

INDIANS ARE THE EMPIRE'S FUTURE!

An Expressionist Play

by

David Cole

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Characters (in order of appearance)

The COASTGUARD (CHAMBERLAIN)  
MARTIN  
CANDLE, a map-maker  
Voice of the ON-DUTY SIBYL  
HIMILCA  
JESSICA } Off-Duty Sibyls  
LILY  
The SEATED FIGURE under the sheet  
2 AUTOMOTIVE MECHANICS  
BACARAC  
The STONECUTTER  
The LEGIONARY  
The SCULPTOR  
ALEXANDER OF THE FIELDS, Imperial Wine-Steward  
PRENSIL, a pastry-cook  
VIC, THE PAINTING-SLASHER  
The INDIAN CHIEF (EMPEROR)  
COURTIERS A B and C  
LADIES A B and C  
PIDDLE, a ruined merchant  
The ISAURIAN, a captive  
The GUARD-PIPER  
Courtiers

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I (page 1)

Scene i. The westernmost sea-coast of the Roman Empire  
Scene ii. A road by a wall  
Scene iii. The Off-Duty Sibyls' Room  
Scene iv. A clearing in a forest  
Scene v. The Imperial Wine Cellar (Ageing Room)

ACT II (page 68)

Scene i. The Victory Party in the Emperor's gardens  
Scene ii. The Throne-Room

## PREFACE

I never thought to set a preface before one of my plays in the past, but I am learning how readers and viewers can be irrecoverably alienated by a first impression of oddness; so, with this play, it seemed wise to try and dispel the seeming oddness by presenting it as the product of an attempt to treat, for once, explicitly one of the deepest felt implicit conventions of the historical drama.

I once wrote a play about King Midas. At one point, the King is called upon to perform a symbolic action which would immediately suggest to everyone in the audience a Christian allusion. As he is performing the action, his daughter enters and asks what he is doing. Well, what he was doing - to my mind, to anyone's mind - was prefiguring Christianity; why, it suddenly occurred to me, should Midas himself be the only one presumed incompetent to grasp what was otherwise common knowledge? So, "I'm prefiguring Christianity" was the answer I had him make.

Of course, one cannot know when one is prefiguring something; but my point is that characters in historical plays always seem as if they do - and must necessarily always seem so. The utterly modern quality of consciousness in Bolt's *Thomas More* or Eliot's *Thomas Beckett* is so thunderously implicit that it seems almost unpardonable archness not to let it get explicit. As such figures will inevitably sound like they know what we know, why not let them speak the awareness with which, in any case, they are going to seem to be bursting? When Cecil B. De Mille had a character in one of his movies cry, "Men of the Middle Ages! Let us fight the Hundred Years' War!" he was making the most original contribution to the aesthetic of the historical drama since Shakespeare.

The paradox stems, of course, from the impossibility of a playwright's throwing himself back in imagination to a period of less ample consciousness than his own. We all know for a fact that Septimus Severus never had the experience of looking out his window and seeing an electric light; but nobody alive today can have the faintest idea what it is like, or how it affects the general quality of consciousness, never to have experienced electric light. Or symphonic music. Or Christianity. One is put in mind of the difficulty confronting medieval questers after the Philosopher's Stone, who were told that all they had to do to gain their desire was climb a certain mountain and not think of the word "rhinoceros." The imagination of the historical dramatist is a carnival of rhinoceri.

One cannot resolve the dilemma, but one can dramatize one's recognition of it. *INDIANS ARE THE EMPIRE'S FUTURE!* is an attempt at such a dramatization. I got the idea for the play from Montaigne via C. S. Lewis: "Montaigne passionately asks why so noble a discovery [as that of the New World] could not have fallen to the Ancients who might have spread civility where we have spread only corruption (*Essais* III. vi)." (*Oxford History of English Literature*, Vol. III, p. 16). It is a speculation enveloped in irony; and as I began to think about how I might do the play, the ironies (wretched, arch little things!)

proliferated like fruit-flies - to my increasing irritation. For why, I thought, have I brought this hypothetical ancient explorer into the world only to doom him to the role of perpetual patsy to his creator's sense of historical irony? How insufferable, really, that stage-center should be occupied by a rhinoceros of a prominence sufficient to knock the spectator's eye out, but which taboo requires everyone on stage to pretend is invisible. Suppose one were to do one's characters the kindness of lifting that restriction... It is all very well to say, "Romans couldn't possibly know about an American future!" but the brute fact is that they are inevitably going to seem to. The only debatable point is whether they should be allowed to give voice to their consciousness. As the intensity of my dislike of facile ironies grew upon me, I decided that they should. It wasn't really such a strange decision. Every play is ultimately about the problems that arise in the course of writing it.

As the reader is probably beginning to suspect, this is all a little after the fact.

I want to say a word about my having used the subtitle: "An Expressionist Play." Two hopes encouraged me to this impertinence. First, I hoped to communicate my belief that expressionistic phantasmagoria is not automatically the character of the stage-world in the modern theatre. Not that there is anything wrong with expressionistic phantasmagoria; but there is something deeply wrong with a playwright's not coming to his own conclusion, for each of his plays, about the kind of world that play brings along. It is depressing to see a playwright unthinkingly - as if unaware that this was an appropriate area for conscious choice - take over the stage-as-dreamscape convention, which is after all but one of many ways of defining the stage, though it has perhaps entrenched itself as the most unquestioned convention in the modern theatre, the convention felt as fact. But surrender of the prerogative of choice on this point amounts to surrender of one's fundamental creative prerogative as a playwright: the creation of a space, a world, with a distinctive character, incommunicable except as the play communicates it.

Secondly, I hope the label "expressionist" will guide the reader's or viewer's expectations as to the nature of character, plot, action and language. Particularly, I hope it will have the effect of focussing a reader's attention on the visual aspects of the play, which are consistently more important than the words; though ultimately, this is a foolish distinction, the interpenetration of language and visual elements being the essence of expressionism. I think you will enjoy this play more the more you visualize and the more receptive you are to the repetition and development of visual motifs. But the appearances of a given motif do not constitute a pattern of dots which, if connected, suddenly fall into place as the "meaning" of the motif. If you are left with the impression that one thing is always recalling another in this play, but that the basis or meaning of the



connectedness remains challengingly obscure, you will be experiencing the play as I hoped. I am not aware of having imbedded any central theme or truth in the play. I did not begin with a theme, I began where I always begin - with a situation; and out of the situation I have tried to create a richness.



## Scene I

(The westernmost sea-coast of the Roman Empire. Painted on a drop far upstage are a beach and behind the beach, just visible at a great distance, a brown stone wall running offstage to both left and right.

Somewhat right of center a white stone breakwater runs downstage from the beach on the drop almost to the downstage edge of the stage, not exactly perpendicular to the upstage wall but fanning slightly right. The floor of the stage right of this breakwater is lit by a steady azure light; the somewhat larger portion of the stage floor left of the breakwater is played over by a rhythmical succession of violet and azure lights which suggest a stylized wave motion. About halfway along the breakwater stands a turret-like gold watch tower, the surface of which is elaborately but indistinctly decorated with beaten gold friezes.

Hanging down over down-left, nearer to the audience than anything else on stage, is a stylized brass disc of a sun, the same disc the Isaurian holds in Act II, Scene i.

At rise, the stage is empty. After a moment, the COASTGUARD appears at the upstage end of the breakwater; he slowly moves toward the tower, and as he begins to climb it, speaks.)

### COASTGUARD

So, once again, as always, here I come climbing this tower for one of my long glances at the western water. Here waves roll west until they tire of it, and any bird plunging into that situation

(gestures toward the West, i.e., audience)

had better have the patience of a saint, for infinity it looks and infinity it is.

(pause)

And that sun is further than it looks, making colorful faces at me on the way down as I sit here, the western edge of the empire, staring in the direction nothing comes, staring west; and take up the watch nightly.

(pause)

An empty, though a flaming, prospect. A great passionate mind with nothing on its mind. Never anything more than nothing - not until the night Columbus gets back, who has a thousand years before he sails yet.

(MARTIN appears in the left-center area, making exhausted motions somewhere between swimming and flailing.)

But here - what's this? here comes something swimming out of the sunset a thousand years early! This is a real fairy-tale! This is exactly what never happens!

(calling to M-MARTIN)

Are you one of those pirate fellows (they get swept over from Africa; it's been known) ?

(MARTIN takes one sharp breast-stroke, as if impelling himself to the surface. He shakes the water off his face and looks up at the COASTGUARD, treading water; he is physically exhausted, but it has sharpened his mind.)

MARTIN

"Am I a pirate," was I just asked?

COASTGUARD

I don't know what else I could be prepared for you to be.

MARTIN

(mimes flipping over on his back and floating)

O Roma, Roma, you're so funny. I left you funny, and here you are funny at my return. Such a funny, funny empire you are...

COASTGUARD

You don't go swimming around in there! This is supposed to be a speculative ocean for us - no swimming!

MARTIN

Where else in the universe could one put in with the greatest

discovery till steam-engines and have the first question be,  
Are you a pirate? Oh, Rome, my dear; I'm discovering whole new  
caches of affection!

COASTGUARD

An explorer?

MARTIN

I would like to see the Emperor.

COASTGUARD

Explorers do not see the Emperor.

MARTIN

I'm not an explorer; I sell fabric. I was blown off course and  
I want to tell the Emperor about it.

COASTGUARD

You're very far from your Emperor at this moment, young man.

MARTIN

I really came in at some stink-hole, did I?

COASTGUARD

I mean, just swimming around there. We don't extend very far into  
the chaos. Come up into the cohesion of the Roman Empire.

MARTIN

Oh, I'm not in it yet, am I? All right, hold on a minute.

(MARTIN "swims" to the edge of the breakwater. The  
COASTGUARD descends from the tower, pulls him up onto  
the breakwater. They sit side by side on the front edge  
of the breakwater, legs dangling.)

COASTGUARD

So where have you been?



✦

MARTIN

I have been riding with the American Indian, over his plains and up his hill. I have slept afternoons in the wigwam and then got up and danced the Red Deer Dance.

COASTGUARD

"America" is your name for...?

MARTIN

An area in the Roman mind where no one's lighted the candles yet; the future conceived under the metaphor of a place.

COASTGUARD

The purple mountains' majesty...?

MARTIN

Above the fruited plain - right. And I've seen it, been there and seen it, been there and had a look. More nature and more silence you never saw. A whole continent - or two, actually - that looks like it has years it can lie resting before it has to get up and start worrying about the first haystack. This is the kind of country where a bird can fly for hours over a pine forest and it never occurs to him to grow lonely, though it's Saturday afternoon and November.

COASTGUARD

You have to be an explorer.

MARTIN

No, really, we were just carrying some of that nice Cyrenean linen over to Tauris and something blew up out of the Atlas mountains at us and we began to drive west. Just like the moon, you know, we did nothing but wester, and this went on for weeks. Everybody was trying to remember their mythology - the Blessed Isles, the Cattle of the Sun - because we expected to come floating into

some supernatural realm daily. There was one more storm in sight of the American continent and that tossed me onto the beach, but I think we lost the crew and the sample-cases.

COASTGUARD

And why do you feel it's of such consuming importance that the Emperor be let in on all this?

MARTIN

The Indians. They're so primitive, sweet. They sit down to life as if they were guests at a rich brother's feast - pick anxiously at some needs for a few moments and it's all snatched back into the kitchen. <sup>All right</sup> ~~there~~ there's a situation that cries, "Rome!"

COASTGUARD

Oh, that won't make much of an impression. Not on this Emperor.

MARTIN

You mean he'll only be interested in the natives as exploitable?

COASTGUARD

I mean, with him, if you think Rome has an obligation, you'd better be prepared to say what it comprises. And if you think we're such big ones with the benefits, you'd better be able to say just what, in your opinion, they are.

MARTIN

Technology.

COASTGUARD

Technology what?

MARTIN

As the first benefit.

COASTGUARD

Our technology? But it could actively depress you, all we don't have in this age! Oh, we do bridges and things, but who here knows a damn thing about chemistry and circuits and engineering? With all that waiting around the corner, I can't exactly feel I'm living in the age of marvels. In fact, I would say this: all the technical achievement of this age divides into what we can't do and what we do awkwardly.

MARTIN

Religion.

COASTGUARD

Wiser gods than its own preserve your savages from the Roman worship! Begun in a Greek borrowing and like to end as a trove of ornament, it has any life it has now as a sentiment or a racket.

MARTIN

Politico-military machinery.

COASTGUARD

Armies that can't move fast enough propping governors that can't reach far enough.

MARTIN

You're awfully negative.

COASTGUARD

I'm a coastguard; I'm supposed to assure the peripheries.

MARTIN

But not to extend them? All right, on with the benefits: Tradition.

COASTGUARD

The monks haven't even gone into their cloisters yet, and you use that word?

MARTIN

Social graces. Exquisite luxuries from the dark corners.

COASTGUARD

Who in this town ever heard of cocktail dresses or a mixed drink? And pester me with no exoticism, please; I can think of nothing more gawky.

MARTIN

I know this, too, you know; but don't get strutting about your age - it's not yours to dismiss. Keep your sense of it, Coastguard; it's all you get to keep.

COASTGUARD

(with a deferential gesture)

Just trying to acquaint you with some of the difficulties.

MARTIN

Maybe the Emperor denies the machines, the faith, the laws, the history and the pleasures of Rome to his Indians, but there's one thing an Emperor can't very well deny: Empire. The Emperor must bestow himself.

COASTGUARD

Have you met this Emperor?

MARTIN

No.

COASTGUARD

I think you'd better go right inside

(gestures inland)

and meet him.

MARTIN

Well, that's my plan. It's far, though?

COASTGUARD

Not so very - unless you've only yourself for company - oh, I should be asking that in my coastguard capacity, too: Did anybody swim in with you - or have you come in from the other side of the world all alone?

MARTIN

(rises)

A great red chief sat rear-paddle in my canoo. But the storm that leaps off every coast to greet me seems to have pulled him down.

(starts to exit up-right, along the breakwater)

COASTGUARD

Do you have proof for your chief, for any of this?

MARTIN

Look for a headpiece of white feathers on the beach, or maybe a feather in the water.

(MARTIN exits toward upstage, walking along the breakwater; the COASTGUARD begins to climb the tower again.)



## Scene II

(A road running along the wall painted on the drop in Scene I. The wall, composed of brown stone blocks, is about ten feet high and extends offstage to both left and right. The only pattern that can be made out in its coarse workmanship is three large arches - not actual scooped-out arches but their outlines only, formed by the placement of stones within the wall's solid face. On top of the wall, and about a third of the stage's width out from the left wall, stands a golden tower, an exact replica of the one in the first scene, but only about one-third the size.)

At rise, CANDLE is tugging at a large stone down-right, trying vainly to displace it. Slightly center of him stands a surveyor's rig: tripod, quadrant, plumb-line, sheaf of maps and charts. The stone he is trying to lift, though natural, looks at first glimpse as if it might be a rough-hewn monumental stone, or pedestal.

Enter MARTIN, from left, slowly, staring at the wall, staring around him, trying to get his bearings.)

CANDLE

(looking up and seeing MARTIN)

This is what I've been waiting for!

(to MARTIN)

Would you give me a hand with this rock.

MARTIN

The Coastguard told me this was the way into the Empire. Am I headed right?

CANDLE

You picked the right person to ask.

MARTIN

You're the only person there's been since I lost sight of the coast three days ago.

CANDLE

Three days you've been following the wall...

MARTIN

Well, on the assumption it must lead to the palace, or an outlying rampart, at least. It's quite a wall.

CANDLE

It is that. You want the palace?

MARTIN

I have to see the Emperor. I discovered the New World, centuries too early, and lucky for the Indians because it gives us a chance to do something.

CANDLE

What're you - explorer?

MARTIN

Fabric business, name of Martin - I don't know why everyone asks about my being an explorer, but I'm not!

CANDLE

Well, you say you want the palace...

MARTIN

One could have another reason, no? Anyhow, does this road go there?

CANDLE

Nowhere.

MARTIN

The road goes nowhere?

CANDLE

Just keeps jogging along by the wall there.

MARTIN

What's it a wall of?

CANDLE

It's just a wall, apparently.

MARTIN

I'm sorry, there aren't just walls. Walls wall something and roads lead somewhere.

CANDLE

You're going to give me lessons about roads? That's my life, roads.

MARTIN

What're you - gypsy?

CANDLE

Ah, these fanciful explorers! The peacock in every crow. Do I look like a gypsy? Did you ever see a gypsy with a surveyor's rig? I'm a map-maker: Candle, by appointment Cartographer to His Majesty the Emperor, Division of Road-Maps.

MARTIN

Well, that's ideal! You must have a map of this road you can let me have.

CANDLE

(gesturing toward his gear)

I'm just now making one.

MARTIN

How can you be just now making one? There must be one for them to have built the road by.

CANDLE

Oh, but that's very characteristic of these emperors, you know; that's a tendency: to build roads and then forget where they go, remembering only the possibility of getting there. So, now and again,

they send out Candle to open up - well, what might just as well for their purposes be wilderness uncharted. Which come to think of it makes me something of an explorer, though a back-tracking one, and over ways thought to be known. An explorer with a limitation. One poor Candle to dispel the darkness over the Roman Empire, and him a limited light.

MARTIN

Well, Candle, without wishing to give offense to your professional savvy, I can't really believe that even the most forgetful Emperor would just plunk down a wall threedays' march.

