

That Emperor's Fool

A musical about nothing

The Emperor's New Clothes
Retold as a fantasy satire for all ages

Run time: 2:15

Cast size: Versions available for 10, 12, 14, or 16

Principal characters: 6 males, 5 females

Chorus of 2, 4, 6, or 8

Multi-ethnic casting works



“In all, wonderful work, Skip. I'm very impressed with the quality of everything you've done - bravo!”

Donald Tongue, email, 9-1-19
Founder and Managing Director
New World Theatre
Boston/Concord NH

Letter to the editor in *The Dramatist*, journal of the Dramatists Guild of America
March/April 2019 issue – in response to a discussion in favor of non-rhyming songs:

Dear Dramatist,

I'm sorry. I'm a sappy sentimentalist, and I love rhyme, but only when the message is true and on mark. I reached a high point, I feel, with these few lines that open the eleven o'clock number of my musical:

*No rock, no hill,
There's no place to stand.
No mountain, no temple,
No feet on solid land.
All our cherished idols
Have perished in the sand.*
– From *That Emperor's Fool*

Skip Schloming
Cambridge, MA

Andrea Renken apetschelt@yahoo.com Apr 19, 2021, 9:52 AM:
I LOVE your musical! Please let me know when it is staged!
Andrea

That Emperor's Fool

A musical about nothing

A fantasy satire
based on the classic folktale
The Emperor's New Clothes

Book and Lyrics by Skip Schloming
Music by Alistair Mungall

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Characteristics of fools

from Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*, 1935:

Mischievous; sprightly; grotesque; “a tincture of the absurd”; takes life easy; glides out of awkward situations; little conscience; failure to attain to the normal standard of human dignity; repartee; laughter-maker; bon mots; Lark, Pod, Mackerel, Ham-Cleaver (some names of fools); parodying; impertinent; personal remarks and witticisms against guests; exposition of unworldly ethical principles; spars with philosophers; extempore versifier; poet; musician; mime; expressive gesticulation; dances with dislocations; a parasite; a man who “gives words” for food and clothes.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

A bizarre little empire. Gaudy fashions and empty conversations. (*“Chit Chat Chit Chat”) Everyone struts and preens. But when the prime minister LORD SHALLOT speaks, all the COURTIERS snap into lock-step, robotic-minuet conformity. As LADYSHIP and LORD SHALLOT try to bring order to the court, the COURTIERS all display their strict conformity: “Fancy dressed, show our best, never rest...” But they end up expressing unsettled feelings: “Why are things so grey?” (“Something’s Missing”).

Princess ELDORA, the Emperor’s beautiful daughter, complains of having to wait for what must be the perfect prince. Three princes, in turn, march in and ask for her hand. She dismisses them all (“Wait? Must I Wait?”).

MUNDO, the Emperor’s fool who always flirts with the female courtiers, boasts of his jokes and mischief: “Of insult and barb I am master, no stock of invective is vaster...,” then turns serious and angry, and affirms that he always speaks the “truth, the ugly, unsmugly truth” (“A Fool Am I”).

LADYSHIP, the wife of LORD SHALLOT, the prime minister, together discuss The Plan, describing it in wonderful words – with no content. The COURTIERS all agree about The Plan.

To wake the world-weary EMPEROR, MUNDO plies his jester’s philosophy of opposites: “What makes you an emperor high and renowned is having a loathsome low crackpot like me around” (“So Opposite We Are”). Amused by his fool-friend, the EMPEROR offers his bastard daughter ESPI to be MUNDO’s wife. The news travels instantly, the COURTIERS all gasp, and ESPI collapses into sobs.

But MUNDO is deeply insulted by the offer of low-class ESPI. He vows revenge. He will seduce the EMPEROR’s most beautiful daughter ELDORA: “How do I take a high-class virgin to bed? By declaring True Love – with no intent to wed!”

MACH, a traveling fashion designer, reminds his two companions that his usual grand deceit will actually help everyone in the empire to believe in all the things they believe in that they can’t see – “Like gossip and the daily news, which are the source of everyone’s views...” (“What They Can’t See”).

The EMPRESS, miffed that she gets nothing from the EMPEROR, vows to bring him naked to his knees before her (“I Am Woman”).

Arriving at the Imperial Court, MACH suggests that everyone wants Something More (“Something More”): “One fig leaf hung, we haven’t ceased to decorate the naked beast.” MACH proposes a fabulous new outfit for the EMPEROR, but cautions: “Fools can’t see it.” He pulls out a mere thread (pantomime). Everyone squints until ESPI gushes: “Ohmigawd it’s beautiful!” All snap to rigid conformity and agree – except MUNDO: “There’s nothing there but empty air!” The COURTIERS hiss: “Fool! Fool! Fool!”

Suddenly helpless and maddened without MUNDO’s usual assistance, the EMPEROR marches out, ordering his new outfit and MUNDO’s and ESPI’s wedding.

MUNDO, however, opposes marriage – “There’s nothing faster to disaster for the male race” – and flirts with all the women – except ELDORA (“One Man One Woman”). MUNDO follows ELDORA to a Love Grotto and asserts that true love comes as surprise: “Out of nothing, I say you are mine. Standing nowhere, I make you my love.” ELDORA joins in the fantasy (“Out of Nothing”), but then runs off.

To avoid marriage to ESPI, MUNDO tells her that the ver-r-ry slo-o-ow philosopher PROFESSOR KUNKEL secretly loves her. To PROFESSOR KUNKEL, “women...and...logic...do...not...mix” – until MUNDO suggests that ESPI loves him. PROFESSOR KUNKEL and ESPI quickly fall in love (“Sometimes A Man / Sometimes A Woman”) . . . then spat over nothing.

The COURTIERS express their approach to life (“Nicely, Nicely”).

LADYSHIP, the true boss, states her position (“I Much Prefer Grey”)

In the Weaving Room (pantomiming with the frame of a loom), MACH and his assistants POTTS and PITTS prepare for the COURTIERS to view the progress on the cloth (“Rose, Jade, Blue,

Marmalade”). The COURTIERS sing of the magnificent cloth they have seen (“The Fabric of Our Lives”) while MUNDO pounds them verbally: “Lies! Lies! Always lies! Tongues that are forked, tongues that are tied, tongues that have licked the devil’s backside!” – but he is ignored. As the COURTIERS sing triumphantly, MUNDO and ELDORA, looking at each other from far apart, ponder on their love (“Out of Nothing” (reprise)).

ACT II

The COURTIERS are alone, caught up in their own intruding doubts about why they can’t see the cloth (“Alone”), and why they don’t say so (“Little Silences”), when the EMPEROR suddenly enters and they all snap to conformity (“Everything’s Fine”).

MUNDO wonders why he shouldn’t just seduce ELDORA and forget about true love, when ELDORA enters and joins him in his thoughts. Soon the couple moves closer to expressing their love (“Out of Nothing” (reprise)).

LORD SHALLOT uses logic to conclude that his relationship with ESPI will be successful (“Item, Item, Ergo”). When he fails with ESPI, he calls upon THREE BUREAUCRATS to consult a giant book called “The Plan” to end the spat between ESPI and PROFESSOR KUNKEL. The Plan is all gibberish. Only after PROFESSOR KUNKEL firmly dismisses The Plan and the COURTIERS do he and ESPI reconcile (“Sometimes A Man / Sometimes A Woman” (reprise)).

ELDORA, worried, expresses her true feelings to her mother, the EMPRESS (“I’d Say I’m A Fool In Love”), who urges her to do what she must.

Frustrated by MUNDO’s hesitancy, ELDORA demands that he speak his true feelings. MUNDO feels trapped in his ruse with her, but then blurbs out that “It was all a game, me and you, I took your bright golden light and threw it in the dirt.” He slumps to the floor in defeat, expecting to lose her.

ELDORA, however, stands firm, dismisses the deceit, and declares: “The mantle is off, the daylight undressed. Lay open my heart, and my breast.” She coaxes MUNDO to say “I love you,” and he does. (“Touch Me Now Evermore”).

MACH, confident in his ultimate success, explains to his helpers how it all works (“Lip Service Tango”). LADYSHIP, the prime minister’s controlling wife, confronts MACH on the invisible cloth, claiming that the empire is real. MACH, however, points to the empty “Plan” and declares they are partners: “We make empires out of lies. And what you and I don’t want to do is to let anyone know it.” LADYSHIP silently concedes.

The EMPEROR finally goes to the EMPRESS’s bedchamber, confessing that he cannot see the cloth (“I Cannot See It”). The EMPRESS urges him: “What you must do is fake it impeccably. Everybody does it. Fake it until you convince yourself that your fakery is true.”

The EMPEROR at last determines that his duty is to uphold convention. As he is “dressed” in his new outfit by MACH and his helpers (pantomimed), he stands naked (down-lit in discreet shadows, wearing a black thong or spandex shorts) and seeks inspiration: “Somewhere in distant corners of the heart, somewhere a tiny voice may start, listen to that distant call, listen to that quiet all...” (“Somewhere in Distant Corners of the Heart”).

Still dressed in (almost) nothing, the EMPEROR prepares for a big parade and watches ELDORA and MUNDO run off. He sinks to his knees in despair. The EMPRESS enters and immediately renders judgment that he and his new outfit are “gorgeous!” She helps pull him up and grandly escorts the down-lit and naked EMPEROR in final procession with the COURTIERS (“The Fabric of Our Lives” (reprise)).

MUNDO and ELDORA enter, swing around each other, and head off, singing (“Touch Me Now Evermore” (reprise)).

LENGTH

The running time is approximately two hours 15 minutes. Readings confirm this length. An abundance of very short dialogue lengthens the number of pages.

PRODUCTION REQUIREMENTS

A minimum production would require 10 actors with doubling for the chorus of Courtiers and bit parts. More preferable would be 14 or 16 actors with a chorus of six or eight.

The strongest visual feature of this musical will be the costumes, which should be gaudy, unique and faux high fashion, perhaps against a black-and-white or pastel set.

NUDITY OPTIONS

The Emperor's state of disrobe at the end should avoid full nudity, front or back, as it would distract the audience from the action, which is the Emperor singing the eleven o'clock number. The degree of coverage can be adjusted to taste: preferably, a close-fitting spandex boxer-brief, black, which would be unnoticeable under a downward spotlight on a darkened stage.

OPTION OF MORE PANTOMIME

Pantomime is used for the invisible cloth/clothes. But additional pantomime is possible, if desired, and would increase to believability of the cloth/clothes pantomime. Ask for a script with dialogue in [brackets] to indicate what can be pantomimed and the message it needs to convey.

THE CHARACTERS

THE EMPEROR	bass	
THE EMPRESS	alto	×
MUNDO (MOON-doe)	tenor	The Emperor's jester
ELDORA	soprano	The Emperor's eldest daughter
LORD SHALLOT (SHAL-low)	bass/baritone	The prime minister ×
LADYSHIP	alto	The prime minister's wife ×
MACH (MAHK)	baritone	A traveling fashion designer
POTTS	tenor/baritone	Mach's first assistant [Sir Smead, chorus, princes] ×
✓PITTS	tenor	Mach's second assistant [chorus, prince]
ESPI	soprano/also	Emperor's bastard daughter [chorus] ×
PROFESSOR KUNKEL	bass	A ver-r-ry slo-o-o-w philosopher [chorus] ×
✓MUTSCHKA	alto	The Emperor's second daughter [chorus]
✓MALE COURTIER	baritone	Chorus, prince, bureaucrat This role is optional but highly preferable.

*COURTIERS	SATB	The chorus [as few as four]
*THREE DUBIOUS PRINCES	non-singing	Played by Courtier/Potts/Pitts
*ONE BUREAUCRAT	bass	Played by Male Courtier

*These parts can be played by actors above the line, giving a 13-actor production.
 ✓ A 10-actor production has been written that drops these characters.
 × in a chorus of 6 most of the time, regardless of cast size

THE COURTIER / CHORUS

...have a demanding role. Onstage a fair amount of time, they typically move in lock-step synchronization and speak in unison, to represent their extreme submissiveness and social conformity.

SONG LIST

ACT I

“Chit Chat Chit Chat”

Courtiers

“Something’s Missing”

Courtiers

“Wait, Must I Wait?”

Eldora

“A Fool Am I”

Mundo

“So Opposite We Are”

Emperor, Mundo

“I Am A Fool And No Damn Fool”

Mundo

“(Help Them Believe In) What They Can’t See”

Mach, Potts, Pitts

“Something More”

Mach and entire Court ensemble

“I am Woman”

Empress

“One Man, One Woman”

Mundo, Empress, Female Courtiers

“Out of Nothing”

Mundo, Eldora

Mundo entices Eldora the princess into a relationship. This is THE romantic love ballad of the musical, melodic, thick with powerful emotion, as operatic as a musical ever gets.

“Nicely, Nicely”

Courtiers

“I Much Prefer Grey”

Ladyship

“Rose, Jade, Blue, Marmalade”

Mach, Potts, Pitts

“Sometimes A Man, Sometimes A Woman”

Espí, Professor Kunkel

“The Fabric of Our Lives/Out of Nothing (reprise)”

Courtiers, Mundo, Eldora

ACT II**“Alone / Little Silences / Everything's Fine”**

Courtiers, Ladyship, Lord Shallot

“Out of Nothing (reprise)”

Mundo, Eldora

“Item, Item, Ergo”

Professor Kunkel

“The Mask Dance”

Emperor, Pitts, Courtiers

“I'd Say I'm a Fool in Love”

Eldora

“The Plan”

Bureaucrat, Lord Shallot, Espí, Professor Kunkel, Courtiers

“Sometimes A Man, Sometimes A Woman (reprise)”

Espí, Professor Kunkel

“Touch Me Now Evermore”

Mundo, Eldora

“I Cannot See It / It's Gorgeous”

Emperor, Empress

“Lip Service Tango”

Mach, Ladyship, Potts, Pitts

“Hidden Corners of the Heart”

Emperor

“Finale”

Entire ensemble

Place and time: A bizarre little empire somewhere, sometime.
Definitely not here and now.

Act I

Scene 1

(In front of curtain. The Courtiers enter, gossiping in pairs, then all pause in alarm at some great scandal, jaws agape, staring at the audience, then back to gossip and repeated. Shortly after Courtiers enter, Mundo enters and sneaks around, poking at Courtiers and other mischief.)

COURTIERS

CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT.
CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT.

(pause and stare in alarm)

CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT.

(pause and stare in alarm)

CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT.

(pause and stare in alarm)

CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT, CHIT CHAT.

(Suddenly, curtain rises. it is morning in the Imperial Court)

(A gong.)

(Mundo runs into the Court as Courtiers move into their Court positions.)

LORD SHALLOT

(announcing)

The Emperor must rise!

(Another gong.)

COURTIERS

SUN UP,
WAKE UP,
RISE UP
...SOMETHING'S MISSING!

DAY BREAK,
BODIES WAKE
START TO SHAKE
...SOMETHING'S MISSING!

LORD SHALLOT

He still sleeps! The Emperor must rise!

MUNDO

My dear prime minister, he prefers to dream.

LORD SHALLOT

Don't bother me, fool!

MUNDO

That's my job, Lord Shallot.

COURTIERS

TICK, TOCK,
ROUND THE CLOCK,
NEVER STOP.
...SOMETHING'S MISSING!

SHIP SHAPE,
BOW AND SCRAPE,
NO ESCAPE.
...SOMETHING'S MISSING!

LADYSHIP

Lord Shallot. Where is the Emperor?

LORD SHALLOT

My Ladyship. I will get him.

(turning to exit, shouting)

Emperor! Emperor! It is time to rise!

LADYSHIP

(sternly)

Stay where you are, Shallot!

(Lord Shallot stops obediently.)

MUNDO

It is time for your Plan, Ladyship, to start the gossip today.

LADYSHIP

Do not bother me, Mundo.

MUNDO

But that is my job.

COURTIERS

MORNING COMES BRIGHT AND EARLY,
DRAG OURSELVES OUT OF BED.
PUT ON A SMILE SO PEARLY,
EV'RYTHING SEEMS DEAD.

LADYSHIP

Lord Shallot, the Courtiers seem stirred up.

LORD SHALLOT

Yes, Ladyship. We can't ignore it much longer.

LADYSHIP

It threatens our grip, Shallot. We need the Plan.

LORD SHALLOT

Yes, the Plan is almost ready.

MUNDO

Oh, no, the Plan again. Cue disaster!

LORD SHALLOT

What would the Emperor's fool know about the Plan?

MUNDO

If you need a plan, all is lost.

COURTIERS

Fool! Fool! Fool!

SO CHIC,
 SO SLEEK,
 IN OUR CLIQUE,
 ...SOMETHING'S MISSING!

FANCY DRESSED,
 SHOW OUR BEST,
 NEVER REST,
 ...SOMETHING'S MISSING!

CHIN UP IN STYLE SO FINELY.
 POWDER OUR FACE ALL DAY.
 SHOULDN'T THINGS GO DIVINELY!
 ...WHY ARE THINGS SO GREY?

LORD SHALLOT

The courtiers are vexed, Ladyship.

LADYSHIP

Shallot, we must finish the Plan

MUNDO

(mockingly)

A plan for disaster.

LORD SHALLOT

(ignoring Mundo)

The Emperor must rise! He is needed!

MUNDO

For what needed?
 The sun shines,
 The river winds,
 And you keep kissing behinds.

LORD SHALLOT

(indignant)

I am Prime Minister.

MUNDO

Prime Miniscule!

