thus, Loomis Gruber and Sugar, both mediocre and mundane, had found each other.

Those early years after marrying Sugar had been hard. Having a shock of reddish pink hair that couldn't stay combed hadn't helped his looks. His prospects after graduating, just barely, were no better than hers.

He'd tried to join the Army but was pronounced unfit due to his weight. He'd worked in his father's auto body shop until a football teammate had told him about a fourth-rate coaching job at the high school. He'd be not much more than a waterboy and ball carrier, but it was something.

Overall, Loomis Gruber wasn't much, but what there was, was Sugar's. With his newfound faith, he remained determined to be something, although he didn't know what. And she was going to do what she could to keep him moving up.

"I have a lot to make up for," he'd say to her often. "An' goddamn it, I'm gonna grab whatever comes my way with both hands." Hearing

him talk this way made her hopeful, but sad. He really *did* want “it,” whatever that was. But “it” wasn’t coming his way.

He moved up the ranks of the coaching staff slowly and finally outlasted every other coach to become the leader of a team ranked last in the state. Sugar was pleased when that happened, but once again, she reminded herself that she’d have to settle. Being married to the head coach of a struggling team at a low-end, rural, southern high school wasn’t what Sugar wanted for herself.

And then, the Lord intervened, as Pastor Horne had promised He would.

As sometimes happens, a team will end up with the perfect complement of talent, drive, and luck in its players. It had taken Gruber’s team fifteen years to be so blessed. Even Loomis didn’t know what had happened, but suddenly, his boys, perennial losers, began winning. In those last two years, his team had emerged unbeaten to win the state championship twice in a row.

That had gotten the team, and their coach noticed. Suddenly, Loomis was giving interviews to local television stations and newspapers. He was feted at award dinners across the state. And always close by was the Pastor and the Lord. Sugar was beginning to feel hopeful, at last. She was beginning to see past the absurd nose and the patch of unruly hair and thought there might be something to the Lord after all.

And then, out of nowhere, he was running for U.S. Senator, with the small Pastor by his side. And as he campaigned, talked, and gladhanded, there emerged a personality she’d never known. Suddenly, he was large, boisterous, and influential. He drank bourbon, smoked cigars, and told off-color stories to other politicians. He wore thousand-dollar suits and \$300 shoes.

No one had been more surprised by his transformation than Sugar. She was neither insightful nor bright, but *even she* knew that Senators were

supposed to look and act like Kennedy or Kerry, smart and sophisticated, just as she'd seen them on TV. Loomis was neither of these.

But Sugar knew enough to sense the opportunity this presented to her. For the first time in her life, she could be among modern royalty. She would be mingling with women who were stylish and smart. Maybe she could learn from them. She wanted to look good on Loomis' arm. Wanted to be a queen. She'd do anything for that, she told herself.

But always, in the background, was the unctuous little Pastor, who still made her skin feel cold.

And that, she suspected, might be a dangerous thing.

Freshman Senator Loomis Gruber studied himself in the mirror of his office bathroom, turning left and right to see all angles of his hefty face.

"Shee-it," he whispered, "I sure as hell wish I was better lookin'."

But that didn't matter now. Just as it had never mattered.

Today was *the* day. What he was about to do would change everything, forever.

He adjusted his elegant, purple silk tie, shot his cuffs from his suit jacket's sleeves, gave himself the biggest smile possible, swallowed the last of his bourbon, and left for the Senate floor.

"Good luck, Senator," Carol, his chief of staff, called out cheerfully as he waddled out of the office.

"Don't have nothin' ta do with luck," he mumbled, without turning to her. "Today, I'm here ta do the Lord's work."

Chapter 3:

Manifesto

Helen Back, the Senate reporter for the Baltimore Sun, kicked her legs over the arm of the seat next to hers in the Senate gallery. Like most days, today probably would be solemn and restrained. The first speech of the day was to be delivered by a freshman Senator from the South and promised to be about as boring as most other speeches she'd witnessed in her time at the Senate.