CANDLE

Eleven.

MARTIN

Oh! You've been to the end of it?

CANDLE

It's really an experience. Once, on commission, because the Emperors were getting curious - no one even remembered who built it anymore, never mind where it goes - I went out to the end of the wall. For eleven days I traipsed along this road, and in ten days I never passed a sentry, or even a tool-shed or an outbuilding - though further along there are some crenellations. When I woke up each dawn I couldn't be sure whether I'd really put in a day's trek the day before or had just dreamed through the last day's march I actually had made.

MARTIN

I had exactly that uncertainty sailing over to the New World!  
That endless ocean...

## CANDLE

Water and time are like that. At sunset of the eleventh day - I couldn't tell from a distance whether it was coming to an end or just turning a corner - but where for eleven days I had had wall to my left, now there was suddenly sky. I ran around the end and peered down the other side - and, do you know, the wall just came to an end; it wasn't part of a building or a system of fortifications or anything. On the other side was just some more of that meadow I'd been exploring on this side - as I might have found out a great deal sooner if I'd only been able to climb up and gaze cross-country. The wall was just there in its eleven-days' bulk, halving a meadow.

(MARTIN sinks down despairingly, his head in his hands.)

MARTIN

How am I ever going to get to the Emperor?

CANDLE

Oh, I can get you there; it just won't be on this road.

MARTIN

Where do I go from here?

CANDLE

First, though, I wonder if you'd give me a hand with this stone. Nature has plopped it down just in the position I have to stand my quadrant to get a proper reading.

(He motions MARTIN to take up one end of the rock; he takes up the other, and at a signal from him, they both lift.)



MARTIN

(straining terribly)

What now?

CANDLE

(not visibly straining; figuring to himself)

Well, let's see: I'll want the sight lined up south-south-west, that is, in the third quadrant, which means -

MARTIN

Set it down, then figure... I can't hold on...

(They drop the stone with a crash, slightly upstage of its former position. MARTIN straightens up, panting. CANDLE begins to set up the tripod just right of the stone's former position. MARTIN is watching him idly when suddenly something catches his eye and he stoops down over the hole left by the rock.)

MARTIN

Look!

CANDLE

What?

MARTIN

We've uncovered a whole world down here. Worms turning up their underbellies to the sky, a spider hot-tailing it out of the pit and getting all snarled up in a snail...

CANDLE

(bestows a quick glance and returns to his tripod)

It's a pity for them.

MARTIN

... A whole community of beetles trying to cover their confusion. Particularly note the beetles, Candle; it's an emblem of your

profession. I mean, when you map-makers do... a lake, say, you're in very much the position of one of those beetles, aren't you? - scurrying around the contours and never able to get the large view...

(pause)

What's a pity? What do you say is such a pity for them?

(gestures toward hole)

CANDLE

That we lifted the rock. Whole lives are now having to be lived in the light that weren't before. They'd be glad to get back under, let me assure you.

MARTIN

If that were among the possibilities.

CANDLE

I grant you, it's a real poser, this discovery of yours; but does it warrant chasing off to the Emperor's?

MARTIN

Was that the sound of a limited light backing out?

CANDLE

I'll get you there, I just want to know why the rush.

MARTIN

He's got to get started on the Indians. You saw about how long I can hold that stone up.

CANDLE

Why do you find yourself inclining to care about the Indians?

MARTIN

Oh, for that I give you your own reaction to the beetles. Can I just turn back to my life after I've brought a whole new world into the light?

CANDLE

As you've already noticed, it can be quite a strain holding  
destruction

(indicates stone)

in abeyance. And if you do let slip, you'll probably crush them, so  
that it would probably have been better if you hadn't  
~~been~~ brought them into prominence in the first place.

MARTIN

(excited)

Yes, all that prescience that one's no idea what to do with  
and has suddenly got to sustain... I see that, that I grasp!

CANDLE

Ah, you have a glowing mind.

MARTIN

I have something like that.

CANDLE

And an unbeatably modern heart.

MARTIN

Then get me to the palace.

CANDLE

(sticking the sheaf of maps under his arm and  
taking out the maps one by one)

Just let me get out the map.

(unrolls one; they both look at it.)

This is interesting, now: shows the route of a Phoenician who got  
half way down the left bank of Africa. The most fabulous voyage  
of Antiquity, until you reached the Other World.

MARTIN

I thought you do road-maps.

CANDLE

Yes, it's just a personal interest of mine, these expeditions over the frontiers, into the unknown, where there are no roads.

(unrolls another map)

MARTIN

That's some building, isn't it? Isn't that a ground-plan?

CANDLE

The Palace.

MARTIN

Oh! Here, give me that, I'll hold on to that.

(MARTIN stuffs the map into his belt.)

CANDLE

(unrolls and looks at another)

I can't remember just what this presents us with...

MARTIN

It's such a shower of color, as if a troop of crabs with green and pink paint on their claws had dragged themselves across the page; and then that big square of blank space right in the center...

(hasarding a guess)

Expressionism?

CANDLE

Oh, I remember: that's the Emperor's mind, based on reconnaissance gathered by the Chamberlain.

MARTIN

Oh! I'll hang on to that, too. Yes, I'll certainly hold on to that.

(stuffs the map into his belt)

CANDLE

(produces another map and unrolls it)

Here it is. "Routes from the Wall to the Palace."

MARTIN

It's a perfectly blank paper.

CANDLE

I remember where the lines were. I'll take you there.

MARTIN

Well, that's kind.

CANDLE

Let me ask something in return. When you go back into the New World, you'll need a cartographer; take me. I want to do something really new for once; not just new for my generation because they've gone and forgotten.

MARTIN

Candle, what could be newer?

CANDLE

But will you take me?

MARTIN

Let's see how you do getting us to the palace.

CANDLE

(having an officious bright idea)

You know where we ought to go first? - and it's on the way.

To the Sibyls'.

MARTIN

Why them?



CANDLE

They're our experts on the future.

MARTIN

But I don't need anybody to tell me about the future. I live with the future the way you live with your blisters.

CANDLE

They'll tell you how the Emperor will react.

MARTIN

I'd rather just get there and see the reaction.

CANDLE

And I know a back-entrance to the sanctuary; we can take those sibyls with their pants down...

(uncertain pause)

It's on the way...

(uncertain pause)

MARTIN

All right.

CANDLE

It's what I'd do.

(CANDLE gathers up all his stuff and they begin to leave. CANDLE touches MARTIN's sleeve to stop him for a moment.)

But don't expect too much of me, Martin. I'm a limited light.

(They go out.)

## Scene III

(The Off-Duty Sibyls' Room. An asymmetrical box-set with the right wall in extreme, and the left wall in slightly forced perspective. The room has the appearance of a badly lit cellar, the only strong light coming from a two-foot square cut in the ceiling above center. A sign on the back wall, left, reads "OFF-DUTY SYBILS' ROOM." Spaced evenly along the long right wall are two plain chairs. In the downstage chair sits LILY, a pretty young sibyl; in the upstage chair sits HIMILCA, a crone-like old sibyl. Just left of center sits JESSICA, a gracious lady-sibyl in her middle years. All through the scene JESSICA tends a small incense-burner which sends up fumes through the square hole in the ceiling directly above it. In the down-left corner, facing profile to the audience, sits what is apparently a figure in a large straightbacked chair - but both chair and figure are covered over by a sheet, as if for storage.)

## VOICE OF THE ON-DUTY SIBYL

(From above. (Whenever she speaks the off-duty sibyls pause and listen to her.) )

I'm sorry, I don't understand what you want, I don't know what to do with such a question.

## HIMILCA

(savagely, in the intense, hoarse whisper she always speaks in)

Stir it up, Jessica; stir it up.

(JESSICA prods the contents of the burner with a spoon, looks nervously up through the hole.)

## JESSICA

So anxious, that poor girl... I think she'll fall off the tripod.

## HIMILCA

Ach, these new ones! What do they know?

## LILY

What do any of us know, Himilca, until they shoot the narcotic at us?

JESSICA

But she's had three pinches, you know, Lily. It is a little poor.

HIMILCA

(to LILY)

But there are some of us don't need Fume, some of us old sibyls who've worked the future through our fingers so long, we've got the feel of it now.

(During this speech, unnoticed by the sibyls, a sort of trap-door has opened high up on the right side of the upstage wall; through it the heads and shoulders of MARTIN and CANDLE, the latter carrying a long flashlight topped with frosted red plastic, are visible.)

LILY

Oh, come on, Himilca.

HIMILCA

Vision! Our each turn on the tripod we pick up a little something, the way housewives get so they can jimmy their baking home. Why not? It's learnable, trainable. It can be...firmed, the vision, like a muscle.

LILY

Quote-unquote Himilca, the gum-eyed sibyl.

(HIMILCA makes a snarling, threatening noise.)

JESSICA

Quiet yourself, Himilca; rein in all those powers. And you, Lily; a little respect for a sister-sibyl who was passing out oracles when you were in your cradle -

LILY

- bewailing my poor unfirmed vision.

JESSICA

Now there is something in that, Lily, I think. I myself, once or

twice lately, when I'm quite certain the effect had passed off,  
I have myself had the sensation -

VOICE OF THE ON-DUTY SIBYL

(from above)

What do you expect when you come here with a question like that?  
If what you wanted was a prediction of success in your voyage, or a  
warning, I could speak to you. But every subject you broach is  
unknown - not the outcome merely: the milieu, the trappings...

HIMILCA

Ach, these young ones and new ones!

LILY

Well, all right, Himilca, all right Jessie, if I'm such a fool for  
only knowing what Fume tells me, let's hear you descant upon the  
Emperor's query on your own steam. Nobody's under the influence  
now; it's six hours since any of us was on duty: let's see what a  
clear head can make of that little puzzler.

JESSICA

Ah, the Emperor's query: that one I give you. That we'll get on the  
tripod, if at all.

HIMILCA

The trappings is puzzle enough, but then for him not to know  
whether it was a dream or a real figure -

LILY

I don't see, what difference does that make?

JESSICA and HIMILCA together

JESSICA: Oh, it does, Lily!

HIMILCA: All the difference.

HIMILCA

It's one thing to meet a bright red colored man in your garden - that's just peculiar. But to meet him in your dreams -

JESSICA

Well, he may just have wandered in to your garden, but if he's in your dreams, Apollo put him there -

HIMILCA

- meaning for his sibyls to get him out.

JESSICA

Although, with this emperor...

LILY

Now why is it always different with this emperor?

JESSICA

Only that he's not the staunchest upholder we've ever had of the ancient Roman distinction between dream and fact.

HIMILCA

But dream or fact, I don't have any clear vision yet. The white feathered headpiece, the red skin -

(MARTIN grabs CANDLE's arm.)

I'm not up to doing that class of problem in my head. Maybe I'll grow to it.

LILY

Maybe. Meanwhile, I'm glad to hear you admitting there's a class of problem only approachable through the old Soul-Enabler.

(LILY crosses to the burner, bends over it and takes a sniff; she straightens up shivering with pleasure, eyes aglow, inspired to prophecy:)

Disaster!

(She traps more fume in her cupped hands and releases it under the the nose of JESSICA.)

JESSICA

(reacting to the fume)

Judgment!

(LILY traps more fume in her cupped hands and releases it under the nose of HIMILCA.)

HIMILCA

(reacting to the fume)

Barbarian trouble!

(Unnoticed, the figure under the sheet seems to claw at the arms of his chair. LILY returns to her place. The three SIBYLS, under the effect of the narcotic, relax and look dreamy.)

VOICE OF THE ON-DUTY SIBYL

(from above)

What? What do you call it? The "Other World"?

(MARTIN perks up his ears, and grabs CANDLE's arm again.)

What "other world"? How do you sail into any other world? Why do you make it so difficult for me? I will try to be effective, but why do you not allow me to enter my kind of future, a future still Rome? What is this other kind you are forcing me to look on?

(But the sibyls are drugged too deep to notice this outburst; they are lost in their own restless thoughts. Long pause.)

JESSICA

The taste of Fume always starts me thinking of oracles I came out with years ago; and now, for the first time in a long time, I find myself thinking of the very first, that sculptor from the village on the northern frontier, a hot assertive boy judging by his question: Do I get to the summit of my art, Shall I know what it

is to hold in my hand the chisel of a master? I liked him, I would have been glad to be able to tell him yes (and also, I would just have liked my first pronouncement to be pleasant), but Fume kept coming up violent death. So I put it to him thusways, I said: "I don't say you won't sculpt wonders, but anything comes out from under your hand is going to have death on it" - whatever that meant. But in fact, Whatever that meant, I...

(searches for the word)

shied at having to say it. Not that he seemed unduly upset (of course, I've learned since then that they hardly ever take it predictably), but I mean, not even to the extent of being... struck or... set back at all. No his whole manner of taking it bespoke satisfaction, as if he'd presented a demand and was very decidedly getting the heart of it.

LILY

As indeed he was. But, I agree: the composure was unusual. In most cases, if you so much as mention the word "death" - well, what usually happens is like in the case of this Legionary I handled. Now this is a man of the battlefield I'm talking about, no stranger to death and dying. But his fuller experience hadn't worked any acceptance or resignation in him; no, but had had the effect of raising with even more than usual imminence the question of life everlasting. How can I get off and keep living? was the challenge he flung down before my tripod; and Fume inspired a nice answer: "Involve yourself in the fortunes of great men," I told him, "and you will go down with them."

JESSICA

Oh, Lily, that was irresponsible! Suppose he'd taken you to mean assassination?



(HIMILCA laughs wickedly, relishing this possibility.)

LILY

Oh, he was very loyal, though, always volunteering for things - as a matter of fact I think he was actually on the Emperor's staff: a consultant on anti-barbarian techniques, stationed on the northern frontier.

HIMILCA

It was no good answer, not if it stood a chance of getting us trouble from the government. If you don't have an answer, that means Fume doesn't want you to have one. You can keep quiet, in that case - in fact, it's a mistake not to, to feel you have to have something. One time a pastry-chef got in here and started whining about how "all his handiwork would vanish in a day, nothing he ever did came to anything," and asked, What perpetuity is there for my cakes? Well, there the answer was plainly "none, nothing;" so that's what I told him - nothing. I just sat there looking mystic till they brought in the next johnny.

VOICE OF THE ON-DUTY SIBYL

(from above)

Yes, take trinkets if it seems wise to you: what does the Oracle know of tropic races? No, I will not conjecture the provenance of those white feathers you fling at my feet. Ah, but you are not seriously consulting me on matters of bread-supply? The ocean does not exist for me in that sense. You ask too much: you ask the consciousness of another time!

(CANDLE is having some difficulty restraining MARTIN throughout this speech.)

JESSICA

(to HIMILCA)

Now I had one who would have envied your baker reviewing his



thousand generations of peach-tarts. This fellow had an envy of more inexhaustible existences. He sickened at the idea that things like brush strokes and melodies would outlive him - or, as he put it, live him down. That they had no consciousness to do the living didn't appease him; he had consciousness to do the resenting and that was enough. His question was rather like

(to LILY)

your soldier's: What kind of a life can I look forward to, but I think what he meant wasn't how long, but how durable. Well, it wasn't the straightest of questions, so out flies the double blade of prophecy. "You shall live," I told him, "until life holds nothing more for you" - which he, having a robust faith in variety, took to mean quite some time, but maybe he's finding the other meaning now.

HIMILCA

(with relish)

Yes, I like those good tricky ones; they ought to be our stock-in-trade, the others a sideline only. I'll tell you my best that way: A glass-dealer from Ipsus in Tyronia had a project to ship goblets around the Pillars to Cadiz: a great risk, and highly profitable - but would he be succesful? The fumes were all coming through images of disaster; there wasn't a Chinaman's chance he had there. But I'm a tight hand when I get hold of a bit of the future - I don't just slosh it around. "Pursue this plan," I told him, "and a great fortune will change hands." He did - and one did: his own.

(Again MARTIN would burst out, and CANDLE has to <sup>put</sup> a hand over his mouth to restrain him.)

LILY

Ah, business, policy, careers - that's the life of a sibyl:  
marvelous!

JESSICA

But also I enjoy the touching small questions we get in. Like, that Isaurian was in here the other day - you know, one of those big blond savages from that northern march we just conquered - and he's wondering Which event he should enter in the Olympic games? - seems he was the general champion of his village and somebody told him he ought to come to Rome and try and be in the games. Well, I just left it up to Fume - I don't even know the names of half the events - I just gave him the picture as it rolled in. You know, sometimes you get nothing, and sometimes down to the last pin-hook, but this was funny-in-between. I saw him raise up this brass disc, crouch down just about to heave it, and then - it shut off... as if a curtain was being rung down on a moment I wasn't supposed to see past...

VOICE OF THE ON-DUTY SIBYL

(from above; exultant)

Fume lifts me! A time will come when the chains of the ocean will fall away and a continent stand revealed; when a pilot shall discover new worlds, and Thule no longer be ultimate! Sailor! You may be the one!

(MARTIN again vastly excited; the seated figure under the sheet claws the arms of its chair.)

JESSICA

So I recommended the discus, though I was only accredited through that point: maybe the rest would come with the moment.

HIMILCA

I have it! I've unlocked the Emperor's vision. Now listen:

A Roman walking in a garden comes upon a headpiece of white feathers. Curious, he slips it on. At once his skin goes all red and his garments turn into some deerhide fabric. Have I given it right?

