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(ii) Quick Note

If a writer begins with "how to read" something, you should generally run - but maybe this is an exception.

This play is meant for internet video. Each scene is quite short, no more than a few minutes at most. The line-breaks are in place to help the actors find the internal music of the dialogue. In the same way, you will likely enjoy it more if you read aloud - but, while reading, simply ignore the line-breaks, reading from punctuation to punctuation as you normally would, and let the rhyme and rhythm of the language emerge.

=====

(iii) Characters

JOSHUA NORTON I, self-proclaimed Emperor of the United States

MARK TWAIN, a writer for the San Francisco newspaper The Morning Call

ALBERT EVANS, a writer for the San Francisco newspaper The Alta California

FLORIST

DOCTOR

POLICE SERGEANT

SPECIAL OFFICER, a sort of security-guard or supplemental policeman

BOY, son to Special Officer

VARIOUS POLICE

VARIOUS SAN FRANCISCANS

AH HOW, a Chinese friend to Joshua Norton I (speaking Chinese)

=====

NORTON I

=====

1. (Streets of San Francisco.)

N - Joshua Norton I, F - Florist, T - Mark Twain, E  
- Albert Evans, O - Special Officer

-----

N: Take warning,  
all!  
I call  
you to a good morning  
and a good afternoon,  
and to do to each  
man forming  
the reach  
of my empire's span  
whether small  
or grand  
as you would have done to you!

F: Aye, I shall,  
Your Majesty. For I'm not one to strew  
the land  
with fall-  
en flowers  
nor wasted  
exhortation.  
Your Majesty, take this hour  
this carnation  
and let beak the  
power  
and art  
of your command  
on my neighbors'  
hearts  
to make them  
pay for  
their floral needs  
at my cart.

N: I cannot decree  
where these  
people buy.  
But I can suggest.

F: Your Majesty, even a sigh

from you is blessed.  
And a commendation is all I  
ask.  
Now back to my task.  
For I cannot rest  
myself in your awesome might  
nor bask  
too long in  
your sovereign light  
when my right  
station  
is a sight  
down the road selling roses.  
Good day, my lord.

N: Good day, for sure,  
good man.

(Florist exits.)

T: Your Majesty!  
I report a tragedy  
and travesty  
in this your sacred capitol city  
of San Francisco!  
It seems that early  
this co-  
ld dawn  
a fantastically  
large spawn  
of some phantasmic  
insect  
put his gro-  
sset excrement  
on  
the Alta California floor  
and then played eggs with it  
by smearing it more-  
over onto all the newspapers!  
And the filth is so infused to make your  
eyes water  
while reading,  
your breath hotter  
than the seething  
insect vomit  
on its  
typeface.  
And this all from the presence  
of one disgrace-  
ful bug  
named Albert Evans -  
this ug-

ly creature you see before me.

E: Forgive him, Your Majesty, for he is sorely broke and sober, having used poorly his last dollar from a weakly written joke for a holler and a poke with a whore over on Pike Street, who stopped pouring whiskey down his throat likely just ten minutes earlier than your sublime arrival. No worthier stretch of time has my rival here ever gone without being blind drunk, and without the alcoholic diet he follows his mind is now sunk so far into sobriety that all of his deplorable impiety becomes no more than this squawking like a hen, which I say is still better than the wildly slobbered drivel that comes from his pen.

N: You men are entrusted with the news of my empire and this is how you spend your days! Mend your useless ways! End the time you waste in slander and fill each paper's page

with understandable information! And if you handle that with time still left for allocation then write great books or rhyme or plays for my great nation.

T: Well, I'll do it but I won't like it.

E: And I'll like it but I won't do it.

N: Well, either way go to it! Begone!

E: Yes, Your Honor!

T: You mean Your Majesty. It's maddening how you mix up words!

E: You only heard me wrong because your mind is addledly fixated with syphilitic slurs.

T: You said you're on her?

E (exiting): I said instead of your purse you'd better bed her next time with sonorous purrs.

T (exiting): Mine or hers?

N: Good day, good sirs! ... Dear God, look how low to the bottom of this hole in the road! It's shaped like a bottle and it'll probably hobble forever the next unknow-

ing horse  
who hits it!  
Of course  
I must have someone fix it  
immediately!  
Am I not the emperor?  
Is my station  
no more than tedious li-  
aison with the pleading  
simperers  
who would sway my nation  
and twist it  
for their own purposes?  
For just as certain is  
my might  
to check them  
so I must do right  
down to farthest fleck in  
my realm.  
I cannot just walk by.  
For I  
am the high  
and helm  
and respected  
and sworn  
and ordained,  
and I hold elem-  
ental that sacred warn-  
ing to the main-  
stays of kingdoms  
that he who would  
do good  
for his people must toil  
for even the soil  
that is put  
beneath them.  
You there,  
officer!  
Come take a new share  
of lofty ser-  
vice to the empire.  
Guard you where  
I stand  
while I go to hire  
and command  
a man  
to smooth off these  
dangerous ledges  
and resupply ear-  
th to this treacherous  
hole  
until this road is edge-less

and well-planned.  
I would remain  
while you went  
instead,  
but as I reign  
by righteous care  
and you are only a paid flint-  
lock I dare-  
say you'll be met with incred-  
ulity  
and some will swear  
you're out of your head  
or up to tom-foolery.

O: Excuse me?

N: I said stand dutifully  
here and lose me  
neither horse  
nor man  
from my imperial pur-  
view  
while I source  
a hand  
to mend  
this this mur-  
derous through-  
fare true.

O: You don't tell me what to do.

N: Do you understand  
who  
I am,  
you damn  
incompetent?  
At least let your common sen-  
se glue  
you  
to this spot  
while I -

O: Did you just sli-  
ght me, you rot-  
ten complement  
to outhou-  
se piss?  
Come now,  
this  
is the end of your unblessed  
solic-  
iting in San Francis-

co. You're under arrest!  
Let's go!

N: Stop! Unhand me!  
Let go,  
you unmanly  
unreason-  
ing bandit!  
This is treason  
and my subjects won't stand it!

O: You're a madman!

N: You're a ruffian!

O: Take that, man!  
That's enough of your  
mouth!

=====

=====

2. (Holding cell in San Francisco jail.)

N - Joshua Norton I, O - Special Officer, B - Boy  
(to emerge from hiding)

-----

N: Do you hear me?  
Do you harken?  
You are bleary-  
brained and barking  
mad  
to weary  
me so long  
with your strong-  
arm seditiousness  
and abuse!  
How vicious is  
your wrong-  
headed use  
of my sacred person!  
You have given me hurts and  
bruises  
and I will make you no excuses  
when my subjects burst in-  
to this  
jail  
to free me!  
I am the emperor!