Freshman Senators from the South were neither power brokers nor influencers. Few fellow Senators paid attention to them.

Helen Back liked the independence her job afforded her, given that she didn't need to be among the pulsing horde of reporters at the Sun's editorial offices. And she liked the stately quiet of the Senate floor, a pleasant change from her past jobs, which involved wearing fatigues and flak jackets and helmets while covering a never-ending procession of wars and skirmishes in the Mideast.

Helen was a young woman in her mid-thirties. Being a global war correspondent had given her insight, wisdom, and a sense of confidence. It had also made her cynical and tough. She was tall, lean, and fit. She wore her dark hair in a stylish bob and was dressed in an elegant suede shirt and fashionable tactical pants over expensive dress boots. She'd grown comfortable with the military look.

As she waited for the chamber to open, she worked on the New York Times crossword, chewing absently on the tip of her pen.

She liked the calm of the empty chamber and the stately elegance and sense of history that surrounded her. It was large, ornate, and timeless, and reminded her of the stability and dignity of the country. After covering too many wars in too many unruly and dangerous places she felt safe within its confines.

Until now, Senator Loomis Gruber hadn't made a single speech during his three years in office.

In fact, he had not really participated in any function of state, preferring instead to enjoy the perks of his office and dutifully vote the party line. When he was with colleagues, he bantered loudly and boorishly about football, food, and liquor. He didn't care about politics and had learned little in his time in the Senate.

Therefore, no one knew what he planned to talk about, and as a result, they were only mildly interested in what he was about to say. With what most of his colleagues had seen of him, they weren't expecting much.

The Senator waddled up to the podium and hung his head solemnly for a moment. Then, he removed several pages from his jacket pocket and unfolded them slowly on top of the lectern.

He cleared his throat loudly.

“As y'all may know, my granddaddy fought in World War II to help defeat socialism and communism in Europe,” he bellowed, in the style taught to him by the Pastor.

Hearing this, Helen raised her gaze to the podium, dropped the puzzle, and excitedly fumbled in her purse for her digital recorder.

“What the...?” she whispered. “Socialism and communism? Doesn't he mean fascism?”

“And now!” the Senator bellowed, “this country faces the same threat from communism that we faced back then!”

“Only now, the godless communists an’ socialists have infiltrated our gub’ment, and threaten to destroy this *supposed* “One Nation Under God” from within!

“And so, with the help of the Jews in government, we’ve reached a crisis point!”

A few senators squirmed in their seats, but they were all quiet now, each staring intently at the strange man with the frazzle of orange hair.

“The three branches of the United States government, which is the Senate, the House, and the Executive, have all been completely corrupted by communism in its most pernicious form, and in their laziness an’ sloth have allowed, yea, even encouraged, the moral collapse of our society!”

“Out of order!” cried a Senator to Gruber’s right.

“Stop this now, Senator!” the Speaker cried.

“Oh... shit!” Helen thought, thrusting her recorder over the gallery rail.

Gruber ignored him and raised his right arm for emphasis. “An’ as this society collapses, godless sodomites and sinners an’ Jews have...”

“Senator, you are out of order!” the Speaker boomed, slamming down his gavel on the lectern.

“... have increased their numbers, in violation of the natural law of the Lord!”

Helen’s mouth hung open. “*He’s going to bring the house down!*”

More senators stood, shouting at Gruber and gesturing violently at him. There was so much noise in the chamber that it drowned out Gruber’s speech for the next ten minutes. Nevertheless, he continued,

trying desperately to shout over the objectors and the Speaker. Helen could still understand most of his speech since he had lifted his head and shouted at the ceiling above her head.

“And so!” Gruber bellowed, “My state, in recognition of the laws of God, has no choice but to *remove itself from the union!*”

“Jesus Christ!” Helen said to herself.

As he said these last words, the chamber quieted ominously. The senators who had risen from their seats stood in shocked silence. Everyone stared at Gruber, incredulous. The Speaker leaned on his desk, not certain he had heard correctly.

