

## GOD, GUNS, AND GENTLEMEN

(Scene is a hotel room, empty, but two men soon walk in, an older, balding and overweight fellow, the Republican party whip, and a much younger, handsome, clean-shaven fellow in a neat suit.)

**Smegman:** And so to sum it up ... it's God ... Guns and Gentlemen, that's what it amounts to. The church, the NRA and the chamber of commerce. Can I get you a drink?

**Steve:** Just a beer maybe.

**Smegman:** I got Bud, that'll do, won't it? (pulls it from the refrigerator and joins Steve, who is looking over the impressive tall buildings at night, not like his Mississippi hometown.)

**Steve:** Got a nice view here, Mr. Smegman. Real nice.

**Smegman:** Call me Ace, everybody does. And cheers. (He bumps his bourbon and water to Steve's can of beer.)

**Steve:** Here's to my first term in the United State House, representing the citizens of Coahoma County, Mississippi.

**Smegman:** Yeah, Coahoma. Guess that's an Indian name.

**Steve:** Most likely. I need to read up about it if I'm going to represent those fine folks.

**Smegman:** Well, it's surely not Indians. And you're here. You're on the train. Indeed, you're a fresh face for the party and, may I say, loaded with potential.

**Steve:** Surely do hope so.

**Smegman:** So it's just about that easy. When you represent a district, you go first to the church people, most honest people in town and influential. You got to show up in church on Sunday, somewhere, be seen. Teaching Sunday School is good if you're a Baptist. And ...

The leading citizens of the town are in the Chamber of Commerce. Merchants, bankers, insurance salesmen, business owners of all kinds. That's the key organization.

I just heard a voter from Georgia on TV. He said he was a Republican because he owned his own business. That tells you something. That's who we are, the party that represents the wealth, the cream of society.

Then there's the offshoot civic service clubs – the Rotary Club, the Kiwanis Club, the Optimist Club, the Lion's Club. The Catholics have their Knights of Columbus, not sure what that's about.

The old war horses have the American Legion and the VFW – the proud Veterans of Foreign Wars. And there's the Moose Lodge and the Elks Lodge. Hell, just join what's there. Gets you involved. You're always scouting for votes. All I know is that you can get beer and alcohol with any of those fellows and it gives you a break from the little lady. Ha!

And you could join the Masons. Same kind of thing, they got more rituals, I think, and vow to take care of the families of their brothers as needed. Wives of Masons have an auxiliary thing called the Eastern Star.

**Steve:** Daddy was a Mason; the family has a big old bible with golden fringe. I think it's the King James version.

**Smegman:** All pretty much passé. We got a different reality in these modern times.

**Steve:** Daddy was pretty much a Christian but he didn't like black folks, kind of a contradiction.

**Smegman:** Listen. You want all voters. If black people vote, you want their vote. Don't say nothing against them. The game is ... stay in power. You're always running for re-election; you never quit. You need votes and money, for media, and for your own ... set of books.

**Steve:** The salary seems quite fine but where do the guns come in? Religions and guns shouldn't be a mix, huh?

**Smegman:** Churches fear evil, and they see it in society; they don't mind guns. Evil adds fuel to their message and gets followers. And the Chamber is about business prosperity, and firearms just happen to be a major growth industry right now.

Here's the truth about the GOP. First big lesson. We own the arms industry and it's the largest budget item for governments across the world. Fear reigns, we promote it. Firearms protect, we sell them.

Starting with your first pistol or rifle all the way up to nuclear missiles launched from space, this is all our territory. We serve these growth industries and help them grow. The more conflict, the more sales; the more sales, the more profits, the more millionaire Republicans, which you are destined to be. (salutes and drains his drink, goes to the kitchen for another) Another beer?

**Steve:** So the defense industry kind of ... rules the world.

**Smegman:** It gets the money. And a lot of this stuff can be expended and replaced. Like in Yemen and Syria and Iraq and Ukraine, whew, now a big drain. Big sales happening, millions of explosions. Ha!

**Steve:** Lots of death.

**Smegman:** The wages of war. A lot of people just hate one another and want to be armed.

**Steve:** I wish we could just all disarm, and be at peace. Don't you?

**Smegman:** That's ... a tough question.

**Steve:** No, it isn't.

**Smegman:** Beg your pardon? You want to know the reality ropes that tie it all together, the lariat in which we control the world. It's arms; it's wealth. It's the party's lifeblood.

**Steve:** And that of millions of other innocent people, they're dying by the thousands every day and you make money.

**Smegman:** Well, what the hell, young man? You can't change the world from what it is. We're just selling products.

**Steve:** Products that magnify the killing, the maiming, the destruction to catastrophic ruin in many countries. And what do we care? Are we just selling products then?

**Smegman:** You can't change reality, young man.

**Steve:** Yes ... you can.

**Smegman:** Well, just what do you think you're going to do, Mr. Freshman Congressman? Not much. And you'd be wise to follow the lead of the party, the people who put you where you are. Listen and learn. Why? Because the party must be unified to be a force that can take power. Hear what I'm saying? Power.

**Steve:** Have you ever heard of the word Virtue? It's usually a religious term.

**Smegman:** It belongs there. We're dealing with politics and power. We have it or they do, and it's damned close right now. Your career can make a difference here.

**Steve:** It will be a reflection of who I am. Who I really am. What are my values? Do I have a conscious, a spiritual consciousness. Am I honest? Do I have any virtue? Will politics suck it all out of me?

**Smegman:** I'm not saying you should be dishonest, for god's sake. Just follow the party's values. And the first value is having power.

**Steve:** I would think the value we can provide is in the legislation that we can pass, make life better for people, in Coahoma County, everywhere. It's a matter of the law, isn't it, not the eternal struggle to take over power. What's it for, except for passing good legislation?

**Smegman:** Well, how can you pass good legislation if you're not in power? You need to get your priorities straight.

**Steve:** No, Mr. Smegman. I think you do. The political process seems to have twisted your mind. Good legislation is a matter of law, not politics. Do you have another ... Bud?

**Smegman:** You seem to totally misunderstand your ... limited position in the party, Steve. Let's go over it again. It's simple. Vote with the party. We put you here.

**Steve:** Well, I like to think for myself. I'm sure you agree that rising young Republican politicians should be good thinkers. Smart. And virtuous. And ... can I maybe get that Bud.

**Smegman:** (shaking head) Lord help me!

**Steve:** I really doubt that God will. He's not in your Chamber of Commerce; come to think about it, maybe you're in his. Who's your real boss?

**Smegman:** Damned, son. Where did we find you?

**Steve:** I actually found you. I wanted to be in Congress so I bought a suit and used you. Thanks so much.

**Smegman:** So ... how about some loyalty. You owe us!

**Steve:** Not according to Thomas Jefferson, I was reading him the other day. Smart ... really a smart fellow.

**Smegman:** (says nothing, stands in wonder and frustration. He downs his bourbon and grimaces.

**Steve:** That stuff ... (gestures). That was always too strong for me. Do you think I'll ever get another Bud?

**(Stage goes dark.)**