(MARTIN is open-mouthed.)

LILY

We know the vision -

HIMILCA

Here is the meaning. The white headpiece represents the snow-bound northern province of Isauria. When Rome took it on, she took on a bloody barbarian rising. Rivers of blood will soon flow down from its snowy peaks and redden the Roman Empire, even as the man in the garden, when he put on the white headpiece, suddenly found himself dyed in red. The vision is a clear call to the Emperor that he must at once mount a campaign against the northern barbarians. Emperor and Armies of Rome, hear the words of your Sibyl and March North!

(MARTIN pulls CANDLE away from the trap-door, which falls shut. The other two sibyls rush over to HIMILCA and congratulate her. The figure under the sheet seems to be raising its palms in supplication.)

JESSICA

Lovely, dear; only experienced you could have thought of that.

LILY

And on one sniff of the fume I gave her!

HIMILCA

Fume! That was on a clear head, young woman.

LILY

(to JESSICA)

Isn't it amazing -

HIMILCA

Vision! Pure vision!

LILY

(to JESSICA)

- what she can get from a single puff?

(Blackout)

HIMILCA's voice

(a bitter whisper in the darkness)

I haven't a drop in me - nothing!

## Scene IV

(A clearing - a "chequered shade" - in some luxuriant neoclassical woods, woods right out of Horace as painted by Claude. Down-left MARTIN and CANDLE are relaxing under a tree. A little left of up-center, the two AUTOMOTIVE MECHANICS are standing restlessly about. They wear overalls and light blue shirts with rolled sleeves; at their belt hang various tools: T-squares, pliers, screw-drivers with yellow plastic handles. They shift about very ill-at-ease, as if they would like to leave but don't think they'd better. Their heads are completely covered by grey, hole-less sacks topped by railwaymen's caps. Down-right, resting his back against the proscenium arch - this means he is a little nearer the audience than anybody else - sits BAGARAC, whittling a twig. A little up of center stands a tombstone-like memorial tablet, somewhat squat, a little broader than its three-foot width and tapering slightly toward the top. Its inscription is not wholly legible - something about "Imperator", followed by a line of Roman numerals. On either side of the front face of the tablet, which looks rather like a completed polished version of the stone MARTIN helped CANDLE to lift in Scene II, a blank, cameo-shaped oval with scalloped edges is clearly marked out. The STONECUTTER sits on a stool slightly down-right of the stone, facing it, chisel raised above the right-hand cameo, mallet raised above chisel.)

MARTIN

Candle, you're not getting me anywhere. I've been walking around the Roman Empire with you for eight weeks and you've yet to set me before the Emperor.

CANDLE

It has begun to occur to me, you know, that we may have gone down a wrong road somewhere.

MARTIN

You're always harping on all the things you don't know, but roads you are supposed to know.

CANDLE

Given the opportunity to line things up with my map, yes; but that day at the Sibyls', you shuffled me out of there so fast -

MARTIN

But I had to get right to the Emperor, or else he was going to act on the way that fool woman took his vision. Campaign on the Northern Frontier! I suppose by now he's hugging himself that he's wiped out some inconsequential barbarians somewhere -

CANDLE

You shouldn't have rushed away like that, Martin. You swept us out of there so fast, they never got a chance to be helpful -

MARTIN

Not helpful! They just showed that my Indian is the Emperor's future, that's all - you know, that's who it was in the Emperor's dream, not some symbol of the barbarian north, if they'd just had any sense of it. I wonder who that could have been upstairs asking the questions. He certainly seemed to be in on the modern consciousness.

CANDLE

I didn't make too much of that dream of the Emperor's.

MARTIN

But I recognized my Indian in it, the great chief who sat rear-paddle in my canoe. I was wrong to tell the Coast-Guard to look for his feathers upon the wave: my chief, too, is alive and abroad in this Empire, even to the extent of finding his way into the Emperor's garden (which is more than I seem to be able to manage) - or else into his dreams (which is not so out of the question). Anyhow, now I've got two things on my hands: while I'm searching for my Emperor, I'm searching for my chief, too.

(Enter the LEGIONARY, briskly. He strides in front of the STONECUTTER to down-right of the tablet and strikes a profile military pose, holds it a moment, then turns to see how he has placed himself in relation to the STONECUTTER, and, on the basis of what he sees,



alters his pose slightly.

Enter the SCULPTOR; he strikes a somewhat more elaborate pose down-left of the STONECUTTER.

Both LEGIONARY and SCULPTOR hold their poses expectantly. (The STONECUTTER does not move.)

SCULPTOR

I'm listening expectantly for the first clink from your chisel. When it's my own work, I can usually gauge the whole quality of the marble from that first shock,

(gesture)

and from there even go on to make a fair guess as to how well the statue is going to turn out.

(pause)

This is quite unusual for me, to be on the other side of the footlights like this (to use a New York <sup>expression</sup>). But please: don't let yourself be rattled by ~~any~~ <sup>my</sup> reputation. It's just because I'm the Master Sculptor of the Northern Frontier that I can be relied on to grasp the headaches of my lesser brethren.

(pause)

Only, why don't you begin? Or perhaps you have begun - incredible as it seems that I should have missed the first tinkle of the chisel.

(He drops his pose and looks over the STONECUTTER's shoulder.)

You haven't touched your medium!

STONECUTTER

(drops his position and turns to the SCULPTOR)

You know it isn't settled.

SCULPTOR

Not settled? What isn't settled?

(STONECUTTER nods in the direction of the LEGIONARY. The SCULPTOR, noticing the LEGIONARY for the first time, is unpleasantly surprised.)

Are you still in this?

LEGIONARY

I certainly am, with all the interests I represent.

SCULPTOR

Oh, "interests you represent"! Just because you flew into heroics among the barbarians -

MARTIN

(to CANDLE)

Did he say he was fighting the barbarians?

(to the LEGIONARY, without waiting for CANDLE's reply)

Did you say -

LEGIONARY

(to SCULPTOR)

I'm a symbol of something very fundamental about Rome.

MARTIN

(to the LEGIONARY)

Did I hear you say -

SCULPTOR

(to LEGIONARY)

Oh, you're just a one-soldier Realm of Ideas, is what you are.

MARTIN

(to LEGIONARY)

Are you talking about the recent -

LEGIONARY

(to SCULPTOR)

Look, I happen to have been designated a symbol, just as much as yourself; this isn't just some sounding-off I'm doing.

(just now hearing MARTIN, whom he addresses)



What is it you keep asking me?

MARTIN

Whether you had any role in the recent barbarian-fighting?

LEGIONARY

Well, that could be said.

MARTIN

Would you mind telling me about it - especially your role, which sounds like it's going to be a really prominent one.

LEGIONARY

That could be said. Caesar chose me - well, let's keep this accurate, though - I fearlessly volunteered to reconnoiter the barbarian positions. I come from this village, I have an understanding of the terrain in this area...

MARTIN

You mean the battle with the Northern Barbarians took place right here?

LEGIONARY

In a meadow three miles to the left.

(MARTIN shakes his head sadly.)

My procedure was to determine the weak points in their defenses - they have this system, see, they lash together all their possessions to get up a kind of barrier - but I found the weak point - sort of a keystone-arch where all we had to do was lob a stone in and it would come crashing. So I briefed Caesar and we overploughed them.

MARTIN

So this was a pretty big victory?

LEGIONARY

Oh, well, it cleaned up the whole northern area, if that's what you mean.

MARTIN

Now this is important: Were they all typical blond barbarians; I mean, nobody wearing white feathers, nobody with skin a sort of sausage-color?

(BACARAC looks up, startled, for a moment.)

LEGIONARY

You mean red Indians? You know, it's a little early -

MARTIN

Oh, my god, you don't seriously think you have to tell me it's a little early!

LEGIONARY

Oh, well, then, if you know... Well, to get right back to my part in the Great Victory -

BACARAC

(sarcastically)

"The Great Victory"!

(shakes his head pityingly and goes back to whittling)

LEGIONARY

I briefed Caesar, called in catapults, and we overploughed them.

SCULPTOR

(to MARTIN, indicating the tablet)

And for this, he thinks he's going up on the plaque.

LEGIONARY

Well, and for all I...

(searches for the word, then hopefully offers:)

suborn.

SCULPTOR

"Subsume," you great fool, if you'd ever heard the word before three days ago. Not that you do subsume anything, except maybe the vanity of every small cheese that ever owed it ~~it~~<sup>all</sup> to a big one.

(to MARTIN)

This - what shall I call him? - this bramble who was swept to glory because he happened to catch on Caesar's jerkin at that moment...

LEGIONARY

(as if giving a parade command)

Ho.....ld it!

(in his normal tone)

Now look: I go around with the big men, yes; maybe I even stick a little close, but I'm acting on a explicit prophecy: "Adhere to the fortunes of great men, and you'll be O.K." They told me at the Sibyls' that was how I should be.

SCULPTOR

Oh, the Sibyls! They told me, "No making anything for you; you're going to destroy;" but I went ahead, sculpted, rose to complete eminence on the Northern Frontier. "Merry Gorgon," as the boy

(touching his chest)

is known, because, as a lady at the proconsular level once told me, "At your hands, Gorgy, being turned into stone is quite pleasant."

LEGIONARY

I subsume as much as you any time!

CANDLE

(to the SCULPTOR)

Yeah, but now, this tablet: How do you come off being a claimant,

never mind making a doubt of his claim? I don't guess you were exactly anybody's pattern of heroism - sitting around chiseling as Rome burned, more likely.

LEGIONARY

(embarrassed at having given the wrong impression)

Well, it's not for heroism, actually...

(to SCULPTOR)

You explain.

SCULPTOR

(to MARTIN and CANDLE)

You knew whenever the Emperor finally took those barbarians he was going to throw up a commemorative tablet.

(MARTIN and BACARAC both shake their heads sadly.)

Well, since he had his success right here, or hereabouts, as a special favor to this village, (as if the presence of my studio weren't honor enough for any one northern dump), he invited them to climb right up there on the tablet with him. They were to pick for commemoration whatever one feature of their communal life they thought deserved it. He said to them in effect, "Come down into the future with me" - an offer which, do not I extend? As you can imagine, every craft and condition presented arguments why it should be them, but they weren't getting anywhere with all that crowd.

LEGIONARY

So finally it seemed expedient to narrow the field down to the Sculptor and me, on the basis that between us we subsumed anybody else in the house: I, the fighters against foes and political chaos -

SCULPTOR

- And I, the framers of great institutions.

LEGIONARY

I, the strugglers against wilderness and disaster -

SCULPTOR

- And I, the builders of shelters and machines.

(The AUTOMOTIVE MECHANICS shuffle with particular violence.)

LEGIONARY

I, the battlers against disease -

SCULPTOR

- And I, the molders of sound children in the womb.

LEGIONARY

I, the crusaders against the evil in human character -

SCULPTOR

- And I, the dreamers and young girls, those sweetnesses in window-seats.

LEGIONARY

I, the drivers of darkness forth from unknown places -

SCULPTOR

- And I,-

MARTIN

Yes, well, you certainly cover a lot of terrain between the two of you.

SCULPTOR

So much so, that each feels he must grace the plaque.

MARTIN

Well, so he must, each must.

SCULPTOR

(with real curiosity)

Come, how would you decide it?

LEGIONARY

Yeah, supposing we put it up to you?

MARTIN

Decide what?

SCULPTOR

Which one goes on the tablet.

MARTIN

This tablet, this one right here?

LEGIONARY

This tablet.

MARTIN

Well, aren't there spaces for two cameos?

SCULPTOR

Yes, two.

LEGIONARY

Two cameo-spaces.

MARTIN

Well, then, what's the problem?

SCULPTOR

(determined to show infinite patience)

The problem is, which of us two shall, with full emblematic heightening, become unto all future ages the symbol of what is best in this village.

MARTIN

But there are two!

(LEGIONARY looks puzzled.)

SCULPTOR

(to LEGIONARY)

Spaces, I think he means.

LEGIONARY

(brightening)

Oh, yes, two. Two cameo-spaces.

MARTIN

Well, then, what's the problem?

SCULPTOR

The problem is, which of us two, with full emblematic heightening -

MARTIN

Yes, I know! But I mean, there are two of you and there are two spaces. I don't see just where the difficulty arises.

LEGIONARY

(to SCULPTOR)

What's he say?

SCULPTOR

That there... Oh, I see! That there are two of us, and two spaces, and so...

(to MARTIN)

What was the rest of it?

MARTIN

(completely exasperated; to everyone else on stage)

Can anyone here explain it to them?

(turns and sees the AUTOMOTIVE MECHANICS, and is disagreeably surprised)

What the devil are you doing here?

FIRST AUTOMOTIVE MECHANIC

(doffing his cap)

From the automotive age - an age so remote it may not even have happened yet.

SECOND AUTOMOTIVE MECHANIC.

No one considers us for the tablet - on the grounds of there having been no automotive age. As if that sold any tooth-paste.

FIRST AUTOMOTIVE MECHANIC

(in disgust)

Aaaach!

MARTIN

(to BACARAC)

You under the tree - do you understand what I'm trying to tell them?

BACARAC

(looks long at MARTIN)

Stop coming across me. I'm no stranger to your calculations.

MARTIN

(Struck by the answer, he advances to BACARAC, stops in his tracks as he notices something)

What you've got round your waist is wampum!

(BACARAC goes on whittling. The gleaming blade catches MARTIN's eye; he seizes it out of BACARAC's hand.)

That's an American knife!

BACARAC

It's me grandpappy's belt and me father's tool.

MARTIN

What are you whittling?



BACARAC

I'm not whittling something; I'm just whittling away the wood.

MARTIN

Was it you at the Sibyls' asking all those questions about America?

(silence)

Have you been there and back already?

(silence)

Don't be estranged from me; we're alone in the whole ancient world!

(silence)

Who are you?

BACARAC

Give me back my knife.

(He raises his hand for it; MARTIN does not move.  
They look into each other's eyes.)

CANDLE

(to the SCULPTOR and the LEGIONARY)

I think what my friend Martin is trying to say is, there's no need to be deadlocked about this tablet thing, because you can both get on it, one in each cameo: Sculptor in the left cameo-space, Legionary to the right, or the other way round if you prefer.

LEGIONARY

(to SCULPTOR)

He's saying we could both go on?

SCULPTOR

That's what he's saying.

LEGIONARY

I don't think he realizes -

SCULPTOR

(to CANDLE)

I don't think you realize -

CANDLE

What? That you wouldn't be seen on the same tablet together?

LEGIONARY

No, but it's not possible.

CANDLE

Perfectly.

SCULPTOR

No, it's not, it's really not.

LEGIONARY

(to CANDLE, confidently)

You watch.

SCULPTOR

We don't know what will happen...

LEGIONARY

But something.

SCULPTOR

You watch.

STONECUTTER

(rises)

It's time I inject my note. Nobody gets on the tablet unless I chisel him in, and I don't chisel in anybody unless I'm assured I can fill one of the two cameo-spaces myself.

LEGIONARY

(to CANDLE)

See? I knew a difficulty would come looming up at us if we just sat patiently.

(to STONECUTTER)

Listen, private: the sum-total of what you subsume is a big, round, stone nothing.

STONECUTTER

Nobody gets on unless I do.

SCULPTOR

If the tablet is to honor an artist, shall it be some miserable stonecutter rather than Merry Gorgon, the master Sculptor of the Northern Frontier?

CANDLE

If you're such big doings, why don't you just take the chisel away from him and do it yourself?

SCULPTOR

I shall never sculpt again.

CANDLE

Oh, temperament.

SCULPTOR

Law. Ever since three men tore out their hearts for hopeless love of my statue of the goddess Futura, I have been forbidden to touch a chisel. It is melancholy not to be able to follow the work one knows oneself born for; but, on the other hand, what greater tribute to mastery! Show me another sculptor has ever come near to this!

LEGIONARY

You see? You can't go up there

(indicating tablet)

for the opposite of me. You're supposed to be the creators and I'm the destroyers, right? But how do you make a measure of how creative you are? You say, "this much death resulted from what I fashioned."

That's all anyone does: no one much fancies a brown stain on his sword, but no one feels the importance of his skills or his being unless he believes loss of life might come into the picture somewhere. But David's going into that in the next play; for now, I just want to say, if a destroyer's going up on that plaque, it should be me, the explicit one. I thank you.

STONECUTTER

Nobody gets on unless I do.

CANDLE

(crossing to MARTIN)

There doesn't seem to be any way of starting these two boys on their journey to immortality.

(to BACARAC)

It's stupid, isn't it?

(indignant reaction from the SCULPTOR and LEGIONARY)

BACARAC

For the soldier, it is stupid. In fighting against the barbarians, he has not fought against Rome's actual future.

MARTIN

Say what you mean by "Rome's actual future."

BACARAC

(starts to speak, then checks himself)

Nothing that wonderful.

SCULPTOR

(to CANDLE)

You call the immortality conferred by stone stupid?

LEGIONARY

You call the commemoration of a great victory stupid?

CANDLE

How far into the future do you think you're going to get with that  
(indicating tablet)  
big stone hanging around your neck?

SCULPTOR

We'll show you! Stonecutter, the Legionary and I both abandon our  
claim. One cameo is yours, and welcome. As for the other -  
Automotive Mechanics!

(The AUTOMOTIVE MECHANICS turn to him.)

Now is the moment to show some of that pertinency you're always  
giving yourselves. Seize Candle!

(They do so.)