O: You're a madman! A fail-  
ure! Deceiving  
yourself by weakness  
and wimpering  
from the bleak mis-  
ery eng-  
ulfing your future!  
But this jail cell should suit you  
fine!  
And maybe even suture  
your disjointed mind!

N: I think you'll find  
that you're the one self-deceived!  
I guarantee  
in less than an hour  
by the force of our  
subjects voices at your back  
you'll give me reprieve  
from these

cruel black  
bars!

O (exiting): I guarantee  
you're eyes'll be  
rolling wrack-  
ed with stars  
if you don't shut up!

N: What impudence!  
What simpletons  
have become the implements  
of justice  
and right  
in my imperial  
city!  
That I am cursed and s-  
eized in my magisterial  
might  
by such piti-  
less beasts  
and interned  
not to be released  
until my subjects have learned  
my plight  
and come to fetch me!  
How unfledged these  
"spec-  
ial officers"!  
Did I not retch be-  
neath  
my teeth  
when I first  
heard  
my police  
would be "unburd-  
ened" by these merc-  
enaries! To help them in them in their rounds!  
And it sounds  
of course  
even worse  
to me now  
that  
I am forced-  
ly impound-  
ed in their pens!  
Here I pay down th-  
e account  
of my own sins  
of neglect -  
that I would let such infect-  
ion fester without check

in my empire!  
And that I would - ho! by Your  
Grace Holy Sire  
who deign-  
ed to appoint me to my reign  
from the mire,  
what is this?  
What are you doing here, lad?

B (emerging): You're the man who's mad,  
whom they call the emperor, aren't you?

N: I warrant you,  
I'm the emperor whom some call deranged.  
But when you've exchanged  
your your years  
for letters  
you'll find, I fear,  
that my forebears and betters  
too were harangued  
in private by forgetters  
of their allegiance  
in all regions  
at all times.

B: You talk funny, sir.  
I think you're out of your mind.

N: I talk as I am.  
And I am a man  
like no other.  
I tell you in truth  
the tongue's right use  
is what persuades  
women to the mother-  
hood act  
and shades  
uncouth  
ungainly fact  
with wings  
of debonair  
fiction;  
the tongue is the ver-  
y bur-  
i-  
er of great imperia,  
and good diction  
is the scepter of kings.

B: Are you really a king, then? on high?

N: A good monarch has no need to lie.

B: Then why  
are you in jail?

N: Without fail  
great men must suffer prison.  
It is in  
the emblem  
of our risen  
God that we see  
to what degree.  
I am a sovereign but I also must listen  
to Him who rules  
over me.  
And you too  
have your own du-  
ty to God and myself and the tools  
of my reign,  
so why aren't you in school?

B: I don't want to go.  
I don't have to explain  
myself to you.

N: And does your father know  
that you abstain  
from your own good?

B: No, he would  
bludgeon me till I died.

N: I should  
doubt  
that even a bad father's pride  
would let him go so far -

B: My father is made of tar  
and bout-  
s of violence and belts.  
You can see my welts.

N: My God, boy, what has happened to you?

B: That is my father's handiwork  
and care.  
You know the man - he put  
you where  
you are now.

N: The special officer?  
O Blessed God, I w-  
on't have such unholy harm

in my domain!  
I'll see the man's whole arms  
torn off his frame  
should he hurt  
you again!  
I give you my word  
as your sovereign  
emperor  
that your father's temper  
will extend to your  
flesh nevermore  
after today!  
Ho, there! Jailer  
beyond the door,  
you are not beyond my sore  
disfavor,  
my sway,  
nor  
my wrath!  
Come here!

B: Shut up, you raver!  
You mad-  
man! Shut up!

N: Officer, come now here  
or fear  
where you will be!

B: My God, he'll kill me!  
Shut up!

N: Officer!

B (hiding): Stop! Please!

N: Officer! I command you to come!

=====

=====

3. (Holding cell in San Francisco jail.)

N - Joshua Norton I, O - Special Officer (to enter),  
B - Boy

-----

O (entering): What is this racket  
and thunder,  
you cracked ir-  
ration-  
al blunder-  
ing madman! Shut up!  
Shut your mouth!  
Or I swear I'll cut  
your tongue out  
of your reality-sundered  
head!  
Dammit, I said -

N: Enough now, you rude  
incompetent  
crook!  
I've brooked  
too much  
of your spewed  
effrontery!  
your pomp and contumely!  
your rook-like  
screeching  
has become to me  
too many  
antediluvial  
portents  
that a flood of thuggery  
impends  
upon my sovereignty  
and my dominions!  
My negligence  
comes home!  
But my atone-  
ment begins  
now,  
for the good stone  
of service one puts down  
with his own  
hands  
today  
best begins any other plans  
he may

have for dams  
of future justice and halls of man-  
ly peace.

I say  
enough of your diseased  
brutality  
and severity.  
You may call me mad  
but in reality  
is not he who would sav-  
age his own being  
the one who's verily  
deranged?  
And how much more sadly  
insane  
is one who'd stain  
uncaringly  
his spirit?  
who'd tear a pit  
in his own heart  
and strike his own son?  
I know  
what you've done!  
What hard,  
unho-  
ly scum  
have you let fester  
in your brain  
that you would pester  
me with blame  
of dan-  
gerous disturbance  
when you know  
in no uncertain  
ways  
that you are the one  
gone  
crazy!  
How dare  
you strike  
your own child!

O: You lazy  
ranter!

N: Stop! I swear! No lon-  
ger mild  
and gently  
shall I remonstrate  
with the likes  
of you!  
But I decree

that you shall do  
no more violence  
nor demonstrate  
more menace  
to your  
son!  
On pain of imprisonment  
or exile from  
my imperial city of San Francisco!

O: How many more sick fits  
of your insolence  
must I listen to,  
you lunatic old  
man! (The officer discovers the boy.) Ho!  
Boy, what are you doing here!  
Have you been communic-  
ating  
with this brain-seared  
witless  
old maniac!  
With your slyness  
and prating  
and lack  
of virtue  
I'm sure you'll  
end up like his highness  
here, cursed to  
hell and fettered  
by lonely  
insanity,  
unless I hurt you  
enough to kill  
you and damn your di-  
seased person  
once and for all right now  
- if only  
my hand  
and my mettle  
were so hard!  
But still  
you'll learn better  
than to breed calamity  
under my guard-  
ianship,  
you blighted  
urchin!

B (as officer beats him): Stop! Stop, please!  
I'm sorry! Stop!

N: You sick beast

of a man!  
Stop! You release  
me and I'll drop  
you like the piece  
of putrescent  
feces  
that you are!  
You horrible  
coward  
and cesspit  
of mankind  
to bar  
me while you lessen  
and sour  
our  
entire species  
with such deplorabl-  
y mind-  
less  
vileness!  
I'll piss  
in your spine  
when I've broken your back!  
Jesus,  
I'll murder you, you sack  
of unholy defilement!  
You pissant!  
You filth!

