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JOANNA RUSS

Poor Man,
Beggar Man

JOANNA Russ was born February 22, 1937, in the Bronx, New York. Her parents are schoolteachers, and science, literature and books were part of her early environment. She was a Westinghouse STS scholar in 1954. She received her B.A. degree in English from Cornell University in 1957 and her M.F.A. degree in playwriting from the Yale Drama School in 1960. She has acted in community theater (the Brooklyn Heights Players) and semiprofessional groups (the West Broadway Workshop).

She began writing at the age of thirteen, and her more than thirty published stories have appeared in science fiction publications such as The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction and the Orbit series, and also in such general publications as Manhattan Review, Epoch, Cimarron Review, The Little Magazine, South, Red Clay Reader and William and Mary Review.

At present she is assistant professor of English at Cornell University, teaching creative writing and even, on occasion, science fiction reading. She also reviews books for The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction and College English, contributes an occasional article to scholarly publications, belongs to Science Fiction Writers of America and the Modern Language Association, and reports that the only hobby she has time for is eating. She offers as her personal philosophy: "Women ought to run things, as we are friendlier than men, but alas, that is only because we are not allowed to run things."

Her two novels, Picnic on Paradise and A.-7d Chaos Died, were both Nebula Award finalists, as was her novelette "The Second Inquisition." In the 1971 Nebula Award balloting her novelette "Poor Man, Beggar Man" appeared on the final ballot.

A strange man, with a black cloak wrapped about him and a fold of it drawn over his head to hide his face, with the easy, gliding step of one who no longer cares if his feet go over rough or smooth, a man who smelled the smell of cooking at a turn in the narrow, rocky path, but to whom it meant nothing but a signal about what somebody else was doing, nothing more, this fellow-who was of a fairly ordinary and nonformidable appearance (though perhaps a bit mysterious)-slipped along the winding path outside Alexander's camp near the Indus River as if he knew where he was going. But he had no business being there, certainly not in the heat of the afternoon, though the vegetation around him cast the path into a certain tenebrous gloom. Light and shade spotted him. It was early in the Indian summer and petals and yellow dust dropped on the path and on the leaf mold to either side. He shook himself free. He reached an open place and continued, not looking round.

A quarter of a mile from the general's tent the path ascended, became rockier and more open; a guard lounged on a rock, absorbed in a bluebottle he held between thumb and forefinger. He did not see the stranger as he passed, nor did he return his salute. Muffled to the chin, the stranger passed servants clearing dishes from a board table set up in the open sunlight (for the general's tent commanded a view of the valley from an uninterrupted but therefore somewhat inhospitable height). He stepped inside the tent, bending under the canvas flap, his black cloak trailing. He found his man seated at a low table, calling for a map; he put one hand on his shoulder and then he said quite diffidently-

"Come, I'm still a civilized fellow."

"Apollo guard us!" choked the conqueror, turning pale. The stranger laughed and shook his head, still with the inoffensive and

7 friendly manner that had made him so popular, and that had ` occasioned such grief when Alexander had murdered him at the age of twenty-eight. '

"Your teacher, Aristotle, wouldn't like that," he said, shaking his y head humorously, and he sat

down on the edge of the table, closing his hand around a wine cup.

"Take your hands off that!" said Alexander automatically, and '- then he said, his color coming back, "Take it."

"Oh no, thank you," said his dead friend, smiling apologetically, "I couldn't, now. You have no idea what an inconvenience it is, to be dead-

"Take it!" said the conqueror.

"Ah, but-- and his murdered friend put the wine cup down.

"Well?" said Alexander. The dead man smiled, the mild smile of those who provoke and endure insult; he smiled, backing away. .: "I thought," he said, "that the novelty of my appearance-

"Doesn't last."

"Ah, but you owe me-

"What?"

The ghost wandered away a few steps, past the ray of brilliant f sunlight that entered the tent through the front flap, brushing the`

canvas wall with his shoulder and causing not a ripple. "I remember," he said, "I remember." Alexander watched him intently in the half light the light that made of the conqueror, of his hand some face and bronze figure, a statue. a

"Ah, what I remember!" broke out the ghost, with a genuine laugh. "I remember your amazing forcefulness when you got drunk." The man at the table watched him. "And I remember," added the ghost, padding round the room, "sitting with my feet up and my knees under my chin on some kind of marble shelf, like a schoolboy, and watching you rant-

`s

"I never rant."

"Rave, then. But you mustn't split hairs. My word, they tried to hold you back, didn't they? And my sister was your old nurse what a scandal! I hear you shut yourself up for three days." Here he paused in the darkest corner of the tent. "You know," he said, coming out into the light, dragging his cloak carelessly off one shoulder, "you know," he said, his whole face becoming clearer, his brow rising, his eyes opening as they do in strong feeling when the face is about to become a mask, "you know" (with an expression almost of amazement) "I do remember it quite well. I have analyzed it a hundred times. I had no idea what hit me. I thought the room had turned round and the floor had come up and thrown itself against me. And then something hit me in the chest and I bit my tongue, do you know, and I saw your face-

Here Alexander broke into a roar of laughter that might have been heard even outside the tent, but the tent flaps did not move; they hung quite still.

"My dear friend," he said affectionately, "really I am very sorry, but you know you might have come back four years ago. I feel for you, I do, but I'm afraid time has rather worn the whole affair away. You see" and he pointed to the litter of papers on his desk.

"Ah," said the ghost wisely, "but I don't age, you see."

