



An Emperor Among Us: The Eccentric Life and Benevolent Reign of Norton I, Emperor of the United States, as Told by Mark Twain

David St. John

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As cigar smoke hangs heavy in Mark Twain's sitting room, the members of the Monday Evening Club eagerly await his presentation, which they think will be the reading of his paper The Decay of the Art of Lying. Instead, Twain changes his mind and enthralls his audience with the true tale of one man's unconventional and fascinating journey through life. It is 1849 when a thirty-one-year-old Jewish South African immigrant sails into San Francisco Bay with forty thousand dollars in his pocket, coming to join the Gold Rush but eventually finding his fortune in real estate and commerce. Just a few short years after Joshua Norton finally realizes success, however, he fails beyond his darkest nightmares. Now delusional and nearly penniless, he proclaims himself the Emperor of the United States as he aimlessly wanders the streets of San Francisco. As Emperor Norton unintentionally becomes a vital part of the young city, the people afford him the respect of a true monarch as he issues proclamations that, under his fictional rule, bring a much-needed renaissance of civility to society. An Emperor Among Us tells the intriguing tale of a remarkable eccentric who wove a unique, gentle, and civilized thread into the rough and tumble fabric of early San Francisco.

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