O (opening cell-door and beating Norton): Take  
that!  
And be still  
or I'll kill  
you! I'll plant  
my boot in your shattered  
jaw  
and spill  
your addled  
brains  
out on the floor  
with all  
your ranc-  
id teeth rattl-  
ing round  
about me!  
Do you want some more!  
Speak now,  
you spouting  
sewer-drain!  
Speak now! You can't!

=====

=====

4. (Holding cell in San Francisco jail.)

N - Joshua Norton I, O - Special Officer, T - Mark  
Twain (to enter), E - Albert Evans (to enter)

-----

T (entering): My God, what have you done  
to him  
you un-  
scrupu-  
lous sump  
of piss!  
Get back!  
Or get something  
to stop and undo  
this  
bleeding!  
And get a sack  
for me to  
put your slack  
corpse in when I'm finished  
beating  
you to death!  
Get back and leave him  
breath!  
Emperor!

O: Why are you in this cell!  
Get out!

E (entering): What the hell  
is this about!

T: We've come to tell  
you there's dread  
rout  
and heedless  
pell-mell  
riot  
down  
in the heat-  
ed streets  
around  
Chinatown,  
but instead  
we find out  
you've dealt  
out  
your own needless

rounds  
of  
impiet-  
y against an unsound  
old man!  
You've killed him!  
You've drowned  
him in  
cold and  
villain-  
ous barbarity!

E: I swear it if he's  
dead that you die too!  
What did you do!

O: He was fum-  
ing incoherently  
when I came into this room!  
It was just a few m-  
inutes before you two m-  
en arrived -  
he was blathering  
inhuman-  
ly and slaving  
like a rabidly  
dying dog in agony  
until he suddenly writhed  
and collapsed l-  
ike this!

T: You conniv-  
ing capsule  
of piss,  
you lie!  
On his body are maps of l-  
ashing  
and welts,  
and your eyes  
are flashing  
like the last melts  
of a candle  
in the hands of  
a desperate man -  
and your gaze goes  
flickering  
to the door  
again!  
Do you perhaps sup-  
pose  
you're  
quick enough

or that someone else  
will come?  
I told you all San Francisco's  
now sickly suc-  
cumb-  
ed to horr-  
or against the Chinese -  
who are not too weak  
in the knees  
to stand  
and fight  
back  
for their slums.  
The streets and alleys  
are alight  
with fire,  
and the cracks  
and drums  
of bullets  
have seized  
every inch of the air!  
The police  
are indisposed  
out there!  
Listen and despair!  
For you are alone  
with us, you scum!  
You villain!  
And the blood and hair  
and skin  
of our own  
true San Franciscan  
friend  
is still in  
the quick  
of your nails,  
where  
you were sick-  
eningly tear-  
ing him to bones  
before we came in.  
I say you suff-  
er, you wail  
in pain, and  
die!

E: I say Amen!

N: Enough,  
say I!

T: Your Majesty!

N: Get back from me!  
God save my empire  
from its men's dire  
alacrity  
to mire  
themselves in antagony  
and bloodshed!  
What good  
comes back to me  
should  
that man dangle  
red  
from a rough dread  
scaffold!  
trussed  
or strangled  
or cut in half up-  
on it  
like some demonic  
simulacrum  
of the angels!  
What good is that, you mad un-  
learning strangers  
to reason!  
If you remain unchanged in  
spite  
of God's immaculate  
decrees and  
command  
to love each other  
as holy tabernacles  
of His Light,  
then how could your benight-  
ed treason-  
ous mangl-  
ing of a brother-  
man  
give you an-  
y better  
understand-  
ing of right  
or good?  
So, stop! I am not another  
fran-  
tic-minded hood-  
winked bedlamite  
like  
yourselves!  
I am emperor! I shall be understood  
or else!

E: Your Majesty, please be calm!

N: By God, all my life  
I've been as patient  
as a midwife  
in delivery of my nation  
from its darkness!  
Yet for all my staid and  
solemn ministrations,  
still Satan's heartless  
hatred crawls in  
every inch of my dominions -  
my men injure themselves to violence in  
front of me!  
They pinion each other's souls!  
They make rents and  
holes in humanity!  
And then with wild effrontery  
and vanity,  
they tell me be calm,  
old father,  
even as they pierce my palms  
and foot-soles  
and complain  
how bothersome I am  
to hold out at them  
my alms  
and offerings of sanity!  
But enough now of forbearance!  
Enough of sane consideration!  
You men are sold adherents  
to soul-garrisoning hate's drain  
and contamination,  
forswearing love  
and making mutual banes  
of

each neighbor  
you meet!  
And you leave me no recourse  
but to be your savior  
by reign of force  
complete!

E: Your Majesty, the walls quaver  
and strain  
for havoc in the street!  
Step away!

N: Get back from me  
I say!  
My apocalypse on your blood-stained  
heads!  
Behold my dread all-eclipsing  
power now  
as from this profaned  
hour  
I take in grip sovereignty  
and the whips of wrathful rule!  
Since you remain unschooled  
in love you shall follow me  
in cowering fear!  
Let him who has ears to hear  
come hark!  
Let him who has eyes to see  
come mark the glowering  
angels rising up about me!  
I am emperor, do not doubt me  
for any common man!  
I can command the skies  
and mountains go down be-

neath the sea  
for drowning!  
And Elish-  
a like  
around me  
fly ch-  
ariots of fire s-  
ounding out  
my s-  
acred day  
now come!  
Do you suppose  
you hear some  
gun-  
play  
in the streets!  
the throes  
of un-  
staid  
sons  
of men!  
I tell you no beat  
of drum-  
ming feet  
nor heat  
of bullets now sway  
these walls!  
No sums  
of men  
you hear at all!  
It is the whirlwind  
and the reckon-call!  
O, Father God, now let fall  
your separating  
curtain!  
Unfurl and  
rend  
this serpent-  
like veil, this imitating  
of a mad frail  
saint amidst all hating  
mankind;  
unwrap this world-in-  
terred  
seeming  
at life  
from my city's bale-  
fully dreaming  
mind!  
Unbind  
them from strife  
and murder

and blackmail  
and scheming!  
And unblind  
them to my true naked sun-  
like importance  
in the Earth!  
Glorify me now, Your Second-Son,  
before them!  
Show them  
Your chosen,  
Your Emperor Norton  
the First!  
Behold me, all!

(The walls and roof collapse on top of Norton.)

=====

=====

5. (Holding cell in San Francisco jail.)

T - Mark Twain, E - Albert Evans, O - Special Officer

-----

T: My God! My God, I swear!