"That's too bad," said the emperor, putting his elbows on the table and his chin in his hands, "and now-

"Now?" said the ghost expectantly.

"Now be a good fellow and go away."

"No."

"Then I shall," but when the emperor pushed back his chair and got up, he saw that the friend he had killed was somehow sitting in it and fingering his papers and that he did not like.

"My, look at this," said his friend.

"Let that be!"

"You're going to India; how nice."

"Will you-!" and he snatched the stranger's hand, but the shock of finding it flesh and blood was too much for him and he started back, shouting, "Guards!" No one came.

"Ah, nonsense," said his friend quietly. He sat at the table as a

secretary or accompanying philosopher sits and writes down a great man's words; his black cloak had slipped off his shoulders and lay half on the seat and half on the dirt floor, like a pool of ink. He picked up one document after another, carefully and respectfully. It had always been remarkable how this man could pick things up; his hand closed around a cup, a vase, a woman's hand, with such gentleness and such attentive curiosity that one might almost imagine inanimate objects feeling actual pleasure at his touch. Women had liked him and he had evaded them.

"You're going to India," he said. He was looking at marks on a map. Alexander strode matter-of-factly to the tent flap to get friends or attendants who would rid him of this annoyance, but the tent flap hung straight as stone. He could not move it.

"What do you want from me?" he said between his teeth.

"We-ell," drawled the stranger.

"What?" shouted the king, losing his patience.

"You're growing afraid."

"Not I!"

"Yes you are, and you'll do it."

"Do what!"

"Quietly." He studied the map. "Look at this," he said. "You're going to cross the Indus, you'll be another seven years away from home, your army will mutiny and by the time you establish another Alexandria-how many Alexandrias are there by this time? -at the eastern edge of the world, your government in the west will have collapsed and you'll have to begin all over again. Good Lord, what an agenda!"

"Stop playing with me," said the king, and he sat, with considerable dignity, on a low bench near the opening of the tent.

"Why not? You used to play with me," said the ghost reasonably. "I used to."

"Precisely. You used to."

"Death hasn't steadied your character," said Alexander.

"Or sweetened yours!"

"Those who want to get kicked will get kicked," said the king.

"Yes, precisely," said his friend, blinking. "Well, what I want is this. I want you to turn back, go spend the next winter in Heliopolis, renamed from Babylon (what a change!), and withdraw your borders to the edge of Persia. You're a fool. You can't keep what you've got. As it is, the empire will fall apart three days after your death. You think you can put up a few carved pillars, appoint a satrap and a place is yours. Nonsense."

"And-"said Alexander.

"And," repeated the ghost, looking a little bewildered, "and well-there you are." Alexander rose to his feet. "I'm not done-" But a sudden breeze blasted the tent flap into the air as if someone's violent enthusiasm had flung it skyward. Grinning cheerfully, though perhaps with a certain awkwardness, Alexander walked to his friend and embraced him.

"Would you believe me," he said, "if I told you that I had repented? Sincerely repented? Why, man, I saw no one for three days; they thought I would abandon them in the middle of the desert. So much grief! But you should have known enough to keep away from me." He patted, without shrinking, his friend's unnaturally solid back. "And the story about your sister was true," he said, "though embroidered a little, I'll admit. I was truly fond of her and hated to cause her pain. And you" His voice thickened. "Well, you know-"

"Ah," said the ghost, helplessly blinking.

"You know," said Alexander tenderly. "You know." And then, without another word, only looking back with smiling and compassionate regret, he walked out of the tent.

Left alone, the stranger gazed thoughtfully after him for the space of a minute. Then, with extraordinary rapidity, he whipped his cloak from the chair near the low table, wrapped it into a small package, and flung it into the air. Watching it as it hung suspended between the roof and the floor, he laughed to himself, a noiseless fit that doubled him up. As soon as he took his gaze off the cloak, it fell like any other object, gracelessly unfolding itself in a scattered bundle like a wounded goose. He picked it up and put it on.

Nom for the other one, he thought, and he sat down on the bench near the canvas wall, quite composed. His name was Cleitus. He had been known in life as Cleitus the Black.

In Persia, in order to secure his political position, Alexander had married (and caused two hundred of his nobles to do likewise, although their sentiments on the matter had not been ascertained at the time) a Persian lady of aristocratic birth. Roxane, as his wife was called, had spent most of her childhood in a courtyard with a mosaic marble floor, either learning to read and write (which she despised) or chasing a striped ball with several other girls who kissed her hand in the morning and in the evening and said "my lady." When she was seventeen she was surprisingly and suddenly married to a man famous, handsome, young and formidable Three weeks' absence from home made her desperately sick for her courtyard, which she had always considered a prison before, and in which she had longed to stand on a chair piled on another chair piled on a table so that she could see out of it and view the great world.

She came into the tent five minutes after Alexander had left it and two minutes after the stranger had seated himself on a bench.

"Eh!" she said, startled. He was down on his knees, bowing, before she could take fright and run. Then he kissed her hand, which comforted her because that was so familiar.

"Who are you?" said she, sensibly. He only smiled at her, as vaguely and disarmingly as a man who has never been anything else but a woman's bumbling pet, and he kissed her hand again "I, madam," he said, "am called Theophrastus."

"What a foolish name!" said Roxane, giggling, for she had never learned to lie or be polite either.

"My lady," he said, suddenly affecting to look alarmed, "should you be here alone with me? That is-I mean-I believe-" Roxane tossed her head.

