

NORTON I

Written by

Jonah K. Ericson

923 Fremont Street Apt 3  
Manhattan, KS 66502  
620.768.9344  
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SENATOR-3

I think that, yes, I'm collecting signatures to run for senate.

NORTON

Oh really? I'd love to sign! I'm always in favor of those that want to get involved in politics.

NORTON signs his paper.

SENATOR-3

Fantastic, thank you, Mr - Joshua - Norton.

CITIZEN-1

Oh my God!

NORTON

Joshua Abraham Norton - pleased to make your acquaintance.

SENATOR-3

Pleasure to meet you, sir.

NORTON

The pleasure is all mine. Now, I happened to overhear you disparaging labor unions.

SENATOR-3

Well, yes, you see they keep workers from doing their job. If a worker doesn't work then they don't have money.

NORTON

But they make sure the working arrangements are healthy and safe. Now you can correct me, but if you loose your hands in an accident isn't hard to work?

CITIZEN-2

My friend lost his arm at the mill and they fired him for it! They said he couldn't be productive.

NORTON

Right! And isn't it difficult to make money if you are fired from your job?

SENATOR-3

Now, the problem is not in health and safety. The bigger the unions - the - uh - uh -

PAGE-4

Less employees a business can hire.

SENATOR-3

Right!

NORTON

You've changed the subject.

SENATOR-3

What? No I didn't.

NORTON

(to CITIZEN-1)

Didn't they change the subject?

CITIZEN-1

Um - yeeees?

NORTON

They are now more concerned with the ability of the business to hire workers than the workers' ability to work.

SENATOR-3

I didn't say that.

NORTON

That doesn't sound particularly populist to me. (To the citizens) You two? How does it sound? Very populist?

CITIZEN-2

No. Not really.

CITIZEN-1

"Not really"? Not at all, sir!

NORTON

Right-o! (To the Page) And you? How does it sound to you?

PAGE-4

But long-term labor unions don't help the worker.

NORTON  
 (Laughing)  
 This is the land of dream?

M  
 You shouldn't be here.

NORTON  
 Home of the American dream?

M  
 Drop it. You shouldn't be here.  
 This place - it will kill you.  
 Leave while you can.

M goes to exit.

NORTON  
 Will I see you again?

M  
 Not if you follow my instructions.

NORTON  
 Then I will not follow them.

M  
 Alright - then you will fail.  
 Goodbye, Mr. Norton.

NORTON  
 Goodbye.

He exits whistling happily.

#### INTERLUDE 1

Enter M

M  
 Monarch by choice of the Golden  
 West,/ Usurper by right of his own  
 behest,/ What though his reign was  
 world-wide jest -/ This wise old  
 Emperor Norton -/ There never was  
 Monarch so kindly as he,/ So lordly  
 in rags, democractic and free,/   
 With never a battle on land or sea -  
 / Our good old Emperor Norton.

Exit M.

Exit BANKER-1/2.

SENATOR-3  
Bring her in.

Exit PAGE-4. Enter M.

SENATOR-3 (CONT'D)  
You've made it.

M  
Yes, here I am.

SENATOR-3  
Sit down. Let's have a drink.

M  
No thanks.

SENATOR-3  
Like old times?

M  
I'm not thirsty.

SENATOR-3  
We used to drink together.

M  
Yes, well, I needed it then.

SENATOR-3  
And you don't need it now?

M  
No.

SENATOR-3  
What did you want to see me about?

M  
You asked me to come here.

SENATOR-3  
Right.

M  
I don't want anything from you.

SENATOR-3  
I just wanted to catch up.

M  
Catch up?

SENATOR-3

On life.

M

Alright . . . What would you like to know?

SENATOR-3

No, no, sit - have a drink - we'll talk like old friends.

M

Old friends?

SENATOR-3

We are old friends aren't we?

M

We have a past. "Friends" is an interesting word.

SENATOR-3

Is it really that strange to say we were friends once? You used to call me - I can't think of the phrase - you loved it though.

Pause. SENATOR-3 gets up and goes to bar.

SENATOR-3 (CONT'D)

Drink of choice?

M

I said I didn't want a drink.

SENATOR-3

Whiskey with water. It's what you used to drink isn't it. I always liked a gin and tonic myself.

(Tasting his drink)

You sure you don't want one?

M

No, I don't. If we're just going to chat, I'm going.

SENATOR-3

But, I've just made you a drink. Your whiskey.

M

I said I didn't want one. Why don't you listen?

(MORE)

M (CONT'D)

(pause)

Whatever, I'm leaving. Goodbye.

SENATOR-3

(Throws glass of whiskey  
against the wall.)

Don't. Go.

(Collects himself)

Sit down. I've caught myself, you  
see, beating around the bush.

M

Go on.

SENATOR-3

This new - obstacle.

M

The emperor.

SENATOR-3

DON'T. Don't use that word. He is  
not a leader. Okay? He is an  
obstacle.

M

Problems? With the new regime?

SENATOR-3

Do you not realize what this means  
for democracy?