E: My devil better!  
Someone out there  
has a trebuchet or  
an arbalest  
for all unblessed,  
unfetter-  
ed bang and hell!

T: The onanist!

E: A mangonel!

T: I own he's less than-  
an-pleased  
with his dangled pleasure-beats  
so he goes  
and blows  
a cannon off  
in San Francisco's  
streets!

E: May his hands come off!

T: He'll use his feet!

E: The bastard!  
He's blasted  
half your  
future paychecks away!

T: And I'd say  
that's the  
last of  
yours!  
You never  
put together  
a better  
speck of wordplay  
than a deaf whore's  
bored

poor-  
ly paid  
moaning  
before  
the Emperor came roaming.  
What else can your newspaper print?

E: I suppose the emperor's  
only ten percent-  
of your  
material!

T: Hear that whimpering!  
Hear him yelling under this splintered end  
of the rafter,  
half-embedded  
in the wrack!

E: Your Honor!  
We're coming after  
you! We're getting  
this stack off  
your back!

T: It's Your Majesty,  
you unbridled  
lackey  
idiot!

E: How tactlessly  
you spit  
out your idle  
grabby  
acquisitiveness!  
I'm not addressing  
you as Your Majesty -  
that's the emperor's title -  
no matter  
how mad at me  
you get!

T: Not me! You called the emperor Your Honor  
again!

E: When?

T: Just then!  
You said, "Your Honor, we're -"  
Remember?

E: No, I said, "You're on a weir."  
Can't you hear?  
See, I'll contend there's  
enough resemblance  
to this dust  
up-ending  
itself  
over the shelf  
of that toppled truss  
to allow a nearness  
of imagery in speech:  
like water breach-  
ing over a small dam,  
or a weir,  
where  
you're stan-  
ding.

T: God damn, ink-  
sling-  
er! You can't  
drink  
or write worth a whiz.  
But you're quick on your feet.

E: Yeah, well, let's get His Lordship on his.

O: Help me, sweet  
God, please!

E: That's not  
the emperor! It's that diseased  
rat maggot we caught  
beat-  
ing and abus-  
ing our sovereign.

T: Then let's let him rot.  
And let's get some hot  
burning coals and use  
them to light the wood like an offering  
upon him.

O: No, please!  
Heave  
me out!

T: Damn, I forgot.  
Emperor Norton might be beneath  
that lout.

E: Can you breathe?

Do you see th-  
e emperor? Is he dead?

O: The emperor? Not a mote of dust  
touched  
his glorious head!  
Believe  
me! He was t-  
ot-  
ally enfold-  
ed in lustr-  
ous light like a muzzle-fl-  
ash burning too bright  
and too long!  
And around him a throng  
of amazing  
white-  
robed angels stood  
in song  
and held up the in-caving  
wood  
from coming near him!  
The tumbl-  
ing rock  
itself seemed to craven-  
ly fear him!  
Thank God that man's too good  
to humble  
and shock  
the world with a clear glim-  
pse of his true blazing  
magnificence!

E: You brazen  
blackguard!  
What backwater simpletons  
do you misapprehend us  
for?  
to forget your  
violence  
in this insinc-  
ere  
outpour  
of stupid and weary  
exaggeration.

T: Dear God, look behind his ear! He'-  
s got a laceration  
through half his head!  
His neck's coagulated  
and sheathed  
with so much gleaming

red  
I can't believe  
it isn't full exsanguination  
yet!

E: How's he not dead?

T: Sit still, don't move!  
Dear God, I know  
there's no  
time to lose  
but I'd kill for a smoke  
and some booze  
right now.

E: You'd kill him. He's ooze-  
ing out blood  
by the pound  
and needs help  
ten minutes ago.  
Stay with him.

T: Stay yourself.

E (exiting): No,  
you're too slow,  
and if someone show-  
ed you a drink  
you'd stop to throw  
it down  
and think  
you were doing right all around.

T: God knows it'd sharpen  
my senses.  
I'm staring out the lenses  
of my eyes  
looking at the warp and s-  
kew of that skull  
and its insens-  
ate eel-  
like leaking.  
I can't prize  
or peel  
my c-  
urdling pupils  
from its bleak and  
sour seeping.  
And I can't stop stupid-  
ly speaking  
about it either.  
Hey! Come back!

Come release my two pit-  
ifully unblinking  
gogglers  
from drinking  
up this Medusa-black  
mind-boggle of  
a sight!  
Come rack  
me with your putrid  
hubris  
and distract  
me with your incoherent blights  
of logomachy!  
Come bother me  
with your benight-  
ed word-cobbling  
once  
for good!  
God, man, not you!  
Don't move!

O: Where did he go? What should  
I do?  
He just wants  
to be understood!

T: Who?  
What are you talking about?

O: My boy! He runs  
out  
into the bedlam  
and violence!

T: No, that was Albert Evans,  
the scourge of all silence.  
The babble  
of guns  
and bunk  
and hot air  
he mistook for his own tongue  
and dashed off somewhere  
to listen to himself,  
though when he comes  
back he'll swear  
he went for help.

O (struggling away): But there's yelp-  
ing and warfare  
out there  
non-stop!  
There's bloodshed

and looting!  
You hear the city's head-  
count drop  
with the shooting!  
It's a riot  
and my son could die if  
I don't get to him!

T: You'll blow yourself to bits, you im-  
becile!  
Stop, you madman!  
The streets are full of missiles!  
Get back! Damn!

=====

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6. (Streets of San Francisco.)

N - Joshua Norton I, F - Florist, E - Albert Evans (to enter), D - Doctor (to enter), S - Police Sergeant (to enter), S - Special Officer (non-speaking, to enter), V - various police (non-speaking, to enter)

-----

N: Damn your closed  
and froz-  
en minds,  
my beloved  
blind  
of San Francisco's  
troubled  
fogs!  
Your woes  
were mine:  
your ungovern-  
able dogs  
of covet-  
ous hate;  
your throws  
of shoveled  
rocks  
in '49  
since strayed  
to bloodl-  
etting blows;  
your Sutter-  
bait-  
ed bogs  
of low  
and job-  
less  
and desperate  
lawless  
men.  
I have kept  
within  
mine honest,  
royal  
breast  
my promis-  
es of loyal  
friend-  
ship and clemen-  
cy for you;