CANDLE

(desperately casual)

It's nothing to me! It's a matter of perfect indifference to me!

SCULPTOR

(to STONECUTTER)

Bring out of the stone of the second cameo-space the lineaments  
of this scoffer.

CANDLE

It's stupid, I hate to be a party to it! This is no future for a  
limited light.

SCULPTOR

So, to the future he goes, to be sculpted.

(Exit LEGIONARY and SCULPTOR.)

During the following dialogue the AUTOMOTIVE MECH-  
ANICS tie CANDLE to a tree, while the STONECUTTER takes  
out a little pocket-mirror with a stand, sets it on top  
of the tablet, and adjusts it so he can see into it and be  
in a good position to work at the same time.)

MARTIN

(to BACARAC)

I didn't find hawk's-bells such a favorite as glass beads, did you?

BACARAC

Oh, hawk's-bells were pretty generally -

(catches himself)

MARTIN

We are alone in this age in a consciousness of the New World.

BACARAC

Don't torture me. I was blown off-course.

MARTIN

That's what we all say, but I was at the Sibyls', I heard you preparing yourself. It was you, wasn't it?

BACARAC

Won't you let me lie to you a little?

MARTIN

Only a very little. What's your name?

BACARAC

Bacarac.

MARTIN

No, Bacarac, this is too much knowledge to be alone with, and too much to do. There's the Indians to help, and the Chief to find, and Rome's actual future to avert.

BACARAC

What chief?

MARTIN

The great red chief who sat rear-paddle in my canoe. He is abroad in the Empire. You have to help me find him, you have to come with me to the Emperor.

BACARAC

It represents no part of my aspiration.

MARTIN

Then why did you seek the New World?

BACARAC

Oh, Martin, as you of all people should know, the New World is not seekable. Like any other future, it came up over the horizon at me.

MARTIN

You were at the Sibyls'?

BACARAC

Afterwards, to check. They don't really understand our part of the future, do they, when things are starting to get all un-hellenic?

MARTIN

Nobody understands, but we'll clue in the Emperor and hope the enlightenment spreads down.

BACARAC

Martin, this war with the barbarians - these foolish mistakes - I can't take much more of them.

MARTIN

We should try to get as much tolerance from our view as penetration.

BACARAC

You're not up to that!

MARTIN

I certainly wouldn't contradict you there. Come.

(starts to leave)

BACARAC

Martin!

(MARTIN stops and turns back.)

I'm going to come to symbolize failure for you.

MARTIN

Come.

BACARAC

I'm just giving warning.

(They go out. CANDLE, now tied to the tree, strains to get his face as far out of the STONECUTTER's field of vision as possible. But he had as well saved himself the trouble. The STONECUTTER, with the aid of the mirror, which he consults constantly, is engrossed in chiseling out his own features.)



## Scene V

(The Emperor's wine cellar: musty, dimly lit. Three huge vats are lying on their sides, bottoms out toward the audience. Attached to each bottom is a spigot in the form of a little golden tower. The pattern of the three vats is reminiscent of the three arches in the wall in Scene II. Down-right, a large rough wooden table with benches. Down-left a high clerk's desk, on which are a candle, the room's only source of illumination, and several bottles of wine.)

At the desk sits ALEXANDER OF THE FIELDS, the Emperor's Wine Steward. ALEXANDER picks up now one, now another of the bottles, holds each in turn to the light; evidently he is trying to decide between them. MARTIN enters down-right, cautiously feeling his way in the half-light.)

MARTIN

Now where am I?

ALEXANDER

(startled)

Who's there?

MARTIN

Martin, the fabric-man.

ALEXANDER

What is any Martin-the-fabric-man doing in the Imperial Wine Cellar?

MARTIN

Wine Cellar! I'm supposed to be on my way to the Emperor.

(takes out a rolled-up map, unrolls it)

ALEXANDER

Not if you're here, you're not.

MARTIN

I don't understand this. I went exactly according to the map.

ALEXANDER

(putting his hand out for it impatiently)

The map here!

(takes one quick look)

This map isn't of the palace.

MARTIN

But it was given to me as -

ALEXANDER

Whatever it was given to you as, it's a map of the Emperor's mind, second impression, as charted by the Royal Chamberlain.

(hands map back to MARTIN)

MARTIN

(gazing ruefully at the map)

Oh, my limited light, where have you set me down? Ha! Probably just down the street from that western sea-wall where I started.

ALEXANDER

Well, now, this is the palace -

(MARTIN brightens.)

But if you want the Emperor, you've still got some circling-in ahead of you.

MARTIN

(sinks onto the bench, right)

I'll never find my way. Oh, Bacarac!

ALEXANDER

Oh, I don't know. I keep hearing it's such a complicated palace. But I don't think it's such a complicated palace. You walk down a hall, you turn a corner, you go through a door -

MARTIN

(feeling in his pockets)

Wait a minute, wait till I get something to write with.

ALEXANDER

No, I wasn't giving you instructions; I just mean, those are the only possibilities for you at any given moment in this palace. So, getting to the Emperor, getting here to the wine-room - how really complicated can something like that be?

(pause)

MARTIN

Aren't you going to ask me why I want to see him?

ALEXANDER

No, I'm not going to ask you why you want to see him.

MARTIN

You would be the first one, by my reckoning, who didn't.

Who are you?

ALEXANDER

Alexander of the Fields, Imperial Wine Steward.

MARTIN

Why "of the fields"?

ALEXANDER

I was employed there, but I came in.

MARTIN

Ah, yes, that sensation of being afield and then coming in... I have been walking up and down the furrows of the Empire with a little bag of seed, trying to decide where to put in the seeds of the future. And now I've...

(gestures around the wine cellar)

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come in.

ALEXANDER

Don't give me anything about the future!

MARTIN

You have an aversion to the future, Steward?

ALEXANDER

Uninterested. The wine is ageing, the Empire is ageing all around it. I understand neither chemistry. But I don't find anything fresh or bright or young about the future: it's a maturity for this age, which is already none of the youngest.

MARTIN

Ho! You would be just the right foil for my travelling companion.

ALEXANDER

(startled, looking around)

Is there somebody else in here?

MARTIN

No, I'm afraid I seem to have lost him. I expected to lose him, but not quite so soon as this. Well, one is deceived in one's companions...

ALEXANDER

What did he have to see the Emperor about?

MARTIN

Oh, you couldn't get him to admit to the least errand. From the moment I put him on the road to the palace you could see him casting about for a way off. Well, I understood, of course; but it didn't cease to be annoying; after all, the man's degree of

responsibility was no less than my own: if one's been to America, one doesn't just then not see the Emperor about it. Well, you could go on in that vein... But as we trudged along, I could see him looking - looking under every stone, so to speak - for some sign or event after which he wouldn't have to go on. And eventually he found one, as he had long since decided he was going to do. Ah, my maddening friend Bacarac! The man couldn't learn to incorporate, Steward. The future shakes all of us, but it does not unfit all of us. One learns to have made the discovery without having it change utterly, utterly everything. But this man's own age ceased to be habitable to him! Measure it by your own distaste for the future: for you, unthinkable; for him... as if it were a lake and he had a villa there.

## ALEXANDER

So your friend - he found his excuse for not calling on the Emperor? I ask in the full understanding that you're talking more for your own benefit than mine.

## MARTIN

Just as we got to - what we thought at the time was the gate of the palace, but which we must have been misreading as the pia mater of the Emperor's brain-pan - just inside the palace garden we saw a raised platform, and on it there was this big blond fellow holding up an enormous brass gong or discus and sort of dancing with it. My friend Bacarac, he stopped one of the soldiers playing music for the dance and asked him what it was all about. What it turned out to be, they were having a rehearsal for a masque that's being given at some imperial function - is there really a victory celebration tonight?

ALEXANDER

Yes. A garden party by torchlight. I have to supply the wine.

MARTIN

When we asked what the masque was supposed to be showing, they said, the triumph of the Emperor over the Barbarian North. Well, that was too much for my friend Bacarac - or rather, that was just what he'd been looking for: "You see, Martin?" he kept crowing, "You see? They're hopeless in this empire. They're celebrating something almost too stupid to think of. They're hugging themselves for having averted a future that was never there for them. They think, that because they have the idea of the future wrong, they're never going to have to live through it." I took it upon myself to remind him that we were the only ones in the empire who, having been west, could correct that impression; but I already knew what the answer to that would be: "I'm clearing out, I can't get comfortable in this age, not even educating it. Indians are the Emperor's future, but if he won't live with that, I mean to. I can't live anywhere else, Martin, can't; don't ask it of me!" I had turned away in disgust <sup>From</sup> his irresponsible whining, but when I turned back - he wasn't there, must not have been there for some time, which means that for some time I must have been listening to...

(he trails off)

ALEXANDER

To?

MARTIN

To my own thoughts.

(He sinks his face onto the table.)

ALEXANDER

(trying to rouse him)

Young man! Martin!

(MARTIN looks up.)

You're discouraged and tired and a little thinned out, in the manner of men who have strayed too far into the future. Take a glass of wine; it'll put your spirits up on the same level with your "spirit", singular.

(He pushes a gold goblet on the table into MARTIN's hands; MARTIN stares at it.)

Oh, wait; I know what I'll have you do! This'll refresh you and also go toward pacifying that bull of a social conscience you seem to have about always giving the Emperor the benefit of your experience. Right before you came in I was sitting here trying to figure what would be just the right wine to give them at the Victory Party tonight (with this Emperor you're expected to be precise).

MARTIN

(sadly)

Victory Party!

ALEXANDER

But I've had so many aromas before my nostrils I'm all dulled. I wonder if you'd try some of the finalists - here in these vats, here - and see which one you feel catches the essence.

MARTIN

Yes, I'd be happy to try to determine the quality of the Emperor's victory.



Thank you, good. First, there's that vat on the left there.

(MARTIN takes the goblet, approaches the (stage) right-hand vat, puts his cup under the spigot and turns the handle. But instead of anything flowing from the spigot, the whole front (i.e. bottom) of the vat swings open like a huge door, revealing PRENSIL, a demented looking old pastry-cook, sitting with legs crossed on the floor of the vat-interior. He wears a cook's hat, and before him is a row of delicious looking pastries. All around are sifters, rolling-pins, etc. Behind him, reaching back into the dim interior of the vat, is a great pile of cakes, breads, etc, reaching to the ceiling.)

MARTIN

(starting away and covering his face)

Phew, what a smell!

(PRENSIL seems to be thrown into a panic by the sight of MARTIN. He spits savagely on each of the pastries before him, and only then looks up at MARTIN.)

PRENSIL

Get back! Nobody touches any of this, not a bite!

MARTIN

(to ALEXANDER, gesturing toward the open vat)

What's this supposed to be? Uch, that smell!

PRENSIL

Do you think I've simmered and stirred, rolled out perfect pastries and crust, so that the first god-damn explorer to walk in here could stuff 'em down his throat? Well, think again! This is Prensil you're up to!

MARTIN

(to ALEXANDER)

Close the vat, I'm gagging...

ALEXANDER

It's just rotted pastry. Prensil, here, is known to be the Empire's foremost pastrycook, but he can be a very tantalizing



character, can't you, P?

PRENSIL

Not a crumb! Not what the spoon leaves on the pot!

ALEXANDER

Prensil turns out pastrywork so fine, he can't bear for anyone to eat it. Cut a slice off a Prensil rye-bread? Why, one had as soon cut a limb off a Gorgon statue!

PRENSIL

Not after it's rotted, even.

ALEXANDER

And rot it certainly does, as you can smell. So Prensil's days are passed, sitting amidst the stinking, rotting crusts of every glorious pastry he's ever drawn forth moist and savory from the oven.

MARTIN

How refreshing! For once this trip, no complications - just a plain damn fool.

PRENSIL

That's the first thing they always say; then, as the desire grows on them, "you pure artist," in flattery. But none of them, not one, ever gets his lips around one of my chocolate *éclairs* or pineapple tarts.

MARTIN

Pineapple and chocolate! They don't exist in the Graeco-Roman period. They're American produce.

PRENSIL

I have the freedom of time like freedom of a city.

MARTIN

No, you don't, you old fool - nobody less! Your art's the  
bramble Time won't spare an inch of soil to. You're no master  
in your art, you're just particularly good at arranging striking  
little ironic defeats for yourself.

Still, I'd like to know where you got hold of pineapples and  
chocolate...

PRENSIL

That settles it. Not a glimpse, even.

(PRENSIL starts to close the vat.)

ALEXANDER

Now wait a minute, Prensil; Martin, you have a little patience.  
Prensil will be catering at the Victory Ball tonight -

MARTIN

Waving his seductive bake-goods under the imperial guests' noses...

PRENSIL

But no one even gets to put his finger on the icing. Eat! - my  
pastries and the idea, "to eat"? No link there; not a connection.  
Ewige Kunst!

MARTIN

Shut him up again.

ALEXANDER

But he can get you to the Emperor.

MARTIN

(bouncing it, with ironic inevitability, off his  
own last line:)

Let him out.

ALEXANDER

(helping PRENSIL out of the vat)

You're going to help this young fellow to the Emperor.

PRENSIL

Not even the emperor - not if they were to burn me alive - actually tastes.

ALEXANDER

But you'll show him?

(indicating MARTIN)

PRENSIL

Just let him keep his hands in his pockets, and give him a piece of suet to chew on so he doesn't get any ideas.

MARTIN

If it's settled, would you close the door on that stink.

ALEXANDER

Prensil here will guide you.

(He closes the vat. MARTIN looks hard at PRENSIL.)

MARTIN

More new companions. I wonder how long it will be before I lose you.

ALEXANDER

All right, Martin, go on to the next vat.

(MARTIN puts his goblet under the spigot of the center vat and turns the handle. Again the vat-bottom swings open like a door, this time revealing a sweating, half-naked figure, hunched over something we cannot yet make out.)

MARTIN

What is this place, a prison?

It's an ageing-room, where some people have to come and learn about ageing.

MARTIN

Who's this poor nit?

(Before ALEXANDER can answer, the figure in the vat - it is VIC, THE PAINTING-SLASHER - leaps to his feet with a savage laugh, raising triumphantly above his head a rectangular wooden frame, with what looks like innumerable strands of confetti dangling from it. VIC is dressed in rags with a scruffy black beard.)

VIC

(holding up the frame)

Thus I deal with the allegorical painting that would have sent the Emperor into immortality for his Northern Victory. Slivers! - that's what they've all got to look forward to, these artifacts that claim more life for themselves than I get.

ALEXANDER

(to MARTIN)

It's Vic, the Painting-Slasher; what he can't abide is that a piece of art should outlive him.

VIC

Outlive? Will you bring it all down to x number of years? No, but outweigh, outvie - some few scraps of pigment because they happened to come under the right hand. Oh, they can have a great life, these paintings - but they have to be let alone to live it: that's the one little blight on their enjoyment. But while Vic's around, nobody's settling back in his frame for ~~a while~~ a fascinating little snooze. So they've been gawked at, studied and loved? - Vic can fix that: swipe, swipe with me little blade, and it's all

over in a minute, little disappointment for them, who were thinking more in terms of eternity, you see.

MARTIN

Vic, that's a poor jealousy, let me tell you. These artifacts - they don't have a future; they'll just always be around as elements in a future that is solely ours, as men. You have a future, I have, this demented baker once had; but pictures just have - what shall I call it? - a prospect of continuance.

VIC

Not with me on their tail, they don't! These cool little square fellows, they live off their annuities, you know, of study, admiration and love. But:

(sings)

When the sha - dows crawl On the mu - se - um wall

Vic with - draws his knife; Then ev' - ry

paint - ed scene Turns a sick - ly green,

Fear - ing with some rea - son for its life.

- which is but one of my many notes and reflections on that most

lonely, feared and misunderstood of professions: painting-slasher!

MARTIN

(to ALEXANDER)

I wouldn't like to stick around till you've mellowed him.

ALEXANDER

(impatiently)

Not "mellowing-room" - "ageing-room".

MARTIN

(to ALEXANDER)

You think you've fit that man for a life in time?

VIC

I could live and live! I feel my capacity for it! I wouldn't get tired after the ten-millionth roast chicken or the ten-thousandth year, I've such a hunger.

MARTIN

(to VIC)

If the only idea you've got of the future is the product of the present with some indecently large number, then you're quite right to be envious and regretful: you haven't any future at all. But, as it seems to be my fate to have to keep reminding this generation, "Keep a hold on your sense of your own age; it's all that's forthcoming." If art has all the luck, then you be the artist; let your medium be previous paintings, your instrument the knife, and cut out a world for yourself like a conquistador cutting settlements out of the American jungle. You must be interested in shapes?

VIC

Only the shape of things to come. Through painted town, sky, landscape, human visages, through all the little everywhere of

a great picture, my knife never strays or ambles, but holds a refreshingly steady course: Slash! Slash, slash, slash! Slash! I never feel like a crescent or a right angle; just cut down, lift out the blade, plunge it back in somewhere else in the composition, and slash again. Vic: the artist. Medium: slashes of steel!

MARTIN

I wish my friend Bacarac could meet you. You're just the lyrical climax of everything he thinks he loves. You future-haunters! As if the future weren't right here, at hand, accessible -

VIC

Slashable!

MARTIN

(to ALEXANDER)

Ach, cage him.

PRENSIL

Cage him. Not a whiff for that one!

VIC

All right, seal me up again; just throw in another painting, that's all I ask - one. I'm such a craftsman, I can make it last hours.