Gruber took advantage of the pause. “The Lord has appointed me to carry this message to y’all! We have formed a new gub’ment in the nation of New Canaan an’ shall create, by His direction, a new, independent republic, thus freeing ourselves and our people from the tyranny of sin an’ the disease of communism!”

There were a few boos from the chamber, but most senators continued to stare at the speaker, dumbstruck.

“We shall create a new Holy Land, a true haven from a godless world, where we shall craft a nation truly under the laws of God. For as the faithful know, there is no nation but that which is sanctioned by God, an’ which serves God!”

There were angry rumbles from the floor.

“We have the support of our citizens, an’ with the divine guidance of the Lord, the only true law, we shall prevail!”

“Mister Speaker,” the senior Senator from Michigan cried out. “This man has clearly lost his faculties!”

“Order in the chamber!” the Speaker demanded. “Sergeant-at-Arms, remove the speaker from the premises!”

“That ain’t necessary!” Loomis shouted violently. “As of this moment I resign my office an’ declare myself a citizen of the great nation of New Canaan! The Lord’s will be done!”

He stepped down from the podium as if to leave, but then turned to the Speaker and pointed at him.

“Y’all think my state is jus’ a buncha goobers an’ rednecks. But, by God, my ‘Goober Nation’ shall prevail!”

Gruber strutted deliberately out of the chamber, accompanied by boos, catcalls, and scattered applause, while the Speaker, screaming for order, continued banging his gavel madly on his desk.

Helen sat motionless in her chair, stunned and speechless.

The strange zealot with the orange hair had just set fire to the Constitution and the country. And Helen Back, having spent too many years of her career in one shithole dictatorship after another, didn’t like that at all. Not one bit.

She snatched a cell phone from her purse and scrolled through her long list of contacts.

Just who in hell *was* former U.S. Senator Loomis Gruber?

On the way to his office after the speech, Gruber asked Carol, his Chief of Staff in D.C., if she’d follow him to New Canaan. Carol, a slim, attractive woman in her forties, had a husband who was a Major in the Marines and who had served two tours in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. He’d been wounded twice.

Her answer had been unwavering.

“I wouldn’t follow you across the hall, you fucking traitor!” At which point she grabbed her box of belongings and stormed out of the office, slamming the door behind her.

Margaret Wurmser laid the newspaper on the desk of her hotel room and exhaled loudly. *So, this was how they were going to do it*, she thought.

Gruber, “the tip of the spear,” as the Pastor had called him, was a failed football coach and lackluster politician who had just removed his “country” from the Union.

Jesus.

She poured herself a large tumbler of bourbon as she stared thoughtfully out the hotel window at the distant ocean.

She’d spent the last two days doing a background check on the Pastor, with the help of a private investigator she knew in North Carolina who had a knack for research.

What she’d found was interesting, indeed.

Pastor Gabriel Horne was born Huey Ray de Long in a town buried in the midlands of Mississippi. His father had left when he was born, and he was raised by a cruel and passionately devout woman who cared for little but her Bible.

Huey had had his first run-in with the law at the age of ten when he stole a bicycle from the local five and dime. For that, he’d received a warning.

At the age of twelve, he stole a neighbor's purse containing a credit card, which he tried to use to purchase a pack of cigarettes and a six-pack of cheap beer. That got him six months in a home for juvenile delinquents, where he honed his craft.

By the age of eighteen, he had graduated to grand theft by car-jacking a truck from an old woman at knifepoint, which earned him five years in Mississippi State, the prison that is, not the University.

He turned professional grifter after learning the con game from his cellmate, a luckless old man who'd failed at every crime he'd tried and thus had spent almost his entire life in juvenile halls, jails, or prison.

What he'd taught Huey had been as valuable to Huey as it had been to the old man, so Huey had quickly been arrested in a check cashing scheme that had netted him ten years in state prison. It was there that Huey finally found his calling by accepting the Lord as his Savior. He began preaching to the prison population and found to his surprise that the inmates listened devoutly to his sermons.