"Nobody follows me around," she said, "here. Nobody would dare hurt me," she added, "I suppose." "Yes," she said. "Are they-are they-" (she whispered this)"bloodsuckers?"

"Uh-no," said the ghost, his wits scattered.

"Oh, then it's all right," she said, relieved. "You can keep away the other kinds, but that kind-"

Suddenly she looked at him keenly. "You don't really know, do you?" she said.

"Of course I do," he said. She frowned. "No-you-don't," she said with emphasis. Her face darkened. "You're Greek!"

He admitted it.

"Ha!" she said. "You probably don't believe in them at all."

He protested that he did.

"No you don't," she said. "I can tell. You'll tell my husband it's a lot of nonsense. I know."

"Madam!" he protested. "On my honor--"

"Greek honor!" she cried. "You'll tell my husband it's some Asiatic foolishness." She darted to him, grabbing his shoulders and furiously shaking him. "Yes you will!" she shouted. "You'll tell him it's nonsense and then he'll go out there and then--" and she turned away and screwed up her face. She began to cry.

"Now, now, now," he said.

"He'll get killed!" wailed little Roxane. "He will! He will!"

"No, no, no," said the stranger, stroking her hair. She leaned against him, sobbing a little. Then she pulled away.

"I'm rather homesick," she said sharply, explaining her conduct.

"Of course, of course," said the ghost in the tone women used to love so when he was alive. "It's only natural, of course."

"You shouldn't pat my head," said Roxane, sniffing.

"Yes, of course," he said smoothly, "of course.--But it calms you, doesn't it? and it does so distress me to see you upset."

"It makes my eyes red," said Roxane, blowing her nose in her long, Persian sleeve.

"It makes you unhappy," said he, "and I don't like to see people unhappy, you know, though I have so few feelings myself." He smiled. "I had a wife like you once; she was much cleverer than I and she hated the court: a real intellectual."

"Nobody with any heart would," said he. She colored.

"Madam," he said quickly, "I must find the emperor."

"I don't know where he is," said she, sitting plump on the bench. She looked interested and expectant. The ghost began to walk up and down like a man tormented in his mind by the urgency of something. He said "Ah, but madam!" and then he shook his head to himself a few times and said, "Madam--"

"Why, what's the matter?" cried Roxane, who was entirely ignorant and hence unafraid. The ghost came and sat down beside her with his black cloak (looking rather foolish) dragging behind him.

"You know, madam," he said earnestly, "that your husband, his Imperial Majesty, pai dios--"

"Yes, yes," said Roxane impatiently, clasping her hands.

"Your husband," said the ghost, looking round as if afraid they might be overheard, "has no doubt told you, madam, that he intends to cross the river in a few days' time and for this he will need native scouts, guides, madam, to acquaint him with the towns and villages that may lie beyond." Roxane nodded, perfectly attentive. "Well now," continued the ghost, "and, madam, I tell you--I tell you, I am nearly out of my senses--these guides whom your husband has engaged now refuse to go anywhere. They have scattered to the four winds, madam." He looked at her apologetically, as if

what he was about to say was too foolish to be believed and in any case utterly beyond her notice, and then he said, "They are afraid, madam, of the ghosts."

"Ghosts!" shouted Roxane, sitting bolt upright.

"Oh yes, but it's nothing, some native foolishness, people walking about with their feet on backward-

Roxane sprang to her feet and began walking nervously around the tent.

"If there are ghosts out there," she said, "I won't let him go."

"But his Imperial Majesty-"said the ghost, coughing faintly.

"Never you mind about that," she said. "I know what's what and I know-"She turned to him suspiciously. "What kind of ghosts?"

"Kind?" said the ghost, puzzled.

' "I'm stupid," said Roxane spitefully. "I believe in ghosts."

"Ah, but," said the man, as if he had made an astonishing discovery, "so do I!"

"Really?" said she.

"Ali yes.-I've seen too many not to believe in them. But the kind I believe in are not those Indians with their feet put on backward or your Persian demons and afreets that suck blood but a kindwell, a kind-

"A Greek kind?" asked Roxane, fascinated.

"No, I think a universal kind," he said with a slight, guilty laugh, stroking her hair. "The kind, you see- You see, when a poor wretch dies, some unfortunate idiot, many times he dies with an unfulfilled passion, something that tormented him all his life but something he never mastered or settled with. And this poor fool, he finds after his death that he's not one of the blessed dead that lie in the ground or end up in the fire and are gone, that's it, the lucky ones. Most of these men-and women, too, you know-most of them are nothing much, no force of character, you might say, so they simply blow about with the wind like old rags, drifting from place to place."

"Ooooh-yes-yes-" whispered Roxane.

"Now for most of us," he went on, cupping her face in his hands, "that's it, you see, but for a few-" He smiled enchantingly. "A few have too much feeling to stand for that; they want too much, and these are the dead you hear about in songs and stories, who come back to pay off debts or wreak vengeance, you know, or take care of their children. And some-ah, some! they have a driving passion, a force that won't let them rest. They have hard bodies like you and me. You can see them, too. And you can find them-why, anywhere! In the marketplace at high noon, in temples, theaters-

"They don't cast shadows!" Roxane broke in eagerly.

"Ah, but they do," he said, "indeed they do and sometimes" (with the same slight, guilty laugh, picking up his cloak and cradling it in his arms) "sometimes they even carry their shadows

around with them. They do all sorts of odd things. But they are poor folk, after all, you know."

"Why?" she whispered.