And Mundo is a *fool!*

LORD SHALLOT

FOOL! FOOL! FOOL!

COURTIERS

Lord Shallot!

LADYSHIP

Yes, my dear.

LORD SHALLOT

The Emperor must wake!

LADYSHIP

Wake!

LORD SHALLOT

Wake!

COURTIERS

He's not ready for court. I know. I'm with him every day.

MUNDO

Mundo, you are a fool.

LORD SHALLOT

FOOL! FOOL! FOOL!

COURTIERS

And the Empress, Lord Shallot?

LADYSHIP

No, the Empress won't come to court.

LORD SHALLOT

Good.

LADYSHIP

She stays in bed waiting to see the Emperor naked again.

MUNDO

LORD SHALLOT

The Emperor sleeps!

LADYSHIP

The Empress won't come to court.

COURTIERS

HAVE CONTROL
 BODY AND SOUL
 IS OUR GOAL.
 ...SOMETHING'S MISSING.

AS A RULE,
 KEEP OUR COOL,
 NEVER A FOOL.
 ...SOMETHING'S MISSING.

FANCY DRESS IS JOYOUS.
 MY, DON'T WE LOOK PRIM.
 NOTHING SHOULD ANNOY US.
 LIFE IS LOOKING, LIFE IS LOOKING, LIFE IS LOOKING GRIM.

(ESPI and MUTSCHKA enter.)

MUTSCHKA

Good morning, sister. I am very agreeable today.

ESPI

We are the Emperor's daughters, Mutschka. We have rank. And I don't like being called, you know, a bastard by everybody.

MUTSCHKA

Don't be so, Espi. I keep my eyes shut and my nose open, and I have no trouble at all.

ESPI

You do that to be superior, Mutschka. I hate people being superior. They don't pay attention to my hat.

COURTIERS

(individually, one after another, touching their hats)

Hat!
 Hat!
 Hat!
 Hat!

Hat!

Hat!

(All together)

Hat!

(ELDORA enters and crosses to the throne.)

MUNDO

(kneeling before her with exaggerated deference)

My princess Eldora, what would the Emperor's daughter do today?

ELDORA

Nothing. The days and nights are endless. I will be Empress one day. I want more.

MUNDO

(to ESPI, MUTSCHKA and ELDORA)

The Daughters Three tell a tale of nights in the Imperial bed.

(to ELDORA)

First, the child of fresh-made bed.

(to MUTSCHKA)

Then the child of sagging bed.

(to ESPI)

Last . . . the child of some other bed!

COURTIERS

(whispering in unison towards ESPI)

Bastard daughter. Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!

ESPI

I don't care what you call me.

MUNDO

Hah! All those exhausting nights got the Emperor three daughters but no son. What a shame. The Emperor waits and waits for a son. Eldora, you are the Emperor's only chance for a son, when you marry.

ELDORA

(more to herself than others)

WHAT DO I SAY?

I CAN'T GET AWAY.

BUT NOTHING IS HERE

TO GIVE ME CHEER.

(A gong. A PRINCE OF DUBIOUS QUALITY enters.)

A COURTIER

A suitor for Princess Eldora.

MUNDO

This is suitor number seven, eight, nine... (greatly exaggerating) thirty-two.

LORD SHALLOT

The Emperor must be here to judge him.

ELDORA

I will judge him myself. Let him approach, Lord Shallot.

(LORD SHALLOT gestures to the PRINCE. An entry fanfare – percussion only – as the PRINCE marches up to ELDORA and bows deeply.)

PRINCE 1

Your most elegant Eldora, Princess. I am the King of Brash. And your empire one day and my empire already would make a most commendable juncture.

ELDORA

A juncture? Between your empire and mine to be? But what commends your person to me?

PRINCE 1

My person? I mash every foe, I bash every culprit, I lash all the wicked ...as a truly worthy king would do for you.

ELDORA

Thank you, sir. I shall consider.

(Prince exits to percussion fanfare. ELDORA shakes her head.)

MUNDO

Another “no.”

ELDORA

WAIT? MUST I WAIT
 AS THE MINUTES GO BY?
 ENDLESS DAYS
 FILL WITH GREYS.
 WHEN IS MY CHANCE TO DANCE UNDER THE SKY?

STOP ALL THIS WAITING,
 THESE DAYS NEVER FLY.
 WILL THE YEARS
 TURN TO TEARS?
 WHEN IS MY CHANCE TO DANCE 'TIL STARS FILL THE SKY?

IS SOMEONE OUT THERE?
 IS HE WAITING IN THE NIGHT?
 IS SOMEONE TO CARE?
 WILL HE DANCE INTO THE LIGHT?
 IS THERE A CHANCE
 THAT WE'LL DANCE
 'TIL THE MORNING BRIGHT?

(Another gong. COURTIER appears.)

COURTIER

Another suitor.

LORD SHALLOT

(to Eldora)

Shall we?

(ELDORA nods "yes." Percussion fanfare as ANOTHER PRINCE OF DUBIOUS QUALITY enters and approaches ELDORA.)

PRINCE 2

You are, I presume, Eldora, to whom I am pleased to let you view myself, Duke of Platitudia. I am an epicure and connoisseur of the pure, the good, the true et l'amour. And I pursue a further rendezvous with you to have your hand and pick your fruit.

ELDORA

My duke, do give me time to decide.

PRINCE 2

I do truly give you time. Adieu.

(Prince exits to percussion fanfare. ELDORA shakes her head)

MUNDO

He won't do-o-o-o. But, Eldora, you keep your purity under lock and key. The Emperor would be most happy if you...

ELDORA
(ignoring MUNDO)

WAIT? MUST I WAIT?
AS THE HOURS PASS BY
DAYS WON'T END.
TIME'S NO FRIEND.
WHEN IS MY CHANCE TO DANCE BELOW MOONLIT SKY?

DAY AND NIGHT
SHADOWS AND LIGHT
PASSING ME BY,
WHEN WILL MY HEART FLY?

COURTIERS
(musically different)

SHE'S OFF BY HERSELF.
HER NOSE IN THE AIR.
PRINCESS ON A SHELF.
SHE REFUSES TO PAIR.
SHE'S WAITING TO MARRY.
IGNORES ALL THE HINTS.
EVERY TOM, DICK AND HARRY
IS NOT ENOUGH PRINCE.

(A gong. COURTIER enters again. By now no speech is necessary. Lord Shallot motions the COURTIER not to announce and signals for the prince to enter. Yet another PRINCE OF DUBIOUS QUALITY marches in to a percussion fanfare.)

PRINCE 3

Oh, my dear, my dear Eldora. Count Vasilova here for you. Lovely hand. Eldora, dear. Your skin is as pure as a pearl, your hair so glistening. A man of my high breeding suits you so well.

ELDORA

I would be unsuited by evening.

PRINCE 3

Let's match and make fire and empire.

ELDORA

Let's not rush, my dear count. Give me time to chew upon your offer.

(PRINCE exits to a fanfare.)

ELDORA

NOW END THIS WAITING
 LET SOMEONE COME BY.
 DO YOUR PART,
 TOUCH MY HEART.
 GIVE ME A CHANCE TO DANCE 'TIL THE SUN RISES HIGH.

IS HE SOMEONE FAR AWAY
 OR SOMEONE I KNOW?
 WILL HE BANTER AND PLAY
 OR ROMANCE LIKE ROMEO?
 IS THERE A CHANCE
 THAT WE'LL DANCE
 AS THE YEARS COME AND GO?

I'M WONDERING IF,
 I'M WONDERING WHO,
 I'M WONDERING, WONDERING.
 HOW I WISH I KNEW.

MUNDO

Prude One, Prude Two and... my princess Eldora, are you a prude like your sisters, or do you aspire to something lower still?

ELDORA

I grow tedious of verbal tricks, Mundo, and bad suitors.

MUNDO

Sadly, the sun rises again with no son for the Emperor.

ESPI

Why can't I be as beautiful as she?

MUNDO

Because your pedigree was lost by the Emperor's screw up.

COURTIERS

Bastard daughter. Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!

LADYSHIP

Lord Shallot! Move on!

(LORD SHALLOT beckons to PROFESSOR KUNKEL, who slowly steps forward.)

LORD SHALLOT

Yes, La... My dear Professor Kunkel, you are a doctor of great learning and I wish to ask your opinion.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

(always speaking very slowly)

Lord . . . Shallot, . . . I . . . am . . . most . . . greatly . . .

LORD SHALLOT

Professor Kunkel, I wish to know your exact opinion.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

. . . honored . . . to . . . be . . . in . . . your . . . presence . . .

LORD SHALLOT

Your opinion, professor.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

...and . . . equally . . . am . . . I . . .

LORD SHALLOT

Your *opinion*, Professor Kunkel!

COURTIERS

Your opinion!

(A pause)

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Vie-e-e-ew.

LORD SHALLOT

View?

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

My-y-y . . . *view-w-w-w!*

LORD SHALLOT

Exactly, your *view!*

(A pause)

Per-r-r-r-rha-a-aps . . .

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Perhaps?

LORD SHALLOT

So-o-o-meti-i-i-imes.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Perhaps, sometimes?

LORD SHALLOT

Ma-a-a-aybe-e-e-e.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Perhaps, sometimes, maybe?

COURTIERS

(Pause)

And...that....is...my....

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

And that is his...

COURTIERS

Oo-o-o-opin-n-n-n-io-o-on!

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

(A beat)

View! View! View!

MUNDO

My-y-y-y-y...view-w-w-w-w-w!

PROFESSOR KUNKEL
(flustered)

View!

COURTIERS

MUNDO

(to PROFESSOR KUNKEL)

The sky shakes,
The wind breaks,
And feeble little man
Confuses all he can.

LORD SHALLOT

Fool!

COURTIERS

FOOL! FOOL! FOOL!

MUNDO

(happily)

A FOOL AM I
I CANNOT HIDE,
MY TONGUE CAN HOMICIDE.

A FOOL AM I,
MY JEST APPLY
TO BEINGS LOW AND HIGH.

OF INSULT AND BARB I AM MASTER,
NO STOCK OF INVECTIVE IS VASTER.
WITH WORDS I JAB,
WITH WORDS I STAB,
WITH WORDS I KICK ASTOR FASTER.

A FOOL AM I.
TO PRUDES I FLY
AND QUICK THEIR LACE UNTIE.

A FOOL AM I
TO SPIT IN GOD'S EYE,
OR KISS THE NAKED SKY.

AND FOR THIS PANACHE I INHERIT
NO DEGREE OF SOCIAL MERIT
I'M DUMB, A BUM,
A CRUMB, SCUM.
Yes! AND GLADLY DO I WEAR IT.

MUNDO

(as much to himself as others)

AND HOW CAME I A FOOL?
THIS PRINCE OF RUDE MISRULE?
BY MY TONGUE! HO! THIS UGLY TOOL!

(becoming serious and angry)

A FOOL AM I,
MY TONGUE I PLY
TO EVERY FAKE I SPY.

A FOOL AM I,
THE TRUTH SPEAK I,
HANG PRETENSE, SHAM AND LIE!

I AM THE PRICK AND BARB OF TRUTH.
BEHIND EVERY MASK I SLEUTH.
I SPOT EVERY BOTCH,
I TRACK EVERY BUNGLER,
I SNIFF EVERY CROTCH,
AND SLICE THROUGH THE JUNGLE
OF LIES!... AND SPEAK THE TRUTH!
THE RUDE AND UNCOUTH TRUTH!
THE WHOLE REVOLTING,
DARING, GLARING,
UGLY TRUTH!

LADYSHIP

Lord Shallot, don't let the fool distract us. It's time for the Plan.

LORD SHALLOT

But we haven't finished the Plan.

LADYSHIP

Oh, we'll figure that out later. What we need is the Plan. It will keep everyone's attention off of everything else in the Empire. Shallot, get the Emperor up!

COURTIERS

(individually, one after the other)

UP!
UP!
UP!
UP!
UP!

UP!

(All together)

UP!

Scene 2

(The Emperor's bedchamber. The EMPEROR asleep in bed.)

MUNDO

(kicking the sleeping Emperor)

Dead to the world. His preferred state. Hey, boss. My Emperor.

(he kicks him again)

Again it's bad. But with me by your side to slice at the tide, you'll make it to nightfall without going mad.

(Another kick)

EMPEROR

(poking briefly out)

Ow! I'm not ready for court, Mundo. Let me dream.

MUNDO

But, Sir, the empire can't exist without you.

EMPEROR

(he slowly pulls himself up)

Okay. I'm up, I'm up! Amuse me, Mundo! I can't face it yet.

MUNDO

Sir, what color do you see this pillow?

EMPEROR

Red, of course.

MUNDO

Of course, red. But do you suppose this pillow you view is, to someone else, a pillow of blue?

EMPEROR

Red is red, Mundo. This is one of your tricks.

MUNDO

Maybe so. Maybe no. Maybe red's in your head. We are caught, each one of us, inside our eyeballs. Could blue be the view from some other eyeballs?

EMPEROR

The pillow is red, and everyone ought to say so.

MUNDO

You are caught in your 'oughts.' But wake up, sir, and you would see . . .

EMPEROR

... the Truth. That's what you always say, Mundo. What is Truth, Mundo?

MUNDO

Truth is Good and Beautiful, as philosophers say.

EMPEROR

But you, Mundo, what do *you* say it is?

MUNDO

Truth is ugly. Hide it, dress it up, play it down. But never look at the ugly truth. Not so, your Eminence?

EMPEROR

I see what everyone except you sees, and I uphold it.

MUNDO

What you see is The Agreement we all made, like One Man For One Woman.

EMPEROR

One Man For One Woman. *We agreed* upon that?

MUNDO

Long ago. A clever woman came up with it. Divided all us men up. We were doomed.

EMPEROR

But one man, one woman, that is the natural way – isn't it?

MUNDO

Natural? Not possibly. It crept into our minds in a thousand bits of conversation.

EMPEROR

But what else can be?

MUNDO

More ways in heaven and earth: one man, many women.

EMPEROR
Well, yes.

MUNDO
One woman, many men.

EMPEROR
No-o-o-o-o.

MUNDO
Many men, many women, like salad.

EMPEROR
Yes, but no . . .

MUNDO
And even men-men and women-women.

EMPEROR
So opposite we are.

MUNDO
But it all comes down to one way to be: ...

EMPEROR & MUNDO
Man-Woman.

EMPEROR
That is The Agreement.

MUNDO
And we men lost it.

EMPEROR
But I am Emperor. I must preserve The Agreement.

MUNDO
And I am a fool who fools around. In private, all the ladies love me.

EMPEROR
Fooling around is not Love, Mundo. A fool cannot have Love.

MUNDO

The Love that poets sing of? Should I, the fool, take a taste of True Love?

EMPEROR

Never just a taste, Mundo. Recklessly, a true lover plunges deep. Love would undo my fool.

MUNDO

It would undo my foolery.

EMPEROR

SO OPPOSITE WE ARE, YOU AND I.
I AM THE CROWN.
AND YOU JUST BARELY SCORE
AS A TRAMP OF A CLOWN.
ONE WONDERS HOW WE TWO
CAN BE FRIENDS SO BOUND AND TRUE.

MUNDO

My master and friend,
MARK MY WORDS, I WON'T HOLD BACK,
THERE'S NO WHITE WITHOUT BLACK.
AND EQUALLY RIGHT,
THERE'S NO BLACK WITHOUT WHITE.

EMPEROR

That's absurd.

MUNDO

BEHOLD BEFORE YOU THE BLACKEST HOLE,
THE DARKEST, INKIEST, JET-BLACK COAL.
HOW WOULD YOU KNOW IT TO BE SO BLACK
IF YOU HAD NEVER SEEN WHITE, JUST A SMACK?

EMPEROR

Ah-h-h.
SO IF ALL WERE BLACK
OR ALL WERE WHITE,
YOU COULDN'T TELL THE OTHER ONE EXISTED.

MUNDO

THAT'S RIGHT!
SO WHAT MAKES YOU AN EMPEROR HIGH AND RENOWNED
IS HAVING THIS LOATHSOME, LOW CRACKPOT LIKE ME AROUND.

EMPEROR

Crawl! So, you are saying, that's why we have this mixed-up world of opposites . . .
THERE'S NO GOOD WITHOUT BAD.

(The EMPEROR starts hesitantly, then gets the idea.)

NO JOY WITHOUT SAD.
NO SWEET WITHOUT SOUR . . .

MUNDO

COUNT ETERNITY BY THE HOUR.
HOW COULD WE BE HONEST IF NO ONE LIED?

EMPEROR

OR HAVE A SECRET IF NO ONE PRIED?

MUNDO

WHERE IS SAINTHOOD WITHOUT DEFECTS?!

EMPEROR

OR CHASTITY WITHOUT SEX?

What is so is not. And what is not is so.

(A moment of mutual puzzlement.)

BOTH

Yes!

EMPEROR

But, Mundo, it's all topsy turvy. Black, white, friend, foe, yes, no. Where do we *stand*? All that's left is . . .*nothing*.

MUNDO

That's all you ever had.

EMPEROR

Nada.

MUNDO

Zilch.

EMPEROR

Locked behind these eyeballs.

MUNDO
Looking out at . . .

EMPEROR
Emptiness.

MUNDO
The aching void.

EMPEROR
As big as the universe.

MUNDO
But in this black-white, yes-no world, nothing . . . goes . . . with . . .

EMPEROR
(figuring it out)
Everything!

MUNDO
Out of the void . . .