When he was released after eight years, he drifted throughout the south, preaching and speaking in tongues in carnivals and county fairs until he'd saved enough to put a small down payment on a modest country chapel near where he eventually built his church.

There, he became Pastor Gabriel Horne. A man delivered from sin by the Lord.

The man who was about to deliver a dream to Margaret Wurmser.

Chapter 4: A Confederacy of Crackpots

As soon as Helen returned to her office in the basement press room of the Senate office building, she fell heavily into her chair, exhausted, and replayed the recording of the speech.

It made her blood run cold.

She'd grown up on a farm in rural Alabama, where she'd heard such talk often from her righteous, caustic parents and sympathetic neighbors. She hadn't liked it then and detested it now. She knew that a sizable population of people in the south, mostly rural and uneducated, still harbored resentment against the north and the federal government, whom they continued to call "carpetbaggers" and "goddamned Yankees."

As soon as she could, she'd left for college in the north and had never again been further south than Baltimore. It had taken her years to lose her Alabama twang. Listening to Gruber's nasal accent that morning had brought it all back to her.

There was another thing that had bothered Helen since listening to the speech. It was that word. "*Yea.*" A simple man like Loomis Gruber wouldn't use that word in ten lifetimes. But she knew, from her past, that a preacher would.

She flipped her laptop open, swept her hand through her dark hair, and began typing furiously.

"*Dear God,*" she thought, as she typed the first few words with a staccato-like fury. "*What has he done?*"

The next morning, in the Baltimore Sun's editorial, headlined "A Crackpot Confederacy," Helen Back had let it fly. What her mother had called "setting the house on fire."

She began by calling Gruber's speech the previous day one of the most absurd, dangerous, and anti-democratic diatribes she'd heard since the rise of Adolph Hitler in the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923.

"It was clear to this correspondent that the speaker, former U.S. Senator Loomis Gruber, had had the text of the speech prepared by some other madman since he has neither the education nor intelligence needed to concoct such a screed.

"Based on interviews I conducted with party colleagues following the speech, Gruber has been an ineffective, perhaps incompetent, first-term Senator with a limited knowledge of government and politics. As proof, during his rant, he managed to incorrectly identify the three branches of the United States Government and had confused 'communism' and 'socialism' with 'fascism.'

"It is the common opinion that his three years in the Senate have been marked by nothing more substantial than backslapping backroom banter with minor politicians. He has not crafted one piece of substantive legislation in his time in the Chamber, preferring instead to rant about the 'corruption' of the country.

"As is recorded verbatim in the accompanying article in this newspaper, his absurd speech to the Senate was obviously prepared by some mad religious reactionary with a twisted, racist worldview and a maniacal obsession with God.

"It causes me to worry about the future of our Republic after witnessing a United States Senator playing dupe to some nefarious, and obviously self-interested, outside influence.

“In what may be the waning days of this great Republic, during which the political landscape has grown so divided, there are many voices crying out about what the nation needs and who might best care for it.

“In American politics, there has never been a shortage of actors from across the human spectrum who have stepped forward with ‘solutions’ to the nation’s political crises of one kind or another.

“Yes, there have been noble souls, true patriots who have sacrificed mightily to put the welfare of the young Republic above their own personal ambitions.

“But as is the case with Loomis Gruber and his traitorous ilk, whoever they may be, there has also been a long and steady stream of corrupt and morally bereft people with no selfless ambition beyond the limits of their own greed and corrupt ideals.

“Puritanical zealots and charlatans. Madmen. Oversized, bloviating narcissists. Screeching, self-serving ‘protectors of people’s rights,’ gun-toting ‘right-to-life’ advocates, and men who claim to be ‘guardians of humanity’ by subjugating women to ‘save them’ from themselves. And I haven’t even left the 19th century.

“Then there are conspiracy theorists and traitors, like Loomis Gruber and his mentors and minions.