"Why?" he said lightly. "Why, because they only live while their passion is unsatisfied, you see. And as soon as they get what they come back for, they die for good. But they must come back, you know, they can't help themselves. They want it so much. You know yourself" (here she shuddered) "what it feels like to go about wanting something desperately, don't you?"

"Oh, I do!" sadly.

"Well, there you are." He stopped, looked tenderly at her, and then, as if it were the natural sequence of his discourse, kissed her, pulling her up to him by the shoulders.

"Ah, that's wrong!" cried she, bursting into tears because she had a husband but nobody, really, and he-smiling-because she reminded him (perhaps) of three or four memories picked out of his memories of women or perhaps all of them, because he had loved and pitied everything living when he himself was alive.

"Little one wants to go home, doesn't she?" he whispered, holding her against him. "Little one's lonely? Eh?" kissing her hair.

"Yes, yes," she sobbed, pushing him away. As if she were coming out of an enchantment, she looked at him doubtfully, ready to run away. '

"Madam," he said briskly, "if you would permit me-I mean to utter no treason against his Imperial Majesty, but a man of affairs, a man preoccupied with questions of state-a busy man, in short - why, such a man may neglect those nearest and dearest to him without the least design. He may not even realize that he is so doing, his mind being preoccupied as it is."

"Ah?" said Roxane, bewildered but sure there was something s good coming.

"In such cases," said the stranger, with a bland smile, "a short absence may be the best- ah, madam, forgive me offering you advice, but as, an old friend of the family, as it were, I feel-"

"Well-" said Roxane, trying to look like a grande dame.

"I feel," he continued, "that if your husband could be presented though not in reality, of course-with the prospect of losing you -if he could be made to imagine it, so to speak, he would at once realize the void, the gap, if I may say it, the absence in his life and he would-with a rush of feeling, of repentance, as it were, though far be it from me he would immediately regret that his business affairs had taken him so often and so far away from you."

"Well, ye-es," said Roxane.

"Many men," continued the stranger, with unction, "many men only realize their true feelings when those feelings are threatened, as it were. They

"Yes, but how?" Roxane broke in impatiently.

"How?" he said.

"How could I do it?"

He bowed (as best he could from a sitting position).

"How?" she repeated anxiously. "Come, tell me and do stop beating about it like that!"

"Madam has seized the thought at once," said the stranger admiringly.

"I always do," she said, "I'm very quick, but really, if you won't-"

"A minute, a minute." He cleared his throat. "Could you not-"; he said, and then: "There is an Indian village a few miles from this camp."

"Yes indeed," said Roxane promptly.

"You have never been to this village," he said, "but you can go there easily enough. In daylight, of course. The path is wide and unmistakable. If you don't mind staying with one of the farmers -a comparatively rich and luxurious household, of course-"

"Pooh! I don't care," she said.

"Well then, that's that! Stay for a night and he'll go wild without you. And I wouldn't be surprised if he gives up this Indian project, too. You'll get a good deal more attention from him from now on." He spread his hands. "That's it."

"Oh!" exclaimed Roxane, then "Oh!" again in delight. She

sprang to her feet. "I shall," she said, "this very night. Thank you." She started to run out of the tent, exclaiming "Yes-I must-- and then she turned around abruptly, saying, "Don't tell!" He took her hand and she cried "Really!" quite unaffectedly, snatching it away with a disgusted expression. He bowed low-a real bow this time -and the princess rushed out.

Left to himself, the dead man appropriated two items of his former master's property: a pen and a piece of paper. With the appropriately serious expression, he began to write a letter, a letter such as those written to husbands by adventurous and fleeting wives who are only too delighted to be running away with somebody interesting, but who write of the whole matter in terms of the deepest and direst compulsion. He was laughing soundlessly to himself by the time he had finished. Ah! that kiss had been sweet! but only for old times' sake, he thought. The static qualities of death oppressed him; he felt that mutability was mankind's only hope, even though it took the flowers and pleasures of one's time. Most terrible about the dead was the way in which they did not, could not, could never, could never even hope to change. Change, he thought, with unspeakable anguish. Outside the tent, as transparent to his sight as the sky, the sun was beginning to set. Little Roxane would be in her Indian village by evening, very curious, very delighted to see how the peasants lived and playing alternately the milkmaid and the great lady. He envied her. He envied Alexander, he envied every common soldier, he envied every dog, every rat, every louse on that inhospitable, rocky eminence. They could be hungry. They could be in pain. They might not walk through the worst of Alexander's battles no more in danger than the rain that rotted the bodies of the dead. Did men want little or get much? He could not tell. With the mild, ingenuous face and diffident manner that had made him so popular in Alexander's court, he wandered about the tent with the letter in his hand. Dinners were cooking all over the camp, three and a quarter miles of dinners. The thought of so much human busy-ness caused him considerable pain. He moved unsteadily and blindly against Alexander's campaign table, and then as the innocent maps and memoranda stared up at him in the gloom, his brow cleared. He dropped the letter on the center of the heap. Alexander would look for his lady in the woods, not in the village, misled by the fanciful instructions of a dead man, and in the woods- his blind face stirred with a painful rage. That damned fool! The sentry who would find it would run to him-not a moment too soon; that would be seen to -and Alexander, who knew perfectly well that his wife detested writing and could not spell, would-! The ghost bent over in a silent fit of laughter. Oh, the emperor would call himself an idiot but he would go! He despised his wife, no doubt, but he would go! He would know it was a trap, but he would go! What had the Athenian philosopher said? Ghosts hate crowds? Ah yes, that was it. In silence and in little company and most of all at night-The fool! Men were easiest to manipulate alone, in silence, and in the dark; that was all. Even that great fool, that king of fools, that king of kings . . . Laughing still to himself, the emperor's friend walked toward the tent wall, his cloak folded over his arm. He could have gone out any way he chose, but he chose to melt through the wall like a mist, astonishing anyone who saw him. No one saw him.