ALEXANDER

Here's crayon and a pad.

(takes them out of the clerk's-desk, left)

See what you can make of that. See how it feels to cut the heart out of what you've put your heart into.

(ALEXANDER throws in the pad and crayon and slams the vat; but it remains slightly ajar.)

ALEXANDER

(to MARTIN)

One more.

MARTIN

Is this really helping you with your wine, or have we dropped that pretext?

ALEXANDER

No, no; it's helping. I'm getting into the mood to make my decision. One more vat, please.

MARTIN

(in a sudden access of disgust)

No!

ALEXANDER

No?

MARTIN

I'm tired of this.

ALEXANDER

But I have for you -

MARTIN

Everybody has something for me. Everybody's got a little metaphor they want to dangle in front of my nose and then scurry off with - everybody in this empire, apparently. But I'm tired of having little symbolical adventures. I want to see the Emperor.

ALEXANDER

I'm afraid this is largely an empire of symbolical adventures.

(He waves his arm. The door of the left-hand vat swings open, revealing two figures: upstage, red in body color, wearing a white loin-cloth and a head-dress of pure white feathers, stands the INDIAN CHIEF, facing 3/4 away from the audience. And downstage, toward the front of the vat, is the sheet-covered figure-in-a-chair from the Off-Duty Sibyls' Room in Scene III.)

MARTIN

Chief!



ALEXANDER

That was to whet your appetite.

(The vat-door slams shut.)

MARTIN

But he doesn't need ageing!

ALEXANDER

He most of all. All right, Prensil; let's shut up shop and get on to the Emperor's.

MARTIN

What about choosing your wine?

ALEXANDER

I'll just give 'em the old stand-by, and this time it'll be for the Emperor's victory. Now, Prensil, remember: get him there!

(PRENSIL tugs at MARTIN's sleeve; they go out. ALEXANDER sits down at his desk, picks up one bottle of wine and holds it to the light, looks at it long and hard.)

The door of the center vat opens slowly. VIC peers out cautiously to make sure that ALEXANDER is not looking, then sneaks out after MARTIN and PRENSIL.)

End of Act I

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Act II

## Scene I

(The Victory Ball in the Imperial Gardens.

A two-foot platform occupies the upper one-third of the stage; the platform, from which a sweep of stairs leads to the rest of the playing area, is decorated with vine-covered portico-arches and red torches in sconces; the backdrop suggests a formal garden and more torches. At the head of the steps, a little left of center, stands an easel, and mounted on the easel is a large, undistinguished, framed picture of the landscape of antiquity as visualized by the painters of the eighteenth century; the picture is quite similar to the backdrop of Act I, Scene iv.

At rise, three couples - COURTIER A and LADY A, COURTIER B and LADY B, and COURTIER C and LADY C - are dancing in the downstage area. Their clothes are not so much Roman as twentieth century dress designer's "Roman style." The music, provided by a string orchestra, is based on the following motifs (cf. *My Fair Lady*, ball music) repeated endlessly throughout the scene, except where indicated:

waltz tempo

The musical notation consists of four staves of music. The first staff starts with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The music is written in a simple, melodic style with various note values and rests. The fourth staff ends with a double bar line and the instruction "da capo" written above it.

The couples talk, each couple among themselves, as they dance.)

COURTIER B

That Emperor! When he wins, he wins.

LADY B

And then goes on to give a party about it.

COURTIER B

While he's on the subject.

COURTIER C

This is going to be the closest we've ever come

LADY C

Yes. I close my eyes - and it's New York.

COURTIER A

Did you hear something about the keynote for tonight's costumes being feathers?

LADY C

No more worry in the North, or any worry anywhere now.

LADY A

Yes, feathers. So that one's get-up will fit with this masque we're getting.

COURTIER A

A masque?

COURTIER C

The Barbarians drop down into their snake-holes again, that's where they're going.

LADY A

Yes, a victory masque, featuring that big bear of an Isaurian they've captured.

LADY C

And we can get on with our aspiration again,

ALL

We courtiers at Rome!

(COUPLE C are brought up short before the landscape on the easel.)

COURTIER C and LADY C

What's that?

(The other two couples stop dancing and come over to look at the picture, each couple with arms around waists.)

COURTIER A

That horror is apparently a moment of scenery from the Victory Masque.

LADY A

I thought feathers! You told me feathers, I'm all attuned to feathers!

COURTIER A

If they can work in that big Isaurian, what can't they work in?

COURTIER B

(to COURTIER A)

But what a drab Dora of a painting!

(to LADY B)

Now I feel we could impart tremendous vividness to that picture: shining, wet color...

(LADY B looks at COURTIER B, puzzled, asking for help, as if she had forgot the meaning of an earlier understanding between them.)

LADY A

(to COURTIER B)

That would be a service! God!

COURTIER A

(making impatient gestures to LADY A for her to rejoin him dancing)

Back in! Come on, back in!

(He seizes her and they begin to dance again.)

LADY B

(to COURTIER B)

"Shining, wet color..." You mean, the time draws nigh for brushes?

(COURTIER B nods eagerly, seizes her, and dances her off)

LADY C

(despondently)

All the signs point to a relentlessly didactic evening.

(holds up her arms in dance position; COURTIER C takes hold of her and they dance.

Enter ALEXANDER OF THE FIELDS with a wine bottle in either hand; close on his heels comes the RUINED MERCHANT carrying a tray of wine glasses, some clean, some used.)

ALEXANDER

(to MERCHANT)

Now please try and confine yourself to handing out glasses and collecting them, and don't, as the saying goes, find any lost balls before they stop rolling: all right?

COURTIER A

(sees ALEXANDER; abruptly leaves off dancing, forsaking his partner in the middle of the floor, and crosses to ALEXANDER.)

There's the man!

LADY C

(likewise stops dancing and crosses to ALEXANDER)

Oh, Alex! What's he got for us, has Alex?

(LADY A and COURTIER C go on dancing, apparently unaware that their partners have deserted them.)

ALEXANDER

My courtiers: doesn't your Alex always manage to suit the wine to the moment?

COURTIER A

Or failing that, the moment to the wine - yes.

(MERCHANT is clumsily handing glasses around, gives LADY C a soiled one and has to replace it.)

ALEXANDER

Then dance, my courtiers! Alex'll get the right thing into your glasses.

(ALEXANDER half fills LADY C's glass from the bottle in his left hand; LADY A dances over. Throughout the whole scene with ALEXANDER, courtiers and ladies keep doing vague dance motions, sometimes in couples, sometimes alone.)

LADY A

How now, 'Lexi? What's the moment and what's the wine?

ALEXANDER

Victory, lady. The moment is: victory. And the wine -

(holds up both bottles)

Essence of the first flush.

(half fills LADY A's glass from left-hand bottle. LADY C raises glass to her lips; ALEXANDER prevents her from drinking.)

Haie, lady; I have to put in the old suitability yet.

(starts to pour from the right-hand bottle into LADY C's glass)

LADY C

No thanks, 'Lexi. Not done with this one yet.

ALEXANDER

You haven't had my whole thought, lady (I think in wine, with wine!).

It's a mixed drink: two liquors in the sense of a mixed blessing, which is quite exactly the quality of tonight's triumph.

(fills LADY A's and LADY C's glasses, from right-hand bottle)

COURTIER C

(to nobody in particular)

We have such a rich palace life, all of us here in the late empire, sitting around enjoying our age together... Ripe!

(LADIES A and C taste the drink, apparently do not like it especially, attempt gallantly to smile a compliment at ALEXANDER.)

ALEXANDER

My courtiers! You have assisted at the birth of the "Manhattan."

(sensation)

COURTIER A

Hey, a New York drink!

LADY A

The cocktail lounges of the 'fifties.

LADY C

The Bilt-up!

COURTIER C

The Biltmore, I think it is, dear, actually.

ALEXANDER

(nodding to COURTIER C)

Even so.

(fills glasses of COURTIERS A and C from both bottles)

LADY A

(sipping with relish)

Alex, you love! Always with a little something to help our



aspiration along.

COURTIER C

(raising his glass)

I give you - Alex!

ALL 4 COURTIERS

Alex!

(They clink and drink. Expressions of pleasure all around. COURTIER A makes as if to dash down his glass - but the MERCHANT intercepts it, quite startling the courtier. The MERCHANT hurriedly gathers up everyone else's glass and scurries off with them.)

COURTIER A

Who was that winner, for god's sake?

ALEXANDER

My glass-boy.

(COURTIER C and LADY C dance <sup>away,</sup> ~~off~~ separately.)

I told him not to take things before people were through. Did he - ?

COURTIER A

Oh, no; I got it down. Only, it seemed as if - well, as if he wanted those glasses. For something, you know - just had to have them.

ALEXANDER

Apparently he does want them - for some sort of parlor game or something he's preparing.

(COURTIER A gives ALEXANDER a look of polite incredulity. LADY A presents herself in position to be danced away, "treading water" until COURTIER A takes her in his arms.)

Perhaps it's a nuisance, my courtier; but he's a man who's lost every penny, and one tries to be a little kind...

(embarrassed silence)

LADY A

(to COURTIER A, relieving the situation)

Come on, darlin'; let's see about this feathers thing, shall we?  
I shouldn't like to be the only one.

COURTIER A

Right.

(takes her in his arms and begins to dance her off)

Lovely drink, Alex.

(to LADY A)

Isn't it time they started the dancing?

(COUPLE A dances off. LADY C, in the course of her drifting around the stage, comes up against the landscape.)

LADY C

Oh, Alex, do you have any idea what this picture's doing here?

(VIC, THE PAINTING-SLASHER sticks his head cautious-  
out on stage, sees ALEXANDER and COUPLE C, and quickly  
draws his head back.)

ALEXANDER

(exiting, as if presenting the next act)

Oh, I go with the wine; the picture goes with the masque. But  
here comes the Chamberlain, working in toward the heart of the  
party. He goes with the masque.

(The CHAMBERLAIN hurries in. He is the COASTGUARD  
of Act I scene i, dressed in a garrish silk conjuror's  
robe and conical hat; he carries a huge copper gong  
with a stylized sun tooled onto it - the disc of Act I  
scene i. He collides with listlessly dancing COURTIER C,  
and the gong gives off with a resounding boom.)

COURTIER C

(with inexplicable menace)

Will you pardon that, Chamberlain?

CHAMBERLAIN

I have to find that Isaurian, is what I have to do. Go ranging,  
ranging...

LADY C

Chamberlain! That picture! Its presence!

CHAMBERLAIN

Masque, all in the masque. Wait. It gets clearer.

COURTIER C

Yes, we keep hearing it figures in the masque. What we're having trouble with is why they'd incorporate such a dreary landscape in the first place.

CHAMBERLAIN

You say, "dreary." But actually, they showed Nature as quite grand in the painting of that period - only, the grandeur looked as if it all rolled off on a wire, and behind there would be lighting and brick. Well, all right then, there you are! That's precisely the character the Emperor would like to think his conquests have given life in the Empire today. Now that those Barbarians have had the North cut out from under them, there'll hopefully be something not very convincing about the wilderness or the grandeur anymore. Whence

(gestures at picture)

the landscape.

What have I done with that Isaurian ?

(starts to leave)

COURTIER C

(confidentially)

Talking of the Emperor...

CHAMBERLAIN

Oh, yes, he's here. Sitting by his doorway as usual, watching.

COURTIER C

Could I also just ask you -

CHAMBERLAIN

(striking his forehead)

Every time I leave him alone for ten minutes, he turns up standing before that pile of glasses in the garden.

(gestures to up-center)

COURTIER C

(amazed at the CHAMBERLAIN'S tone)

The Emperor?

CHAMBERLAIN

The Emperor? The Isaurian! Standing before those glasses the way his chiefs were thinking to stand before Rome.

COURTIER C

Yes, that was the other thing, Chamberlain so Informational, O Communicational Center. What is it with those piled glasses?

CHAMBERLAIN

(shrugs)

Not on anyone's programme.

COURTIER C

Because, they've pre-empted acres of lawn.

LADY C

Acres!

CHAMBERLAIN

(puts up a finger)

Over which -

(dramatic pause)

I track my Isaurian.

(Exits melodramatically.)

COUPLE A waltz on, very gay, injecting fresh energy into the proceedings. Both LADY A and COURTIER A wear Indian brave's head-dress (two feathers), and a few other

traces of Indian ornament - a strip of wampum here, a pelt there, on top of their "Roman" costumes.)

LADY C

(seeing COUPLE A)

Oh, is that lovely! We'll have some!

COURTIER C

Oh, fun!

LADY A

(not quite succeeding in keeping down her delight at having been first to be in on the fashion)

We had heard there was some chance of its being the style maybe...

LADY C

(archly)

Oh, maybe! Just teensiest perhaps!

COURTIER A

So, we went ahead and equipped ourselves.

LADY C

(to COURTIER C, as if with a flash of inspiration)

We'll do that!

COURTIER C

(rising to her enthusiasm)

We'll have some!

LADY C

And put a room between us and that creepy painting in the process.

COURTIER C

So off we pop - but we're back on the next minute.

COURTIER A

(taking LADY A in his arms and dancing with her)

Yes, don't hurry. It'll be hours before the dancing starts, anyway.

(COUPLE C dances off.)

COURTIER A

(nodding in the direction COUPLE C has exited)

Nice people, but always a fraction behind the beat, if you take my meaning.

(LADY A touches her fingers to her feathers and smiles complacently.

They dance. The music dissolves into the PAINTING-SLASHER's song. COUPLE B dance on in formal dance position, but they do not touch each other. Each has in his hands (a little out from the body of the other) a couple of large paint brushes, dripping different colors.

COURTIER B and LADY B separate, make play Alphonse-Gaston gestures of deference at each other. Finally LADY B advances on the landscape painting; is just about to daub some paint on it - but turns back to COURTIER B embarrassed; is encouraged by COURTIER B; daubs the painting with a stroke of red. She turns back to COURTIER B, clasping her hands in delight. He then advances - like her, tentatively at first, then more vigorously. Eventually, they are making daubs and strokes on the painting with complete abandon, covering over the landscape with an impromptu abstraction.

COUPLE A notice what COUPLE B is doing; exchange puzzled glances, stop dancing and go up behind COUPLE B to watch them. LADY B turns radiantly to COUPLE A.)

LADY B

You want to do this!

LADY A

(admiring the effect of COUPLE B's daubings)

How bright! Colors in bars! Wet! Ah, I can't express... And getting rid of that indefensible landscape!

COURTIER B

Oh, but please! not so much emphasis on getting rid! Let's not ignore the new composition developing. It's the portrait of an age!

LADY A

(closing her eyes rapturously)

It's New York! I can feel it coming, all the time coming... !

COURTIER A

(to COUPLE B, indicating his feathers)

Yes, well, I wonder if you'd noticed these new accessory-things...

LADY B

They're something! Inexpressible New York!

COURTIER B

Unfortunately, however, our time here is quite taken up with our brushes -

COUPLE A, together

LADY A. Where can we -

COURTIER A. Oh, can one -

COURTIER A

(in a tone that does not succeed in being off-hand)

Uh..., do you suppose we could put our hands on some brushes for us?

LADY A

(plaintively)

We've just got feathers and a new thing's starting!

LADY B

(to COURTIER A)

A beard by the name of Vic is pressing them on anyone who gives the faintest indication.

COURTIER A

And you should get yourself a feather.

LADY B

Oh, can one have feathers, too?

COURTIER A

At the Sibyls' Pavilion. Just mention New York.

(to LADY A)

Come dear: exit after brushes.

(takes her in dance position)

LADY A

(to COUPLE B, trying desperately to seem insouciant as COURTIER A dances her off)

Of course, we'll have to do some juggling; our feathers already claim a great deal of our attention.

COURTIER B

(calling after them)

One minute, we're off to the prop-bench ourselves.

(takes LADY B in his arms impatiently, as if her being there were the precondition for a much desired exit, and dances her off.)

Enter VIC, THE PAINTING-SLASHER. He looks at the defaced landscape picture, smiles with satisfaction, and raises his knife over it for the coup de grâce.)

MARTIN's voice

(off-stage)

I think this ought to be the last of that network of colonnades.

(At the sound of MARTIN's voice the PAINTING-SLASHER starts and scurries off.)

Enter MARTIN, reading a map, and PRENSIL carrying an enormous basket of pastries.)

MARTIN

(referring PRENSIL to the map and to the stage)

Yes, you see: we must be just about where that gold slash comes in across the white area. Well, Prensil! How were you affected by the sight of twenty-five rooms full of courtiers celebrating



a victory that never happened?

PRENSIL

Everybody's out to wheedle a pastry. The peasants in the courtyard, they give you this song and dance about how bad the harvest's been, and could they have a roll, please? Court children chasing peacocks across the tiles and still licking their hands from the last treat: "Prensil! Cookies, please!" And sentries moving around in the trees and guardsmen to either side of a gate: "Oh, it's been months since Ma's brought anything out of the oven; so, a tart, quick, or it'll be swords in the can fer you, buster!" But nobody -

(as if reciting a litany)

not for hunger reasons, not for money reasons, not from pity -

MARTIN

The map has centered me a little, that's all. I still don't see how I'm supposed to find the Emperor in all this.

PRENSIL

(going right on)

Nobody! gets to thrust his attentions on my three beautiful pastries. And if I can just get them into the kitchen safely, I can see to it they'll never be served.