“And cowards, like Gruber’s fellow U.S. Senator Melvin Hoare and the state’s three Congressmen, who, I’ve discovered from colleagues, disappeared during Gruber’s speech and have not been heard from or seen since. I wish them no sanctuary.

“In fact, the feeding trough of American politics is so large, its promise of power so alluring and at the same time so corrupting, that it naturally draws morally bankrupt individuals, like Loomis Gruber and his Congressional colleagues, to its ranks, the way carrion draws flies.

“One must sometimes be willing to strike a deal with the devil to achieve their ends. And as we all know, the devil will have his due.

“In launching this seditious notion, Gruber has done exactly that, and, ironically, in doing so has cast off the very system that delivered him into politics.

“If his state prefers to support this *great experiment*, then I say good riddance to the ‘Goober Nation’ and its people. And God help them.

“The citizens of the remaining United States deserve better. God save us.”

The rebel state’s three United States Congressmen huddled in a locked upstairs conference room in the Rayburn House Office Building, terrified. They had known about the intended secession and had supported it until it had happened. Pastor Horne had warned it was coming, and, needing his support, all three had gone along until the deed had taken place.

“We don’t have no choice,” Congressman Merle Nitzer whined. “I ain’t gonna go to prison for this!”

“Aw, shut up,” his colleague, the Honorable Emmon Shagg, snapped. “Ya liked the idea when Pastor Horne offered you the money.”

“Yeah, but that was ‘fore I heard what happened in the Senate,” Nitzer replied, sulking. “I didn’t think it’d get so... outta hand.”

“Whatdya think was gonna happen?” Shagg demanded, pointing at his colleague angrily. “They wasn’t gonna give us medals!”

A large, heavily-jowled Congressman named Wilbur Pittance sat across the massive oval table and squirmed uncomfortably in his chair, sweating through his suit jacket.

“Fellas,” he said, wiping his brow with a damp handkerchief, “it’s done. We don’t have no choice.”

“So, fatass, what’s yer plan?” Shagg demanded.

“It’s only been a couple ‘a hours since the speech, so we still got time,” the fat man grunted as he thought. “But they’ll be lookin’ fer us. They’ll think we’re in on it.”

“Well, we *were*, dumbass!” Nitzer squeaked. “Shee-it, we all took that money.”

“Fuh-uh-uck!” Shagg growled. “Wish I’d never met me that damned Pastor.”

“Well, I ain’t goin’ to no federal prison, that’s fer sure,” Pittance moaned, wiping at his brow.

“An’ I ain’t runnin’,” Shagg said, desperately. “My wife, she’s gonna kick my ass out fer sure.”

“Well, that’s what we gotta do, then,” the fat man whispered.

The three looked at each other, nodding hopelessly, as Shagg picked up the phone on the desk and punched a button.

“Oh, my God!” Maisi, Shagg’s assistant, shrieked after answering the phone at her desk. “I jus’ heard! I knew it! I jus’ fuckin’ knew it!” She began sobbing uncontrollably.

“Now, calm down, girl,” Shagg cooed.

“You calm down!” his assistant sobbed. “I knew you redneck fuckers were gonna screw this up!”

“Maisi, we’re gonna fix it,” Shagg said, smoothly.

“What am I gonna do now?” Maisi wailed. “I ain’t goin’ back to Mississippi. I got me a boyfriend up here. We’re gonna get married!”

“Maisi...,” Shagg sighed.

“What am I gonna do?” his assistant cried, inconsolable. “Am I goin’ to jail?”

“Maisi!” Shagg demanded, trying to calm her. The crying at the other end of the line subsided.

“What?” she whimpered.

“Here’s what yer gonna do,” Shagg murmured. He hunched forward and spread his arms across the desk, then hung his head.

“Maisi, yer gonna call the FBI...”

U.S. Senator Melvin Hoare drove south in his rental car as fast as he dared, his hands sweating as he gripped the wheel.