When Alexander received his wife's letter he was lying on a divan after supper, hearing one of his tame philosophers read him a discourse on the immortality of the soul. It did not please him. He had drunk moderately at table. He received the letter curtly, read it abruptly and gave vent to his feelings with a roar of rage.

"My lord!" exclaimed the tame philosopher.

"Damn her!" cried the king.

"The immortality of the soul-" ventured the philosopher, trembling.

"Damn the immortality of the soul!" shouted the conqueror, his neck swelling. He began to put on his armor. He dashed to the wall, seized his shield and rushed out, looking in again only to snatch up his sword from where it stood by the entrance to the tent. His face was scarlet and distorted, like a djinn's.

They searched the area north of the camp, taking no chances; they shouted to each other; someone found footprints but they were not the proper size. Soon, through his own impetuosity and his soldiers' fear of becoming separated, the emperor and one of his philosophers, a historian, one Aristophorus, found themselves ahead of the search party. They were in a little glade.

"Rest yourself, rest yourself," said Alexander, and the old man, tottering to a fallen log, said "Yes, my lord." He was carrying a torch. He took off his sandals and sat, his back hunched over, his beard pointing at his knees.

"Why don't they shout?" said Alexander suddenly. "I told them to shout."

"They will catch up with us, my lord," said the philosopher, rubbing his feet, "no doubt." Alexander repeated "No doubt" and wandered to the other side of the glade, into which a faint radiance had already begun to creep from the rising moon. He peered into the darkness.

"I can't see any lights," he said.

"According to Aristotle," said the philosopher contentedly, "the eye sends out rays which are reflected by objects in its path, thus producing sight. But when the rays are reflected strongly by any object-and those objects composed of the element of fire are most vigorous in the exercise of this property-then other objects appear but weak and faint in comparison."

"Put it out!" said the young man, and as the old one only stared at him uncomprehendingly, Alexander seized the torch himself and thrust it upside down against the earth. Immediately the darkness around them seemed to rush in as if the circle of light had been snapped like a hoop; Alexander leaned between two trees at the edge of the little clearing.

"I can't-" he said, and then, conscious that he had spoken more softly than before, "I can't see a thing."

"They will catch up with us, my lord," said the old man. With the moon rising and the firelight gone, something very peculiar was happening to the little glade; objects were melting and changing; they ran one into the other as if nothing in the universe were stable. The clearing looked like the bottom of the sea. Alexander walked rapidly back and forth for a few moments, then turned (as if the place were affecting his nerves) and stared at the old man.

"I'm afraid to talk out loud," he said, as if stating a fact, and then he said sharply "Who are you?"

"What, my lord?" said the old man, startled, but his imperial master did not answer, only shook his head as a man does who has found a mote in his eye. He walked about again and then stopped as if the indistinct light-and the masses of shade confused him; he said, "I hear no one."

"Why no, my lord," said the old man placidly, stroking his toes, "I daresay they have passed us by and we must wait until morning."

"Fool!" said Alexander. He stopped in the middle of the glade irresolutely. Then he said, "Get out of here, old man."

"My lord?" said the philosopher mildly.

"Get out of here!"

"But my lord-!"

"Get out! That's a command! You'll find the others soon enough."

"Will you-"began the philosopher, but Alexander (who had drawn his sword) waved him imperiously away.

"Get out!" he roared.

"But my dear lord-" (shocked,) and then the king urged him with such fury that the old man flew out of the clearing with his sandals still in his hands. He saw the lights of the soldiers' torches at once, as Alexander had said he would, and they spent the rest of the night looking for the emperor, but they did not find him.

Left alone, and doubly uncertain of himself, Alexander turned back into the glade, only to see his friend lounging against a tree in the moonlight at the opposite end. The moon had risen and it bathed the little glade in livid quicksilver; the king felt his nerves s

give way; he had an impulse either of love or of despair that made him want to bury his head in his friend's knees and beg . . .

"I like a light in which I can judge distances," he said grimly.

"There are no distances here," said the dead man. "Here things are very close together."

"My wife?" said the conqueror.

"Quite safe." They looked one another over for a few moments, the one erect and bristling like a dog, the other curved against his tree as he had curved against every surface, every command, every necessity in his short and easy life.

"Your fine world!" said Alexander contemptuously, indicating the clearing with a gesture that was almost-but not quite-a snap of the fingers.

"No," said the dead man, smiling urbanely, "yours. The real world. Like the bottom of the sea. As you look at my features they

seem to swarm and melt. They could be anybody's." -

"Imagination!" with scorn.

"Ah, the imagination . . . the imagination, which the philosophers say gives color to everything." The dead man detached himself from his tree and moved noiselessly into the clearing, over grass the color of mercury. "My dear friend," he said lightly, "my dear, dear friend, you must remember that I am dead and so I look at things from a very special point of view. I know, you see, the torments of desire after death, desire too late to satisfy desire, and I want you to avoid the same fate as myself. You must not spend eternity longing for your wife and your cook and your mattress maker, for you neglect them; you know you do."

"Bah! Don't want them," said Alexander.