EMPEROR
Comes all creation, bang! Mundo, you are so clever!

MUNDO
It's nothing.

BOTH
SO OPPOSITE WE ARE, THE CROWN AND THE CLOWN.
WHO CARES WHAT THEY SAY, LET THEM ALL FROWN.
AND FRIENDS WE ARE, YOU AND I!
NONE BETTER BY FAR, JACK LOW AND ACE HIGH!

EMPEROR
Mundo, you are like a son. I will make you my son. I give you my daughter Espi.

(A spotlight reveals the COURTIERS surrounding a shocked ESPI.)

COURTIERS
Espi?!?!)

EMPEROR

Mundo needs a wife. One man, one woman, yes, Mundo? Are you not a man?

MUNDO

Oh, far below.

EMPEROR

An emperor's fool would do well to have a wife.

MUNDO

He would be a fool.

ESPI

I'm going to be married? To the Fool?

(protesting proudly)

I am the Emperor's daughter.

EMPEROR

You are my bastard daughter. You will marry my fool.

COURTIERS

Espi and Mundo! Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!

ESPI

Baw-w-w!

(A spotlight focuses in Mundo. The others disappear.)

MUNDO

(to himself)

Me marry Espi?!?!?

I BE CASTRATO BEFORE I MARRY HER!

Yes, that's Mundo. Cut off! Detached!

THAT'S HOW I SEE,

THAT'S HOW I SMITE,

THAT'S HOW I BARB,

THAT'S HOW I BITE.

I AM A FOOL! AND NO DAMN FOOL!

Scene 3

(A vast open space. POTTS and PITTS walk in carrying a variety of portable equipment – a chair, a small desk on thin legs, a “royal” rug runner, a whisk broom and other grooming supplies – intended to serve MACH, ostensibly a traveling fashion designer.)

POTTS

Stop complaining, Pitts. We're almost to the empire.

(spying the empire in the distance offstage)

Ho! There she lies, a jewel upon the land! Our next con-quest. How they squirm, Pitts! Each one thinks he is the only one.

PITTS

Utterly alone.

POTTS

And there we are, Pitts, watching them all in their silent i-so-la-tion . . .

BOTH

Squirm!

POTTS

(looking closely at the empire)

Whoa, it's huge! Pitts, look! Gawd, it's enormous, Pitts.

PITTS

Big is big, Potts.

POTTS

Imperial is all over the place, Pitts.

(MACH enters intently reading a book as he walks, barely attentive to POTTS.)

POTTS

Mach, this empire is huge. Will it work? So many important people? Look at it, Mach.

(MACH does not look, but throws away the book and snaps his fingers.)

MACH

Potts and Pitts, my seat!

(Instantly, POTTS and PITTS go into an automatic ritual. With flourish, they seat MACH on the portable "throne," prop the little desk next to him, roll out the rug runner to his feet, march up it and start to dust, primp, and powder him.)

MACH
(gazing straight ahead)

Tell me, Potts.

POTTS
It has very many towers. Ten, eleven, or more! Will it work?

MACH
With so many kissing the line, Potts, they knuckle under even faster.

POTTS
So many fakes staring at thin air? How does an empire keep going?

MACH
Just so. They do it all the time.
Remember, Potts, humans are a gullible specie.
Remember, Potts, we invent reality.
Remember, Potts, all the things people believe in . . .
that . . .*they* . . .*can't* . . .*see!*

LIKE GOSSIP AND THE DAILY NEWS
WHICH ARE THE SOURCE OF EVERYONE'S VIEWS
ON THINGS THAT HAPPEN OUT OF SIGHT
OVER THE HILL, OR IN CHAMBERS TIGHT.
HE TOLD SHE TOLD HIM TOLD HER.
IF A NICE FELLOW SAID IT, IT HAD TO OCCUR.
DID ANYONE SEE...
THE CUNNING DEED, THE SECRET PACT,
THE CRYING NEED, THE GHASTLY ACT?
PLEASE, LET'S NOT CONFUSE
ALL THAT GOSSIP AND THE DAILY NEWS.

ONE CAN WONDER HOW FAR WE'VE GOT,
BUT IT'S A FACT OF THE HUMAN LOT
TO BELIEVE THINGS THAT CLEARLY ARE NOT.

TAKE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SEXES.

LOVERS NEVER FACE THE FACTS.
 FROM THE MOMENT OF ATTRACTION
 THEY PUT ON THEIR FINEST ACTS.
 HE'S A PRINCE, SHE'S A DOLL,
 (HE HOBBLER AND SQUINTS, SHE'S TEN FEET TALL.)
 THEN WHEN THE WEDDING KNOT IS TIED,
 THEY SHOW AN OPPOSITE SIDE
 AND COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT
 THEIR MATE HAS A PROFUSION
 OF FAULTS THEY HAD NOT PREVIOUSLY IDENTIFIED.

THEY MAKE IT ALL UP. THERE'S NO REALITY.
 PEOPLE FIGHT FOR, DIE FOR, PAINT THE SKY
 FOR THINGS THEY CANNOT SEE:
 RANK, ELEGANCE, CLASS AND CHASTITY.
 LA MODE, LA MYSTIQUE...

POTTS

LA CREME...

MACH

AND THE BOURGEOISIE.

POTTS

The bourgeoisie?

MACH

You can't see it, can you?

BOTH

THE BOURGEOISIE!

MACH

AND WHAT SHALL WE SAY OF GOVER'MENT
 WHOSE WAYS EVADE DISCOVERMENT,
 WITH POMPOUS DISPLAYS THEY PASS LAWS AND DECREES
 THAT SCARCELY...EVER...CURE THE DISEASE.
 "WHEREFORE...", "WHEREAS...", "WHEREBY..." WHAT ON EARTH IS IT?!
 THEIR WORDS ARE A JUMBLE SUBLIME AND EXQUISITE.
 THEY BUILD PYRAMIDS, TEMPLES, STATUES, AND WORSE
 TO THE GLORY OF ... UH! [shrug shoulders to an unknown] WITH THEIR HAND IN
 OUR PURSE.
 THE SWEETEST NOTHINGS A LOVER MEANT

ARE SO MUCH SWEETER THAN THE NOTHINGS OF GOVER'MENT.

SO, FELLOWS, YOU SEE, THEY NEED YOU AND ME.
THEY NEED US TO PIQUE THEIR GULLIBILITY.
TO REMIND THEM IT'S CHIC TO IGNORE REALITY.

POTTS

TO KISS MILORD'S FEET AND SHOUT THEY ARE FREE.

PITTS

TO SAY THERE'S TWO OR FOUR
WHEN THERE'S REALLY EXACTLY THREE.

MACH

IN SHORT . . .

ALL

THEY NEED US...
TO HELP THEM BELIEVE...
IN...WHAT...THEY...CAN'T...SEE!

(They all exit grandly.)

Scene 4

(The imperial court. The EMPEROR slumps half asleep on the throne. Around him are LORD SHALLOT, LADYSHIP, and MUNDO.)

LADYSHIP

The Plan, Shallot!

LORD SHALLOT

Your Highness, we have the most urgent matter of...the Plan.

EMPEROR

The Plan? .

LORD SHALLOT

The Plan for everyone.

EMPEROR

Oh, that Plan.

(MUNDO hops over and whispers to the EMPEROR.)

EMPEROR

Will the Plan have articles?

LADYSHIP

Yes, Your Eminence, any decent Plan has articles and sections.

LORD SHALLOT

The Plan needs your approval, Your Excellence, and I'm sure . . .

EMPEROR

It needs improvement.

LORD SHALLOT

(astonished)

Improvement?! We are almost done work on it.

EMPEROR

Article . . .

(He picks a number out of the air.)

. . .Five.

LORD SHALLOT & LADYSHIP

Article Five?

EMPEROR

Article Five needs a *slight* bit of improvement.

LORD SHALLOT

Why, now that you mention it, Article Five does need a bit of improvement.
(announcing to no one in particular)

Improve Article Five.

LORD SHALLOT & LADYSHIP

A bit!

(MUNDO whispers again to the EMPEROR.)

EMPEROR

And Article Seven.

LORD SHALLOT & LADYSHIP

Article Seven?

EMPEROR

Needs wholesale revamping!

LORD SHALLOT

Oh, yes, yes, such keen insight, Your Imperial, such profound vision, such . . .

EMPEROR

Revamp it!!

LORD SHALLOT & LADYSHIP

Revamp Article Seven... A bit!

LADYSHIP

(steps forward to take charge)

Your Imperial Greatness, a mild state of panic is called for. The fundamental problem is a considerable lack of Plan...

(A gong interrupts. COURTIERS enter. One COURTIER

whispers to LORD SHALLOT.)

LORD SHALLOT

The court assembles.

A COURTIER

Presenting a messenger from . . . where?

EMPEROR

Let's see who has come to court.

(POTTS and PITTS enter and parade to the center.)

POTTS

The moment is fat... for all to hear

PITTS

...of the Great, the Unequaled. . .

POTTS

...the Unparalleled Master of Fashion, Mach. . .

PITTS

...who makes the Finest...

POTTS

...the Finest for the Highest.

(A stunned silence.)

COURTIERS

The finest?

(MACH enters grandly.)

MACH

The finest!

(A grand flourish. POTTS and PITTS roll out the red carpet and again go through the routines, finally seating MACH in front of the EMPEROR.)

LORD SHALLOT

I beg your pardon. What is your claim to sit so improperly in front of His Worthiness?

POTTS

He has papers.

(Everyone freezes.)

COURTIERS

Papers?

LADYSHIP

(to Lord Shallot)

Stick to the damn Plan, you idiot!

(Everyone ignores her.)

POTTS

Papers from potentates. What sort of personage of state would you care to sample?

MUNDO

(satirizing Potts)

My dear minister, would you care to name a 'personage of state'?

LORD SHALLOT

Well, perhaps a magistrate?

POTTS

(whips out a sheaf of papers)

A hundred magistrates!

COURTIERS

Papers!

POTTS

And if not a magistrate . . . ?

MUNDO

My dear minister?

LORD SHALLOT

Perhaps a general?

POTTS

(whips out another sheaf)

Fifty generals!

COURTIERS

Papers!

POTTS

And if not a general . . . ?

LORD SHALLOT

I think... a prince!

POTTS

(yet another sheaf)

A dozen princes!

COURTIERS

Papers!

POTTS

And if not a . . . ?

LORD SHALLOT

A president!

POTTS

(produces a paper)

One president!

COURTIERS

One paper!

POTTS

Here are papers from half the lands and principalities of the world.

MUNDO

Enough paper to wipe a king's ass.

MACH

Am I speaking to the Most High Emperor?

LORD SHALLOT

Indeed you are, but this is not...

MACH

No false flatteries from me, Your Eminence. I came straight here when I read in this book, page 42 ...

(He has picked just any page, shows it to LORD SHALLOT and snaps the book shut too soon.)

... that you are a great emperor known far and wide for the utmost.

COURTIERS

The utmost.

MACH

Your Highness, I bring to princes, potentates and emperors what their hearts desire: power, glory, wisdom, and beauty. Sir, my fashions are not ordinary. I create . . .

SOMETHING MORE.

But I will not waste your time if you do not desire . . .

SOMETHING MORE.

(He starts to leave.)

I will leave at once. Not bother you. Clearly you do not want . . .

SOMETHING MORE.

(Irresistibly caught, the EMPEROR tips his head to LORD SHALLOT, who thwarts MACH's departure. MACH turns back.)

MACH

WHAT IS A MAN WITHOUT HIS CLOTHES?

OR A WOMAN STRIPPED TO HER TOES?

NOTHING BUT THEIR BORN-NAKEDNESS.

RAW NATURE'S UNMISTAKEDNESS.

THE SAME AS ALL,

SO DULL, SO NEANDERTHAL.

(A STRIP TEASE IN REVERSE. A fashion runway appears, down which strut two male and female models, tastefully naked or in leotards with fig leaves or deeply shadowed by down lights. Through the course of the song, they acquire first some simple adornments and then more and more, building into elaborate, gaudy outfits.

ALTERNATIVE. Courtiers do a runway display of their clothes.)

MACH

BUT GIVE THAT WOMAN A FEATHER,

GIVE THAT MAN A FUR,

AND THEY BECOME SOMETHING MORE.

GIVE HER A RIBBON,
 GIVE HIM A HAT,
 GIVE HER A SASH,
 GIVE HIM A CRAVAT,
 AND THEY BECOME SOMETHING MORE.

COURTIERS

GIVE HER SOME FRILLS,
 GIVE HIM A VEST,
 GIVE HER A FLOUNCE,
 GIVE HIM A CREST,
 AND THEY BECOME SOMETHING MORE.

MACH

IN ANCIENT TIMES WE ALL WENT BUFF.
 BUT ALAS, GOD'S WORK WAS NOT ENOUGH.
 ONE FIG LEAF HUNG, WE HAVEN'T CEASED
 TO DECORATE THE NAKED BEAST.
 WE THINK WE CAN IMPROVE THE NAKED MAN.

SILKEN STOCKINGS RUNNING UP THIGHS.
 A CASCADE OF LITTLE PINK BOW TIES.
 AND THEY BECOME SOMETHING MORE.

WITH JEWELS BEDECKED, WITH SPANGLES BEFLECKED,
 WITH RUFFLES AND LACE AND FESTOONRY UNCHECKED.
 AND THEY BECOME SOMETHING MORE.

COURTIERS

SILKEN STOCKINGS RUNNING UP THIGHS,
 A CASCADE OF LITTLE PINK BOW TIES,
 AND THEY BECOME SOMETHING MORE.

MACH

A BY DRESSING UP OUR NAKED FRAME,
 WE GATHER NOTICE AND ACCLAIM.
 FROM NOTHING BUT THE COMMON LOT,
 WE BECOME . . . ARISTOCROT!

COURTIERS

SOMETHING MORE.

(The strip tease is finished. The models are elaborately dressed.)

MACH

It's all very logical. How you dress is who you are! So how can an emperor be an emperor without all the fittings an emperor must have...to be emperor?

COURTIERS

Oh-h-h-h.

MACH

Yavol!

(to a COURTIER)

THIS SAYS 'A MAN OF COURT.'

(to LORD SHALLOT)

THIS SAYS 'OF HIGH IMPORT.'

(to the EMPEROR)

AND THIS SAYS, WELL, YES, 'EMPEROR.'

BUT WOULD YOU LIKE

SOMETHING MORE?

ROBES THAT SAY

'HERE IS GOD AT PLAY' – ?

COURTIERS

SOMETHING MORE!

MACH

BESPEAK THE ATTIRE:

THERE IS NOTHING HIGHER!

COURTIERS

SOMETHING MORE!

MACH

Let's face it. Even an emperor can be ordinary. But if he dresses as an extraordinary, dazzling emperor, then that . . . he . . . will . . . be!

COURTIERS

(hymn-like)

THERE COULD BE

SOMETHING MORE.

MACH

WHATEVER THE EMPEROR DREAMS OF
ALL THE COURT WILL RAVISH.
THERE ARE NO EXTREMES OF
ANYTHING TOO LAVISH.

What do you dream of, my emperor? Power? Glory? Beauty? Wisdom?

(The EMPEROR beckons MACH to approach.)

LORD SHALLOT

My dear sir, the Emperor has all these things and more . . .

EMPEROR

(brushing LORD SHALLOT aside, whispers to MACH)

Wisdom.

MACH

(whispering back)

Wisdom it is!

(turning to the full court)

I SHALL MAKE YOU THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY,
THE MOST INCREDIBLE . . .

COURTIERS

OH-H-H-H!

MACH

ALL SHALL ADMIRE . . .

COURTIERS

OH-H-H-H!

MACH

ALL SHALL EXCLAIM . . .

COURTIERS

OH-H-H-H!

MACH

(darkly, under his breath)

EXCEPT! EXCEPT FOOLS!

(full to the court again)

ALL SHALL DESIRE!

ALL SHALL ACCLAIM . . .

(darkly, under his breath)

BUT, THERE ARE SOME, THERE ARE ALWAYS FOOLS. YES, FOOLS!

(full)

ALL SHALL BE RAZZLED,
ALL BE AMAZED.

(darkly)

YES, FOOLS!

MUNDO

'Tis I.

MACH

ALL SHALL BE DAZZLED,
ALL SHALL BE DAZED,

(darkly)

BUT THEY . . .

MUNDO

Here am I.

MACH

DO YOU KNOW WHAT? THEY . . . CAN'T . . . SEE IT!

COURTIERS

WHA'?

MACH

THEY CAN'T SEE IT!

COURTIERS

THEY CAN'T SEE IT?

MACH

NO, THEY CAN'T SEE IT!

COURTIERS

OH-H-H-H!

MACH

MY FASHIONS ARE FABULOUS!
GOSSIPED AND TALKED ABOUT!
CLAMORED AND GAWKED ABOUT!
BUT THEY . . .

THEY . . . COURTIERS

CAN'T . . . MACH

CAN'T . . . COURTIERS

SEE IT! MACH

OH-H-H-H! COURTIERS

MACH
 KINGS ALWAYS WEAR IT!
 PRINCES NEVER SHARE IT!
 PRESIDENTS SWEAR BY IT!
 BUT THEY . . .

THEY . . . COURTIERS

CAN'T . . . MACH

CAN'T . . . COURTIERS

SEE IT! MACH

OH-H-H-H! COURTIERS

MACH
 MINISTERS ENDORSE IT!
 PROFESSORS DISCOURSE IT!
 MAGISTRATES ENFORCE IT!
 BUT THEY . . .