“Fuck!” he growled, unable to think of anything else to say.

The morning had gone all wrong. The first few minutes of the speech had been nothing like what he’d been promised by Gruber, and as soon as he heard the words, he knew it was time to get out.

“Jus’ sit tight,” the fat fuck had told him. “Ever’thin’s in the hands ‘a the Lord.”

“*Christ! What did that mean?*” he’d thought at the time.

Now, his stomach rumbled, and terror took hold.

He suspected they'd be at his home by now. Capitol Police, maybe the feds.

"Oh, shit," he gasped, sobbing. Hannah would know by now. So would the kids.

Now this, after all the crap of the last few weeks. That stupid bitch he'd been screwing. The secret apartment. His wife would be done with him for good this time.

And twenty years in the Senate, up in flames.

"God! God!" he screamed, slamming his hands on the wheel.

Why had he taken the money? Why hadn't he turned them in? Either way, he was ruined.

He turned his options over and over in his agonized brain.

Run? To where? And now that Hannah knew, she'd take everything he had. Where could he go, broke as he'd be?

"Fuckin' redneck," she'd say. "Always knew you weren't good fer shit!"

"Me, the fuckin' redneck?" he thought miserably. *"Me pickin' you outta that fuckin' trailer park was the only good thing ever happened to ya!"*

He couldn't go to prison, even a federal pen, after all the savage racial comments he'd made over the years to appease his constituents. "Coloreds." "Mes-can drug mules and murderers." "The Asian plague."

"I'd be dead in a day if I wuz lucky," he thought, and panic set in again, just as it had that morning.

The white line of the highway blurred as the sun began to dip over the horizon. He continued to speed south through Virginia, although he didn't know why. There was nothing waiting for him anywhere.

There was no home to return to further south in his home state. No refuge. No haven.

And then, in a moment, he remembered something his mama used to tell him as a boy. He felt calm and at peace as he remembered.

His rental car flew onto the northern approach of the Rappahannock River bridge, which spanned the high gorge over the river. In the waning daylight, he lurched the car toward the guard rail.

“In the hands of the Lord,” he thought in a flash. *“Maybe that won't be so bad, after all.”*

As soon as the Capitol Police had taken Gruber into custody, they brought him to the Oval Office, as requested by Susan, the President's assistant.

Gruber, surrounded by his captors, stood awkwardly in the office and looked around. Having no need, he'd never seen the place before, and he marveled at its luxury.

President Harrison Quim entered from a side door and marched toward his desk, dismissing the police with a wave of his hand. They hesitated for a moment before exiting through the door to Susan's office.

Harry Quim sat heavily in his chair, pale and exhausted. He left Loomis standing for the time being.

He punched a button on his desk, and Susan answered immediately.

“Susan, bring in a bottle of bourbon and two glasses.”

“Yes, Mister President,” she replied, efficiently. “And Sir? Do you want me to keep the police here?”

“For now,” Quim replied. “But we won’t be long.”

Quim motioned to the chair in front of his desk and studied Gruber as he screwed his ass down into it.

The door opened, and Susan entered, carrying a tray with an ice bucket, two Baccarat tumblers, and a decanter bearing the Seal of the Office of the President. She moved silently to the desk and placed the tray soundlessly and skillfully on the corner, then spun abruptly and left, closing the door quietly behind her.

Quim stood, filled the two glasses with ice, poured bourbon in both, and handed one to Gruber. He took a seat on the corner of the Resolute desk, his back to the darkened window, and took a large gulp of his bourbon before sighing deeply.

“Loomis, I’ve had a really shitty day, and thanks for coming in so late,” he said quietly.

“Well...” Gruber began.

“Let me finish,” Quim interrupted. “First, that stunt of yours in the Senate this morning...”

“Well...” Gruber began again, a little slower now after taking a sip of his drink.

“No, Loomis, let me finish.” the President interrupted, still speaking softly.