"No?" With the same fixed smile the dead man moved toward him, like a walking corpse or a man in a dream.

"Keep away!" cried the king in horror.

"Why?" said his friend gently. "Because I have a white face? Because I look like a leper? My face is white, my dear friend, through an excess of passion. My movements are slow because I . am dead."

"Damn you, what do you want?" cried Alexander, breathing hard.

"Want? The man who killed me."

"I never-never-!" cried the king passionately.

"Never? Never?" Color came flooding into the dead man's face, making it look black under the moon. "Never intended? Never meant? Oh no, I daresay! No one ever intends to kill a pet! One wrings the poor bird's neck in a moment of sheer, unthinking irritation, isn't that right? One kicks the clown and behold! the poor fool falls downstairs and breaks his neck. Bah! One shatters a vase, merely." They looked at each other for the space of a minute and then-as if the outburst had broken his mood and reassured him

"I never disliked you," said Alexander sullenly.

"Oh, no!" in a tone half between a laugh and a sob. "Oh, no!" more quietly.

"No, never," said the king stolidly, and he went and sat on the fallen log.

"I'm not through," said his friend mildly. "Do you know what you `missed?" He leaned over the seated man. "For one, your wife's sweet little tongue that I tasted some four hours ago." Alexander said nothing. "Ah, you don't care? You have glory?"

"I do," said the monarch.

"Yes, like the sunset, I suppose. All the color and light that belong to nobody belongs to you. Names! What else do you have: love?"

"We don't deal in that commodity," said Alexander with a flash of teeth.

"Ah! there you speak like your father. Your father, whom your mother poisoned with the poison they use to drive rats mad, and who died blubbering over a servant girl who was the only one in the palace foolish and brave enough to give him a drink of water."

"One can avoid being poisoned," said Alexander, grinning again.

"Yes, one can," said his friend, "and I daresay if you avoid being

poisoned or assassinated or stabbed in a mutiny-and you have been pretty successful so far-you will live to be an old man."

"You tire me out," said Alexander, rising.

"Ah! but wait-can you get by, do you think, at the end?"

"You've shot your bolt, man!"

"No, wait-listen-there's my wife. I think about her all the time, about the colors of her face and hair and the remoteness she had for me, and how I liked her the better for that, I think. Oh! don't you wander about when you're dead, remembering things like that!"

"I can remember what I've done," said Alexander, laughing, , "which is more than you can manage, I think. Now! Let me go. I have no time for any more."

"No, no," said his friend softly.

"Ah, yes!" answered the king, as softly.

"Try," said the dead man. The king drew his sword. "Try." His friend was smiling charmingly; he stretched forth his neck as if to offer it to the knife. "I can keep you here," he said. "That's one ' ` thing I can do."

"For what!" harshly.

"You'll see."

The king began to laugh. He walked about the clearing, roaring with mirth. The moonlight struck sparks from his sword hilt and a line of silver blazed along the blade; he whirled his sword above his head like a boy going into battle for the first time; he struck the trunks of trees with it and laughed.

"I have something to show you," said the dead man quietly.

"What?" gasped the king, "what?" half out of breath.

"Something, dear, boy." Alexander could not stop laughing. He sat on the log and roared, rocking back and forth. The moon must have gone behind a cloud, for the little glade grew darker and darker; in the gloom, in the midst of the indistinct mass of confused shadows, sat Alexander laughing. He looked up and found, .to his surprise, that his dead friend had come up behind him and now held him by the shoulders in a grip so strong and yet so light that he could not break it. He was forced to turn to one side; he tried to turn back and could not; he struggled impotently under the dead man's grip while his friend's face, so close to his own, moved not an inch, showed not by the slightest alteration in its expression that to control

the warrior of the age was any effort for him, a soft and an always soft living man.

"Look," he said, "look ahead," in a voice almost like love, and changing the position of his hands so that he held the king's face (that king whose arms now hung uselessly at his sides), forced him to turn his gaze.

Alexander gave a scream like the scream of the damned, like the yell of a hurt animal that has nothing to restrain it: no discretion, no prudence, no fear. He would have fallen to the ground if the dead man had not held him.

"There, there, there!" said the dead man in a soft, enthusiastic, urgent whisper, his eyes glittering. "There, look! look!" He grasped the king's shoulders with a vehemence that left marks; he shook him. "There's glory for you!" he whispered, and finally letting him go, retreated across the clearing, never taking his eyes off him, never moving his rigidly spread hands, blending into the stippled shadow and the uncertain light until one looking after him would never have known that there was any such person.

Alexander sat drooping on the fallen log as the old philosopher had before him. The moon was setting; morning was near. His soldiers, horribly frightened at losing hire in the middle of the night, would find him at last, though he would not speak to them. He would raise his handsome face and say nothing. They would bring his wife to him (she had gotten worried and had sent a messenger back to the camp in the middle of the night) and he would look at her, say her name in a tone of surprise-and faint. Two days later the army, the Persian queen's handmaids, the king's philosophic retinue and the royal couple themselves would pack all their gear and start on the return march to Babylon, now called Heliopolis.

The rumors were started by an Egyptian professor whose

cataloguing system for the library at Egyptian Alexandria was . summarily rejected by the emperor. Alexander, he said, was mad and had been shut up. He was drunk all day. He alternated wintry ' midnight swims with bouts of fever. His wife had left him. "No, no," said Aristophorus heatedly, "the truth is-"and hurried away .. to attend to something else.

