

GEORGE. (*Still deceptively bland.*) All right ... I want to know about your wife's money because ... well, because I'm fascinated by the methodology ... by the pragmatic accommodation by which you wave-of-the-future boys are going to take over.

NICK. You're starting in again.

GEORGE. Am I? No I'm not. Look ... Martha has money, too. I mean, her father's been robbing this place blind for years, and ...

NICK. No, he hasn't. He has not.

GEORGE. He hasn't?

NICK. No.

GEORGE. (*Shrugs.*) Very well ... Martha's father has *not* been robbing this place blind for years, and Martha does not have any money. OK.?

NICK. We were talking about *my* wife's money ... not yours.

GEORGE. OK ... talk.

NICK. No. (*Pause.*) My father-in-law ... was a man of the Lord, and he was very rich.

GEORGE. What faith?

NICK. He ... my father-in-law ... was called by God when he was six, or something, and he started preaching, and he baptized people, and he saved them, and he traveled around a lot, and he became pretty famous ... not like some of them, but he became pretty famous ... and when he died he had a lot of money.

GEORGE. God's money.

NICK. No ... his own.

GEORGE. What happened to God's money?

NICK. He spent God's money ... and he saved his own. He built hospitals, and he sent off Mercy ships, and he brought the out-houses indoors, and he brought the people outdoors, into the sun, and he built three churches, or whatever they were, and two of them burned down ... and he ended up pretty rich.

GEORGE. (*After considering it.*) Well, I think that's very nice.

NICK. Yes. (*Pause. Giggles a little.*) And so, my wife's got some money.

GEORGE. But not God's money.

NICK. No. Her own.

GEORGE. Well, I think that's very nice. (*Nick giggles a little.*) Martha's got money because Martha's father's second wife ... not Martha's mother, but after Martha's mother died ... was a very old lady with warts who was very rich.

NICK. She was a witch.

GEORGE. She was a *good* witch, and she married the white mouse ... (*Nick begins to giggle.*) ... with the tiny red eyes ... and he must have nibbled her warts, or something like that, because she went up in a puff of smoke almost immediately. POUF!

NICK. POUF!

GEORGE. POUF! And all that was left, aside from some wart medicine, was a big fat will ... A peach pie, with some for the township of New Carthage, some for the college, some for Martha's daddy, and just this much for Martha.

NICK. (*Quite beside himself.*) Maybe ... maybe my father-in-law and the witch with the warts should have gotten together, because he was a mouse, too.

GEORGE. (*Urging Nick on.*) He was?

NICK. (*Breaking down.*) Sure ... he was a church mouse! (*They both laugh a great deal, but it is sad laughter ... eventually they subside, fall silent.*) Your wife never mentioned a stepmother.

GEORGE. (*Considers it.*) Well, maybe it isn't true.

NICK. (*Narrowing his eyes.*) And maybe it is.

GEORGE. Might be ... might not. Well, I think your story's a lot nicer ... about your pumped-up little wife, and your father-in-law who was a priest ...

NICK. He was not a priest ... he was a man of God.

GEORGE. Yes.

NICK. And my wife wasn't pumped up ... she blew up.

GEORGE. Yes, yes.

NICK. (*Giggling.*) Get things straight.

GEORGE. I'm sorry ... I will. I'm sorry.

NICK. OK.

GEORGE. You realize, of course, that I've been drawing you out on this stuff, not because I'm interested in your terrible lifehood, but only because you represent a direct and pertinent threat to my lifehood, and I want to get the goods on you.

NICK. (*Still amused.*) Sure ... sure.

GEORGE. I mean ... I've warned you ... you stand warned.

NICK. I stand warned. (*Laughs.*) It's you sneaky types worry me the most, you know. You ineffectual sons of bitches ... you're the worst.

GEORGE. Yes ... we are. Sneaky. An elbow in your steely-blue eye ... a knee in your solid gold groin ... we're the worst.

NICK. Yup.

GEORGE. Well, I'm glad you don't believe me ... I know you've got history on your side, and all ...