I've honored  
you as guests  
and in-  
timates, not as toil-  
ing subjects;  
I've blessed  
you with the oil  
and incen-  
se of compassion,  
and I've stretched  
myself thin  
to respect s-  
uch lashing,  
boil-  
ing passions  
as have swayed you.  
But I am not made to  
rule  
forever  
over madmen;  
I shall not be tether-  
ed nor displayed to  
mules,  
nor captain  
such unfetter-  
ed fire-  
blooded fools.  
No, I must sever  
myself from mine own  
sadness,  
from empire  
and throne,  
before you'd all make stool  
and black mess  
of my higher  
yet to-you-undigest-  
ible  
jewel-  
like reason.  
Your treason  
is your own unschool-  
able derangement  
and it's best  
if I  
make estrangement  
our future relationship.  
For I'd not be insane if  
I can escape it -  
I'd not be like you.  
Didn't I, though enraged, yet  
patiently  
apply to

you, my nation,  
to let me guide you  
through  
the secession  
question,  
instead of letting  
that pride-filled  
and voracious  
gangland  
of wangl-  
ing senators divide you  
up into bleeding brother  
soldiers?  
are you forgetting  
I said disband  
that gangren-  
ous congress  
and trust my mother-  
like modest  
hands  
to enfold you  
with concern?  
But no! You made my empire burn!  
And even beyond that,  
when I saw  
slack-  
jaw  
insanity  
leering  
where you were steering  
your-  
selves for  
war,  
though I might  
have single-handedly  
called for-  
th My Father's searing  
right-  
eous sword  
to commandingly  
have my way,  
did I not pray  
for  
you instead,  
and once more  
handsomely  
lay  
aside my read-  
y force  
of power  
and supremacy,  
to set

example  
of how one  
both legitimately  
proud and  
manful  
in doughty  
strength and sense  
can yet -  
like a gentlemanly  
prince -  
still get  
along  
with another whose winc-  
ing and wrong  
for now? -  
this in sinc-  
erest and simplest  
service  
to their future  
friendsh-  
ip and  
mutual  
long-term purpose -  
did I not give earn-  
est  
for this  
in my own being  
that you might then, s-  
eeing  
me, so too turn?  
But no! You made my empire burn!  
And even now,  
am I not a plain  
thank-  
ful friend  
to Ah How,  
the old Chinaman,  
whom the papers name  
and honor in  
official rank  
as my Grand Chamberlain,  
we twain  
a fresh  
living emblem and  
instance  
of indifference  
to the flesh's  
rang-  
ing pigments?  
Yet in what seems strange-  
ly only an instant s-  
ince

the Civil War  
you would endanger him  
and other innocent c-  
itizens  
in my real-  
m for no more  
than the mel-  
anin  
in  
their skins!  
So, enough of your  
hell-  
ish and unrepentant  
whore-  
dom to sins  
and hate!  
enough of your burn and burn!  
Before  
ins-  
anity  
shall once more  
worm-  
like sate  
its impotent  
and S-  
atanic y-  
earn-  
ing for violence  
in you,  
I will take this  
churn-  
ing and squawl  
ing intolerance  
pent up  
inside  
you and break it  
once and for all  
by holy demonstration!  
I will make you my nation's  
Golden C-  
ity truly,  
San Francisco,  
a place in-  
spired to such new l-  
evels of saneness  
and mind-illumination  
that it seem-  
s like only a fooli-  
sh plain mess  
of unruly  
dream-  
ing and over-approbation

of friendliness,  
questions,  
acceptance,  
and fun -  
but tonight I enter the heavens!  
I will make an end of this,  
and then I am done!  
You will see me no more!

F: Your  
Majesty! Nor-  
ton! Get over here on the floor!  
Can't you hear the bullets blast-  
ing and soaring?  
Get down!

N: No, there is one last  
orna-  
men-  
t for me  
to win  
unto my crown!

F: What!

N: I'm leaving!

F: You can't! Your Majesty believe me  
I'll go out of business!  
My flowers are always a little  
listless  
and brown!  
They're not as good as the Chinese's  
somehow!

N: I don't know him.

F: I mean my shipments  
are all dependent  
on you,  
and if you go then  
no one  
will choo-  
se to buy even a few  
ornamental  
shoots  
of hibiscus  
from me!  
Can't you see?  
I'm known to San Francisco's  
tourists  
as the florist

for His Majesty!

N: You would saddle me  
with moral s-  
way  
of remorse and  
guilt!

But I have seen you in Chinatown  
kill-  
ing the tilt-  
ed displays  
of your honest  
compet-  
ition,  
trampling to the ground  
immodest-  
ly their bouquets  
and nosegays -  
and their traditions  
and lawful  
rights -  
in broadest  
day-  
light!

F: I know!  
O

God,  
you're right!  
I'm so  
sorry!  
That was the low-  
est point in my lifetime,  
before I  
struck my  
own  
go-  
ldmine  
with the no-  
tion of using...

N: Of using me?

F: Yes, Your Majesty.

N: But do you see  
I'm not offended!  
I would rather be  
tendered  
myself to your service  
as your gentle  
limber-

hearted  
emperor,  
imparting  
to your purpose  
and simple p-  
rofit and good  
my own noblesse  
as surety,  
than that you should  
be  
bes-  
tially  
sche-  
ming against  
or hurting  
or scaring  
even my most worthless  
subject or friend.  
That is my office,  
my royal chair, and  
my philosophy.

F: Your Majesty,  
I swear I  
will never cheat a Chinaman  
again!  
Just don't leave San Francisco!

N: Beware!  
And speak slow  
and carefully  
what you would swear to me  
this night!

E (arriving): Your Majesty!  
Are you all right?  
What happened  
back when  
the wall collapsed?  
How, with your uniform  
so torn  
and your skin so fright-  
fully black and  
blue  
from such painfully borne  
vicious attacks,  
do you  
stand here as lord-  
ly as morn-  
ing, practic-  
ally as if  
you had never been scratched?

N: And how do you ask  
about me  
and play pity,  
when half  
my city  
is sacked  
with the very hide-  
ous fears  
and infighting  
you've been hack-  
ing at  
and inciting  
these past  
years  
in your papers!

E: Me?

N: At the Call  
and the Al-  
ta  
all  
the ink to its last  
vapors  
is full of apallingly  
dyslogistic  
names  
and blasphemies  
aimed  
at my modest friends  
the Chinese!  
Now, sure  
you can maim  
my prestige  
and minimize me  
with your pelts  
of vulgar  
blabbery,  
for I'm not so insecure  
in myself  
nor in my majesty  
to require that men not fashion  
gags of me  
or have some  
laughs at me -  
indeed  
even the First  
and Last King  
of all the earth  
and the rapture  
hereafter

was blackguardly  
mocked,  
so it only proves my worth  
when you miscapture  
me in ink  
as addledly  
ing-  
lorious  
and half-cocked -  
but when your story is  
steady  
inc-  
ulcation  
of brain-blocked  
racism  
what are you betting  
on but  
the abysm-  
ally shameful  
blood-  
letting  
of the minority?