M

He doesn't actually have any  
governing power, you know that  
right? He is just a man.

SENATOR-3

A delusional man.

M

So why are you afraid of "a  
delusional man"?

SENATOR-3

He may not have governing power,  
but every day more and more  
citizens are on his side. He is  
getting popular.

M

More popular than you?

SENATOR-3

Those people out there. The people of San Francisco. Those are *my* people. They belong to *me*. Their hearts, their souls, their lives, and, most of all, their votes, and this - this - *emperor* changes nothing.

M

So it's a popularity contest? One you're afraid of losing. You're not actually concerned with his affect on the democratic process. You're afraid that when elections come around you won't be on top any more.

SENATOR-3

You think I'm so transparent?

M

Like glass.

SENATOR-3

And your position is so obscure? I can read you from here.

M

And?

SENATOR-3

You're obviously infatuated with the man.

M

Infatuated, please.

SENATOR-3

You always take a liking to the eccentrics.

M

I need you speak with more clarity.

SENATOR-3

How's this? He's touched the soft place in your heart that lets stray dogs in. The same place that had you follow men to the west. You love those sorts of people.

M

You used to be one.

SENATOR-3

A silly dreamer that's what you would call me. Isn't that right?

M

Yes.

SENATOR-3

You loved that word.

M

May I go now? Or will you throw another tantrum?

SENATOR-3

Fine - maintain your infatuation with the - obstacle.

M

Bye.

Exit M. SENATOR-3 sits for a moment, fuming. Enter PAGE-4.

PAGE-4

Sir?

SENATOR-3

What is it now?

PAGE-4

There are two more people to see you.

SENATOR-3

Tell them I'm busy. I don't wish to see anyone else today.

PAGE-4

They say that someone was shot at the dock today.

SENATOR-3

It never stops. I'll go speak to them on my way out. You stay here and handle any - problems.

PAGE-4

Everything alright, sir?

SENATOR-3

Everything is fine. I'll see you tomorrow.

MOURNER-3  
And Emperors.

MOURNER-1  
Kings,

MOURNER-2  
And Shahs,

MOURNER-3  
And presidents.

MOURNER-1  
A leader is a great thing.

MOURNER-2  
A death is a sad thing.

MOURNER-3  
The death of a leader is another  
thing.

Enter M and PAGE-4 in funeral  
attire. PAGE-4 brings out a  
hastily written speech.

PAGE-4  
Thank you all for coming. We've  
gathered here today to celebrate  
the death of a man who once wrote a  
eulogy to a dog. I've written some  
words about Norton that I would  
like to share. One, he was a man.  
Two, he worked very hard for the  
city of San Francisco. Three, he  
cared for everyone here in his own  
way. Few men have endless love, but  
this man loved endlessly, and we  
will remember him whether in love  
or ill - endlessly. Thank you.

A shimmer of light. A spot on  
M.

EPILOGUE: A REQUIEM FOR NORTON THE FIRST

M  
On January 9th 1880, the *San  
Francisco Chronicle* published an  
obituary to Joshua titled "El Roi  
Est Mort".

ALL  
El Roi Est Mort.

M  
As follows: "On the reeking  
pavement,

MOURNER-1  
"in the darkness of a moonless  
night under the dripping rain,"

MOURNER-2  
"and surrounded by a hastily  
gathered crowd of wondnering  
strangers,"

ALL  
Norton the First,

MOURNER-3  
By the grace of God,

PAGE-4  
Emperor of the United States and  
Protector of Mexico,

M  
Departed this life.

MOURNER-1  
Other sovereigns have died with no  
more of kindly care -

MOURNER-2  
Other sovereigns have died as they  
have lived -

MOURNER-3  
With all the pomp of early majesty,  
but death having touched them,

ALL  
Norton the first

PAGE-4  
Rises up the exact peer of the  
haughtiest King of Kaiser that ever  
wore a crown.

M  
Perhaps he will rise more than the  
peer of most of them.

MOURNER-1

He had a better claim to kindly  
consideration than that his lot:

MOURNER-2

'Forbade to wade though slaughter  
to a throne and shut the gates of  
mercy on mankind'

MOURNER-3

Through his harmless proclamations  
can always be traced an innated  
gentleness of heart,

PAGE-4

A desire to effect uses and a  
courtesy,

M

The possession of which would  
materially improve the bitterful  
living princes whose names will  
naturally suggest themselves.

ALL

El Roi Est Mort.

M

Thank you.

Exit MOURNER-1.

M (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Exit MOURNER-2.

M (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Exit MOURNER-3.

M (CONT'D)

Come here.

Embraces PAGE-4

PAGE-4

I feel strange leaving him here.

M

Who knows maybe we'll leave and his  
soul will dance around this place.

PAGE-4

I wouldn't expect anything else.

Exit PAGE-4 and M arm in arm.  
Just before they're off.  
NORTON sits up. PAGE-4  
continues off. M make eye  
contact with NORTON. A moment.  
M extis.

NORTON

Joshua A. Norton. Died January 8,  
1880. Aged about Sixty-five.

END OF PLAY