

Finding George Washington: A Time Travel Tale

by Bill Zarchy

Plumbing

The General sat back, bone-weary, enjoying the rest. He then examined his drink.

“Beer, you say?” he grinned tightly. “Very watery, isn’t it?”

We quickly ran out of things to say. He marveled at the cans.

“Such bright, beautiful metal! They appear to be made of gold and silver.”

“Not.”

After a while, inevitability reared its ugly head. “Young man?”

“Please call me Tim, General.”

“Timothy. Could you kindly direct me to the privy?”

“Sure. But I’d better show you how to use it. It’s all changed since your day.”

“That won’t be necessary.”

“Well, there are plumbing devices to learn.”

“Plumbing?”

I took him on a tour of the bathroom. I was sure that, even in wartime, the General had always washed from a basin filled with warm water by servants. He had probably never seen running water in a sink, much less a shower.

At the basin, he gleefully grasped the left lever and twisted, then stuck his hand under the tap.

“Oh my! It’s warm. No, it’s hot! Who heats this water and puts it into this pipe?”

“The water comes from a tank, where it’s kept hot by burning a fuel. Here’s where you sit, General.” I showed him how to lift the lid and the seat and mentioned the protocol of closing the seat after use. He eyed the toilet suspiciously.

“And this little magic lever on the side blows water through and makes it all go away,” I added.

“Where?”

“Where what?”

“Where does it go?”

“Just ... away.”

“Is it magic, Timothy? Like the cold box?”

“No sir, just technology.”

“Eh?”

“Invention. Science.”

He was curious, yet his shoulders slumped with each new revelation, his apparent displacement in time and space beginning to weigh on him. He needed help.

He looked at me with a tight smile. “I fear I must rest. I hate to impose, but is there somewhere I could lay my weary head?”

I smiled. “I know just the place.”

“And perhaps something to wear that is a bit less formal than my current attire?” He looked down at his high boots and filthy wartime clothing.