	COURTIERS
OH-H-H-H!	
	MACH
THEY ARE FOOLS!	
	COURTIERS
FOOLS!	
	MACH
FOOLS!	
	COURTIERS
FOOLS!	
	MACH
ASININE, COCKAMAMIE FOOLS!	
	COURTIERS
HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!	
	MACH:
THEY ARE FOOLS!	
	MUNDO
'Tis I!	
	MACH
FOOLS!	
	MUNDO
Here am I!	
	MACH
STUTTERING!	
	MUNDO
C'est moi!	
	MACH
BUMBLING!	

Voila! MUNDO

MACH
MUDDLE-HEADED FOOLS!

COURTIERS
HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!

MACH
FLUSH TO THE RED!
BETTER OFF DEAD!
(suddenly majestic)
BUT I WILL BRING YOU . . .

MACH & COURTIERS
. . .SOMETHING MORE...

(The EMPEROR whispers to LORD SHALLOT. The Court hushes.)

LORD SHALLOT:
Show us a sample, that we may judge.

MACH
I have none. They take it all, they love it so much.

LORD SHALLOT
Show us a mere scrap.

MACH
I carry not even one piece. Bandits steal it.

LORD SHALLOT
We must have evidence.

MACH
But I will show you a thread. A thread is all you need to judge.

(With great ceremony, PITTS presents a small packet, which MACH unfolds. Slowly MACH pulls out the “thread” as the COURTIERS inch forward, squinting hard, ESPI in front of all.)

ESPI
(after a long pause)

Ohmigawd!

COURTIERS
(pulling back)

OH!

ESPI

It's beautiful!

COURTIERS

OH-H-H-H-H!

(MACH dashes the thread away. The COURTIERS stiffen to their original reserve.)

COURTIERS
YES, INDEED, QUITE AMAZING, QUITE STUNNING.

MACH

Did it please your Excellency?

(The EMPEROR tips stiffly to LORD SHALLOT.)

LORD SHALLOT

His Highness . . . thought it . . . very beautiful.

EMPEROR

Ah-h-h-h-h! Mundo! What is your opinion of this?

COURTIERS

Fool!

MUNDO

I see empty space, nothing at all.

COURTIERS

Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! NOTHING AT ALL!

EMPEROR

Mundo, my friend, nothing at all?

MUNDO

I am your fool.

EMPEROR

Useless fool! A wasted fool! What do you see, Lord Shallot?

LORD SHALLOT & LADYSHIP

(suddenly very stiff)

IT'S MARVELOUSLY BEAUTIFUL.

COURTIERS

(pulling back from their jeering at MUNDO to a slavish following of LORD SHALLOT and LADYSHIP)

ISN'T IT?

LORD SHALLOT & LADYSHIP

FABULOUSLY STUNNING.

COURTIERS

ISN'T IT?

LORD SHALLOT & LADYSHIP

A STROKE OF GENIUS.

COURTIERS

ISN'T IT?

LORD SHALLOT & LADYSHIP

I'M SURE.

COURTIERS

I'M CERTAIN.

LORD SHALLOT & LADYSHIP

NO QUESTION.

COURTIERS

I'M SURE.

MACH

(triumphant)

THERE IS NO PRICE.

(silence)

NO PRICE TOO HIGH FOR WISDOM.

(Freeze-frame.)

LORD SHALLOT

Price? What price?

(Action resumes.)

EMPEROR

Yes, do it! Make me fabulous and wise! Arrange it, Lord Shallot!

(The Emperor starts to exit.)

LADYSHIP

And shall we arrange Espi's wedding to the Fool?

EMPEROR

Yes, do it! And the Plan, Shallot. Do it! Give us a Plan!

MACH and COURTIERS

ALL WILL PRAISE,

ALL WILL ADORE.

I (HE) WILL BRING ALL THAT YOU (WE) WISH,

ALL THAT YOU (WE) HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR:

SOMETHING MORE, SOMETHING MORE, SOMETHING MORE!

(The EMPEROR exits rapidly, followed by the COURTIERS, leaving MUNDO and ELDORA far apart, staring at each other. Suddenly, ELDORA exits.)

Scene 5

(A corner of the palace.)

MUNDO

They twist their eyes with words! They are the fools, Emperor and all. And what am I?

I AM A FOOL! AND NO DAMN FOOL!

Marry Espi? His brainless, bastard daughter? Dear Emperor, no thanks, I'll pick my own!

I AM A FOOL! AND NO DAMN FOOL!

(suddenly, an idea)

Eldora! Heh! heh! The prize of his eye! Oh, foolish me! Yes, Eldora! For a fool that is no fool.
She I will tempt! She I will take! She I will conquer! She I will break!

(He is plotting.)

How do I take a high-class virgin to bed? By declaring True Love – (aside to himself) with no intent to wed!

(triumphant)

I AM A FOOL! AND NO DAMN FOOL!

(He exits.)

Scene 6

(The Empress's bedchamber.)

EMPRESS

What is an Empress to do?

I AM WOMAN
IN MY BED, SIR.
YOU'RE NOT WITH ME.
WHAT'S TO DREAD, SIR?

I AM WOMAN
YOU'RE THE STRANGER.
LOSING ME IS
YOUR BIG DANGER.

WAS IT YOUR MOOD?
NO, IT MEANT NOTHING!
WAS IT YOUR MANNER?
NO, IT MEANT NOTHING!
WAS IT YOUR FRIENDS, YOUR CLOTHES, YOUR MONEY?
NO, THEY MEANT NOTHING!

I AM WOMAN
IN MY BED, SIR.
HAVE YOU NOTICED
I'M NOT DEAD, SIR?

I AM WOMAN
YOU CAN'T TAME ME
AT MY BEDSIDE
YOU MUST CLAIM ME.

WHY CAN'T YOU SEE
THAT I'M WAITING FOR YOU?
ALL THAT I ASK IS
YOU GIVE ME WHAT'S DUE.

WHAT DID YOU DO?
NOTHING.
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

NOTHING.
WHAT HAVE YOU PROMISED?
WHAT CAN I COUNT ON?
NOTHING!

YOU COULD ASK A THOUSAND WOMEN,
THEIR ANSWERS WOULD NOT [or WON'T] BE MINE.
YOU COULD WOO A THOUSAND WOMEN,
THEIR BODIES WOULD NOT [or WON'T] BE MINE.
YOU COULD SCORN A THOUSAND WOMEN,
THEIR RAGES WOULD NOT [or WON'T] BE MINE.
I AM A VERY PARTICULAR ME.

YOU ARE A FOOL
THAT YOU CAN'T SEE
WHAT A PERFECTLY DAZZLING
CREATURE I BE!

I AM WOMAN,
IF YOU PLEASE, SIR.
TO MY BEDSIDE,
ON YOUR KNEES, SIR.

I WILL GET YOU,
THAT'S MY AIM, SIR.
YOU WILL COME HERE,
YOU I'LL TAME, SIR.

YOU WILL COME HERE
STRIPPED AND NAKED,
NOT THE SAME SIR,
UNMISTAKED!
IT'S NO SHAME, COME
TO MY BEDSIDE.
WOMAN, ME!

(MUTSCHKA and ESPI enter and whisper to the EMPRESS. FEMALE COURTIERs enter, and all except the Empress huddle to gossip.)

FEMALE COURTIERs

Oh-h-h! Ah-h-h!

(Another huddle. ELDORA enters and stands apart. Then a sudden silence from the huddle.)

FEMALE COURTIERS

Can't see it?

(pause)

It must have been beautiful!

ESPI

It was a fabulous shade of . . .

MUTSCHKA

Red.

(almost simultaneously as ESPI says:)

ESPI

Blue.

MUTSCHKA

It was multi-color . . . blue.

(says "blue" almost simultaneously as ESPI says:)

ESPI

Red.

FEMALE COURTIERS

Oh-h-h-h!

EMPRESS

This one little thread? I have no doubt it's lovely.

ESPI, MUTSCHKA & COURTIERS

Oh, yes, it was.

ELDORA

That designer is a charlatan, a distinguished fake, playing on the Emperor's vanity, pulling him this way and that.

MUTSCHKA

Didn't you see how beautiful?

FEMALE COURTIERS

Didn't you see?

ELDORA

The Emperor decides in fear and rushing again.

EMPRESS

Your tongue is sharp, Eldora.

ELDORA

Your absence from Court is sharper than my tongue, Mother.

EMPRESS

I am Empress and I rule from my bedchamber.

ELDORA

When I am Empress, I shall rule from Court.

(MUNDO enters.)

MUTSCHKA

Here is the Fool.

MUNDO

More fool today.

ESPI

Good morning, Mundo. You're fairest shy delight am I.

MUNDO

(aside)

My eyes work badly now.

(to ESPI)

Oh, my sweet little frou-frou, I shall run you up the nearest flagpole.

(ESPI giggles.)

EMPRESS

Mundo, dear boy, what proves today?

MUNDO

I have proved to be a fool.

FEMALE COURTIER

He couldn't see it.

EMPRESS

And compensated with the Emperor's bastard daughter.

MUNDO

The gossip flies quickly here, but not as quick as the flies.

EMPRESS

Are you agreeable to the marriage, Mundo?

MUNDO

As to marriage, my spirit breaks, my mind boggles, my stomach turns, my little fellow won't harden, and my feet run away.

EMPRESS

Mundo, give it a chance. You and Espi are not a bad match.

MUNDO

And a very good match it will be. No, my ladies, marriage is not for Mundo, or any man.

DO I SEEM SAD?

MY SMILE TURNED DOWN?

MY EYES SUNK IN?

MY BROW A FROWN?

ESPI & FEMALE COURTIER

Oh-h-h.

MUNDO

That's how I'd be if I married. You have known me as a happy prankster, flitting from flower to flower. But if I were to give my life to one, I would become a tragic clown,

AND SING THE SAD SONG OF ALL JOHNS

WHO HAVE GONE DOWN IN CHAINS WITH JANES.

ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN,

I'D LIKE TO STATE THE CASE.

THERE'S NOTHING FASTER

TO DISASTER

FOR THE MALE CHASE.

ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN,

THAT ENDS HIS WAND'RING DAYS.
 THAT CLAMPS HIM DOWN
 AND PUTS A FROWN
 UPON A YOUNG MAN'S GAZE.

WHEN ALL AROUND THE SPRING'S BEGUN,
 AND EVERY LAD IS HAVING FUN,
 THERE'S FLOWERS TO PICK,
 CANDY TO SUCK,
 LOLLIPOPS TO LICK . . .
 TIL SOME CLUCK SAYS:

FEMALE COURTIER 2

“uh-uh, JUST ONE!”

FEMALE COURTIERS

ALL THE BLOSSOMS ARE PERFUMING.
 AND SAYING LOVE IS BLOOMING.
 CHURCH BELLS CHIME
 IT'S WEDDING TIME.

MUNDO

AND I SAY IT'S GLOOM AND DOOMING.

THE NATURAL STATE OF THE MALE
 BEFORE THIS CIVILIZED VEIL
 WAS TO LOVE THE SPLENDOR
 OF THE FEMALE GENDER
 ONE AFTER ONE IN ALL FORMS HE COULD NAIL.

FEMALE COURTIERS

BUT NOW THAT WE'VE GOT YOU CAUGHT
 YOU'VE GOT TO DO WHAT YOU OUGHT.
 YOU TAKE OUT THE TRASH
 AND BRING IN THE CASH,

MUNDO

DAY AFTER DAY TO MY BURIAL PLOT.

FEMALE COURTIERS

FORGET ALL FUSS AND FUMING
 FOR LOVE IN SPRING IN BOOMING.
 LOVE BIRDS SING

THAT LOVE IS KING.

MUNDO

LET'S FORGET ALL THIS BRIDE AND GROOMING.

(to a Courtier)

HONEY, LET'S COOK UP A LOVE-CAKE FLAMBÉ.
THEN KISS AND BE ON OUR WAY.

FEMALE COURTIER 1

CUTIE, IT'S ALL VERY FINE TO PLAY,
BUT I AIN'T JUST ONE DISH AT A BUFFET.

MUNDO

(to another Courtier)

TOOTSIE, I COULD GET UP AND GO FOR A RIDE,
BUT THAT'S NO EXCUSE TO GET TIED.

FEMALE COURTIER 2

DARLING, THANKS BUT I GET DEWY-EYED,
AND I'M WAITING FOR HERE COMES THE BRIDE.

MUNDO

(to a third Courtier)

DEARIE, IS ANYTHING MORE A THRILLER
THAN TO SLIP BEHIND A PILLAR?

FEMALE COURTIER 3

SWEETIE, TO A GIRL 'TWOULD BE MORE A THRILLER
TO FIND A MAN THAT WON'T SPLITS-VILL 'ER!

FEMALE COURTIERS

ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN,
IT WON'T BE HOMICIDE.
TO EACH HER OWN
TESTOSTERONE,
AND YOU'LL BE PACIFIED.

MUNDO

You don't get my point.

FEMALE COURTIERS

ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN,
WE THINK WE LIKE THE DEAL.

FEMALE COURTIER 1

YOU STAY AT HOME.

FEMALE COURTIER 2

YOU NEVER ROAM.

FEMALE COURTIER 3

AND WE TALK OF THINGS GENTEEL.

MUNDO

Empress, you must have a more mature view.

EMPRESS

ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN,
THE YEARS HAVE THEIR EFFECTS.
THE GLOW IS GONE,
YOU STILL GO ON
DESPITE EACH ONE'S DEFECTS.

MUNDO

Omigosh.

(to Eldora)

My dear, can you think . . . ?

ELDORA

(slowly, sweetly)

ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN
IS HOW IT'S MEANT TO BE.
THERE'S NOTHING MORE
WHEN TWO HEARTS SOAR.
THAT'S WHAT I WANT FOR ME.

(MUNDO watches as ELDORA exits. Then he turns back.)

MUNDO

Marriage for a man like me? Absolutely never!
SO I'VE MADE MY CASE
TO THE HUMAN RACE,
AND THE VERDICT IS UNANIMOUS.
ALL THE MEN SAY 'YES,'
ALL THE WOMEN SAY...

FEMALE COURTIER

'NO'

MUNDO

AND THE WOMEN ARE UNANIMOUS!

Me marry Espi?

SO AS I TURN A NEW LEAF OVER
 AND GIVE UP THIS LIFE OF ROVER,
 I WOULD HASTEN TO CHANGE,
 AND STAY AT CLOSE RANGE
 TO MY ONE FEMALE MATE,
 I WOULD VOW TO GO STRAIGHT
 AND DO THINGS TO PLEASE.
 I'D GET DOWN ON MY KNEES
 AND PURR TO HER!
 DEFER TO HER!
 YESSIR TO HER! . . .

(pause)

GOD, LOVE'S A KILLER!

(suddenly playful)

BUT DON'T LOOK TOO QUICK,
 OR YOU'LL CATCH ME IN THE THICK
 BEHIND THAT PILLAR!

(MUNDO exits in the same direction as ELDORA.)

FEMALE COURTIER

ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN
 THE MAN PROTESTS TOO MUCH.
 FROM WHEN HE'S PINNED,
 'TIL HE'S DOUBLE-CHINNED,
 WE WILL HAVE HIM, HAVE HIM,
 TIGHT, TIGHT, TIGHT...IN OUR CLUTCH!

Scene 7

(A Love Grotto, with a giant, half-naked Goddess of Love statue smiling down. ELDORA enters, then MUNDO enters.)

MUNDO

My lady Eldora, much to see in court today, not so?

ELDORA

Nothing more to see than any day.

MUNDO

How right, I did not see much myself.

ELDORA

You jest, Mundo. Court troubled you today.

MUNDO

I am *in* trouble all right. I cannot marry Espi. I am not a man, but a fool, proved so by that fabulous thread I couldn't see. How can not-a-man marry a woman?

ELDORA

Gossip says Mundo is all the man he needs to be and proves it every night.

MUNDO

My reputation outstrips me, Eldora. But everyone knows the man I am not is he who loves one woman truly. And truly I do not love Espi. So I cannot marry her.

ELDORA

My half-caste sister seems perfect for a fool.

MUNDO

Damn! I am no street clown, I am an Emperor's fool. I am far more suited to you, Eldora . . .
(He breaks off.)

I am sorry if I offend you.

ELDORA

Not at all. But it is you who seem offended.

MUNDO

A fool offends and never is offended, but today . . .

ELDORA

. . . today the fool is offended. Perhaps you are becoming more a man, Mundo.

MUNDO

Until this morning, I was a lover of all women. Then the Emperor set me to marry Espi. And I knew, in that one instant, it could not be her. And I knew, in that same instant, it could be . . . someone.

ELDORA

Someone?

(MUNDO and ELDORA stare awkwardly at each other.)

ELDORA

I HAVE NEVER LOVED A MAN,
AND I DON'T KNOW THAT I EVER SHALL.

MUNDO

NOR HAVE I LOVED A WOMAN,
BUT IT COULD BE . . .

MUNDO & ELDORA

SOMEONE.

(ELDORA deflects from the line of conversation.)

ELDORA

The Emperor was his usual indecision today, flitting and floating . . .

MUNDO

He is searching for something, for someone.

ELDORA

You talk much about 'someone,' Mundo. Who is this 'someone'?

MUNDO

It is one's true love And it is no one.

ELDORA

How can one's true love be no one?

MUNDO

Because love grows on nothing. It is all lovers' imaginations. Surely you have heard how blind lovers are. He adores her chin.