NICK. Unh-unh. *You've got history on your side ... I've got biology on mine. History, biology.*

GEORGE. I know the difference.

NICK. You don't act it.

GEORGE. No? I thought we'd decided that you'd take over the History Department first, before you took over the whole works. You know ... a step at a time.

NICK. *(Stretching ... luxuriating ... playing the game.)* Nyaah ... what I thought I'd do is ... I'd sort of insinuate myself generally, play around for a while, find all the weak spots, shore 'em up, but with my own name plate on them ... become a sort of a fact, and then turn into a ... a what...?

GEORGE. An inevitability.

NICK. Exactly ... An inevitability. You know ... Take over a few courses from the older men, start some special groups for myself ... plow a few pertinent wives ...

GEORGE. Now that's it! You can take over all the courses you want to, and get as much of the young elite together in the gymnasium as you like, but until you start plowing pertinent wives, you really aren't working. The way to a man's heart is through his wife's belly, and don't you forget it.

NICK. *(Playing along.)* Yeah ... I know.

GEORGE. And the women around here are no better than putas — you know, the South American ladies of the night. You know what they do in South America ... in Rio? The putas? Do you know? They hiss ... like geese ... They stand around in the street and they hiss at you ... like a bunch of geese.

NICK. Gangle.

GEORGE. Hm?

NICK. Gangle ... gangle of geese ... not bunch ... gangle.

GEORGE. Well, if you're going to get all cute about it, all ornithological, it's gaggle ... not gangle, *gaggle*.

NICK. Gaggle? Not Gangle?

GEORGE. Yes, gaggle.

NICK. *(Crestfallen.)* Oh.

GEORGE. Oh. Yes ... Well they stand around on the street and they hiss at you, like a bunch of geese. All the faculty wives, downtown in New Carthage, in front of the A&P, hissing away like a bunch of geese. That's the way to power — plow 'em all!

NICK. *(Still playing along.)* I'll bet you're right.

GEORGE. Well, I am.

NICK. And I bet your wife's the biggest goose in the gangle ... gaggle, isn't she...? Her father president, and all.

GEORGE. You bet your historical inevitability she is!

NICK. Yessirree. (*Rubs his hands together.*) Well, now, I'd just better get her off in a corner and mount her like a goddamn dog, eh?

GEORGE. Why, you'd certainly better.

NICK. (*Looks at George a minute, his expression a little sick.*) You know, I almost think you're serious.

GEORGE. (*Toasting him.*) No, baby ... *you* almost think you're serious, and it scares the hell out of you.

NICK. (*Exploding in disbelief.*) ME!

GEORGE. Yes ... you.

NICK. You're kidding!

GEORGE. (*Like a father.*) I wish I were ... I'll give you some good advice if you want me to ...

NICK. Good advice! From you? Oh boy! (*Starts to laugh.*)

GEORGE. You haven't learned yet ... Take it wherever you can get it ... Listen to me, now.

NICK. Come off it!

GEORGE. I'm giving you good advice, now.

NICK. Good God...!

GEORGE. There's quicksand here, and you'll be dragged down, just as ...

NICK. Oh boy...!

GEORGE. ... before you know it ... sucked down. (*Nick laughs derisively.*) You disgust me on principle, and you're a smug son of a bitch personally, but I'm trying to give you a survival kit. DO YOU HEAR ME?

NICK. (*Still laughing.*) I hear you. You come in loud.

GEORGE. ALL RIGHT!

NICK. Hey, Honey.

GEORGE. (*Silence. Then quietly.*) All right ... OK. You want to play it by ear, right? Everything's going to work out anyway, because the timetable's history, right?

NICK. Right ... right. You just tend to your knitting, grandma. ... I'll be OK.

GEORGE. (*After a silence.*) I've tried to ... tried to reach you ... to ...

NICK. (*Contemptuously.*) ... make contact?

GEORGE. Yes.

NICK. (*Sniff.*) ... communicate?