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SWEET SPEECH OF SUCCESS

HAS SUCCESS SPOILT RAY CUNNINGHAM? Glossy women's weeklies did not yet spell out their fashionable headlines. Success shrugged his shoulders. "I try not to," he reported, but nobody bought his story. He left the newsagency and went back to his car. On the windscreen of his Porsche he found a parking ticket. He threw it in with the other speeding tickets in the glovebox. They were forever trying to catch up with him. Well, he wasn't going to make it any easier for them. He couldn't understand why Ray wanted to get into the papers. After all, didn't his HAPPY CENTURY advertisements appear regularly in all the weekend editions? One day he'd just give up trying to understand people.

Take Ray's obsession with money, for instance. Doesn't he know that I just go on printing the stuff? In a way, we do have things in common though. He goes on selling so he can afford to go on buying. That way, he'll never own anything. I too belong to nobody; my loyalties are with no one in particular, although I do prefer people like Ray who spend themselves completely. Occasionally I give someone a lift. Very few ever remember when to get out. They seem to have forgotten where they were trying to get to. Instead, almost all of them get interested in my car. It's when they ask me how fast it can go that I know they're not really trying to get anywhere in particular. I don't mind these joyrides, if only they wouldn't end in the same predictable disaster. When it's time to get out because we've run out of petrol they don't know where they are. It isn't my fault that I have to take them out of the city, if they want to do a bit of racing. I've got enough of those damned speeding tickets already.

Success sat in the car reading the back-pages of the *Courier-Mail*. Somebody was trying to predict a double at Eagle Farm. One hundred and fifty years ago your chances of scoring at Eagle Farm were even more remote. Female convicts were kept in a stockade to protect them against a straight run from prisoners of the opposite sex. Maybe the odds have improved slightly over the years. If they have, it didn't do Ray much good. He kept backing losers, until he himself became one.

Women, Success thought, turning the page. He saw an advertisement from a large retail store. It showed a middle-aged woman tied, hooked and strapped in a corset. I FEEL WONDERFULLY FREE, her speech-bubble intimated. Success grinned. With women

it's easy, he thought. Either you defeat them first and then fuck them or you fuck them first and then defeat them. Either way, you can't go wrong. Makes for variety too, a kind of creative self-expression. Women are so much easier to get on with. Most don't even want to get out when there's no more petrol in the tank. They just sit there quietly; if I talk to them, they remember how fast we were going before we came to a sudden halt. They're so grateful for everything; in the end they're even grateful for their memories.

A policeman was standing outside the car. He was about to write out a new ticket when Success waved the old one at him. "Better move on then," the officer told him. He was only a constable, but after a few more tickets he was certain of being promoted to senior constable. Success wound down the window of his Porsche and asked him, "Do you want me to take you for a ride?" The policeman shook his head. "Sorry, mate," he said. "I'm on duty. Some other time maybe." Quite a decent sort of a chap, Success thought, he'll go a long way. He started the motor and raced out on to the street without using his indicator. As the tyres squeaked and the engine roared the constable got out his book again. But Success had been too quick for him; it was too late to check the number-plate.

In fairness it must be pointed out that Success was in a hurry. He was heading down Ocean Drive for an urgent lunchtime meeting with representatives of the Real Estate Institute of Queensland. He had agreed to address them over a business luncheon at Surfers' Paradise. The subject of his talk was "How to live with inflation". Success did not need any notes, he always spoke freely. Approaching the Gold Coast Highway he decided to rephrase the title of his address slightly. He felt he owed it to the business community to spread more confidence during these times of need, and thought of changing the title to "How to profit by inflation". Yes, he smiled, overlooking the city skyline. I like that. What we need now, he'd tell them, is positive thinking. His secretary had left a note for him about a conference with cardiologists at the Royal Brisbane Hospital which would have clashed with the Real Estate luncheon. Pity, really, but he couldn't be at two places at one and the same time. Well, they would just have to do without him for now.

