

Ripples in the Old Mill Pond

By Russell Baker

Richard Nixon is stirring. At San Clemente, The Los Angeles Times reports, old familiar scenes are being re-enacted. Abplanalp, Rebozo, Mitchell—the old familiar names—assemble, although not around the old familiar tape recorder, one assumes. The chief is pondering his next move.

The Times reports the advice he is getting: Sell San Clemente—wasn't that to be a gift to American posterity?—pack his pardon and move to New York, there to re-establish communication with national and international leaders.

It recalls the opening of "The Bride of Frankenstein," in which the battered Karloff, supposedly destroyed in the burning of the old mill, emerges unscorched from a convenient cellar pond and sets forth on another romp. Nixon has more lives than Lazarus, and this talk of another transcontinental move to New York suggests that someone is already working on what the Watergate gang used to call a scenario for the coming revivification.

Scene One: Nixon sells San Clemente and buys a Fifth Avenue apartment in the same building inhabited by Nelson Rockefeller, now Vice President of the United States.

Scene Two: Using electronic bugs placed in Rockefeller's apartment, Nixon obtains a tape of Nelson saying to Happy, "To hell with Ronald Reagan."

Scene Three: Nixon takes the tape to Reagan. On hearing it, Reagan says, "To hell with Nelson Rockefeller." Reagan decides to rally right-wing Republicans to throw Rockefeller off the ticket in 1976.

Scene Four: Back in New York, Nixon carefully takes off his necktie, which conceals a tiny recording device. He takes the tape of Reagan saying, "To hell with Nelson Rockefeller" to his neighbor, Nelson Rockefeller. Rockefeller decides to resist Reagan to the end, even if it splits the Republican party.

Scene Five: Nixon invites Senator Goldwater to visit him in New York. He plays him tapes of both Reagan and Rockefeller threatening to split the party. Senator Goldwater says, "By gosh, something ought to be done about these fellows." Nixon says, "My feeling exactly." "Do you have any ideas?" asks Goldwater. "Not a one," says Nixon.

Scene Six: Several days later Nixon phones Goldwater in Washington. "About that nasty matter we discussed the other day," he says. "I've

got an idea." "Forget it, Dick," says Barry. "With that pardon hanging over your head, you wouldn't have a prayer of getting on the ticket." Nixon says, "Of course not, and I wouldn't dream of accepting it if offered. But if you took the job, Barry, it would unite the family and elect President Ford."

Scene Seven: Next day Goldwater telephones Nixon. "The only trouble with your idea, Dick," he says, "is that I'd have to be Vice President, and it's more work than I want to take on." Nixon says, "Don't be silly Barry. Haven't you ever heard of the Twenty-fifth Amendment? Once you and Ford are elected, all you have to do is resign, and Ford can appoint another Vice President."

Scene Eight: At the Republican National Convention, which is paralyzed

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in the split between Reagan and Rockefeller, Goldwater offers to take the Vice-Presidency for the sake of the party. President Ford agrees to take him, after getting the approval of Henry Kissinger.

Scene Nine: The Ford-Goldwater ticket is elected and sworn in. Next day Goldwater resigns. Nixon telephones Ford and demands that Ford appoint him to fill the vacancy. "Gosh, I don't know, Dick," says Ford. "Don't try to welch on me," says Nixon. "You owe me plenty. Didn't I help you get America over a bad patch by letting you pardon me when there wasn't a rap any court in the country could have hung on me if I'd gone to trial?"

Scene Ten: Ford appoints Nixon Vice President. The Democratic Congress ratifies the appointment so the Democrats will have an issue to run on in 1978.

Scene Eleven: Nixon calls at the White House and insists that President Ford resign. "Gosh, Dick, why?" asks Ford. "You owe it to me," says Nixon. "If I hadn't engineered the Goldwater nomination for the Vice-Presidency, Reagan and Rockefeller would have split the party and you wouldn't be President today. Besides, I have a much broader grasp of foreign policy than you have." Ford hesitates. "I just don't know, Dick," he says. "Have you talked to Henry about this?" And Nixon says, "Henry and I see eye to eye."

Scene Twelve: Ford resigns, Nixon becomes President of the United States. He immediately starts planning for the next election.

It'll play in Peoria.