Egyptian Alexandria, Babylonian Alexandria, Alexandretta . one room of the palace at Heliopolis had a replica (about seven feet ' high) of a monument Alexander had caused to be built to the memory of his dead friend as soon as he (Alexander) had returned to that city. The monument was a bronze tower, eighty feet high, ; with a platform at the top-"for jumping," Alexander had said disingenuously, watching Aristophorus twitch. He drank for hours =~ at the foot of the replica, in a desultory way. He talked to it once in a while.

One afternoon in that part of late winter when a stone house- ' even in the Babylonian climate- becomes a place to freeze the ' living and preserve the dead, Aristophorus found his master asleep at the foot of the monument.

"You're drunk, my lord," said he sadly and disapprovingly.

"You're middle-class," said Alexander.

"That monument ought to be destroyed," said Aristophorus, weeping.

"It has charm," said Alexander.

"It's graceless!" weeping harder.

"It's necessary." Alexander rolled over and fetched himself up . on a step, blinking like an owl. "We want to honor our dead friend, Aristophorus." He discovered a wineskin under a heap of outer garments on the step. "Bravo!"

"My lord, my lord!" wept the old philosopher.

"My lord, my lord!" mimicked- Alexander. He lay in the heap of ' clothes, idly. "You think I'm drunk but I'm not." He sighed. "I haven't got properly drunk for years. I'm too used to it."

"Oh, my lord!"

"Bah! get out of my sight!" and when he was left alone, his face .
settled into an expression of perfect vacancy. The stone hall was covered with stately, patterned hangings that gave the walls a spurious, slightly ridiculous dignity. There was one uncovered window. Alexander ambled tiredly over to it. It gave on a small court and a garden; someone was hoeing. As the king watched he closed both hands unconsciously; the sight of anyone working always affected him. The slave outside bent himself double, clearing and pulling; then he straightened and rubbed his back. A faint, disorganized sound, of which he was not aware, came from the king's throat; he lifted the wineskin to drink and halted halfway. He remembered, with satisfaction, wresting a cup from the old philosopher when the man would drink from it in a dramatic, despairing show that he too would sink to the king's dreadful level: Alexander laughed. "I'm sick," he said. He leaned on the stone windowsill, watching the sky and shivering. He thought The words they use for drunkenness. Smashed. Stoned. Blind. Hit yourself over the head with a rock. Ah!-to fall- His shivering increased. He thought again, with pleasure, that he was sick. Wipe it out, he thought. He leaned his head in his hands. They worried him about his wife; who would protect her? they said. Yes, that was right . . . Slipping to his knees, he leaned his back against the clammy stone wall with a kind of comfort. The dead man had said once what had he said? "Comfort, above all." But that had been when he was alive.

"My dear lord," said someone. Alexander opened his eyes. "Go away," he said.

"My lord, my lord-"said the old philosopher.

When he opened his eyes again he saw that Aristophorus had gone. He knew that he was sick and it alarmed him. He dragged himself to his feet and started toward the monument. "Oh my dear, my dear," he said passionately to nobody in particular. "My dear, my dear, my dear . . ."

The late afternoon sunlight, wintry and wan, came through the uncovered window and made a square on the floor. He lay on the floor. He opened his eyes for the third time (when the drowning man goes down) and saw the face he had expected to see.

"You're dying," said his friend, and there were tears in his eyes Alexander said nothing, only lay on the stone floor with his mouth slightly open and his eyes vacant. His breathing was quick and shallow. "Clown," he managed to say. "Jackal. But I kept you around."

"I've kept you around. Doing nothing. For the last four years."

"AM-ah!" cried Alexander, for the floor was sinking and bellying under him. "Help!" he cried. Crouched over him, his nurse's son, his harpy, his old friend watched him intently. "Courage, man!" he cried, "courage! It only lasts a moment! Keep your head clear."

"Call my wife," said the king, with an effort. The dead man shook his head.

"Oh yes," said Alexander grimly. "Oh, yes."

"Never," said the other. "I don't share."

"Roxane!" cried Alexander, and then before his friend could stop him, "Roxane!" so that the walls re-echoed with it. There was the sound of light steps in the passageway. "You cruel fool!" whispered the dead man angrily, and he rose to his feet and darted to her, barring the way. She carried her eight months' pregnancy in front of her like a basket, hurrying along the hall with little breathless steps.

"My dear," he said, "my dear, it's nothing, nothing. Go back. Please go back."

"Good heavens, it's you," said she matter-of-factly.

"Yes, love, go back," he said, "go back. Go rest." He held out his hands, smiling tenderly. -

"Oh, no," said the queen wisely, "there's something, I can tell," and she pushed past him. She began telling her husband that he really must go to bed; then she stopped, puzzled, and then a

little intake of breath announced that she had seen the dying man's face. The dead man trembled; he stood at the window where the king had stood, but saw nothing. At his back the princess gave a little scream.

"My dear," said the dead man, turning round (she was kneeling at Alexander's side) "my dear, he'll be quite well, I promise you," (but she seemed not to hear him) "my dear, I promise you-" but she rushed out, crying different names out loud. She stopped at the doorway, looking right past the dead man as if she were looking through him. Her face expressed nothing but surprise, although she was wringing her hands.

"My dear," he said calmly, "what you see' is a delusion. The man is not suffering. At the end fever is not unpleasant, I assure you; the body sinks but the mind floats like a piece of ash, and you will only make your husband's last moments needlessly unhappy if you cry and wring your hands and behave in an unconsidered and haphazard way."

"Aristophorus!" screamed the princess, "Aristophorus!" and she rushed out of the room.