ELDORA

She worships his dimples.

MUNDO

He writes sonnets to her eyebrows.

ELDORA

She is sick from two hours' absence.

MUNDO

Love is like a madness that sees visions where others see not a whit. Love is as made-up as those new fashions that designer sawed out of empty air for the Emperor today.

ELDORA

I don't see it. A happy invention is still an invention. True love must be firm, like truth.

MUNDO

I see. Love is not from the heart. Love is out there, glittering like the Emperor's fancy new finery.

ELDORA

And you don't see it.

MUNDO

But I am a fool, proved so today . . .

ELDORA

And I am a fool, too.

MUNDO

No, certainly not. For your sake, that is. For my own sake . . . I would not . . . be alone.

ELDORA

Nor I.

MUNDO

But I am not the fool. Nor you. They are the fools.
(Urgently)

Do you see, Eldora?

(ELDORA turns away and sings a pretty tune, but it's not love.)

ELDORA
(a capella)

PEOPLE SAY LOVE IS SPRINGTIME AND CHERRY BLOSSOMS.
PEOPLE SAY LOVE IS AFTERNOONS ON A QUIET RIVER BANK.
PEOPLE SAY LOVE IS SIPPING WINE IN THE CORNER OF A CROWDED
ROOM.

MUNDO
BUT THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS AND THE AFTERNOONS
AND ALL THE CROWDED ROOMS
ARE NOTHING BUT TO LOVERS.

I don't see it like everybody sees it. Like you and me, we could be lovers. I mean, not ordinary lovers – there's every reason in the world against us. But none of those reasons has anything to do with . . . Love. Love comes from nowhere you can put your finger on.

I SAY WE LIVE IN THE BLACKEST NIGHT
WITH NOTHING ABOVE OR BELOW.
I SAY WE LIVE IN EMPTINESS
SILENT AS MOONS COME AND GO.

AND OUT OF THE DARK WE BRING LIFE.
OUT OF THE NIGHT WE BRING LOVE.
AND INTO THE LIGHT I . . . BRING . . . YOU!

OUT OF NOTHING
I SAY YOU ARE MINE.
STANDING NOWHERE
I MAKE YOU MY LOVE.
STEP THROUGH THE DARK,
THERE YOU ARE.
ALMOST NEAR, ALMOST FAR,
AND WE SWIRL AROUND EACH OTHER LIKE THE STARS.

HERE WE ARE,
WONDERING WHO.
SUDDENLY THERE,
SUDDENLY YOU.

ELDORA

MAYBE I SEE IT THE WAY THAT YOU SEE IT.
 MAYBE WE LIVE IN AN EMPTY WORLD.
 MAYBE WE DREAM UP THAT SPECIAL FEELING
 TO FLOW BETWEEN YOU AND ME.

AND OUT OF THE DARK WE BRING LIFE.
 OUT OF THE NIGHT WE BRING LOVE.
 AND INTO THE LIGHT I . . . BRING . . . YOU.

OUT OF NOTHING
 YOU GLOW LIKE A FLAME.
 WE SPEAK OF LOVE
 WITH NO TOUCH OF SHAME.
 STEP THROUGH THE DARK,
 THERE YOU ARE,
 ALMOST NEAR, ALMOST FAR,
 AND WE SWIRL AROUND EACH OTHER LIKE THE STARS.

MUNDO & ELDORA

HERE WE ARE
 WONDERING WHO.
 SUDDENLY THERE,
 SUDDENLY YOU.

ELDORA

(turning away, a capella)

EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT LOVE IS SPRINGTIME AND CPROFESSORY
 BLOSSOMS . . .

(ELDORA runs off.)

MUNDO

What's the matter with you, Mundo? Losing your detachment? Oh, hell. I'm not ready for this.
 (to the statue)

Goddess of Love, what have you to say? Nothing? That's the trouble with gods and goddesses:
 they've nothing to say. I'm not ready for love, Goddess. It has not been my way.

TEACH ME, GODDESS. TEACH ME TO LOVE!

(ESPI enters.)

ESPI

Mundo, there you are!

MUNDO
(to the statue)

But not her!

ESPI
What do you mean by . . . ?

MUNDO
(cutting her off)
Espí, hush, I must tell you that I love you.

ESPI
You do?

MUNDO
You have such charm, such quality. But I must deny myself and tell you something else.

ESPI
Tell me what?

MUNDO
I shouldn't.

ESPI
Oh, please tell me, if you love me.

MUNDO
I have heard on very good report that Professor Kunkel is desperately in love with you. Even more than I. And surely he ranks higher in the _____ (a gesture of great expanse) than I do.

ESPI
Professor Kunkel? In love with me? Really so? I thought it would *never* happen. And now, *two!*

MUNDO
It breaks my heart, I don't know what to tell you, but . . . but I will get Professor Kunkel to meet you at the Imperial Weaving Room.

(MUNDO watches ESPI exit.)

MUNDO
Now to find Professor Kunkel...quickly!

(He rushes off in the opposite direction.)

Scene 8

(A courtyard. COURTIERS dance an intricate, bizarre minuet.)

COURTIERS

NICELY, NICELY,
I'LL BOTHER TO SAY IT TWICELY.
NICELY, NICELY,
MY SENTIMENTS PRECISELY.

THE FACE, THE FRONT,
THE MOVEMENT ADEPT.
GLIDING ACROSS
WITH A MODULATE STEP.

NICELY, NICELY,
I'LL BOTHER TO SAY IT TWICELY.
NICELY, NICELY,
MY SENTIMENTS PRECISELY.

THE POSE, THE PACE,
THE POSTURE, THE AIR,
EVERYTHING TIGHT
AND THERE'S NOTHING TO SPARE.

NICELY, NICELY,
I'LL BOTHER TO SAY IT TWICELY.
NICELY, NICELY,
MY SENTIMENTS PRECISELY.

(Enter LORD SHALLOT and LADYSHIP, plotting in hushed voices. Lord Shallot never takes and chance, but instead takes every cue from Ladyship.)

LADYSHIP

(sotto voce)

Lord Shallot, this fashion designer is not part of the Plan . . .

LORD SHALLOT

(sotto voce)

Oh, yes, Ladyship. In my. .

LADYSHIP

(cutting him off, sotto)

We must do something about him!

LORD SHALLOT

(full voice, as if to be heard by someone)

What an exquisite item he showed!

LADYSHIP

(full)

I am ravished by it.

LADYSHIP

(Pulling SHALLOT further aside, sotto voce.)

Lord Shallot, have you ever thought that there are fools out there who can't see it, but are not letting on?

LORD SHALLOT

(sotto)

Oh, well, um, humph, I guess you're, humph, humph, right. That never occurred to me.

LADYSHIP

(sotto)

This damned thing.

(loudly)

So-o-o beautiful! . . .

LADYSHIP

(loudly)

Oh, so-o-o beautiful!

LADYSHIP

(to LORD SHALLOT)

Lord Shallot, the Empire is peopled with many fools.

LORD SHALLOT

(always waiting for LADYSHIP to take the first step)

Well, um, I, um, er, perhaps . . .

LADYSHIP

How do you suppose we manage . . .

LORD SHALLOT

To run it as well as we do?

LADYSHIP
They have no idea, being fools . . .

LORD SHALLOT
That they are so.

LADYSHIP
Until now! Until this fashion . . .

LORD SHALLOT
Thing.

LADYSHIP
What happens if all these unknowing fools suddenly become known to themselves . . . ?

LORD SHALLOT
As fools? They may become . . .

LADYSHIP
Disaffected.

LORD SHALLOT
From the Empire. Quite so.

LADYSHIP
On the other hand . . .

LORD SHALLOT
There are the not-fools.

LADYSHIP
Those . . .

LORD SHALLOT
Like us . . .

LADYSHIP
Who are . . .

LORD SHALLOT
Prudent, wise, and discerning . . .

LADYSHIP

What happens if they are confirmed . . .

LORD SHALLOT

By this fashion thing . . .

LADYSHIP

Validated beyond doubt . . .

LORD SHALLOT

Beyond any question. They may become . . .

LADYSHIP

Cocky . . .

LORD SHALLOT

Arrogant . . .

LADYSHIP

Recalcitrant and fractious!

LORD SHALLOT

Yes.

LADYSHIP

Lord Shallot . . .

LORD SHALLOT

My dear Ladyship . . .

LADYSHIP

This fashion thing is much too black and white.

LORD SHALLOT

Quite so.

LADYSHIP

Fools neatly over on one side, not-fools on the other. Too black and white. Not muddled enough.

LORD SHALLOT

As you say . . .

LADYSHIP

I much prefer . . . grey.
 THAT LOVELY, SUBTLE,
 MUDDLED-UP COLOR
 OF GREY.
 SHOULD PEOPLE SPEAK TRUTH?
 SHOULD PEOPLE SPEAK LIES?
 EITHER WAY, IT'S NO, I SAY.
 I MUCH PREFER GREY.
 LET THEM SEE-SAW.
 LET THEM HEM AND HAW.
 LET THEM PREACH BLAH-BLAH-BLAH.
 AND EMPIRE WILL GROW!
 I MUCH PREFER GREY.

SHOULD MEN BE MEN?
 SHOULD WOMEN BE WOMEN?
 THE WAY IT WAS LONG AGO? NO WAY.
 I MUCH PREFER GREY.
 LET MEN BE A LITTLE WOMANISH.
 LET WOMEN BE A LITTLE MANNISH.
 LET DIFFERENCES ALMOST VANISH.
 AND EMPIRE WILL GROW!
 I MUCH PREFER GREY.

SHOULD PEOPLE GUSH LOVE?
 SHOULD PEOPLE BREATHE HATE?
 FOR ANYTHING SO GUNG HO, I SAY NAY.
 I MUCH PREFER GREY.

LET THEM FEEL GENERALLY
 NON-COMMITTAL.
 LET THEM COME DOWN SQUARE IN
 THE MIDDLE.
 AND EMPIRE WILL GROW!
 I MUCH PREFER GREY.
 So that's the trouble, Lord Shallot, with this . . .

LORD SHALLOW
(echoing)

LOVE GREY, GREY, GREY
 YES, TRUTH.
 YES, LIES.
 OH, NO, NO, NO
 I PREFER GREY
 SEE-SAW
 HEM AND HAW
 YES, BLAH, BLAH, BLAH.
 OH, SO-O-O-O!
 LOVE GREY, GREY, GREY.

YES, MEN.
 YES, WOMEN.
 OH, NO, NO, NO.
 I PREFER GREY
 WOMANISH
 MANNISH
 YES, VANISH, VANISH
 OH, SO, SO, SO!
 LOVE GREY, GREY, GREY.

YES, LOVE.
 YES, HATE.
 OH, NO, NO, NO.
 I PREFER GREY.
 LET THEM LOVE AND HATE
 JUST A LITTLE. OH, YES, A
 LITTLE TINY ITSY
 BITSY EENSY WEENSY LITTLE....
 (SHALLOT's long line interrupts
 and stops LADYSHIP)

NON-COMMITTAL
 IN THE MIDDLE.
 OH, SO, SO, SO.
 LOVE GREY, GREY, GREY.

LORD SHALLOT

Fashion . . .

LADYSHIP

Thing. We must get rid of it. Or control it.

LORD SHALLOT

Exactly. I shall proceed to take care of it immediately.

LADYSHIP

Don't even consider, Shallot. *I* shall take care of it.

Scene 9

(A corridor in the palace.)

MUNDO

My dear Professor Kunkel, a word. I have never noticed you in the company of a woman.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Women and logic do not mix.

MUNDO

And so the fair sex has no interest to you?

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

I care not to be diverted from logic.

MUNDO

That is a pity.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Pity?

MUNDO

No, I shall not be your ally.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

My ally?

MUNDO

If I tell you a woman loves you deeply, no favor I do for you, but for this dear, sweet delight. If I tell you a woman loves you in silence, no favor I do for you, but for this luscious, pluckable fruit.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Too . . .

MUNDO

She sighs.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

...amazing!

MUNDO

She moans.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

You . . .

MUNDO

She gasps.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

...joke!

MUNDO

You appear, her soft breast swells. You sweep by, her lips gasp. You speak logic, her fair cheeks burn red.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

But who?

MUNDO

And so the fair sex has no interest to you?

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Not in the least.

MUNDO

A scoundrel you are, to cause a poor woman to fall deeply in love with you!

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

No such!

MUNDO

And a liar as well.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

No woman luh, luh, loves me.

MUNDO

She has told me so. But it is a pity twice over.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Twice?

MUNDO

You might be just a little too handsome for her.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

No.

MUNDO

And you might be too logical for her.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Logic . . . is . . . flexible. But . . . who?

MUNDO

I am bound to silence. But . . . the Weaving Room, where the new fashion czar, the Weaving Room . . .

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Weaving? But . . . I don't . . . know . . . about . . . *Love*.

MUNDO

Oh, it's very easy. If you are totally confused, then you know you are in love.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Mundo . . . thank . . . you.

(He exits.)

Scene 10

(The imperial weaving room, filled with a gigantic loom. POTTS and PITTS mime an elaborate weaving process. MACH sits, as usual, reading.)

POTTS & PITTS

ROSE, JADE, BLUE, MARMALADE,
PINK, GREEN, MAROON, TANGERINE.

ROSE, JADE, BLUE, MARMALADE,
PINK, GREEN, MAROON, TANGERINE.

MACH

ALMIGHTY GOLD, DYNASTIC FLAME,
ABSOLUTE BLACK, VERMILION SHAME.
ROCOCO GILT, GARRISON GREY,
GUILLOTINE RED . . . OFF WITH HIS HEAD!

MACH

ALL

BABYLONIAN JADE,
MONARCHY MARMALADE.
GENTEEL GREEN,
NOBLESSE DE TANGERINE.

MACH

TONES OF MAJESTY,
HUES OF DIGNITY,
THE CAST OF SOVEREIGNTY,
A FEW UNAVOIDABLE SHADES OF TYRANNY.

ALL

TIE THEM UP, TOE THE LINE,
LACE THEM DOWN WITH IMPERIAL TWINE.

TIE THEM UP, TOE THE LINE,
LACE THEM DOWN WITH IMPERIAL TWINE.

(ESPI enters in the middle of the refrain. Seeing her, they all sober up, ending the refrain in a whisper and returning to their fake weaving as at the start.)

MACH

My dear, please come closer.

(gesturing towards nothing on the floor)

But don't step on it!

ESPI

Oh..

MACH

Isn't it?

ESPI

Oh-h-h, very beautiful. I must go.

MACH

Model it for me! It's the Emperor's new cape.

ESPI

Well . . . just . . .

MACH

I'll drape it over this shoulder, dear. Now, under this arm . . . Marvelous. Now turn around. How does it feel?

ESPI

(cooperating with his pantomime)

It's very . . . light. Very soft.

MACH

You move so elegantly.

(ESPI settles into modeling the cape. As she swings around, PROFESSOR KUNKEL enters.)

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Espi. Damn!

(PROFESSOR KUNKEL starts to exit but, reconsidering, turns back. ESPI spies him, and they stand transfixed. She throws one corner of the cape across her shoulder and beckons him seductively.)

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Me?

(MACH, seeing they will do fine on their own, exits with Potts and Pitts. ESPI adjusts the cape again and approaches PROFESSOR KUNKEL.)

ESPI

How do you like my gown?

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Oh.

ESPI

It's not really my gown. It's the Emperor's new cape. Not done yet. But I couldn't resist. It's so beautiful. How do you like it?

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Rather . . . smashing!

ESPI

Would you like to feel it?

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

No . . . yes!

(PROFESSOR KUNKEL touches her bare shoulder at first in obedience, then beginning to like the touch of her skin.)

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

It's lovely to feel.

ESPI

Yes. It's lovely to kiss.

(ESPI offers her arm.)

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

M-m-m. Yes.

(ESPI offers her other arm.)

ESPI

It's delightful to kiss.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

M-m-m. Yes, it is.

(PROFESSOR KUNKEL kisses all the way up her arm.)

ESPI

Would you like to hold it? I'll drape it on you.

(PROFESSOR KUNKEL now models it.)

ESPI

It's beautiful. You're really quite dashing in . . . blue.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

My favorite.

ESPI

PROFESSOR KUNKEL.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Yes.

ESPI

PROFESSOR KUNKEL. SOMETIMES . . .

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Yes.

ESPI

SOMETIMES A WOMAN . . .

(suddenly fast)

HASN'T A CHANCE
OF SAYING IT STRAIGHT
SHE JUST OPENS HER MOUTH
POINTING NORTH OR SOUTH
AND THE WORDS COME ATUMBLE
OUT IN A JUMBLE
OF ANYTHING BUT
AN OPEN AND SHUT . . .

(She stops suddenly, embarrassed. After an awkward silence . . .)

PROFESSOR KUNKEL
 ESPI.
 Yes.
 ESPI
 PROFESSOR KUNKEL
 ESPI. SOMETIMES . . .
 Yes.
 ESPI
 PROFESSOR KUNKEL
 SOMETIMES A MAN . . .
 (a quarter as fast as Espi.)
 HAS A TONGUE
 THICK AND DUMB,
 CAN'T SAY MUCH,
 NO SOFT TOUCH . . .
 (He stops suddenly, embarrassed. An awkward silence . . .)
 ESPI
 PROFESSOR KUNKEL.
 Yes.
 PROFESSOR KUNKEL
 ESPI
 PROFESSOR KUNKEL. SOMETIMES . . .
 Yes.
 PROFESSOR KUNKEL
 ESPI
 SOMETIMES A WOMAN . . .
 (Suddenly faster)
 HASN'T A CLUE
 OF WHAT TO DO,
 SHE JUST DOES IT ANYWAY
 FRAPPÉ OR FLAMBÉ,
 STIR UP THE POT
 AND SEE WHAT YOU GOT,

HECK, IT'S BETTER TO START,
THAN JUST FALL APART . . .