The lights had already changed to red, but he still made it. He drove into the underground car-park and turned off the motor. It was three minutes to one. Success took the lift to the eighth floor. As its doors swung open, the delegates cheered and applauded his punctual arrival. "Spot on," the chairman confirmed and led the way to the microphone waiting for Success at the head of the table. But before he could say anything, the host introduced Success as their distinguished

guest speaker on this most memorable occasion. "Our guest today," he began, "hardly needs any introduction. You all know him. Those of you who haven't yet had the opportunity to meet him in person have heard a great deal about him. I won't bother reading out to you the long list of qualifications Success holds from the world's top institutions. Instead, I would like to introduce our guest on a rather more personal note. You see, Success and I have been friends for many years now, and I don't mind admitting to you that whenever I am in need of reassurance and inspiration I call on him for help. He's been so much more than an adviser to me though; as a trusted friend he's become part of our family. My wife looks forward to entertaining him whenever he comes to visit us at our modest home on the Isle of Capri, and I don't mind telling you that my children absolutely adore him. So does our Afghan hound Beachboy; he can sniff him out a mile away. And why, you may well ask, why does this generous, sensitive and somewhat shy man in a grey flannel suit win the hearts of young and old alike? To answer that, gentlemen, I only have to recall the moving scene I accidentally observed many months ago. I had just completed a deal up on the Sunshine Coast, a long-term project involving real responsibility, not to mention the risk of further inflation, and as you can imagine I came home tired and exhausted after the burden of signing a major contract. I poured myself a drink and went out into the garden to meditate beside the pool, when I discovered my little daughter sitting on the knee of Success, less than a beach umbrella away. I could not help overhearing their conversation. There he was, our old and trusted friend, talking patiently to my little girl. Apparently she had been trying to change him into one of her fairytale characters, you know, the sort of thing our children are still brought up by in the books they read and the games they play. The modesty and honesty with which our guest gently restrained my daughter should be a lesson to us all. The integrity and courage with which he identified himself to this little girl was one of the most moving moments in my life. No, gentlemen, in this age of fickle fashion and swift succession our speaker today did not want to change at all. He did not take the easy way out. As he stroked my little girl's hair he said to her, and I could hear his voice shaking with emotion, "Nothing succeeds as well as success." Let that be our guide, may everyone of us identify himself with the same humility and remain true to his purpose. Gentlemen, it is my privilege to introduce to you Success."

There was prolonged applause. Most of the representatives had families of their own and appreciated the comments made by their chairman. Ray Cunningham thought of his daughter Jennifer and wiped a solitary tear from his eye. Ray listened to the speech of

Success. The quiet, reassured, masculine voice inspired him to new purpose. It was clear that for someone like him there just wasn't any room for doubt. He was glad now that he had come to the Coast. What he needed more than anything else was direction. Ray forgot about his prawns and avocado. This man up there behind the microphone had a real message. "Be what you are," he seemed to say, "and be proud of it, regardless." Indeed, if Ray had understood him correctly, Success had told him to be consistent, to go through with it, to do what he wanted to do and to go out all the way. What a relief it was to hear someone talk like that! Ray felt that Success had only spoken to him. He wished Helen could have been with him and listened to the advice he was given by this experienced and widely travelled man. For once he did not merely resent his wife's inaptitude and passivity, he actually felt sorry for her. What a life she must have, he thought, no ambition, no plans, nothing to look forward to! Ray realised the full incompatibility of their marriage. How could two people so entirely different in outlook and temperament live together, raise a family and be happy? He wondered what his children really thought and felt about their parents' life. Would they turn out to be more like him, or would they become like their mother one day? Suddenly it hit Ray with all the force of an unexpected discovery that he was a stranger in his own house. He had no real home. He bought and sold houses, settling other people down had become a profitable exercise for him. In his own life he had failed both as a husband and a father. He did not really live with his family, he made a living for them. They depended on his income, but they did not need or love him in any other way. Applauding Success, he breathed a heavy sigh. It was difficult not to become bitter. He remembered the unpaid bills his own father left behind; the plaintiffs calling Saturday mornings when his mother had barely returned from night-shift and was in the middle of preparing some sort of late breakfast for himself and his three brothers. He'd never forgotten these visits of polite but stern men reminding his mother of her last chance and the way they referred to "the innocent children" whose very future would be at stake. His mother's tears and the hateful way she'd smoke a cigarette after they had gone at last.

Success had long finished his address; in fact, he was no longer among them. The elevator had swallowed his pride and delivered him back to the underground carpark. As Ray Cunningham left the table, Success' green Porsche reappeared on the Gold Coast Highway. At Ferny Avenue a sunbleached surfer lifted his thumb. Before he could stop, Success was crossing the Nerang River. He was doing sixty-five an hour. You couldn't say that he was drunk; he was just slightly intoxicated. It had been a good day for him so far, and it was unlikely that anyone would catch up with him now.