“Then, earlier today, I was told I’d lost three members of Congress, not including you. The Congressmen, all from your party, are in FBI custody after pleading guilty to insurrection under Section 3 of the 14th

Amendment.” He took another long pull from his tumbler. “Are you familiar with it?”

“No, but...”

The President held up a hand.

“Then, about an hour ago, I learned the other Senator from your state killed himself by driving off a bridge in Virginia.”

Gruber’s eyes widened and he shifted heavily in his chair. He drained his glass, and the President immediately refilled it.

“Loomis, the only good that I can see coming from today is that my party just came closer to controlling both the Senate *and* the House, at least for the time being.”

Gruber shifted his weight noisily in his chair.

“Loomis,” Harry Quim resumed, leaning toward the bulky man before him, “I’ve never thought much of you. But I didn’t think you’d be stupid enough, or mad enough, to do such a thing.”

Gruber’s mouth twitched nervously as the President continued.

“Can you give me some idea of what you and your ‘*goober posse*’ hope to accomplish with this stunt?”

“We have a duty to my, our, citizens...”

“Duty?” Quim spat. “What about the oath of office you took? What about *your* duty to your own... *this* country?”

“My duty is to God before all else,” Gruber huffed, lifting his chin defiantly.

“Listen to me, you sanctimonious prick!” the President growled. “You’re leaving yourself no way out, and I’m certainly not going to pull your nuts out of the fire.”

“We have God on our side,” Gruber said softly, raising himself slightly in the chair. “He’ll protect us and our cause.”

“Isn’t that what all madmen and religious zealots claim?”

Gruber sat quietly for a moment. “I don’t have to listen to... “

“No, you don’t,” the President snapped, then spun and punched the button on the phone again. His assistant answered immediately.

“Susan, have the police escort *President* Gruber to his office and wait while he clears out his belongings.”

“Yes, Mister President. “Anything else, Sir?”

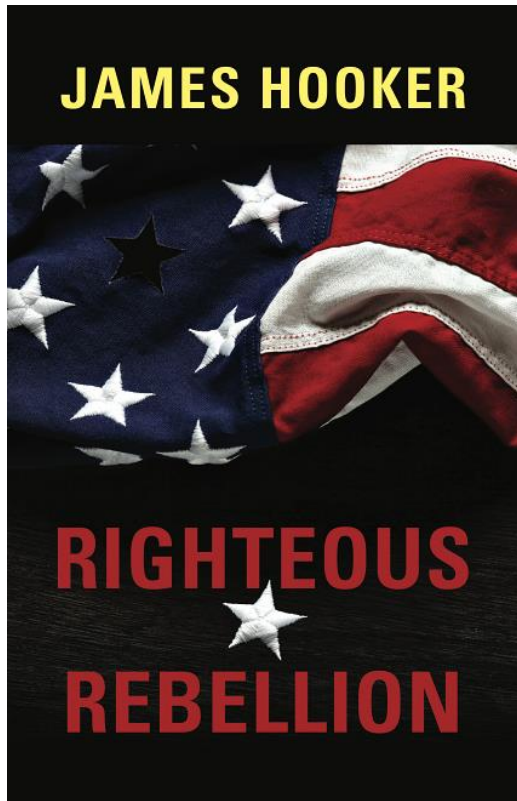
“Yes, Susan, have our *guest* and any family flown back to his... *country*... in a military aircraft ASAP. That means this evening. And cancel his passport, effective immediately.”

“Yes, Mister President.” In a second, the Capitol Police entered the office and stopped on either side of Gruber’s chair.

“Well, then, *Mister* Gruber,” Quim sighed, taking another sip from his glass, then tilting it toward the fat man as he was brought to his feet by the two police. “Good luck with your new ‘*Nation Under God*’.”

The President paused for a beat.

“Because you’re sure as hell going to need it. And Him.”



By a quirk of fate, a staggering amount of cash is given to a ministry in a southern state. A pastor has divined its purpose: to enable his state's secession from the Union. The results are jaw-dropping, chilling, and outright hilarious.

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