E: That was before! When I need-  
ed some security  
to my income!  
But then I split from  
the Call  
for the Alta  
and I've made up for all that  
and then some!  
And Sam's foll-  
owing form  
now at the former  
where he's haul-  
ing that sheet  
in from  
its invidious  
luff!

N: And even with my city ins-  
ane with inc-  
endiaries  
and searing streets,  
you yet stand here  
swearing seriously  
to me  
you've changed enough?

D (arriving): Okay, I've got my stuff!  
Is this the man?  
Why didn't you mention it

was San  
Fran-  
cisco's emperor?  
He's been thrashed  
in flesh  
but not in temperament  
or core;  
you said  
he had a huge fresh  
gash  
and was half-  
or-more-  
dead.

E: It's not him.  
The man we're looking for  
has something wrong with his head.

D: I'm sorry I've got n-  
o time to spare,  
Your Majesty,  
but I want to say  
that the practical  
alacrity  
of your imperial care  
today  
has perhaps saved many lives  
in this city -

N: Quit spitting  
up your flatteries  
and revive  
your piti-  
fully unraveling  
soul  
with the medicining  
I've prepared  
for your remedy.

D: Excuse me?

N: Did you swear  
no Hippocratic  
Oath  
at inagur-  
ation  
of your yoke  
to health?  
Can you care  
for only half a city's  
suffering folk  
and call your-

self  
a doctor?  
Are not your  
obligations  
toward the help  
of all God's glor-  
ious temples  
brought your  
way? Yet from my station  
I've watched your  
curtains wimple  
and your shop doors  
close  
on all those  
other than Caucasians.  
Is that all the man you have chose-  
n to be?  
a simple  
mercenary  
of pimples  
and medications  
and the nose-  
crimpl-  
ing apothecari-  
al voodoo?  
Or will you  
finally  
spinefully  
see through to  
reality  
and true  
hu-  
man salubrity,  
which is man in full commu-  
nion with his own individuality,  
his God,  
and his community?  
Will you finally live up to your calling?  
Am I apalling  
you,  
man? Do I seem odd  
or dim-witted  
that you stare at me awed  
and speechless?  
Or would you see the teacher teach his  
apo-  
stles all  
true power,  
might,  
and meekness!  
Then very well, here comes my hour!  
Watch tonight

now as I -  
the sweetness  
and greatness  
and mainstay -  
of the entire  
empire  
lay  
down my inspired  
life and body  
for every one of my subjects -  
for every one of you, in such dire  
typhlotic  
need;  
for every one of you, race, color, or creed -  
now I flex  
my haughty  
soul and brave  
the ancient hypdroptic  
lauda-  
num of death  
to save  
you!

D: You lay  
your life down,  
Joshua? You rave  
worse with each breath,  
and I'm afraid  
to say, fr-  
iend, that now to the depths  
of your brain  
your wits have given way  
at last.

N: Then why are they  
here, might I ask?

(Police Sergeant enters with police and Special  
Officer.)

S: Joshua Norton! Stand fast!  
You are captured,  
you freakish creature!  
Get that man and thrash him,  
and cinch him  
hands and feet,  
and drag him back here in the streets  
where we can lynch him!

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7. (Streets of San Francisco.)

N - Joshua Norton I, D - Doctor, E - Albert Evans,  
F - Florist, S - Police Sergeant, O - Special  
Officer, T - Mark Twain, V - various police, R -  
various rioters

-----

D: What! Get away!

E: Stay  
back,  
you barging  
band  
of idiots!

F: You better go marching  
the other way,  
sergeant!  
Don't lay  
even a slack  
hand  
on his eminence!

N: God, all of you quit  
with your infinite s-  
oul-parching  
lack  
of sentience!  
Let's hear what they're charging  
me with!

S: You've abducted  
a kid!  
And you've struck to  
the insensate  
pith  
through this  
man's head.

O: He plucked up  
my son and went slith-  
ering like a dead  
snake  
into the blue-red  
drake-  
breath  
fire enslaving  
San Francisco.

D: That man is raving!  
Take a look at his go-  
ry skull  
and ignore  
his stor-  
y completely!  
He's witless!  
I need  
to treat the  
awful  
wound he's been given!

S: How can I witness  
where his  
cranium's  
hull  
is riven  
and divided,  
and then refrain from  
lifting  
with the right and  
lawful  
hangman's  
halter  
this vile d-  
eranged degenerate  
who might've  
killed him!

E: Look who's arriving!  
I told you to keep an eye f-  
ixed  
on this villain-  
ous liar!

T (arriving): Sorry! Why're  
you all mixed  
together in the midst  
of a rotten  
mob?  
Damn, I've  
never been s-  
o tired!  
Sergeant, that slob  
should be quick s-  
trung  
up with a garrote un-  
der his chin  
for the unkind  
blood  
he's wrung

out of our friend!  
He should be hung!  
hanged!  
like a puppet from twine,  
except he's banged  
his brains  
and he's lost his mind.

S: His misaligned  
reason  
shall not release him  
from fanged  
and furious  
justice!  
He has shown egregious  
injurious  
lust for  
violence  
and death,  
and our hard  
judgments  
upon  
him are f-  
rom right guidance  
and in good stead -  
we shall teth-  
er him up by the head  
until his soul departs,  
until his breath  
is gone  
and his heart  
is silence.

T: That's fine  
by me.

E: You idiot swine!  
They're talking about Emperor Nor-  
ton, not who you're  
supposing.

T: That's just what I'm  
disclosing,  
how that mor-  
on was ferocious-  
ly pouring  
kicks and blows ign-  
obly onto His Majesty's back and  
skull.

E: In fact,  
they think it's exactly

full  
backward  
from how you're putting  
your story.

T: What, that His Majesty was dull-  
y head-butting  
the man's gory  
boots  
and fists?

E: No, that the emperor inglori-  
ously whis-  
ked the man's runaway  
son away  
and then for hoots  
busted  
his s-  
kull in like that  
with unjust at-  
tack.

T: That's ludicrous that!  
That's fatuous,  
black  
brainless  
bunk!  
These monk-  
eys aren't that insane and s-  
tupid, are they?

O: Wai-  
t, that was my son c-  
rying  
blameless-  
ly  
out to me!

V: He sounds like he's  
dying!

V: He's out in the street  
where the main mess  
of bullets  
are flying  
round  
him!

V: Damn, get down,  
man!  
The Chinese  
have mulish-

ly let s-  
lip their semblance  
of domestication!  
They're firing  
blindly  
at anyone who's not Asian!  
The air is frying  
for the foolish  
thick  
num-  
ber  
and scintillation  
of their blasts!

N: You strike them,  
they kick,  
and you call them an ass!