(PRENSIL lifts a large, beautiful pastry out of the basket and exits with it, all the while looking suspiciously around him.)

MARTIN

This is the first time I have been alone since I entered the Roman Empire. This is more than a fact.

(Enter COUPLE A, arguing; LADY A has a couple of wet brushes in either hand; COURTIER A tries to snatch them away and she keeps evading him as they argue.)

COURTIER A

All right, hand over those little wet fools and let's enjoy our feathers.

LADY A

I am enjoying my feathers -

COURTIER A

You look about as Indian as 64th Street.

LADY A

- but that does not prevent me from adding a few strokes to the portrait of my age.

(She hits the landscape simultaneously with all four brushes. She steps back and regards the landscape raptly.)

COURTIER A

(taking advantage of her absorption to snatch the brushes away from her)

You has just terminated a long career in art.

LADY A

Return! Return!

COURTIER A

(ugly)

I bought you feathers, don't tell me what you're gonna enjoy!  
You're gonna enjoy feathers!

LADY A

Shameless foul!

COURTIER A

Aaaahhhh, the tinker's ass.

(COURTIER A turns away elaborately. LADY A stamps her feet and shakes her fists and swings her head about - also elaborately. One swing of her head brings MARTIN

into view. She grinds her tantrum to a halt, smooths herself down, and approaches MARTIN in the manner of a little girl about to ask a favor of a favorite uncle.)

LADY A

Will you put yourself in relation with me as a gracious woman? Will you be so kind as to let me have my character again?

MARTIN

I'm looking for the Emperor.

LADY A

At this level, darling, everybody is looking for the Emperor - and looking everywhere. You have a wish, and you look for the Emperor in it; or a calculation, and you figure the Emperor in; or a fear, and - where did that Emperor go? You're joined in your preoccupation by twenty-five rooms full of courtiers all busy thinking "Emperor" every moment they have off from thinking "New York."

MARTIN

(startled)

How do you know about New York?

LADY A

Because in this empire, darling, everybody knows about New York, and everybody loves to dance (hint, hint).

MARTIN

Am I not, then, as I seem, unique in this epoch?

LADY A

Uh-oh! I'm always sorry to be around the first time anyone asks himself that question.

MARTIN

And the rare vision I have cradled against the Atlantic swell - will

it be shown that in urging on my generation the American insight,  
I have risen from a crowd to proclaim common knowledge?

(holds up his arms in social dance position)

Then let's dance.

LADY A

What's "America"? "America" rings no bells.

MARTIN

(drops his arms)

Oh! then I do need to see the Emperor.

LADY A

Come with me! Please!

(She takes him in dance position.)

I know as well as anyone they don't give us any music, but come  
with me! Give me my character!

(The music changes to "Waltzing Matilda," as rendered by a barbershop quartet. This music is, for the first five notes of the tune, deafening, then suddenly recedes into the background, giving the effect of a radio being turned on too loud and then hastily turned down. While the music was at the deafening level, the words "Waltzing Disaster" were audible, but now no words can be made out.)

LADY A swings MARTIN into a resolute two-step and dances him off.)

MARTIN

(as he is being danced off)

What do you mean, no music?

(COURTIER A's gestures and posture during the whole time LADY A has been talking to MARTIN have seemed, from the back, to be indicating jealousy. Now he whirls around - not, apparently, so much jealous as impatient. He approaches the landscape and pokes at it with the brushes confiscated from LADY A, enjoying himself thoroughly.)

Enter PRENSIL, stealthily, sneaks over to the basket he left downstage, cautiously draws out another beautiful pastry, and is just about to sneak off with it when COURTIER A notices him.)

COURTIER A

And what would this be going by?

PRENSIL

Oh, this is just some fiddling behind the scenes, my courtier - of zero interest to the customers. Don't you have some dancing to do, or a clever thing you were just meaning to say to somebody somewhere?

COURTIER A

Did anyone ever tell you you have very beautiful pastries?

PRENSIL

Oh, I bet you tell that to all the tradespeople, I know! But now, enough of me; into the kitchen with me; "why, the fellow grows tiresome in the end."

(starts to leave)

COURTIER A

Stay, with your pastry.

PRENSIL

Ah, now in a minute I'll be forced to conclude you're just feeling me out with a pastry in view.

COURTIER A

(with ostentatious craftiness)

Now who would go to all the trouble of striking up an acquaintance for the sake of this poor dried up pastry here?

PRENSIL

Poor? Dried up? Never! Perfect, wonderful pastry. Unending cookery!

COURTIER A

Well, I'll reconsider, then. I'll at least try it.

PRENSIL

YOU'LL TRY IT?

COURTIER A

It 's for us, isn't it - the guests? I'm a certified guest.

PRENSIL

No tongue will curl around my pastry that ever stuck in a courtier's cheek!

COURTIER A

(mystified)

What do you mean?

PRENSIL

(recollecting himself and improvising)

I mean, this pastry...

COURTIER A

Yes?

PRENSIL

It's not so much for eating...

COURTIER A

No?

PRENSIL

As for ... uh ... an exhibition.

COURTIER A

Well, I'm going to bestow first prize: instant and enthusiastic consumption.

PRENSIL

Not that kind of exhibition. The Emperor ordered this tart to be left one week on a pedestal to show the wearing effects of time.

COURTIER A

Don't be silly.

PRENSIL

(with anguish)

Leave my pastry alone! Stay out of my life and let me live to myself amid my imperishable cream-fillings.

COURTIER A

(with an impatient gesture)

Give; give.

PRENSIL

Oh, you wish! I'll foul her, rather.

(spits on the pastry)

That saves us.

COURTIER A

I'm coming in after you and that pastry.

(gives chase to PRENSIL, who bears the pastry aloft)

PRENSIL

(as he is being chased off; incredulous)

After I've spat on her?

(Music changes again, to "Cruising Down the River on a Sunday Afternoon;" again the effect of a radio turned on too loud, and then hastily turned down - not, however, before the sung words "Cruising into Trouble" are heard.)

COUPLES B and C waltz out onto the upstage platform, wearing more of an Indian outfit than before, but still with plenty of "Roman" clothes showing. Both couples are now equipped with wet brushes, and peck with them at the landscape as they dance by it.

Just after COUPLES B and C dance on, LADY A dances on MARTIN, in the downstage area. She too has on more Indian stuff than before; he looks tired.)

MARTIN

Why do we dance?



LADY A

There is no dance.

MARTIN

Well, what? is the social-dance position a requisite to any movement around here? What are we doing to this uncertain music?

LADY A

And no music.

(They dance a little more; MARTIN drags his heels and finally stops resolutely.)

MARTIN

How can you have on that tribal clothing and not know anymore about America than New York?

LADY A

I've told you what I know, I haven't picked up anything since. Just let me have my character. I'm depending on you.

(As if to emphasize her plea, the music intensifies and COUPLES B and C dance into the downstage area. LADY A raises her arms in a pathetic, uncertain appeal. MARTIN takes her in his arms and all three couples dance.)

MARTIN

But I still want to see the Emperor. Maybe a little later.

(During the dancing, the CHAMBERLAIN leads on the ISAURIAN, a huge blond boy dressed in a Roman toga and carrying the bronze gong under his arm as if it were a newspaper. The CHAMBERLAIN leads him over to the landscape; and gives him instructions in pantomime; then begins to lead him out again. The ISAURIAN stops at PRENSIL's basket, peers down into it with idle curiosity, takes out a pastry, looks at it curiously for half a second, then swallows it whole. The CHAMBERLAIN, who has been waiting for him as one waits for a dog at a lamp-post, now leads him off.)

Enter ALEXANDER OF THE FIELDS with a bottle of wine, and dogging his heels, the RUINED MERCHANT, with his tray of glasses. They approach COUPLE B, who leave off dancing.)

COURTIER B

(slapping ALEXANDER on the back)



Kerplunk, 'Lexi. How about another one of those scrum little drinks.

LADY B

'Lexi, you've been ages getting back to us. I'm parched waiting for some dancing to start. The masque one has given up hoping for.

COURTIER B

Yeah, say, what about that little item, is that coming up any time in the foreseeable future?

ALEXANDER

Well, they've hit a difficulty. You see, they've got this barbarian impersonating - not, as you might think, a barbarian, out - the Emperor; and then the role of the barbarian is being taken by this anti-empire type...

LADY B

(losing interest, and setting her glass down on the MERCHANT's tray)

Yes, well, I'm sure it's all in somebody's capable hands.

(dances off with COURTIER B, who still has his drink in one hand. ALEXANDER and the MERCHANT move on to COUPLE C; meanwhile, MARTIN, irritated and impatient, is still dancing with intense LADY A, unaware of the entrance of ALEXANDER and the MERCHANT.)

LADY C

No more for me, thank you, Alex, I've still got a glass around here somewhere.

COURTIER C

(dropping his partner rather rudely)

Me for anotha!

(takes a glass off the MERCHANT's tray, holds it out; ALEXANDER pours.)

LADY C

Oh, 'Lexi, you would know: why are all the used glasses being piled up on the lawn? There must be a couple of thousand out there

now; more every time I pass. It's very pretty, but also rather childish, don't you think?

ALEXANDER

Well, you see, what's happening out there...

(He sinks into pantomime. The MERCHANT starts to sneak off, keeping his eye on ALEXANDER and COUPLE C. He bumps into MARTIN, who turns angrily; then recognizes him.)

MARTIN

Piddle, for god's sake!

LADY A

(to MARTIN)

Come back to me! Give me my character!

(She turns him back to her. Just at this moment, COURTIER A appears at the wings, with PRENSIL's half-eaten pastry in one hand, and wearing an Indian Chief's head-dress. He puts his hand to his mouth and gives a war-whoop.)

COURTIER A

(indicating his head-dress)

And there's one for everyone!

(COURTIER A pops off. The three LADIES drop whatever they're doing and run after him.)

ALEXANDER

(to LADY C, as he runs out after her)

About those glasses...

(The PAINTING-SLASHER, supposing a general evacuation of the stage, sticks his head in; finding it still peopled, he disappears.)

COURTIERS B and C go over to that side of the stage from which their ladies have disappeared, watch them in the (off-stage) distance.)

MARTIN

Piddle, can we -

(The MERCHANT makes a quick familiar sign that he will be with MARTIN in a minute, sidles over to COURTIERS B and C.)

COURTIER C

(still looking off)

They'll relieve him of every feather before he hits the Sibyls' Booth.

COURTIER B

(getting between COURTIER C and his view)

Never mind.

(raises his glass)

Drink up! I give you, the Empire!

COURTIER C

You do? Then I give you, the aspiration to New York!

COURTIER B

Well, that should cover it.

(They clink and drink, wind up as if to dash their glasses to the ground; but the MERCHANT dextrously relieves them of the glasses and makes a low bow to forestall offence. COURTIERS B and C shrug at each other and exit.)

MARTIN

(He has been bursting with impatience, now crosses to the MERCHANT.)

Piddle, what are you doing at this party, and for heaven's sake, just plain what are you doing?

MERCHANT

Martin, my old friend.

(embraces him)

This is a change in life, isn't it? At this moment, those August evenings are before me when we would sit smoking on the deck of our old galley, The Resemblance, and watch the sun drop behind a Greek island or Africa; then each step below to check his cargo,

to be sure the spray hadn't gotten into your fabric, or the waves shattered my glassware.

Oh, Martin, I am far from that now!

MARTIN

I heard about your bankruptcy at the Sibyls'.

MERCHANT

(in a burst of hatred)

Those bitches! They could have forewarned me; there wouldn't have been any harm in a little truth-telling for once. But mincing and hinting is all they know.

MARTIN

Well, that is their way, Piddle. You ought to have realized when you asked - you must have realized.

MERCHANT

Don't abuse the unfortunate, Martin. You never were sensitive enough that way.

MARTIN

I'm sorry you should think so, Piddle. Tell me how it's been with you - I mean, do you want to talk about it?

MERCHANT

Oh, talk - why not? Well, after the grand débâcle, I washed up, via a number of subterraneous streams of suffering and low-life, at the Emperor's palace, service entrance, and landed myself a job as a cellarer. What else was there to do? All my capital was gone, and while there's a lot of interest to be run up in this empire, there's no new capital. Unless, of course, you're thinking in terms of theft; and those, my dear confrère, were precisely the terms I was thinking in. This job in the wine-cellar gave me access to

the fabulous imperial collection of fine glass-ware, of which there is so much, so badly catalogued, that I had only to watch my opportunities and pretty soon - at the rate of a fine-stem here, a goblet there - I would be able to swipe enough to set up in business again.

Only, they caught me. Alexander showed up in the Ageing Room one night as I was making an inventory of my stock - which is more, I might add, than the rightful owners ever did. It was the galleys for me unless I could think fast - and then a very strange thing happened. I not only came up with an alibi, I came up with an alibi which, even as I was giving it as a lie, I felt was going to grow into more of a truth for me than the actual sordid details ever could be. "What are you doing with them glasses," says they; and says I, "I'm accumulating materials for an image of the Empire." Well, they just fell all over me - but that's this empire: show an interest in their images and they'll love you to pieces - as maybe you've had occasion to observe.

MARTIN

Oh, that's that pile of glasses everyone keeps noticing. Well, frankly, Piddle, I think the gods were watching over you the day you got away with that doozer; but it goes past anything I know that you should then feel obliged to go out and give substance to it.

MERCHANT

They balled me - this empire, with their sibyls; now I was going to treat them to a little glassy picture of their precious Roman Empire!

MARTIN

Well, for that matter, I don't see why a heap of glasses makes

such an all-fire wonderful image of the empire. I mean, it's fragile, if that's what you're trying to say...

MERCHANT

There's more in it than that, Martin. Take the quality of glitter. In each case, empire or model, it's a glitter which, when examined closely, turns out to be the stale shine off innumerable, faceless, drained individuals; off "empties". But just limiting it to the fragility you spoke of: with the empire, as with the glass-pile, all the impressiveness comes from - not fragility, period; but the fact it's getting more fragile all the time, the more's added. It was something that a pile should be possible with ten glasses, but when a hundred, and then a thousand, stay up in despite of air-currents and cracking - well: growing amazement! The more vulnerable it gets, the more imposing; until, paradoxically, this vast Roman Empire, this great achievement of the human mind and men's hands, becomes chiefly remarkable for something it shares with the meanest pebble on the shore: just being there at all.

MARTIN

I'm glad you've found an image that lights up for you like this. If it was me, I could never be so absorbed by an image that I'd forget about wanting my fabric back.

MERCHANT

Such an image, though, Martin!

MARTIN

Well, even there, Piddle. If anyone asked me my views on Roman civilization, my first move wouldn't be to run out on the lawn and start piling glasses.

MERCHANT

Maybe not; but then, how much experience would gather behind any reaction you might have on the subject?

MARTIN

Oh, as for that, I have been walking around the Roman Empire for - I don't know, months, years; you lose track on the road.

MERCHANT

Really! What have you been up to then, Martin?

MARTIN

Trying to find the Emperor, because I have something desperately important to tell him. But here, in the midst of his own victory party - a celebration of a victory illusive for reasons only I could tell him - I seem to be as far from him as I was that first day on the remote Western beach where I washed up.

MERCHANT

What's so important?

MARTIN

Do you remember, Piddle, how we sometimes used to ask ourselves if there could possibly be anything on the other side of the Great Ocean we never dared take ten steps into?

MERCHANT

I associate talks like that with the long dream of an evening becalmed.

MARTIN

A dream! I have been in this side-show of an empire so long, I have gone so long without the chill of salt-air, that I could almost throw everything up and call it that.



MERCHANT

What are you talking about, Martin?

MARTIN

(with decisive enthusiasm)

No, I can't - not when I saw my chief, here, in a room of this palace. I have got to get to the Emperor.

MERCHANT

Martin, would you please -

MARTIN

Piddle, I have been there. Across that ocean, all the way across it, to the Other World; there is another world, Piddle - vaster than your debts or my enthusiasm, ferocious and green and mountainous and watered. And living there, you find red men in communion with their land and their stars, who never heard a word of Latin and who seem to be almost beyond the reach - I could even say, beyond the ken - of Rome.

MERCHANT

Martin, are you serious?

MARTIN

I say, "almost," Piddle; because when I've once seen the Emperor and made clear the opportunities for doing good, for development, for Romanization -

MERCHANT

Martin! Is that what you have to see the Emperor for?

MARTIN

Isn't it exciting, isn't it unbelievable? In the light of how exciting it is, I can't understand why I haven't reached him a lot sooner.



MERCHANT

(with a gesture that includes more than what's visible)

All this? You're really thinking what a good it would be to spread all this?

MARTIN

If it's not what the Indians need, it's what Rome needs. There is nothing new under this sun, and we can't spend the next twelve-hundred years sitting around waiting.

MERCHANT

I won't do it, Martin!

MARTIN

(caught off balance)

You won't...? Who said anything about you...?

MERCHANT

I will not begin piling glasses in the primeval forest! Isn't there enough Rome already?

MARTIN

I don't understand your attitude. Just because you were ruined -

MERCHANT

Who's been ruined? Who? Look at this, just look!

(He makes on this last line a kind of presenting gesture. With a fresh burst of music, COUPLES A, B and C, their clothes now almost completely covered by Indian attire, swirl on to the stage driving MARTIN and the MERCHANT apart.

More and more couples, in full Indian garb, dance on. ALEXANDER reappears, weaving a precipitous course among the dancers, to service them as they move; the MERCHANT rejoins him, keeping an eye out for dancers with empty glasses, which he quickly relieves them of.