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

ESPI.

ESPI

Yes.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

ESPI. SOMETIMES . . .

ESPI

Yes.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

SOMETIMES A MAN . . .
HAS TO DO
A THING OR TWO,
CAN'T DECIDE
WHAT'S INSIDE . . .

ESPI

PROFESSOR KUNKEL.
SOMETIMES A WOMAN . . .

(Suddenly faster)

THINKS HE IS HOT FOR HER,
THINKS HE'S FORGOTTEN HER,
THINKS HE IS THINKING
HE'D RATHER BE DRINKING
OR MAYBE HE LIKES
TO SEE HER IN SPIKES
OR MAYBE HE'D RATHER
NOT HEAR HER BLATHER . . .

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

ESPI.
SOMETIMES A MAN . . .
DOESN'T THINK,
WHO NEEDS MINK?
ANY GUY'D
CHOOSE RAWHIDE.

<p>[Duet] ESPI THINKS HE IS HOT FOR HER, THINKS HE'S FORGOTTEN HER, THINKS HE IS THINKING HE'D RATHER BE DRINKING OR MAYBE HE LIKES TO SEE HER IN SPIKES OR MAYBE HE'D RATHER NOT HEAR HER BLATHER . . .</p>	<p>PROFESSOR KUNKEL DOESN'T THINK, WHO NEEDS MINK? ANY GUY'D CHOOSE RAWHIDE.</p>
---	--

ESPI

You are stepping on my train, Professor Kunkel.

(ESPI and PROFESSOR KUNKEL dance, cooperating in a pantomime with the cape, now stretched into a long sash. She tethers him out to the end of the sash, then pulls him back in, hand over hand. She rolls herself up around the waist, then he unrolls her. He catches her and reels her in, coming face-to-face, almost to a kiss.)

ESPI

Professor Kunkel.
 SOMETIMES . . .

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Espi,
 SOMETIMES . . .

ESPI

SOMETIMES A WOMAN . . .

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

SOMETIMES A MAN . . .

PROFESSOR KUNKEL & ESPI

SOMETIMES A MAN AND WOMAN . . . FALL . . . IN . . . LOVE!

(A final whirl of dancing, then ESPI throws herself on PROFESSOR KUNKEL and kisses him.)

Scene 11

(In corridors. LORD SHALLOT and LADYSHIP enter.)

LADYSHIP

Well?

LORD SHALLOT

The Emperor won't go. We must go to the weaving room.

LADYSHIP

I shall view it and be exceedingly critical.

LORD SHALLOT

Perhaps we can kill it with a huge lack of enthusiasm.

LADYSHIP

Easily. It must be stopped. It violates the Plan.

(LORD SHALLOT exits. Two COURTIERS enter.)

COURTIER 1

Everyone's going.

COURTIER 2

It must be beautiful.

COURTIER 1

(seeing Ladyship)

My lady . . .

LADYSHIP

His Highness deserves the best.

(LADYSHIP exits. MUNDO and two more COURTIERS enter.)

COURTIER 3

We are going.

COURTIER 4

I'm excited.

MUNDO

I shall go to the Weaving Room and say what I see.

COURTIER 1

A fool would not go...

COURTIER 2

...if he were wise.

COURTIER 3

But as he is a fool...

COURTIER 4

...he will go.

(COURTIERS exit.)

MUNDO

Go, yourselves. The master of fashion weaves and unravels a fool.

(ELDORA enters.)

MUNDO

My lady, be careful.

ELDORA

No! Don't speak to me!

MUNDO

You cut the very heart from me!

ELDORA

Oh. You can speak to me now.

MUNDO

You must be careful. There weaves a trick for any would-be ruler.

ELDORA

I will split my words like a true diplomat. Do you split your words with me, Mundo?

MUNDO

I would not fool with you.

ELDORA

Isn't Mundo a fool?

MUNDO

Each minute more so and less so. When I am near that designer, more so. And when I am near you . . .

ELDORA

(becoming elusive)

The moon and the stars are dancing in the sky.

MUNDO

We must go to the weaving room.

(MUNDO pulls ELDORA off.)

Scene 12

(The Weaving Room again. Everyone in the Imperial Court (except the EMPEROR and the EMPRESS) is gathering. ESPI and PROFESSOR KUNKEL present the invisible cloth to the COURTIERS as they enter in processional form. With the greatest of ease, the COURTIERS slip into the cooperation demanded of the moment and mime coordinated movements with the “cloth.”)

COURTIERS

I'M RAVISHED, I'M THRILLED,
I'M IMPRESSED, SO SKILLED.
IT IS THE FABRIC OF OUR LIVES!

I'M GUSHED, I'M GRACED,
I'M FLUSHED, I'M BRACED.
IT IS THE FABRIC OF OUR LIVES!

SO BEAUTIFULLY RED.
SO GORGEOUSLY BLUE.
DELICIOUSLY GREEN.
A MAGNIFICANT HUE!
IT IS THE FABRIC, THE FABRIC OF OUR LIVES!

SO PERFECTLY PURPLE.
LUMINOUS AND WHITE.
BRILLIANTLY YELLOW.
MARVELOUS AND BRIGHT!
IT IS THE FABRIC, THE FABRIC OF OUR LIVES!

MACH

Ladies and gentlemen, I see you are impressed.

YOU NOTE THE DRAPE,
THE RUFFLES IN ROWS,
THE EDGINGS OF GOLD,
CASCADING BOWS.

REMARK THE SHIMMERY,
SATINY GLOW
THE PASSELS OF TASSELS
IN RANK PUNCTILIO.

BUT YOU'LL PARDON ME

IF I HUMBLY ANNOUNCE,
IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SEE,
IT'S WHAT YOU *DON'T SEE* . . . THAT COUNTS!

(Terrified at MACH's bold, suggestive statement, the COURTIERS respond in rigid correctness.)

COURTIERS

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SEE,
YES, NO,
IT'S WHAT YOU DON'T SEE,
THAT COUNTS! NO, YES.

MUTSCHKA

Yes, I have never been quite, no, more impressed with what I have, yes, never seen before and see so plainly, no, unplainly beautiful now.

MACH

What you *don't* see is . . .

THE POWER AND COMMAND THAT FLOWS FROM THESE CLOTHES,
THE STATURE AND DIGNITY THAT GOES WITH THESE CLOTHES.
THE GREATNESS, DOMINATION, EMINENCE, NOBILITY
THAT FLOWS FROM THESE CLOTHES.

COURTIERS 1

POWER,
COMMAND,
STATURE,
DIGNITY.
GREATNESS,
DOMINION,
EMINENCE,
NOBILITY.

COURTIERS 2

IT ISN'T THE THREAD,
IT ISN'T THE RED,
IT'S NOT IN THE WEAVE,
OR THE LACE BROCADE SLEEVE.
IT'S MORE, YOU SEE,
IT'S MORE THAN YOU SEE,
IT'S AUTHORITY, ELEGANCE,
SHEER DIVINITY.

ALL

IT IS THE FABRIC OF OUR LIVES!

LORD SHALLOT

I must congratulate you for this magnificent, beautiful accomplishment, my dear Mach.

LADYSHIP

I am very favorably impressed.

MUTSCHKA

(to Mundo)

And what do you see, Mundo?

COURTIERS

Fool, fool, fool!

MUTSCHKA

What do you see?

MUNDO

I SEE NOTHING AT ALL.
 NO WISP, NO THREAD,
 NO SHADOW,
 NO SUBSTANCE TO HOLD,
 NO CORPOREAL FACT,
 NO, NOTHING INTACT,
 NOTHING, IN FACT.
 FOR I AM A FOOL,
 BENEATH ALL MEN,
 LESS THAN A WHOLE,
 LESS THAN ALL THEM.

(To himself.)

A FOOL AM I
 IN EV'RY EYE.
 BUT IN MY HEART, AM I?

HOW DO I STAND?
 WHO DO I BE?
 A FOOL? A MAN?
 WHAT DO I SEE?

(Turning back to the COURTIERS.)

THERE'S NOTHING THERE!
 SAY WHAT YOU SEE
 THERE'S NOTHING THERE!
 WHY CAN'T YOU SAY?
 WHY CAN'T YOU SPEAK?
 LIES! LIES! ALWAYS LIES!
 TONGUES THAT ARE FORKED,
 TONGUES THAT ARE TIED,
 TONGUES THAT HAVE LICKED

THE DEVIL'S BACKSIDE!

COURTIERS

HA! HA! HA! HA! HA!

LADYSHIP

(to ELDORA)

What, Eldora, do you see?

COURTIERS

Eldora.

(Turning her gaze from the "cloth" to MUNDO, ELDORA "splits her words like a diplomat," letting the COURTIERS think she is talking about the cloth, while she speaks her feelings for MUNDO.)

ELDORA

I SEE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL
SOMEHOW, SOMEWHERE, SOMETHING SO FINE.
MORE THAN LAVISH, MORE THAN BOLD,
MORE THAN LOVELY, MORE THAN GOLD.
AND IT TURNS ME ROUND AND ROUND WITH JOY DIVINE.

(ELDORA grabs the empty air where the "cloth" might be, flings it upward in spangles of shimmery lights and tinkles of sound, and swirls it around to envelop MUNDO.)

COURTIERS 1

POWER,
COMMAND,
STATURE,
DIGNITY.
GREATNESS,
DOMINION,
EMINENCE,
NOBILITY.

COURTIERS 2

IT ISN'T THE THREAD,
IT ISN'T THE RED,
IT'S NOT IN THE WEAVE,
OR THE LACE BROCADE SLEEVE.
IT'S MORE, YOU SEE,
IT'S MORE THAN YOU SEE,
IT'S AUTHORITY, ELEGANCE,
SHEER DIVINITY.

MUNDO

NO FOOL AM I
A HOPE HAVE I,
TO HAVE A LOVE SO HIGH.

NO FOOL AM I!

THIS MAN WILL TRY,
WON'T LET THIS CHANCE SLIP BY!

ALL
IT IS THE FABRIC, THE FABRIC OF OUR LIVES!

MUNDO & ELDORA
(Staring at each other from opposite sides of the stage.)
HERE WE ARE,
WONDERING WHO,
SUDDENLY THERE,
SUDDENLY YOU!

Curtain

End of Act I

Act II

Scene 1

(Darkness. Spotlights on individual COURTIERs.)

COURTIER 1
ALONE.

COURTIER 2
HERE ALONE.

COURTIER 3
OUT IN THE DARK.

COURTIER 4
WHERE AM I, WHAT DO I DO, WHAT DO I SAY?

COURTIER 1
ALONE.

COURTIER 2
GOD, I'M ALONE.

COURTIER 3
NIGHT WITHOUT STARS.

COURTIER 4
WHERE IS EVERYONE? WHY CAN'T I SEE IT? THIS ISN'T GOING MY
WAY.

COURTIER 1
THEY CAN'T ALL BE WRONG.

COURTIER 2
THIS CAN'T BE A TRICK.

COURTIER 3
MAYBE I'LL CATCH ON.

COURTIER 4
 ARE MY EYES SICK?

COURTIER 1
 ALONE.

COURTIER 2
 ALWAYS ALONE.

COURTIER 3
 ALWAYS ON GUARD.

COURTIER 4
 WHO CAN I TRUST? WHEN WILL IT END? WHAT DO I PRAY?

ALL
 LITTLE SILENCES UNSAID,
 IN OUR HEAD,
 CAN'T BE SAID,
 MAKE US DEAD.

LITTLE SILENCES PASS BY,
 NO REPLY,
 START THE LIE,
 MAKE US DIE
 LITTLE SILENCES, LITTLE SILENCES, LITTLE SILENCES . . .

(A trumpet flourish. Suddenly, a brightly lit courtyard and a full processional of correctness, as LADYSHIP and LORD SHALLOT march in followed by ESPI, MUTSCHKA and ELDORA – except that ELDORA holds back.)

COURTIERS
 EVERYTHING'S FINE,
 THE EARTH IS FLAT,
 THE SKY IS GREEN,
 AND THAT IS THAT.

EVERYTHING'S FINE,
 THE GRASS IS BLUE,
 AND ASSES SMELL
 LIKE BARBECUE.

(MUNDO enters from another point, cutting through the formal dance. Searching for something, he stops when he spots ELDORA, and they stare at each other across the distance.)

COURTIERS

EVERYTHING'S FINE.
IT'S CAKE AND TEA.
WHO CARES OF TRUTH
OR LIBERTY?

(Another trumpet flourish. EMPEROR enters.)

LORD SHALLOT

(announcing to all)

Your Imperial Greatness, when shall you go to see the marvelous fabric?

EMPEROR

Have them bring it to me in court. If it's half what everyone says . . .

LORD SHALLOT

It's stupendous, Your Excellency!

LADYSHIP

Ravenous, Your Highness!

MUNDO

Sir.

EMPEROR

Mundo.

COURTIERS

FOOL, FOOL, FOOL!

MUNDO

There's simply nothing there!

COURTIERS

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

EMPEROR

Mundo, do you amuse or do you confuse me?

MUNDO

Simply nothing there.

EMPEROR

The Empress, she should be with me judging these . . .

ELDORA

Father, yourself be the judge.

EMPEROR

My dearest . . . Very nice, very good, very well.

(The EMPEROR exits. MUNDO and ELDORA exit in opposite directions. The COURTIERS move silently in formal dance as LADYSHIP pulls LORD SHALLOT aside.)

LADYSHIP

(sotto voce, to Lord Shallot)

Again! Did you notice?

LORD SHALLOT

(as usual, having no idea what she is referring to)

It was outrageous! What did I notice?

LADYSHIP

Eldora was staring right at that fool!

LORD SHALLOT

Ah, yes, and he was staring at her. I shall take care of it!

LADYSHIP

What will you do?

LORD SHALLOT

Don't you know?

LADYSHIP

Of course I do. You will plant a nagging doubt in his Imperial mind.

LORD SHALLOT

Yes, a nagging doubt . . . about . . . about . . .

LADYSHIP

Mundo and Eldora.

LORD SHALLOT

Precisely. Mundo and Eldora.

LADYSHIP

A nagging doubt keeps everyone in line. Don't you see?

LORD SHALLOT

(loudly, misconstruing what she was referring to)

Of course, I see it!

COURTIERS

(instantly)

Of course, we see it!

LADYSHIP

And the Plan, Lord Shallot.

LORD SHALLOT

Yes, the Plan, every woman, every man. What you can't and what you can.

LADYSHIP

We must stop this fashion thing, it's in the wrong hands! It's much too useful to an empire not to be in *our* hands! *You* plant doubt in the Emperor.

LORD SHALLOT

About?

LADYSHIP

Mundo and Eldora.

LORD SHALLOT

Yes, yes.

LADYSHIP

I will visit the Empress.

COURTIERS

EVERYTHING'S FINE
 WHAT'S DOWN IS UP
 AND TEA IS Poured

BENEATH THE CUP.

EVERYTHING'S FINE.
THE MOUNTAINS CRY,
MAKE LOVE AND KISSES
ON THE SLY.

Scene 2

(A corner of the Courtyard. MUNDO and ESPI enter from opposite sides.)

MUNDO

Ah, my dear Espi, I have just seen Professor Kunkel.

ESPI

Oh, Professor Kunkel, he's so sweet.

MUNDO

He is very proud of his new attraction to the opposite sex.

ESPI

Attraction to the opposite sex?

MUNDO

Surrounded by half a dozen...

ESPI

Half a dozen?! How dare he!

(She slaps MUNDO's face.)

MUNDO

...elephants. I'm only . . .

ESPI

You'll do.

(She slaps him again and races off angrily.)

MUNDO

I play my tricks, I play the fool. But cut out this tongue that speaks what others won't, and behold a tongue like any other tongue. Cut out these eyes that see what others don't, and behold the eyes like any other eyes.

SCRAPE OFF THIS FOOL'S MASK,
AND YOU WILL NOTE
A COMMON FIRE
OF RAW DESIRE!

(ELDORA enters. MUNDO continues, unaware of her.)

MUNDO

HOW SHALL I BE?
I HAVE A CHANCE
TO DREAM THE DREAM
OF A FOOL, OF A MAN.
WHY NOT JUST FONDLE AND LAY WITH HER?

(Suddenly he sees her.)

ELDORA

WHY NOT JUST DALLY AND PLAY WITH HER?

MUNDO

AND FORGET . . .

ELDORA

NO REGRET . . .

MUNDO

WHY BE SO SERIOUS?

ELDORA

WHY BE DELIRIOUS?

MUNDO

MOONSTRUCK AND AMOROUS?

ELDORA

HEAD-OVER-HEELS RAPTUROUS?

MUNDO

NO WHY,
NO WHEREFORE.

ELDORA

NO RHYME,
NO THEREFORE.

MUNDO

OUT OF NOTHING, I SAY 'I LOVE YOU.'
STANDING NOWHERE, I PRAY YOU LOVE

ELDORA

CAN THIS BE TRUE?
CAN LOVE UNDO?