S: You'll be on a pike when  
we annihilate them  
anyways!  
Grab that laz-  
y molest-  
ing maniac  
and hike him  
up fast  
to the first thing with  
upright  
orientation,  
be it mast  
or raised  
mason-  
ry  
or some spike in  
some unblessed  
tree!  
The rest,  
help me reveille  
every white man  
with gun  
or blades in  
grip  
to finally set free  
San Francisco  
of these  
damn slipp-  
ery Chinese!  
Let white carnal blood-craze  
rip  
and run!  
Let white Cain-like hands  
now bathe

in jets  
and libations  
from undone  
yellow flesh  
and organs!  
We're the police,  
but we are for them  
and we shall not see!

T: This is madness!  
Insanity!

V: Dammit, he's  
insane!  
The bullets tear  
his raim-  
ent but he stands in mere-  
st calm  
where  
I would not reach  
my palm  
to seize him!

V: Jesus!  
Get down! Don't shoot him!  
He's diseased in  
his brain to do what he's doing!

(Norton has emerged into the street, alone in the  
gunfire. Opposite, Ah How, with the Chinese,  
begins yelling.)

R: Don't shoot! It's Old Norton! The madman! The  
emperor!

N: Thou, O Lord  
in light  
above,  
thy Father hath afford-  
ed thee all right  
and love  
and power,  
and Thou, by ford-  
ing death itsel-  
f and hell f-  
or our  
poor d-  
amning  
sins,  
hast might  
shown more  
than any king

since  
then or since all time  
before!  
Thy Name divine!  
Thou, holy sword!  
Thy Name a dour d-  
efender  
of remor-  
seful and repentant  
all!  
Come forth,  
thy promised hall!  
Let pour th-  
ine honest ol-  
ive oil on thy s-  
acred  
sons  
and daugh-  
ters of the fall-  
en, shaken  
earth,  
thy solemn  
sure th-  
eocracy  
at birth  
in every heart!  
nor dark  
nor end  
of all creation  
part-  
ing such a nation!  
such elation!  
Such lawless sprees  
of friend-  
liness  
and tolerance  
and confident  
content  
begin with me  
this instant  
by thy providence  
and good,  
and redound  
to me with interest  
when I spend  
with indiscriminate  
forgiveness  
all my love  
just as Thou would;  
for though I stood  
upon Gehenna's  
bluffs,

yet Thou should  
put  
my foot-  
falls on dependa-  
ble and c-  
ertain  
perches  
for Thy dove-  
white  
perfect  
government  
of  
one who's  
sure of  
thine engirdled  
gent-  
le hands.  
Amen for all thy plans!  
Amen thy sturdy  
bands!  
thy sallied love!  
Thine aliya  
spans  
every man's  
and woman's  
soul  
and stands  
eternal,  
whole,  
and circled  
o-  
ver all thy hol-  
y human family!  
Thine amnesty  
for all!  
Magnanimous  
thine awe-  
some fire-fall-  
ing thunderbol-  
ts of conscience!  
thy spirit law!  
thy God-ness  
given  
into me!  
and I in Thee  
eternally  
and in this  
living  
instant!  
Go home, men!  
Go, inhabitants  
of San Francisco,

and pray  
as I've just prayed!  
Go and kiss those children,  
wives,  
and friends  
awaiting you! Be grateful for your lives,  
and if tonight you've killed in stupid fits of hating,  
then make amends for it so many days your eyes shall see!  
Go home and save yourselves!  
Be free of your madness at last!

(From the streets, grown quiet, a single gunshot;  
Norton, who is carrying the boy, staggers.)

V/R: What happened! An accident!  
He's straightened up again!  
Don't shoot! He's mad!  
He's our friend!  
He's Norton! The emperor!

N: I said go home!  
Enough! No more of lingering, watching,  
but release me from your sights!  
And leave an old king to walk his streets in peace tonight!  
Here, now all is right.  
Your boy is frightened but fine in body and mind and soul.  
He's whole.

Get him someplace warm  
for a bite of bracing soup  
then rest.  
And for me, well God bless my empire but tonight it's one earnest servant less!

T: He's shot!

E: He's dying!

T: Help him!

O: He's dead on the spot where he's lying!

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8. (Inside Doctor's store in San Francisco.)

D - Doctor, O - Special Officer, E - Albert Evans  
(to enter), T - Mark Twain (to enter), S - Police  
Sergeant (to enter), B - Boy (to enter), N -  
Joshua Norton I (to enter)

-----

D: Squeeze  
here,  
please.  
Right.  
And seize  
these  
dangling  
keys  
here  
by the hollow  
ring,  
please.  
Right.  
And follow  
this light-  
spangling  
mirror  
with unblink-  
ing  
sight,  
please.  
Right.  
You're fine.  
You know,  
after the last two nights  
to find  
you  
so  
improved  
and almo-  
st perf-  
ectly back to u-  
sual o-  
nly shows  
that the mind  
is a universe  
unto  
itself.  
Who  
can observe  
what the brain

is doing?  
this stran-  
ge unexplain-  
able  
kels-  
on gluing  
all our pers-  
onal cosmos  
together,  
and whether  
and how  
it tethers  
to whatever  
is really real?  
For my livelihood  
I deal  
in healing,  
yet I've found  
I've never  
understood  
the cores of health,  
the mind that's good,  
the heart that's sound,  
the happy self.  
But I talk round and round  
and wear-  
y you.  
Your friends are here  
to help  
you home.

E (entering): Well, look -  
a sturdy fere  
he is! A poem  
of haleness:  
"Man at ease."

T (entering): Doctor, you've uncook-  
ed his once-sear-  
ed sanity  
and saved  
him from disease.  
His frailness  
gone in 36 sways  
of the minute hand -  
hardly a day  
and a half in span  
of time -  
he's  
free  
to go his way  
again

in peace  
of mind  
and in fine  
health, if but he will.

E: I bet he will.

T: Bert, be still.

O: Doctor, these  
aren't friends of mine.

S (entering with Boy): No, but please  
receive  
them with me while I'm  
taking time  
to get you home.  
I know n-  
ow  
just how  
foam-  
y wrathful  
and rou-  
sed to stark  
stone  
venge-  
ful obsession  
you must have felt,  
when you beheld  
the ghastly  
blackened  
welts  
and marks  
entrench-  
ed so m-  
eanly  
in your son's flesh  
and bones.

O: My son?

S: Yes, we've seen  
him in private  
and there's been un-  
seemly  
violence  
done  
un-  
to him.  
And the len-  
gthy period  
of the vile a-

buse  
makes it clear he was-  
n't misused  
and scored  
by Norton,  
so these men  
will help me look for the m-  
an who did it.

E: We're sleuths  
and whores  
to voyeur-  
philic truths  
such as yours.