PRENSIL enters, makes his way through the dancers to his basket, reaches into it, finds it empty, and unbelievably shakes and shakes it.

The INDIAN CHIEF of Act I Scene v appears among the dancers.)

MARTIN

(in a cry rising above all the music and noise)

CHIEF!

(MARTIN begins to make his way frantically through the crowd to where the CHIEF - completely withdrawn, unnoticed and unnoticed - is moving among the dancers. PRENSIL bumps into MARTIN just as MARTIN is on the verge of reaching the CHIEF.)

PRENSIL

(pointing to his empty basket)

They've robbed me of my imperishables! This is a sign of something!

(MARTIN finally succeeds in freeing himself from PRENSIL, but the CHIEF has vanished.

A fanfare sounds, announcing the beginning of the masque. Music and dancing stop. The courtiers arrange themselves in a circle, leaving a space downstage and near the landscape. MARTIN takes one more wild look for the CHIEF; then he too gives his attention to the landscape, on which a circle of light has now fallen, the lighting for the rest of the stage having been dimmed somewhat.

With another fanfare, enter the CHAMBERLAIN, flourishing his hat, bowing elaborately in all directions, like a bazaar spielman. Polite applause, which he acknowledges with more bows and flourishes, and then takes his place to the right of the landscape.)

CHAMBERLAIN

My courtiers! Victory... is... ours!

(prolonged ovation)

But -

(raises his hand and silence falls)

simple victory is not something we are very much interested in at this stage of the Roman experience. But convolved, faceted ironic victory - that's more the sound of it, that's an objective for which Romans gladly give throats to the knife!

(applause)

Now I could give you a masque where some guy dressed up as "Rome" comes out and clobbers another guy named "Barbaria." But would that

give any pleasure to anyone -

(several courtiers click their tongues and give out with enthusiastic "Um-hms!")

- with the slightest pretension to an aspiration to New York?

(abashed silence)

Would that give any pleasure to our boys just back from the Northern Frontier? Or to their wives? Or their widows? And would that, finally, give any pleasure to the Emperor, sitting as always by his doorway, watching? Not, it should be added, watching this masque - but anyway... Here is wine for the palate of the ironist! Here is highstepping to uncertain melodies! Here is

(sings)

Bum - de -dum dum- da-dum dum - da-dum Dum -Dum -Dum DUM!

"The Masque of the Disgruntled."

(Fanfare. A GUARD hustles on the ISAURIAN, dressed as before and still carrying the gong, and BACARAC, naked except for a fur loin-cloth, some bracelets and bells, and an Eskimo-like fur hood. His body has been stained a dark brown, except for a number of large irregular white patches. His face is its usual color, but as yet he keeps it turned away. The CHAMBERLAIN pulls the ISAURIAN forward, exhibiting him.)

This, my courtiers, is one of those Isaurians. Remember them, folks? the fellows from up north who once said something about doing a little conquering?

A COURTIER

Woooo! Woooo!

A LADY

Chug - a - lug!

ANOTHER COURTIER

(gives a Bronx cheer. General derisive laughter.)

CHAMBERLAIN

(imitating someone asking a naive question)

"But he's wearing a Roman suit!" Yes, lamb, so he is. Whatever can that mean?

MARTIN

(leaping up)

Why shouldn't he play you? He "goes" with you, he's part and parcel of your world. He's a barbarian because he's what you mean by the word - which is nothing very extraordinary.

(CHAMBERLAIN a little ruffled. Cries of "Shut up!" "Quiet there!" from the courtiers.)

CHAMBERLAIN

This barbarian can impersonate Rome because he is to such a degree broken by Rome that he becomes, before we ever get to the masque, an expression of what is finest in Rome: her will. And where that will is being done, there... is... Rome!

(applause)

MARTIN

Just the old familiar foe. Not as if here were an Indian or something.

A LADY

Oh, come on!

A COURTIER

You know, it wasn't funny the first time!

(Several hands pull MARTIN down.)

CHAMBERLAIN

(to the ISAURIAN)

Take your place, Rome.

(The ISAURIAN strikes a pose in front of the landscape.)

But your Chamberlain knows what his courtiers must now be wondering. If the Barbarian's doing Rome, who in hell must be doing the Barbarian? Right? Right? Right? Well, there we come to surpreezo numero uno.

What do we really mean when we say "a barbarian"? I'm not asking what do geographers or ethnologists mean;

(to MARTIN, as MARTIN makes as if to speak)

I'm certainly not asking what you mean.

(to courtiers)

I mean, what do you or me, the ones that count, the aspirants to New York? Are we thinking of a lot of blond boys from up north?

(One lady sighs voluptuously in the affirmative.)

No. We use "barbarian" to mean, where the danger lies. A barbarian is where the danger lies. Now this little victory we're celebrating tonight shows, if it shows nothing else (but it shows plenty!) that it is not on the Northern Frontier - not, for that matter, on any frontier - that the danger lies.

MARTIN

(leaping up again)

That you can be this close and not see - !

(He is pulled down in silence by the now absorbed courtiers.)

CHAMBERLAIN

The Roman Empire comes to an end in each loss of faith in its power to continue. Let a man say, "We have exhausted our capacities," and the fixed stars go whirling off into chaos; language and institutions proffer the glad-eye to dissolution;

aspirations and flowering minds wither, and having withered, crumble, and having crumbled, vanish. Who, then, is your barbarian? Your barbarian is your faithless man: contemptuous of Roman methods, discomfited by Roman achievements, and above all, unconfident of a Roman future.

MARTIN

Indians are this empire's future!

CHAMBERLAIN

And such a man, whether he hails from the banks of Danube, or those of Tiber, is the unreclaimable barbarian. So I foresee that nobody's going to mutter when I introduce this gent I've got - though a Roman born - doing the Barbarian tonight.

(claps his hands. BACARAC whirls around, strikes a belligerent, apelike pose, and snarls at the courtiers, who applaud and express approval.)

MARTIN

(leaping up and resisting all efforts to restrain him)

Bacarac - !

CHAMBERLAIN

For the casuallest glance reveals him an incurable scoffer. Even as I was rehearsing my Isaurian, this snarler stood by and mocked -

MARTIN

Bacarac, you can't get out of it like this!

CHAMBERLAIN

This scoffer mocked every feature of Roman life he could think of as absurd in itself, and in comparison to some savages or other from this fabulous western land he claims to have visited.

MARTIN

No amount of irony in the world gets you off. Don't tell me about

how pleasant it is; I'm telling you it's just not being tallied to that score. This sneering is nothing, you have to come and do something.

CHAMBERLAIN

So I said, "All right, if that's how you feel, come over here and I'll work you in" - and he just loves his rotten little role,

(to BACARAC)

don't you?

(BACARAC makes sarcastic gestures of passionate enthusiasm)

MARTIN

Oh, Bacarac, be something better to me than an image of the one failure I did avoid!

CHAMBERLAIN

(turning suddenly to BACARAC and indicating MARTIN)

Is this guy a friend of yours?

(BACARAC produces an elaborately ironic shrug of unrecognition. MARTIN is now violently pulled down and sat on, to the tune of such remarks as:)

A COURTIER

Down in front!

A LADY

When you say "one at every party," you're not usually including the Emperor's party.

A COURTIER

Fix him up with a tall Cinzano.

ANOTHER

Or a tall brunette. Just shut him up.



ANOTHER

Hand him over to Puffy for a French kiss.

ANOTHER

Puffy's French kisses shut up everybody.

CHAMBERLAIN

And now, my courtiers - oh, there was one other thing. I've been getting questions all evening on this landscape.

(steps aside and indicates it)

This landscape, as a backdrop for the masque, was supposed to show the Arcadian character which the long continuance of our Empire has imparted even to customarily unimpressible Nature. However...

(He looks at the landscape doubtfully.)

There seem to have been some... er... impromptu alterations.

(COURTIER B sings the title-line of "There'll Be Some Changes Made," and COUPLES A, B and C dissolve in giggles.)

A LADY

(very disapprovingly)

Oh, god.

CHAMBERLAIN

(brightening bravely)

However:

Be the background what it will,

The truth our masque indites holds still!

(Fanfare; applause. With bows and flourishes, the CHAMBERLAIN takes his place at the side of the cleared area. BACARAC takes up his position behind the landscape. Silence. Expectant pause. The GUARD who brought in BACARAC and the ISAURIAN takes out a pipe and begins to play - snake charmer's music. The CHAMBERLAIN pulls out a parchment scroll from his robe and reads:)



Through long aeons, the Roman Empire, faithful to its trust, poured out the sunlight of its civilization upon a variety of peoples.

(The ISAURIAN walks with a measured pace to the center of the cleared area, raises the gong slowly with both hands above his head, holds it for a moment with arms straight above him - and then leaves it hanging in mid-air, while he opens his arms in a broad, palms-up gesture of supplication.)

And as the Romans supplicated

(slight pause while the ISAURIAN's pose registers on the audience as supplication)

and fought

(The ISAURIAN suddenly leaps into a battle stance, left leg out in front; left arm ramrod-straight out, palm out; right arm back behind right shoulder in spear-throwing position, right hand grasping imaginary spear.)

to keep the sunlight coming, everybody lay asleep at their feet.

(The ISAURIAN slowly drops battle stance, bends gently down, and very, very gently strokes something lying against his feet, smiling as he does so.)

But to the north, beyond the pale, some men never fell asleep; and tossing on their couches, they troubled the Roman dream.

(BACARAC's head suddenly pops out from behind the left side of the landscape; the ISAURIAN, as if he had just seen something out of the corner of his eye, looks left. BACARAC's head pops back.

BACARAC's head now pops out from behind the right side of the landscape; the ISAURIAN, as if he had just seen something out of the corner of his eye, looks right. BACARAC's head pops back.

The ISAURIAN looks out, very puzzled. BACARAC's head rises very slowly over the top of the landscape. His face wears an expression of triumph, as if he had scored the first point.)

Sleepless themselves, dwelling in the kind of ice-land where everything is always blurring and blowing around the corner, these men began to covet the repose of our countryside.

(As if suddenly overcome by languor, BACARAC rests his head on the top of the landscape; his two hands

come up slowly over the top of the picture and caress it sensually. As he does so, the ISAURIAN seems to be following the progress of a mosquito around his own body, and as it alights on an arm or leg, he slaps at it.)

And what they delighted to covet, they dreamt to possess.

(The ISAURIAN goes back to his supplicating position. BACARAC suddenly draws his hands up to the top of the picture and looks over it, as though it were a fence. Taking note of the ISAURIAN's position, he sneaks around to in front of the picture, closes his eyes, takes an ecstatic deep breath, and begins to make clutching, snatching gestures, his hands always closing on empty air.)

O foolish race of men! But they were barbarians, they had to make their presence felt.

(BACARAC continues his grasping gestures around in front of the ISAURIAN, where the ISAURIAN could see him if his eyes were not upwards.)

And who could say? Some notice might even be forthcoming from the Romans.

(BACARAC moves in closer and closer with his gestures, but never actually touches the enrapt ISAURIAN.)

But they, absorbed in contemplation of the sun, were slow to - never mind slow to anger - slow to awareness,

(BACARAC moves closer and closer to the ISAURIAN; his gestures grow more and more feverish.)

until the first note of mockery sounded amidst the emulation.

(Desperate at not having distracted the ISAURIAN, BACARAC spitefully strikes a pose a little to the right of the ISAURIAN which is a parody of the ISAURIAN's own.)

Then the Emperor grew angry, in a degree consonant with his greatness,

(The ISAURIAN slowly brings his hands up to the gong until they are resting on it. Then, with unexpected violence, he clutches the sides of the gong with both hands, turns with it toward BACARAC, and begins to lower it slowly over BACARAC.)

and caused the resplendence of our era to burn in on these ice-people,

(As the ISAUURIAN lowers the gong, BACARAC staggers, quails, sinks to the floor, attempts a few more grasping gestures.)

until they felt the hand of dissolution upon them.

(BACARAC collapses. The ISAUURIAN covers BACARAC's upturned face with the gong, then takes again his pose of supplication.)

Then -

(The CHAMBERLAIN notices where the gong is, hastily sticks it up in mid-air between the ISAUURIAN's upraised hands; and then resumes his position at the side.)

Then he returned to his contemplation.

(Brassy chords signifying the end of a vaudeville "act." Applause. BACARAC gets up briskly. He and the CHAMBERLAIN mug and wave fingers at each other; exchange bows; gesture to the GUARD-piper, who acknowledges the applause shyly; bow in unison to the courtiers; and exit smartly up-center, followed by the GUARD, who drags his heels a little.

Dance music resumes. Courtiers form into couples again and gradually dance off, commenting on the masque as they go.)

A COURTIER

It's great, you know, when they lay it out in visual terms for you. Really brings home the magnitude.

ANOTHER

Boy, don't think those New Yorkers aren't going to have a Roman aspiration or two!

A LADY

It's nice here in the Late Empire ... sitting around the embers with a tall drink...

ANOTHER LADY

I went out of my mind the other day - and guess who I met there?

ANOTHER LADY

So I said to him, "You're basically right; but when you say you're

going to put your foot through the spokes of her bicycle - well, Jerry, that's just not you speaking."

COURTIER A

(to ALEXANDER, drunkenly)

Hey, Alex! Whadda ya say we step out inna the gahden and you can pour

(which he pronounces "paw")

me a hot one?

(With an impatient look, LADY A drags him off. ALEXANDER looks hastily about for the MERCHANT, who shrinks into an upstage shadow to avoid his notice, but decides he can't be bothered to wait and goes out, obsequiously, after COUPLE A.

Through all this, the ISAURIAN has never once moved. MARTIN and the ISAURIAN are now alone on the stage.)

MARTIN

CHIEF!

(pause)

CHIEF!

(The CHAMBERLAIN appears up-center.)

CHAMBERLAIN

Who's that screaming out there?

(sees MARTIN)

Oh, you're the one who wanted to see the Emperor.

MARTIN

Well, just now I meant the Indian Chief.

CHAMBERLAIN

(almost anxiously)

But you do want to see the Emperor?

MARTIN

(smiling)

After my months and years of bumping around the empire on that

errand, I am now asked that question. Yes, I want to see the Emperor.

CHAMBERLAIN

All right. He's right over there by the door.

(having a misgiving)

Just so long as you're not an explorer. You're not, are you?

MARTIN

Not all my adventures could make me one. I sell fabric. I was blown off-course and I want to tell the Emperor about it.

CHAMBERLAIN

Because, explorers do not see the Emperor.

MARTIN

(flabbergasted that the question hadn't ever occurred to him before)

Why don't explorers see the Emperor?

CHAMBERLAIN

Blown off-course to where?

MARTIN

(with a little sigh which suggests that not being answered was no more or less than he expected)

To the far side of history, the Other World.

CHAMBERLAIN

Where, did you say?

MARTIN

The Other -

CHAMBERLAIN

How would you name it?

|||

MARTIN

I would name it, the United States of America.

CHAMBERLAIN

Why would you name it that?

MARTIN

Because of my remarkable, clear prescience, which extends even to knowing - and for all practical purposes exclusively knowing - the actual cast of the Roman future, the barbarians having once been set aside.

CHAMBERLAIN

I think I'd better get you to the Emperor right away.

MARTIN

If you would be so kind.

CHAMBERLAIN

You can continue this discussion with him.

MARTIN

It's all I ask.

(CHAMBERLAIN starts to lead him out, then stops)

CHAMBERLAIN

We've met before?

MARTIN

At intervals. At very long last I am coming to have some small idea of how it works in this empire.

(CHAMBERLAIN leads MARTIN out.  
Lights dim. MERCHANT starts to emerge from shadows,  
sees COURTIER A entering, and slinks back again.)

COURTIER A

(staggers across the stage drunkenly; stops for a moment at the still motionless ISAURIAN.)



You stay right where you are, soldier; you're doing a very important job.

(Exit COURTIER A.  
The MERCHANT emerges from his hiding-place and comes down to the ISAURIAN.)

MERCHANT

Lonely Isaurian: a friend has emerged from the shadows at your side. Standing here in the whirl of warm, alien colors, you must wonder, "Am I then alone in my visionary hatred of Rome?" But you are not alone, great northern chief! Standing here with you now is a man as much an enemy to Rome as yourself, but, what's more important, a man who appreciates that you are the great foe, the arch foe, the only worthy foe of Rome!

That man who just went off to see the Emperor, he would have it otherwise. I know him, and know him for a crazy, selfish man, a man who wants to be thought original and doesn't care what he deranges to get that estimate for himself. This snake, this Rome-lover, is off to lower your credit with the Emperor; to try and persuade him that the Ice-Chiefs are no peril to his throne, that the real danger is something fantastical on the other side of the Unknown Ocean. And will the Emperor believe him? Ah, my friend, who can say? He is a plausible, eloquent, modest-seeming man. And is there nothing we can do to keep the Emperor from believing him, to establish Isauria in her claim as chief contender ~~for~~ Rome's world with Rome? Ah, my friend, that is another question.

Out there on the lawn,

(He gestures toward up-center. As he speaks, a brilliance as might be produced by a thousand-faceted diamond is seen to be glowing there with increasing brightness.)

I have thrown up an image of the Roman Empire as a pile of used

wine-glasses: glittering, fragile, drained, complex and imposing. And tremulous through its being at least impact . Shatter this image, my Isaurian! and thereby show yourself the destined Shatterer of all that finds it image there.