ME, TOO.
 STEP THROUGH THE DARK, THERE
 YOU ARE,
 ALMOST NEAR, ALMOST FAR,
 AND WE SWIRL AROUND EACH OTHER
 LIKE THE STARS.

WORLDS . . .
 . . .COME APART.
 MUST HARDEN MY HEART!

(strongly)
 HERE I STAND,
 FALLING FOR YOU
 SUDDENLY NOW.
 YES, I LOVE YOU!

No, this can't be!

ELDORA

Eldora!

MUNDO

No, no, you can't!

ELDORA

Yes, I love you!

MUNDO

Stop! It must not be! I am an Emperor's daughter. I cannot be with a fool. I must do what an empress would do!

ELDORA

Then you will be a very ordinary empress. Every woman in the empire knows what an empress would do. But if you do what an empress would *not* do, *that* would be great.

MUNDO

I will judge that.

ELDORA

Most certainly. Judge – am I right? – I am a fool, but flesh like any man! Judge, there is no sin when two hearts understand!

MUNDO

(Slowly MUNDO advances, intending to kiss her. ELDORA almost lets him. The music swells. ELDORA breaks away.)

ELDORA
NO! I CANNOT! NO! I AM CAUGHT!

(She runs off.)

MUNDO
How do men and women ever get together?

Scene 3

(Another part of the palace.)

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

(slowly)

A: I AM A MAN,
B: SHE IS A WOMAN.
ERGO: WE FIT.

C: I AM INTELLIGENT,
D: SHE IS NOT SO SMART.
ERGO: WE COMPLEMENT.

E: I AM METHODICAL,
F: SHE IS SCATTER-BRAINED,
ERGO: SHE WILL AMUSE ME.

G: SHE LOVES SWEETS AND CAKES,
H: I LOATHE THEM.
ERGO: I WILL REFORM HER.

(ESPI enters.)

ESPI

Professor Kunkel, there you are. What were you doing with all those women?

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

(slowly)

Espi! What women?

ESPI

Deny it?! You would even lie to me?!

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Espi, be logical.

ESPI

I don't need to be anything at all. Just tell me, what were you doing with those women?

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Espi. Nothing happened. Nothing. Never.

ESPI

There's 'nothing' and then there's 'nothing,' And I want to know which 'nothing' never happened.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

(hopeless)

Nothing I can say.

ESPI

Nothing I can do. Ba-a-a-a-w-w-w-w!!!!

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

ERGO: I AM DEFEATED.

Scene 4

(The Emperor on his throne in court. MACH, POTTS, and PITTS are presenting their handiwork.)

EMPEROR
(stiffly)

Beautiful.

MACH, POTTS & PITTS

Yes, we think it is so.

EMPEROR

Beautiful . . . and imperial.

MACH, POTTS & PITTS

We are glad you agree.

EMPEROR

The Empress will love it.

PITTS

Thank you so much for saying so.

EMPEROR

Take it away.

MACH, POTTS & PITTS

Yes, of course.

MACH

How pleased I am you like it! We have just a bit more to finish.

EMPEROR

Enough! Go!

MACH

Always at your service.

POTTS and PITTS

At your service.

(They exit. The EMPEROR slumps into his throne. LORD SHALLOT enters.)

LORD SHALLOT

Your imperial noblesity. It is I, your servant, and ever do I strive to be of service.

EMPEROR

Service?! It is *I* who serve you all.

LORD SHALLOT

Oh, yes, remarkably well. And you would serve me so well to let me serve you.

EMPEROR

And how may you serve me?

LORD SHALLOT

With information.

EMPEROR

About what?

LORD SHALLOT

Information about your fool.

EMPEROR

Mundo? What about Mundo?

LORD SHALLOT

And information about your daughter.

EMPEROR

Eldora? What about Eldora?

LORD SHALLOT

Information about Mundo and Eldora.

EMPEROR

Mundo and Eldora?

LORD SHALLOT

Yes.

EMPEROR

Mundo and Eldora!?

LORD SHALLOT

Oh, you already know!?

EMPEROR

I know nothing. What about Mundo and Eldora?

LORD SHALLOT

Mundo and Eldora. That's all.

EMPEROR

That's all?

LORD SHALLOT

I am your humble servant.

(LORD SHALLOT starts to exit.)

EMPEROR

Wait, Lord Shallot. Send me Mundo and Eldora.

LORD SHALLOT

Of course.

(LORD SHALLOT exits.)

EMPEROR

I am in an awful spot.

(MUNDO enters.)

MUNDO

The offense of the day is truth denied. Is it a monkey's eye or a horse's ass? Say so!

EMPEROR

No jesting, Mundo.

MUNDO

But that is my dishonorable profession, to see the truth and say so.

EMPEROR

I am beset. What have you with Eldora?

MUNDO

I have a magnificent nothing.

EMPEROR

Your words are slippery, Mundo.

MUNDO

I speak the truth, as you always know me to.

EMPEROR

Why does Lord Shallot whisper "Mundo and Eldora" to me?

MUNDO

For his own purposes, I'm sure.

EMPEROR

No fool should touch my daughter-to-be-Empress.

MUNDO

Only a fool would do so.

EMPEROR

Have you been a fool, Mundo?

MUNDO

Now I am a man.

EMPEROR

You dissemble.

MUNDO

I speak the truth. I have been a fool with women. I am no fool with your daughter.

EMPEROR

Mundo, my friend. Something is tearing us apart. Who can I trust? Not Lord Shallot. Not his wife. And now, not you? Mundo, do you see that damned fashion?

MUNDO

I am a fool.

EMPEROR

Do you see it?

MUNDO

I see nothing there but empty air.

EMPEROR

But you are a fool. Your fool's eyes now are no more use to me.

MUNDO

Trust your own eyes, my friend.

EMPEROR

I have depended too much on other people's eyes. My own are worthless.

MUNDO

Only out of practice, sir.

EMPEROR

And what I see doesn't matter, Mundo. My duty is to keep the way things are. That is what an emperor must do.

(ELDORA enters.)

EMPEROR

Eldora, daughter, Empress-to-be. The new fashion of these tailors, tell me, what do you see?

ELDORA

Father, my Emperor. Why must everything be black or white?

EMPEROR

You don't answer me. And Mundo, this fool, what is he to you?

ELDORA

Are we all puppets in a show, pulling our own strings?

EMPEROR

Answer me directly!

(ELDORA starts to exit.)

ELDORA

No! No! I cannot!

(ELDORA and MUNDO exit.)

EMPEROR

They go together. No answer from her, no answer from him. Nothing is truthful. Where do I go?

Scene 5

(THE MASK DANCE A great hall in the imperial palace. Music in a slow, tribal rhythm. COURTIERS and PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS enter holding large masks on sticks to the floor. The masks exaggerate their original faces, which were already garishly unique to start with. In slow, minuet-like patterns, they greet each other with exaggerated politeness and ritualism, stiffly mask to mask. The EMPEROR slowly walks through them, greeted ceremoniously. He would like to “connect” to each one, but the impenetrable masks push him away. He tries to peer behind one or two masks, but the masks move like shields. Failing contact, he is alone and apart from the group, and he slumps to the ground by himself down at the edge of the stage. PITTS enters and walks innocently through the COURTIERS. They avoid him as an “untouchable” and arrange themselves leaving empty, avoided spaces where PITTS had been encountered. As PITTS comes to the EMPEROR, the COURTIERS disappear.)

PITTS

Do you know the thumb-kiss?

EMPEROR

Thumb-kiss?

PITTS

We went through a tiny village once where friends kissed each other with a thumb-kiss.

(PITTS demonstrates the thumb-kiss, extending a “thumb’s up” forward and touching it gently to the EMPEROR’s lips. The EMPEROR awkwardly starts the reciprocal response, but stops.)

EMPEROR

Why should they do that?

PITTS

Why shouldn’t they?

EMPEROR

It’s ridiculous. A thumb-kiss, as you say. It doesn’t mean anything.

PITTS

No. But it could, if you want it to. It could be another way of saying . . .

EMPEROR

'Hello.' That's all.

PITTS

Not just 'hello' but 'hello' and 'I like you.'

EMPEROR

Between friends. Your thumb-kiss might rarely be used in this empire. The one or two friends I thought I had . . . What is your name, little man?

PITTS

Pitts.

EMPEROR

Pitts, what do I look like?

PITTS

Like an emperor, from your clothes.

EMPEROR

Inside, I am quivering, quaking. It's this mask I wear all the time. Sometime very long ago, this mask got hooked to my face, stuck to my flesh, tied to my soul. Put on some other mask? It would not fit. No, I chose long ago. No turning back. I must accept this path.

PITTS

Like your own ugly child.

(PITTS bows and thumb-kisses the EMPEROR. The EMPEROR thumb-kisses him back.)

Scene 6

(A corner of the palace. A group of female COURTIERS and ATTENDANTS. ESPI enters and runs to them.)

ESPI

Oo-oo-oo! He cheated on me. Professor Kunkel! He cheated on me.

MUTSCHKA

So quickly?

COURTIERS

Oh-h.

ESPI

And I loved him so.

MUTSCHKA

Well, you could go back to Mundo.

ESPI

It's Professor Kunkel I love.

(PROFESSOR KUNKEL enters with LORD SHALLOT and male COURTIERS. Espi sees PROFESSOR KUNKEL.)

ESPI

(continues)

You miserable cheat!

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

I tried.

LORD SHALLOT

If you ask my opinion . . .

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

She has no logic.

LORD SHALLOT

The Plan...

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

The Plan?

LORD SHALLOT

When in doubt, one must always turn to the Plan.

COURTIERS

STEP IN LINE, GET BEHIND THE PLAN, PLAN, PLAN.

(PROFESSOR KUNKEL finally sees ESPI.)

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

(accusingly)

There she is.

ESPI

(accusingly)

There he is.

(They turn away from each other.)

LORD SHALLOT

We must go to the Plan.

(All exit.)

Scene 7

(The Empress's bedchamber. FEMALE COURTIERs surround the EMPRESS, who is in her bed as usual. LADYSHIP enters and the COURTIERs exit.)

LADYSHIP

Good day, my Empress. You are always the peak of fashion.

EMPRESS

Don't be silly, my dear Ladyship. I've been in dreary bedclothes for months.

LADYSHIP

There is no occasion to draw you into public?

EMPRESS

It's not the occasion that lacks, it's the man.

LADYSHIP

I have always overlooked the inadequacies of my mate.

EMPRESS

In your case that's a necessity. In mine, I have no doubt I will improve him.

LADYSHIP

I must tell you something, my Empress. The Emperor is to be shown some extraordinary new fashion.

EMPRESS

That fools can't see. I know that.

LADYSHIP

They are beautiful, these clothes. They are ravishing beyond . . .

EMPRESS

Is that what you wanted to tell me?

LADYSHIP

It is not wise, in my judgment, to absent yourself from court. It leaves you ignorant of matters.

EMPRESS

I have eyes and ears in every corner of the court, and I know everything, my dear Ladyship, including your affair with Mundo.

LADYSHIP

Don't be absurd! I have no affair with Mundo!

EMPRESS

I have no doubt you have, and if you protest, I will be convinced only more.

LADYSHIP

Your concerns would be better directed towards the affair of Mundo and Eldora.

EMPRESS

Mundo and Eldora? Ha! Not a chance. Eldora has her head in the clouds, and Mundo wants it quick. Which is why I know that he and you . . .

LADYSHIP

I did not come here lightly. There is Mundo and Eldora and this master fashioner who is making an extraordinary outfit for his Excellency.

EMPRESS

I have no doubt the new fashion will be *gorgeous!*

LADYSHIP

But this fashion is not good for the empire. It marks too many as fools.

EMPRESS

You vastly underestimate how well everyone hides it.

LADYSHIP

Too much fakery could undermine our authority.

EMPRESS

Hardly. Fakery is what makes our empire. I have no doubt we will succeed famously. I'm getting rather excited myself about the new fashion.

(to the MALE COURTIER as attendant)

Tasho, go freshen up my dressing room.

(LADYSHIP exits disturbed. The COURTIER exits in the opposite direction.)

EMPRESS

Ladyship is desperate. Ta! Ta!

(ELDORA enters.)

ELDORA

Oh, mother. I have to tell you something very important. The fashions, the new imperial fashions. There's nothing there! I know it!

EMPRESS

There is more than fashion, my dear.

ELDORA

I don't know what to do.

EMPRESS

You simply have to decide, as everyone does. You mustn't blind yourself to the truth before your eyes, which is . . .

(The EMPRESS does not disclose her own view.)

ELDORA

There's nothing there.

EMPRESS

But isn't there something more?

ELDORA

I have foolishly let myself . . . It's impossible, it's not proper, I should not tell you.

EMPRESS

Proper? Only when she can't find love does a woman settle for propriety.

ELDORA

Mother, I've been overcome with feelings for . . .

EMPRESS

For Mundo. I know.

ELDORA

You know?

EMPRESS

Everything.

ELDORA

(severely)

But he's a fool.

(softening)

Well, he's more sensitive than anyone would think.

(severe again)

He's a fool.

EMPRESS

(softly)

Sometimes we are all fools.

ELDORA

I'M BEFOOLED BY LOVE,
 BECHARMED BY HIS GLANCES,
 BEWITCHED
 BY THE ITCH
 TO TAKE A FEW CHANCES
 I'M AFRAID I'M A FOOL IN LOVE.

I'M BEGUILED BY LOVE,
 I'M LOSING MY SENSES.
 TAKE A CHANCE
 AND I'LL DANCE
 OVER TREETOPS AND FENCES.
 I'M AFRAID I'M A FOOL IN LOVE.

I'M NUTTY AND DAFT,
 LOST MY WITS ON A RAFT.
 I AM TOUCHED,
 I AM CRACKED.
 THIS IS NO WAY TO ACT.

I'M BEDAZZLED BY LOVE.
 BESTRUCK BY HIS ANTICS.
 BEDASHED
 WITH A RASH
 OF HOPELESS ROMANTICS.
 I'M AFRAID I'M A FOOL IN LOVE.

I'M FLUSTERED AND DIZZY,
 ALL AFLUTTER AND FIZZY.
 I AM CAUGHT

IN THE THOUGHT
THAT IT REALLY IS HE.

I'M BEFOOLED BY LOVE,
BESIEGED BY THAT FEELING.
BESET
BY THE THREAT
THAT I'M HEAD-OVER-HEELING.
I'M AFRAID I'M A FOOL IN LOVE.

BEFUDDLED AND SAPPY,
BEWILDERED AND...HAPPY.
NO DOUBT ABOUT IT, I'M A FOOL IN LOVE.

EMPRESS

And I'm being serious with you. Life is a living hell if you don't follow your heart.

ELDORA

But it may not be right. Maybe I'm just . . . being foolish. And father . . .

EMPRESS

Don't worry about him. I'll take care of the old crust. You take care of yourself, dear. Run do what you must.

(ELDORA exits.)

EMPRESS

(triumphantly)

She's on her way. Ta! Ta!

Scene 10

(Center stage: A tall, narrow, abbreviated office with a customer window over which is a large sign saying "The Plan." Behind the customer window is a huge book on a pedestal. One or Three BUREAUCRAT(S) hunch over it. The BUREAUCRAT(S) parts in CAPITALS are to be chanted, not sung.)

PROFESSOR KUNKEL and ESPI enter from opposite sides with COURTIERS.

ESPI

He cheated on me.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

She said I lied.

LORD SHALLOT

Now, my dears, whenever our own little minds don't have an answer, just hand it all over to the Plan.

COURTIERS

STEP IN LINE, GET BEHIND THE PLAN, PLAN, PLAN!

BUREAUCRAT(S)

(chant-like)

What is the problem, the dilemma, the quandary?

LORD SHALLOT

A great catastrophe befell these two lovebirds.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Nothing ever happened.

ESPI

He cheated on me.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

See-e-e-e!

BUREAUCRAT(S)

It's bad all right.

LADYSHIP

Expunge upon the document.

BUREAUCRAT(S)
(paging through the book)

Let's see. Wait...wait...wait...Ah-h-h!

BUREAUCRAT(S)
BOOK THREE, PART C, SECTION TWENTY-TWO,
WHEREFORE, WHEREAS, WHEREBY,
THE PARTIES ARE ENTITLED TO AN ALLOTMENT.

LADYSHIP

Yes, brilliant. An allotment. Secure the allotment. Wait, who does the allotment?

BUREAUCRAT(S)
(in unison, paging through the book)

Wait...wait...wait...Ah-h-h!!

PARAGRAPH D, THE PARTY OF THE FIRST PART,
BEING, THAT IS, THE FEMALE PART

ESPI

The female!? I won't do any allotment, I won't.

FEMALE COURTIER

IT'S HIM.

MALE COURTIER

IT'S HER.

FEMALE COURTIER

IT'S HIM.

MALE COURTIER

IT'S HER.

FEMALE COURTIER
(with finality)

IT'S HIM, HIM, HIM

LADYSHIP

Who does the allotment, Lord Shallot?

BUREAUCRAT(S)

Wait...wait...wait...Ah-h-h!

(ascending pitch)

PARAGRAPH D, SUB-PARAGRAPH

LORD SHALLOT

(interrupting)

Who does the allotment?!

BUREAUCRAT(S)

(discombobulated)

Oh! Oh!...Ah-h-h!!

(ascending pitch)

SUB-SUB-SUB PARAGRAPH LITTLE F IN PARENTHESES.
THE PARTY OF THE SECOND PART, TO WIT, THE MALE PART,
SHALL DELIVER AN ALLOTMENT OF PLEASURES AND PROMISES...