I am beginning to fade, the dead man thought, going back to Alexander. His attack of trembling hit him again and he knelt by the dying man, taking the unconscious face in his hands.

"King," he whispered urgently. "King." Alexander opened his eyes. "Listen to me."

"No," said the dying man. His friend, cradling the conqueror's head in his hands, smiled with a radiant and serene joy; "Live," he whispered. "Live. Live."

"Can't," said Alexander brusquely, trying to shrug. He closed his eyes. Gently the dead man let his friend's head down onto the floor; he stood up; he moved away. Roxane had come back in with friends, philosophers, doctors; they crowded round the emperor while his friend (whom nobody saw) wandered out of the room into a passageway and down that passageway into another. In the garden (he looked out of a window) the gardener still hoed and weeded last year's dried stalks. The dead man had carried Alexander's wineskin with him and a cup he found near it; he poured himself a drink and sat down on the floor by the window where the pale sunlight came in. Then he stood up.

"You butcher!" he shouted, "you bully, you egoist, you killer in love with your own

greatness!" and then he said "How I loved you, how I admired you!" raising the cup in one hand and his other empty hand to the ceiling in an attitude of extreme and theatrical grief. His arms sank; he sat again on the floor. Now I die too, he thought. He thought, with a certain amusement, of that night in the Indian forests near the river and what he had shown the great Alexander. Like the demons in the old stories he had shown him all the world; he had shown it filled with Alexandrias and Alexandrettas as numerous as the stars, with carved pillars set up in the East as far as the kingdoms of Ch'in and Ch'u, farther than Han, satraps ruling the undiscovered continents on the other side of the globe, tablets commemorating Alexander in the lands of the Finns and, the Lapps, in the lands of the Alaskan Eskimos, empire up to the Arctic Circle and down into Africa, over the Cape and through the other side, Alexanders here, Alexanders there, a fulfilled empire, . a safe empire, a satisfied dream. And then two words: What then?.

Legend has it that great Alexander wept because there were no more worlds to conquer; in truth, he bellowed like a bull.

No one, thought the dead man, feels more despair than a man who has been robbed of his profession. Luckily I never had one. A sound from the room he had just quitted hit him and made him . catch his breath. How terrible to die, he thought, how terrible! He ; took a drink from the wine cup and noted that his hand was . shaking. From the next room came a sharp cry, little Roxane wailing for her man. The dead man, whose heart seemed to have stopped, sat motionless while his face became clear of all expression, taking on the beautiful, grave melancholy of all faces whose owners are absent, temporarily or otherwise. Gently and carefully '' he put the wine cup down on the damp, stone floor, with the E concentrated gentleness of all the times he had picked things up only to put them down-cups, flowers, jewelry, paintings and women's hands. He thought of all the things he had touched and never owned, of all the women he had liked and avoided. The one man he had admired so passionately and so passionately envied: was dead. Nothing was left. He thought, as if thinking of a picture,

of his wife-a dissatisfied Sappho who had written verses and left the court to live with some businessman. He doubled over, not in laughter this time, but as if Alexander's blade, that had

long ago stabbed through his vitals, once again tore him. The dead forget nothing. The blade had ripped apart the intricate webs that kept him alive, it had startled and hurt him, it had broken his heart. Silently he bent over and fell to the floor. He stretched along it with a kind of sigh, as if going to sleep, and the moment he closed his eyes he disappeared. The wine cup stood alone on the floor. An attendant who had heard the news of the king's death ran excitedly through the room and out into the garden.

"Something has happened!" he shouted to the gardener. The gardener threw down his hoe and the two talked together in low whispers.

"It'll be hard on us," the gardener said, shaking his head. The attendant clapped him on the back. "Don't forget," he said, "we stand together." He added generously "I don't forget my relatives." The gardener nodded solemnly. He picked up his tools, the attendant helping him. Together they disappeared into another part of the court. The sun (for it was now late afternoon) moved a little; the square of light on the floor altered its position somewhat and touched the standing wine cup with a spark of gold. Nearby lay the wineskin, on its side but closed by some considerate hand-or so it seemed, for the floor remained clean. Nothing moved. Everything remained as it was. It was exactly as if nothing had happened.

NOTE ON "POOR MAN, BEGGAR MAN": It is riddled with inaccuracies. Cleitus the Black was one of Alexander's generals, whom Alexander actually did kill in 328 B.C., as Cleitus became incensed at the proskynesis (Asiatic knee-crawling) Alexander demanded of his associates. Alexander was drunk at the time, Cleitus' sister had indeed been his old nurse, and from that day on Alexander exempted Macedonians from the Persian court etiquette of proskynesis.

However, Alexander did cross the Indus in 326 B.C. It was the Beas or Hyphasis River that his army refused to cross; after three probably rather unpleasant days, Alexander consented to return to a more westerly portion of the world.

Even more at variance with my story, Alexander had not-in 326 B.C.married Roxane. She was a Sogdian, to be exact, and he married her in 324 at Susa, so that she could not possibly have been with him at the historically ; crucial moment when he decided to penetrate no farther into India. In fact, ' Alexander also married Darius' daughter Barsine in 324 B.C. In 324 he returned to Babylon. He died of fever on June 13, 323. He was thirty-three years old. -.."

In character he was far from the blunt-minded bully my story suggests; in historical fact, my Alexander and my Cleitus put together would have made up a much better facsimile of the historical Alexander.

Perhaps that is the whole point of the story.

/. R.