(The PAINTING-SLASHER sneaks on.)

This gong - this gong you were made to bear as the very symbol of Roman greatness - hurl it in on the very symbol of Roman fragility. Let symbol war on symbol - but never think your victory to be therefore "only" symbolic. You want to get the people of this empire where they live? well, nothing grieves them like a defeat upon their images. Hand them such a defeat! Go in where they sought refuge in a symbol and make a shambles of the place. Do it, my Isaurian; do it!

(Suspenseful pause. Then, slowly, the ISAURIAN shifts his body into the discus-thrower's position, with the gong as the discus. He holds the pose.)

You hesitate? You wouldn't hesitate if you could hear what the Emperor is hearing now. Let me tell you what he's hearing. I'll try and reconstruct the conversation for you, to give you some idea. And if at any point you feel like hurling -

(MERCHANT shrugs, as if to say, "Who could say you nay?")

Now listen: I am going to reconstruct the conversation.

(At the same tempo at which the lights fade, the PAINTING-SLASHER is raising his knife over the landscape.)



Scene II

(The lights come up again, almost at once, on the dimly lit Imperial Throne-Room. The two side walls, of dark stained wood, narrow in toward up-center by symmetrical right-angle turns as they approach the upstage wall. In this wall is a rectangular beige door, wide open toward the audience at rise. Hung in the door-frame and filling it is a piece of scrim, on which is rear-projected a scene from an Italian primitive painting: a grey road leading out the door, winding around the beginning of a steep blue hill and disappearing right around the curve of the hill.

On a stool, left, and slightly down from the doorway sits a hunched over FIGURE facing three-quarters away from the audience, forearms on thighs and hands clasped. Silhouetted against the blue-grey light coming through the door, the FIGURE gives an impression of despair.

MARTIN, followed by the CHAMBERLAIN, enter through a "secret" door built into the wall down-right. Whenever this door opens, some garrish yellow light and some strains of the party-music seep through onto the stage; now the CHAMBERLAIN hastily shuts this door behind him, cutting off both music and light. MARTIN tries to accustom his eyes to the light.

CHAMBERLAIN

(bustling around the wall, right)

He's around here somewhere...

MARTIN

This is the throne-room for the Roman Empire?

CHAMBERLAIN

(facing upstage)

All right, now, we'll just create the conditions and he'll be with us in a minute.

(Snaps his fingers. Down-stage area darkens. Drum-roll, building to a crescendo, at the climax of which a gong sounds and stage-center is illuminated by a pool of dazzling white light, in the center of which stands - the CHAMBERLAIN, left arm and forefinger raised in what is apparently a gesture of benediction. But the instant the lights come on, he uses the finger to get MARTIN's attention, the way one gets the attention of a waiter.)

Oh, I just wanted to say, I think I'll go back to the party now.

(He crosses to the "secret" door, opens it, goes out, and closes it behind him.)

MARTIN

What about the Emperor?

(The CHAMBERLAIN re-opens the "secret" door, sticks his head and one hand through.)

CHAMBERLAIN

(with an exasperated, pacifying gesture)

Coming, Com - ing!

(door shuts again)

MARTIN

Oh, this empire... !

(He sits down. The pool of white light begins to move around the stage, as if looking for something. MARTIN watches it, fascinated. Finally it reaches the hunched-over FIGURE up-left, who, the minute the light hits him, all in one movement rises, turns out and slips on an Indian Chief's head-dress which he has been holding concealed in his lap. The FIGURE is now seen to the the INDIAN CHIEF.)

Chief!

(long pause.)

THE FIGURE

Then am I going to have to fire the first shot, Martin, though I am Roman Emperor and all this time it's been you looking for me, you for me? This is a moment you must have made some plans for; I know for a fact you've got this curious, important thing to tell me, this obsession that rides you. But perhaps the trouble is my appearing to know that much - which from your side of the fence must appear like knowing everything. Is that the problem? Is it a sinking sensation you get at the thought of my already knowing so much of your impasse that seems to invalidate each fresh approach as it rises? But, you know, you really don't have to worry so much about that. I only know about-what

I sound like I know. I'm certainly not going to throw it all back in your face, if that's what's causing the squeamishness. You haven't presented yourself - nor have you been presented to me - as a traitor or a threat. Any inquiries I've made have been in quite another direction. The extent of it is, I ... like to keep an eye on the occasional one who turns around one day and starts working in toward the center. This ... interests me. Then why didn't I make it any easier? Ah, how does one make it easier? - I don't know. And remember: I'm the stationary one. Toward me, you may have to struggle; but I can't even lift my shoe off the floor. And then, would I? What but struggle, and lots of it, could have composed the richness of this moment?

Emperor talks away, and Martin stares away. But at what staring, Martin? Were you expecting an emperor something else in your experience could have prepared you for? I'm afraid I and my conversation don't relate at all <sup>to</sup> these little symbolic vignettes you've been having - not even as their culmination - that's not what emperors are like. I'm not, as the others almost seem to be trying to be, the reflection of something further on. I am irreducible - maybe the one thing in the Roman Empire that is. Do not fall into the vanity of supposing that I have been "placed" here by the doorway as a convenient embodiment of something about you or your troubles - nor, on the other hand, is this to be construed as meaning I am as much a stranger to your thoughts as some old Viking. Nothing about me should be construed, reduced, or made to align. I am in-between whatever extremes you're considering at the moment. You can tell me from the others by my being the real one; and if you think a few weeks in this empire is enough to convince anyone there's

no such animal, you're almost right: if I'm irreducible, I'm the one thing in the Roman experience that is.

Oh, I hate to see the purpose in your eye clouding! Martin, look: when the Chamberlain shut that door, you put the whole whirl of colored light and costume behind you. In here you can just settle in and have a good talk. Wouldn't you like that, Martin? Could it come as anything but a relief to you? Of course I don't want you thinking this is going to be some philosophical discussion and that's all you get for your money.

MARTIN

(slowly)

This is the heart of my world. And it is buried in Indian strangeness.

EMPEROR

Have you been finding anything but strangeness all the way through your world?

MARTIN

But you as my Emperor!

EMPEROR

Apart from knowing me as Emperor, there is nothing in me to know. I am neither individual nor type; I am Emperor, which is the same sort of concept as individual or type.

MARTIN

Never mind about your being Emperor, what are you doing standing there in the full war regalia of an Oskaygee chief?

EMPEROR

(at long last comprehending MARTIN's bafflement)

Is that it? While the Emperor has been carefully explaining Rome from the bottom up, the Explorer has been attending only to details of dress.

MARTIN

(by weary rote)

"I'm not an explorer; I sell fabric. I was blown off-course and I want to tell the Emp - " to tell you about it. But where did you get that rig - and do you get the consciousness that goes with it?

EMPEROR

It was pressed upon me by my courtiers, lovely children. They felt that

(his voice taking on the courtiers' blasé tone)  
as long as I had to stay here at the doorway watching, maybe a nice dress-up would give me some sense of the action.

(slowly)

I found that attention ... dear in them.

MARTIN

How can they know enough to turn you out with this degree of accuracy and not know all about America?

EMPEROR

A name with which I'm presumed to be familiar?

MARTIN

Yes, you are; I have yet to meet someone in here who didn't know what I was talking about - until I started talking about it.

EMPEROR

Good rule of thumb. Well, Martin, that's so: we have all had our one glimpse or another into the American future. And my courtiers,

in their New York aspiration, glimpse perhaps as much America as they can stand.

MARTIN

"Stand?"

EMPEROR

Without losing the indispensable sense of their own age.

MARTIN

And you, the Emperor, the fearless gazer into times to come - how much America can you stand?

EMPEROR

Try me, Martin. Whisk me up, give me a view.

MARTIN

Can you stand to know that the sibyls for once brought back an answer not so much out of their range as out of their sphere? That a dream of Indians should never have directed you to the barbarian frontier, and that once there, you had the futility coming? That any commemorative plaques you stick up are monuments to a missed point, and a victory party of your throwing converts the site into Prisoners' Row? My god, I've been wanting to say this!

EMPEROR

What makes these insults to my achievement a view of the American future - which is what I asked you for?

MARTIN

Because Indians are the empire's future!

EMPEROR

I don't have any idea what you mean by that.

MARTIN

Do we just "live on," Emperor? or do we perpetuate - select certain elements of great worth and concentrate on keeping their noses above water, come what will? For an empire set up like us, there can be only one answer.

EMPEROR

Let me tell you, as Emperor, sitting here peering down into the other, European, future, that the actual perpetuation of Rome will be a process infinitely more complex and channelled and cagey than that - that is, if we're able to hold on to something to perpetuate. You can run down my wars on the barbarians as much as you like, but it was they who set the "if" before that sentence, and if you take any kind of interest in Rome's perpetuation, you'll see there was enough wisdom in my handling of them to treat them as what they really were: a threat. Are your Indians a threat?

MARTIN

Is that a name you usually give the helpless?

EMPEROR

Well, if they're not, where does the urgency come from? Anything they're going to get from us, they'll get. Will you just stand to one side and let history get on with it?

MARTIN

(shaking his head)

We have to bring it down to them.

EMPEROR

We don't have to do everything in advance for every age, Martin - that wouldn't leave us the concentration to live our own.



MARTIN

But we can channel the perpetuation a little. We can find by seeking, as I found by being blown into it, the trade wind that carries Columbus from Africa west. We can staff out the Carribean islands on the proconsular model; build forums in the Allegheny forests; and plan out a network of vestal shrines for the Missouri River Valley. The Imperial eagle could prevail all across the American West on frontier marches from Dubuque to the Redwood forests, and the Emperor himself prevail - by the means of light and buzzers - from the eightieth floor of the Chrysler Building; evenings, from Twenty-one. This would be an America something like what that continent's merited; and this would be the sure climax - not to say, the perpetuation - of Imperial Rome.

EMPEROR

Ah, Martin, after all that's befallen you, abroad and then back home, have you still such confidence in the staying power of a great achievement? Can you really still suppose it will ever be given us to ring changes on the future?

MARTIN

How can you be throwing your hands up like this when nothing's happened as yet; or could have, the future being nothing as yet - not even available for throwing up one's hands at? The future so far is only our insights pointing that way; and the quality of those insights, yes, we can change.

EMPEROR

And would it be in character for us, do you think, to take that step, to stress those achievements that work a change?

MARTIN

Would it not? I thought we were Rome, I thought we did things!

EMPEROR

Not so much stock, please, in either doing or things. We cannot build defences for this empire by piling up all our achievements and then sitting down in the middle and-just-let-anyone-try-and-slap-that-around. That is not what Rome means by ensconcing yourself amid your achievements. That may be what some people mean, but that is not what Rome means.

MARTIN

Ensconcing? You speak as if the whole question were of our safety. What about the Indians? Doesn't it bother you how awful the Spaniards are going to be: driving whole populations into slave mines; unseating great polytheistic cults not - as I've had occasion to point out before in this empire - not unlike our own; and breaking into disunity the great tribal confederations that keep order over a continent twice the size of the whole area ever tramped over by Roman feet? That's what the Spaniards have for the New World: what have we? Don't you, if you just stop to think about it for ten seconds, don't you find that a really irresistible question? What have we here in sky-blue antiquity to oppose to those fierce helmets from the end of time? And that's not just an intriguing speculation - not from our end, anyhow - though if you let this chance slip, that's what the moderns will get it as. This is a question that all the suffering you foresee will drive you to ask - or had better.

EMPEROR

I've just now succeeded in getting on top of the half-conscious uneasiness I've been feeling about you; I speak while I'm still able to hold it all before my mind. There is a great pretense

with you of serving Rome, helping Indians; but what you really want me to approve is a fuller consciousness than is supposed to be available in our time. There is a treachery to your age in the claims you make - though it is to a sense of their own age that you claim to have travelled up and down the Roman Empire recalling people. You'll have nothing to do with prophetic glimpses, you want the run of the place. But in your aspiration to this easy commerce, there is much misunderstanding of Time. Our relations with our future are a little too unsteady for a Roman just to pick up and go there.

MARTIN

Ah, but Emperor, I've been in so many futures! It's easier than you think. Future of a sculptor, a legionary, a pastry-cook, a painting-slasher, a fellow-merchant, and even that Isaurian you took captive - oh no, I beg your pardon, I haven't seen the end of that one yet. "Been in them" in the sense of having been present at the fruition in their lives of a sibyl's prophecy. Those are the ones, you know, those sibyls, who put such a creepy character on the future. You really should break up that outfit, because they do - I don't care how accurate they are - more harm to the way people see the future in this empire... ! It's not all weirdness and shadows. The future is - well, it's like America, it's the Other World: an unknown wilderness - but not after someone goes out and lives there a little.

EMPEROR

A wilderness? Oh, then, there does turn out to be something about the future I can teach you. The future is no wilderness; it is a stretch of clearly marked road: the next stretch of the Road, Time. The Road, Time

(indicates the door up-center)

goes forward out of my throne-room, out of my consciousness; takes a sharp slope upward and immediately disappears around a corner. I am on perpetual watch over the Road, Time, but that little stretch before it goes round the curve is all I ever see - and the Road, like the spiral up Purgatory, is all curves.

MARTIN

And this is the basis of your saying one can't get into the future?

(crosses to the up-center door and makes an ushering gesture)

Step on!

EMPEROR

(not moving)

How charmed one always secretly is by the irrelevant aspects of one's imagery. Though one has chosen the image only to blazon forth one's frustration, yet one cannot secretly help supposing that were the soul-perplexing niceties of time to present themselves in stocky, mile-post form, one could deal with them so much better. - just as one has always envied the heroes of allegorical romances getting their difficulties dished up to them as serpents or meadows or swamps, because, that one could handle - one just pushes ahead - whereas Doubt or Indolence or Pride we have no muscular solution for. But the difficulties survive any inconsistency in the symbolism contrived for them. One is not going to move as fast as one likes on the Road, Time, there is no possibility of an extra century or two before the allegorical night falls, because the road will lengthen with your stride.

MARTIN

And if one cuts across the countryside?

EMPEROR

Yes, your discovery is by way of being such a shortcut, - only, there is no countryside, just the road; which again, is not a road from A to B, but a road -

MARTIN

I don't understand the whole character of this opposition! You claim it's not images by the time I get to you, and then you slap me with the trickiest, sterilest, yieldingest image of all - an image I have about as much chance of extricating myself from as from a judgment. I'm not denying your right to judge me - even to judge me futile; but why not tragic-futile? I have been to the New World, and fourteen hundred years early have I been there: why aren't I being hailed as a noble failure who sought to expand the consciousness of his age?

EMPEROR

Do you expect to be lionized for having attempted to close your generation's eyes to its danger?

MARTIN

Closed their eyes! To what danger?

EMPEROR

Loss of the sense of their own age. And it doesn't just amount to lulling them to sleep - you've been actively encouraging them to forsake it.

MARTIN

That is the voyage a brave heart goes; that is no danger.

EMPEROR

Not dangerous! When one begins to have one's thoughts in modes

not one's own, but in the modes their historians attribute to us, losing our sense of ourselves to the sense they have of us? As if Hannibal ever "evaluated the possibilities and reviewed the alternatives available to him" - well, maybe something like that, but never those well-lit words, the old African sitting up there on his elephant watching the valleys fill with snow... Are you going, without giving it a thought, to defer? Are you going to - just on account of their fatuous suspicion that we "must have known," that no one could really be alive and not know what they know - are you going to panic and drop the whole carefully constructed fabric of the ancient world? Think, Martin, of the satisfaction when a great historical expression like "the Exarchate of Ravenna" or "the Pragmatic Sanction of Bruges" is used for the first time - an expression as indubitably new as lamb for the first time with green jelly, but which is drawing its life up out of the deep mutuality of its age - an expression which it makes a society feel good just to have thought of. Is there any satisfaction like having produced a wonder like that and kept within your means? Think, Martin, if in all your travels through the Empire and beyond, you have ever, in any mere visionary pleasure, felt a satisfaction anything like it - a satisfaction so widely diffused that by any one person it is not felt at all. Understand this, Martin, and you will really have pierced to the heart of Rome. The kind of empire I run keeps within the limitations of its consciousness. That is the frontier worth guarding, and in comparison to the integrity of that, you would be right to minimize the barbarian incursions, for greater danger than any barbarian could ever pose threatens on the other side of it.

(A gong sounds, followed immediately by the sound of much glass breaking.)

The EMPEROR and MARTIN look questioningly at



each other, and then both look upstage.

Suddenly MARTIN runs to the upstage door and strikes, with an impertinent satisfaction he cannot conceal, the ushering pose he once before took there.

Sound of breaking glass continues, growing ever louder.

The scrim on which the Road, Time has been projected is hauled up, revealing a dingy red-brick alley, lighted faintly by two light-bulbs hanging down on cords and disappearing into shadows far upstage. A trail of points of light along the ceiling of the alley suggests many more such light-bulbs further on down the alley for a great distance.

The EMPEROR looks nervously around the throne-room in all directions, and then precedes MARTIN out the door; MARTIN bangs the door behind them.

On the bang of the door, blackout.

Breaking glass noises continue, louder and louder. Over them is heard, twice, the sound of ripping canvas. Then, in the darkness, over the noise of the glass, is heard the voice of the RUINED MERCHANT:)

MERCHANT

Here comes the Middle Ages!

(Deafening roar of breaking glass, trailing off to a few tinkles.)

The End