LADYSHIP

Yes, yes, that's the answer.

BUREAUCRAT(S)

PROVIDED...

LADYSHIP & LORD SHALLOT

Provided?

BUREAUCRAT(S)

PROVIDED THAT THE FEMALE PART
RENDERS FORGIVE-AND FORGOTMENT.

(Silence. Blank amazement by all.)

MALE COURTIERS

IT'S HER.

FEMALE COURTIERS

IT'S HIM.

MALE COURTIERS

IT'S HER.

FEMALE COURTIERS

IT'S HIM.

MALE COURTIER(S)

IT'S HER, HER, HER.

BUREAUCRAT(S)

AND FURTHERMORE, THERE MUST BE PROPERTY.

You do the promises *We* take the property.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

There's no property. Nothing.

ESPI

(indignant)

I'm nothing!?

BUREAUCRAT(S)

Wait, wait, wait...Ah-h-h!

(BUREAUCRAT(S) flip the book to the first page. Very solemn.)

PAGE ONE, PAGE ONE.

IN ALL MATTERS BETWEEN TWO PERSONS,

IT IS THE

(emphasis on each syllable)

RE-LA-TION-SHIP.

ALL

(in a 4-part chorale)

THE RE-LA-TION-SHIP.

LORD SHALLOT

Yes, that's it. Never do we have to blame anything on you or me or anyone. It's the Relationship. Espi, Professor Kunkel, you need to look in between yourselves...

COURTIER(S)

In between.

LORD SHALLOT

To the....

COURTIER(S)

THE...

LORD SHALLOT

Re...

COURTIERS

RE...

LORD SHALLOT

La...

COURTIERS

LA...

LORD SHALLOT

Tion...

COURTIERS

TION...

LORD SHALLOT

Ship.

COURTIERS

SHIP, SHIP, SHIP.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

(suddenly exploding and taking command)

No-o-o-o-o-o-o! Go-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!

(All exit except ESPI and PROFESSOR KUNKEL.)

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

Espi,

SOMETIMES.

ESPI

SOMETIMES?

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

SOMETIMES A MAN.

ESPI

SOMETIMES A WOMAN.

PROFESSOR KUNKEL

SOMETIMES A MAN . . .

ESPI

AND WOMAN . . .

ESPI & PROFESSOR KUNKEL

FALL . . . ONCE MORE . . . IN LOVE!

(Swirling music to a danced finale, ending with a kiss.)

Scene 11

(ELDORA alone in the love grotto.)

ELDORA

I've searched. He's not in his usual places. When I didn't want him, he's there. And now, he's not.

(MUNDO comes into view, seated in the nearby darkness, thinking.)

ELDORA

What would you have with me, Mundo? I am a high woman, you a mere dependent in a great household.

MUNDO

We have the same eyes and ears, the same hands and feet scratching the earth.

ELDORA

My world is so different from yours.

MUNDO

The world comes to us like stale crumbs after a banquet. We must make our

ELDORA

Mundo, no more riddles.

TALK TO ME SOMEHOW.
 SAY TO ME ANYTHING.
 TOUCH ME AND TELL ME
 WHATEVER WILL CHANGE THE SKIES.
 TELL ME THERE'S HAPPINESS,
 PROMISES COME TRUE.
 TELL ME ANYTHING,
 BUT LET ME HEAR YOU.

MUNDO

(to himself)

MY TONGUE IS WEAK.
 MY TONGUE IS A TRAP.
 MY TONGUE WANTS TO SPEAK
 WHETHER IT LIVES OR DIES.

(to ELDORA)

I AM A CHEAT,

I AM A BEAST,
A SCOUNDREL OF DECEIT!
MY LIES NEVER CEASED!

IT WAS ALL A GAME, I FAKED MY LOVE!
I WAGED A WAR ON YOUR WEAK DEFENSE!
I LAUDED YOU, DEFRAUDED YOU,
I TORE AWAY YOUR INNOCENCE!

I WANTED TO SHOW I COULD REACH SO HIGH.
I WANTED TO PROVE I COULD HAVE MY WAY.
I WANTED A TEST WITH THE CREAM OF THE BEST.

I HAVE DONE IT. YOU LOVE ME!
MY CHARADE HAS WORKED!
I TOOK YOUR BRIGHT GOLDEN LIGHT
AND THREW IT IN THE DIRT!

(MUNDO slumps to his knees.)

ELDORA
(rejecting defeat)
THIS ONE MOMENT, STANDING FACE TO FACE,
THIS ONE MOMENT, WE CAN NOW EMBRACE.
TAKE MY HAND, TAKE MY HEART,
TAKE MY SOUL, NO MORE APART.

ELDORA
UNCHAINED,
UNTIED,
UNSHAMED

MUNDO
MY OWN TRICK TURNS ON ME,
THE JESTER OUTMANNED.
THE GAME TURNS REAL,
INSIDE! PINNED,
STUCK, STRIPPED,
PLUCKED NAKED IN THE
PROMISED LAND!

ELDORA & MUNDO
(soaring)
BENEATH THE STARS, YOU AND I
STAND ALONE AT THE SHORE.
SUN WILL RISE,

NO MORE LIES.
TOUCH ME, TOUCH ME NOW, EVERMORE.

ELDORA

Mundo, do you love me?

(silence)

Say it. Do you love me?

MUNDO

Eldora . . . I love you like the sun, moon, and stars all come together.

(Crescendo of music. He pulls her into a kiss.)

Scene 12

(The Empress's dressing room. For the first time, the EMPRESS is out of her bed and standing, being attended to by SERVANTS. An elaborate flourish. The EMPEROR enters. He signals the SERVANTS to leave.)

EMPEROR

The empress has been avoiding my court.

EMPRESS

My servants have ears everywhere. I am hardly out of touch.

EMPEROR

(boiling with anger)

But you are untouchable!

(calming himself with difficulty)

The court misses your presence.

EMPRESS

My presence? Like some decoration?

EMPEROR

Not just . . . I need to tell you something. I need . . .

EMPRESS

I'll come to court if you need me.

EMPEROR

No! Here! I need to tell you. Are your servants' ears listening now?

EMPRESS

Tasho! Go!

(The EMPEROR pulls a COURTIER from behind a column. The COURTIER exits.)

EMPEROR

Is anything going on between Eldora and Mundo?

EMPRESS

If so, there's nothing we can do. Does anything else bother you?

EMPEROR

I CANNOT SEE IT!
I CANNOT SEE A WHIT!

I CANNOT SEE THE STUFF!
IT'S ALL POWDER PUFF!

NOT EVEN FAINTLY QUIZ-ABLE!
I CANNOT BE A FOOL

IN MY EMPIRE!

I CANNOT BE A FOOL

IN MY EMPIRE!

EMPRESS
(starting softly)
IT'S GORGEOUS.
THE DAMN THINGS ARE INVISIBLE!
I HAVE NO DOUBT:
IT'S GORGEOUS.
IT'S FABULOUS.
A KNOCKOUT, GRANDIFEROUS
FABULOUS.
IT'S SPLENDOROUS.
A STANDOUT, KNOCK-ABOUT
SPLENDOROUS.
I HAVE NO DOUBT.

IT'S GORGEOUS.
I HAVE NO DOUBT: IT'S
GORGEOUS.
IT'S FABULOUS.
A KNOCKOUT, GRANDIFEROUS,
FABULOUS.
IT'S SPLENDOROUS.
A STANDOUT, KNOCK-ABOUT
SPLENDOROUS.
I HAVE NO DOUBT.

(By the end, the EMPEROR is reduced to a whimper and the EMPRESS is full voice.)

EMPRESS
You are foolish, my dear. It's very simple. What you must do is fake it impeccably. Everybody does it. Fake it until you convince yourself that your fakery is true. I know when I see your new adornments, they will be ravishing. You are no fool, my Emperor. In you our empire is stunning as hell.

(He exits very perplexed.)

EMPRESS
Ta! Ta!

Scene 13

(The Weaving Room. POTTS and PITTS sit playing a strange game with very large, pictographic cards. MACH nearby, reading as usual.)

PITTS
(playing a card)

Two knights!

POTTS
(playing a card)

One bride!

PITTS
(playing a card)

The sequester!

BOTH
(playing a card, with alarm)

The scarecrow! Oh-h-h!

PITTS
Play your card.

(Another card.)

BOTH
The Blotted Scepter! Oh, no, the Blotted Scepter!

POTTS
Mach! What do we do? Help!

MACH
If you believe in cards or in gods, it's all over.

PITTS
Potts! It's all over! We're done for!

(LADYSHIP appears in the shadows and creeps slowly closer throughout the following, unseen by the trio.)

MACH

Be gentle, boys! You have simply fallen off the edge of lip service into deep belief!

POTTS

Lip service? The Blotted Scepter *hates* lip service. That the rules.

MACH

IT STARTS WITH LIP SERVICE.
 A TINY LIE,
 A MERE HALF-TRUTH.
 A MINOR STRETCH BETWEEN THE TOOTH.

IT STARTS WITH LIP SERVICE.
 A LITTLE FLIM.
 A LITTLE FLAM.
 THE FINEST PEARL NOT OYSTERED – BUT FROM CLAM!

AND THEN ONE DAY
 WE QUITE BELIEVE
 IN WHAT WE ONCE
 COULD SCARCE CONCEIVE:

FORKS ON THE LEFT,
 SPOONS ON THE RIGHT.
 KEEP YOUR CONVERSATIONS
 DULL AND TRITE.

THE TOP IS THE TOP
 WHERE WE ALL WANT TO BE,
 AND SCUM FAR BELOW,
 PARDON ME.

(POTTS and PITTS, cheering up, join in.)

ALL

IT STARTS WITH LIP SERVICE.
 A NICE NEW WORD
 YOU'VE OVERHEARD
 IS ALL IT TAKES
 TO JOIN THE HERD.

IT STARTS WITH LIP SERVICE.

MACH

APPEAL TO THEIR PRIDE
IN WORDS DIGNIFIED,
AND THEY GLADLY CAST
THEIR EYEBALLS ASIDE.

(POTTS and PITTS start to “weave” on the empty loom.)

ALL

AND THEN ONE DAY
WE QUITE BELIEVE
IN WHAT WE ONCE
COULD SCARCE CONCEIVE:

MACH

SOME DAZZLING CLOTHES
THAT NOBODY KNOWS
ARE NAKED SKIN
FROM HEAD TO TOES.

(LADYSHIP steps out.)

ALL

IT STARTS WITH LIP . . .

LADYSHIP

Bravo, Mr. Mach!

(MACH, POTTS and PITTS all freeze.)

LADYSHIP

Very well done, Sir Afashionado, I see your game.

MACH

(relaxing)

Madame Ladyship, I am very pleased you see it. Don't I make beautiful things?

LADYSHIP

I see your *game*, Mr. Mach.

MACH

(He shoos POTTS and PITTS off. They exit.)

Shall we play our game together, my dear?

(MACH forces her into a brief tango turn, which she halts abruptly.)

LADYSHIP

I play no game!

MACH

The empire?

LADYSHIP

Is truth and wisdom.

MACH

Oh, please, not those two in the same bag, my dear. Wisdom says truth is far too painful, so let's lie.

(MACH forces her into another tango turn.)

LADYSHIP

Your fancy fashions for the Emperor are nothing! You just admitted it.

MACH

And you think empire is solid?

LADYSHIP

Of course it is!

MACH

And your little Plan is real, too?

LADYSHIP

Of course! It's written down on paper.

MACH

An empire on paper, hmmm. And when you look at the paper, Ladyship, do you *see* the Plan?

LADYSHIP

Of course you do!

MACH

All I see are dark little marks called letters of an alphabet.

LADYSHIP

This is ridiculous! The Plan is in my mind.

MACH

And if I crack open your skull?

LADYSHIP

I won't be tricked.

MACH

My tongue is no trickier than yours, Ladyship. This Plan is mere words. Someone invented it.

(A long pause. No answer from LADYSHIP.)

MACH

Just as I invented these beautiful vestments. We are comrades in creation, my dear, making empires out of lies.

(He gives her another dancing twirl.)

LADYSHIP

This empire is no lie!

MACH

Oh, come, come. In some parts of the world, people *vote* to elect officials who tell everybody precisely what they must do – and they call it “freedom.” We are dealing, Ladyship, not with a few fakeries, but with cherished beliefs.

LADYSHIP

(she pulls herself away)

I refuse...

MACH

And what you and I don't want is to let anyone know it. Because if they know it's all lies, the whole empire falls apart, doesn't it? Partners, my dear?

(LADYSHIP has been defeated. MACH grabs her hand. She yields. He swings her for a few more turns as she limply follows him. LADYSHIP pulls away and exits. MACH goes to POTTS and PITTS's card game and flips over a card.)

MACH

There! One hundred years of good luck! The rules are never fixed!

Scene 14

(The Emperor's private throne room. Music. Darkness. Faintly visible, the EMPEROR naked, backside to the audience. As the EMPEROR sings, MACH, POTTS and PITTS come forward in turns and "dress" him.)

[See note on nudity in front matter.]

EMPEROR

Opinions, opinions everywhere,
And not a drop of truth.
Millions and millions of words in the air...

NO ROCK, NO HILL.
THERE'S NO PLACE TO STAND.
NO MOUNTAIN, NO TEMPLE,
NO FEET ON SOLID LAND.
ALL OUR CHERISHED IDOLS
HAVE PERISHED IN THE SAND.

WIND AND WHISPERS,
ECHOES EVERYWHERE.
ONLY VOICES OVER VOICES,
CONFUSING EVERY PRAYER.
ALL OUR WORDS MAKE PICTURES
THAT VANISH IN THE AIR.

SOMEWHERE IN HIDDEN CORNERS OF THE HEART.
SOMEWHERE A TINY VOICE MAY START.
LISTEN TO THE DISTANT CALL.
LISTEN TO THAT QUIET ALL.
TURN IT AROUND IN THE EYE OF YOUR SOUL,
HOLD IT AS TRUTH FROM AN ANCIENT SCROLL.
MAKE IT BE A LIGHT IN THE DARK.
MAKE IT BLAZE FROM ITS TINY SPARK.

(The EMPEROR turns full front.)

EMPEROR

WHITE, ALL WHITE
AS A CLOUD-SKY BRIGHT.
BLACK, ALL BLACK

AS A STARLESS NIGHT.
HOW CAN I SAY
WHAT IS WRONG OR RIGHT?

SOMEWHERE IN HIDDEN CORNERS OF THE HEART.
SOMEWHERE A TINY VOICE MAY START.
WHATEVER IT MAY BE,
WHATEVER IT DECREE.
HOLD IT UP TO THE EYE OF YOUR SOUL.
LET IT BE YOUR HIGH AND WHOLE.
HAVE IT BE THE THING YOU BELIEVE
A HOLY PLACE YOU WON'T EVER LEAVE.
AND SPEAK IT AS THOUGH A LIGHT INSIDE AWOKE.
SPEAK IT AS THOUGH ALL THE FORCE OF THE UNIVERSE . . . SPOKE!

EMPEROR

No! No! I cannot! I am the emperor. I must preserve the way things are!
(to someone not there)

Mundo, Mundo, my friend. Carry your torch, burn bright. I am charred midnight.

Scene 15

(The grand courtyard, dimly lit. MUNDO and ELDORA rush into a pool of light.)

MUNDO

Eldora, we are not sips of tea and pedigree.

ELDORA

Mundo, sh-h-h. You hide behind your words too often. [**OPTION:** Whatever happens, gentle or stormy, we shall be together. **END OPTION?**]

MUNDO

I love you.

ELDORA

And I you.

MUNDO

(From last phrase of TALK TO ME SOMEHOW.)

SUN WILL RISE.

ELDORA

NO MORE LIES.

MUNDO

TOUCH ME.

ELDORA

TOUCH ME.

BOTH

(grandly)

TOUCH ME NOW, EVERMORE.

(They kiss. The EMPEROR, naked as before, enters into a pool of light and sees MUNDO and ELDORA in embrace.)

EMPEROR

Oh, no. It's what I feared !!

(ELDORA sees him, quickly turns away, then starts to exit. MUNDO steps toward the EMPEROR, then turns back to ELDORA.)

EMPEROR

Go! Both of you! Leave me to my misery.

(MUNDO pulls ELDORA away with him and they exit. The EMPEROR slumps to one knee. Finale music. The EMPRESS enters dressed in a dazzling new outfit. She pulls the EMPEROR to his feet and admires his apparent attire.)

EMPRESS

Gorgeous! I had no doubt your new fashion would be gorgeous!

EMPEROR

(Looking into her eyes, struggling.)

The Plan... The Plan... lives on!

(The EMPEROR lifts his arm to escort the Empress. She places her arm on top of his. They parade out. COURTIERS enter from the sides and march majestically in procession after them, singing.)

COURTIERS

IT IS THE FABRIC, IT IS THE FABRIC,
IT IS THE FABRIC OF OUR LIVES!

(Mundo sticks his head out from behind the curtain/set piece, looks around a bit impishly, then pulls Eldora out, swings her around, and they sing stretched apart, holding hands:)

MUNDO AND ELDORA

HERE WE ARE
WONDERING WHO.
SUDDENLY THERE,
SUDDENLY YOU.

(They pull into a long kiss as the orchestra swells and...)

SLOW CURTAIN

(On his curtain-call, the EMPEROR enters dressed in an amazing fashion. The audience might think to themselves: "Did I not see it before? Am I a fool?")