T: We're news-  
men and no stor-  
ies get past us.  
In fact,  
every fact  
sticks fast in  
our labial doors  
of printed talk  
and we have sourc-  
es to ask  
when facts  
are needed -  
we have them  
ten t-  
o every half-s-  
tep we walk.  
So, if this man starts beating  
your son again,  
we'll get him  
and then print him  
in the press  
as fast  
as asses  
balk  
backwards  
and we'll blackguard  
him full like bad cracks are  
caulked.  
You understand?

O: Not really.

S: They mean if anyone  
in San Francisco  
sees your son  
with so  
much as his toe

hurting,  
they'll come alerting  
these men and myself.  
We'll go  
find the hell-f-  
ledged bastard  
faster  
than lightning falls,  
and in print  
his name  
will be shamed  
to both shelv-  
es of the continent  
while he hangs  
from a neck-belt  
to a tall s-  
pire  
as we stab out  
his guts till they bleed  
from his balls  
and we set him on fire.  
You understand now?

O: Yes, sir.

S: And I've hire-  
d the doctor too.  
He'll check every few  
days for new  
bruises  
on your boy,  
and if he finds clues of  
threat  
or force employed  
against the child  
we'll act with wild  
dread  
against the noisome  
abuser  
and beget-  
ter of such harm  
as I've already said -  
hung by the head,  
torn apart by the arms.  
You understand?

O: Yes, sir.

S: Good. I'm sure  
we all agree  
to a man  
with your curs-

ing and damn-  
ing of your s-  
on's molester  
the other night,  
whoever he may be.  
So, I hope you understand  
me right.  
We  
will show not a single blessed de-  
gree of patience  
if the man is brainless  
enough to leave  
another painful  
mark on the boy or pester  
him again.  
We are just as determined  
as you.  
We will murder  
who-  
ever's hurt him  
without another word of  
warning -  
I don't care if he's in this room  
this very morning,  
the man will be tied  
and tried  
before he's  
even heard our  
arriving,  
and then die  
upturning  
in slowest dire  
writhing  
of bleeding,  
strangled breathing,  
and burning.  
You really understand?

O: Yes, sir.

S: Then we'll be your compan-  
ions back to your place.  
Ready? Need a hand?

O: I feel steady  
enough. Just give me space  
to stand  
for a beat.  
There I am.  
I'm fine on my feet.  
We -

(Norton enters.)

D, S, E, T: Your Majesty.

D: You came  
for your  
cane,  
I presume?  
It's more  
than the nation's  
boon  
to have you at your station  
with the reins  
of empire  
so soon  
in your hands again,  
sire -  
it's transcendence and  
angel-choir-  
ed elation  
for your friends,  
your loyal men  
and women  
all.  
We're glad  
you survived.

N: Thank you for that.  
But I've  
a sol-  
emn King  
even over me  
and He  
was bad-  
ly appall-  
ed and displeased  
that I tried  
to bring  
Him my soul  
before  
He had  
called  
for it.  
While you bore  
me up He tol-  
d me in spirit-  
ual con-  
ference  
not to waver  
in my job here,  
to foster  
more cheer-

fulness in my sphere  
and make it  
safer  
and more prosperous;  
then He sent me back with clear  
decree  
to serve my s-  
acred empire  
for as long as He  
requires.

D: Lucky for us.  
Also, about your cane -  
I meant  
to explain  
that because  
you left it glinting  
sun  
in the lane  
at that awful  
drop,  
my daughter saw it,  
paused,  
and slowed our dun  
and wain  
to a stop.  
She had been going un-  
flinchingly full-hop  
before  
that;  
and likely the hor-  
se would have sprain-  
ed or crack-  
ed its fore-  
leg and flung  
her; she'd have been un-  
doubtedly hurt and  
maybe killed,  
and the cart would have certainly  
spilled;  
it was filled  
with the pills,  
mercury  
compounds,  
and anti-septic  
phenol  
I've needed  
to treat all  
the people  
in town,  
including Your Majesty,  
who received injury

in the hectic  
rounds  
of tragedy  
and unclean  
violence;  
without these medicines  
there'd be infections,  
maddening  
amputations,  
and vile sense-  
less suffering.  
What I mean is,  
because you're a king  
who neglects not  
even his  
nation's  
shoddy  
roads  
when they need seeing to,  
your subjects  
remain whole  
in body  
and being through-  
out your dominion.  
Thank you, Emperor Nor-  
ton, for being a friend and  
father  
for  
all America - holding each  
of us as dear  
as every other.

S, E, T: Hear hear! Good teacher! Good brother!

D: And please  
believe  
that half my patients  
these  
last two eve-  
nings have been Asian  
and Chinese,  
just as you commanded me.

N: Outstanding,  
sir. I am relieved.  
Thank you for your ser-  
vice to my empire.

D (exiting): With pleasure  
cer-  
tainly, Sire.  
Now let me retrieve

new bandages  
for you.  
Please stand at your  
ease,  
or sit comfortably,  
just a mom-  
ent or two.  
These  
men are leav-  
ing to  
help the officer home  
and I'll be right back  
just me.

S, E, T, B (exiting): Your majesty.

O (exiting): Your majesty.

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fictitious; the inclusion of the special officer's son is fictitious.

(iv) Historical Notes and Liberties

In 1859 in San Francisco, Joshua Norton, who had once been a successful businessman but had fallen on hard times, left a note with the local newspaper The Evening Bulletin declaring himself Emperor of the United States. He was probably 40 years old. For the next 21 years various decrees, proclamations, and exhortations of "Norton I" would appear in the Evening Bulletin and in competing newspapers. Some were genuinely his. Some were fraudulent. It's hard to know which was which.

Certain citizens of San Francisco began addressing Norton as emperor whether for fun or profit - he was something of a tourist draw - and his fame spread. He became known personally to Mark Twain, who was a newspaperman in San Francisco at that time. And other American writers such as Stevenson and Bierce wrote about him after. During his life, nearby cities, such as Oroville and Marysville, would invite Norton as an honored guest to inspect new railroad tracks and attend meetings of legislature.

In 1867 Norton was arrested in San Francisco by a special officer - a sort of local supplement to the police force, but not actual police - at the Palace Hotel and taken to the police station at City Hall. He was "detained for involuntary treatment of a mental disorder". The newspapers were in uproar. Within days the Police Chief, Patrick Crowley, had Norton released, earning belated praise from Albert Evans in the newspaper The Alta California; Ah How, a Chinese man whom Evans had dubbed Norton's "Grand Chamberlain" served as witness when Norton received back his effects.

Anti-Chinese sentiment ran high in San Francisco in the latter half of the 19th century. There was a particularly serious riot in 1877. Legend holds that at this or a similar riot, to prevent further violence, Norton stood between the two races and recited the Lord's prayer until all the antagonists went home. This play takes great liberty with that event and with San Francisco's people and timeline; the story is mostly