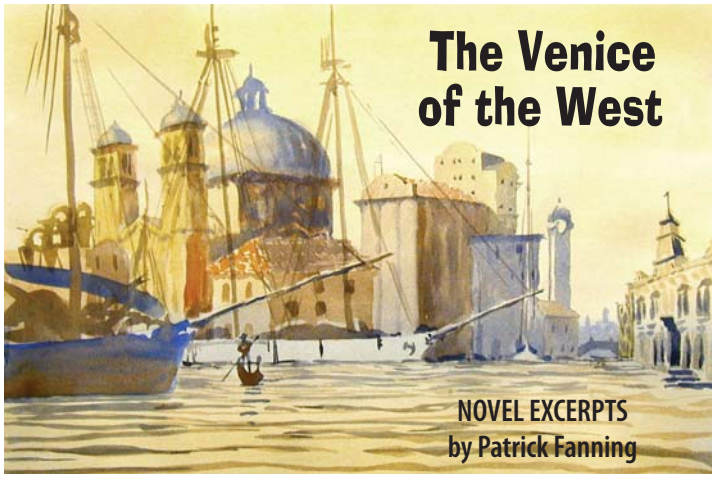
In this fictional, alternative history of California, Mark Twain and John Singer Sargent explore Alta California and Rossland. The (Mexican) Republic of Alta California prevails from south of the Russian River in Sonoma County and a (Russian) Rossland streteches from Alaska to Fort Ross (the Tsar's summer palace on the coast) and east to Sakrametska (Sacramento).

Fanning's narrative switches between dispatches from journalist/novelist Mark Twain and his traveling companion, American impressionist painter, John Singer Sargent, who has come to California to launch a career as a portrait artist and possibly explore his own unspoken sexual preferences. The excerpt includes sketches and watercolors by Fanning, who like his protagonists, is both novelist and artist. It includes a timeline of alternate history versus actual history.



Wordrunner echapbooks | March 2012

Contents

I Meet Mark Twain 1
I Meet John Sargent 3
A Humorist, Not a Politician 5
The Venice of the West. 7
The Fair Marina 10
A Candide Character 13
A Swan Among Geese 15
So Much? 18
Gibralter the Egg Mule. 20
An American Vandal Abroad 22
Daisy and Oscar 24
A Chance Encounter 26
Goya's Studio 33
Holy Relics. 35
Boundary Values 38
The Unholy Family 40
Boom Town 42

Contents *(continued)*

New Dog, Old Tricks 44
Commission of a Lifetime 46
Bushwhacked 48
A Minor Moon of a Minor Planet 50
Wetbellies. 53
Alternative History Timeline 61
About Patrick Fanning 68

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I Meet Mark Twain

The steamship from the Sandwich Islands to San Francisco carried mostly cargo, with only a dozen passengers: Myself, a Catholic priest with wife and six children, a retired colonel in an unspecified army, a sugar plantation manager, and Mark Twain.

At first I had no idea Mr. Twain was on board, since I spent the first half of the voyage in my tiny cabin or at the rail, in the throes of mal de mer. When I finally found my sea legs and ventured into society, it was late in the evening of our fourth day at sea. I entered the cramped "saloon" in search of food. The bar was deserted, and only one table was occupied, by three boisterous men playing cards. Oil lamps swung gently from the overhead beams, bathing the men with an ochre light and casting ultramarine violet shadows on the wall that moved with the undulations of the ship. I took some deep breaths, cautiously ate a cracker from a jar on the bar, and watched the game.

Mr. Twain was stacking coins and shuffling cards, looking and talking like a character from one of his books. He was a tall, thin, but vigorous older man of 44 years, with a fierce mustache and a corona of flaming red hair. A long crooked cigar was clamped in his teeth as he dealt cards, wobbled in his lips as talked, or waved about in his hand as he used it like a conductor's baton to punctuate his drawling speech. His dark eyes seemed to smolder and then spark as he glanced my way, and I felt he could see more of one's character than one might choose to reveal.

"Pull up a pew," he said to me, gesturing at a chair that was screwed to the deck. "We need a fourth to dilute the odds and swell the congregation. I'm Mark Twain, this is the Sugar Plum Fairy, and that reprobate is Colonel Sutherland."

"Pleased to meet you," I said, sliding into the chair, "I'm John Sargent."

"Welcome to the fold. Are you familiar with a little game called Molokai Scratch?"

He had just published The Adventures of Tom Sawyer in 1878, a year before, when I was studying painting with Carolus in Paris. Even though we expatriate art orphans were buried to our

eyebrows in chiaroscuro and perspective, we knew his name. Mark Twain was the great American rustic, casting his irreverent eye over our decadent age and deflating pomposity wherever he found it. I was 23 at the time and stood in awe of his accomplishments.

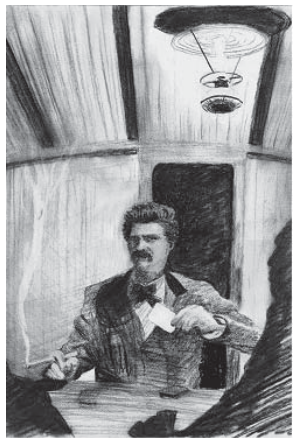
I said, "Sorry, I'm not familiar with Molokai Scratch. Is it anything like Whist?"

"Very much like, except you deal only three cards at a time, black sevens and nines are wild for face cards, and there are no rubbers, no dummy, and no trump suit. Here, I'll deal a hand for practice and you can be the Itch first. After you master Itching we'll make you an expert Scratcher."

I never learned all the rules, but it soon became obvious that Molokai Scratch was similar to Whist in only one way: a team of two players could communicate in code and distort the odds in their favor. Mr. Twain and Colonel Sutherland across from him were engaged in a lively exchange of blinks, coughs, sneezes, throat-clearings, and knuckle-crackings that soon won all the loose coins in my pocket.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," Mr. Twain said at one point, raking in my last centavo, "In the third round, black sevens are only wild for black queens."

I excused myself and retired to a chair where I could sketch the card players surreptitiously. I made Mark Twain the focal point of the composition, placing his companions in silhouette and casting them in shadow. He had large hands with long tapering fingers that dipped and hovered over the cards and coins like gliding birds. He was wearing a burnt sienna suit of clothes over a cadmium scarlet vest, but I would paint him in banker's broadcloth to show his prosperity as a popular author, with a slouch hat and bent cheroot to show his frontier roots.



I calculated that he was or would soon be part of the nouveau riche class who can afford to have their portraits painted, at least by a cut-rate nouveau artiste such as myself. The gift of a charcoal study would be a good investment in future patronage. Perhaps his publisher would be in need of an accurate likeness in conté, on which to base a frontispiece engraving?

I Meet John Sargent

In May of 1879 *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* was selling tolerably well, making my peculiar blend of tragedy and frivolity welcome on the lecture circuit. I voyaged from my home in the Sandwich Islands to San Francisco to deliver another round of travel lectures in the Republic of Alta California. That winter I had changed my name legally to Mark Twain, and was resolved to leave that dour old humbug Sam Clemens behind me in the wake.

I was traveling with my new Submarine Super Camera, a tiny, cunning instrument, with which I made several photographs of our vessel, the steamer *Jupiter*. When I developed the negatives later, I found that the still images failed to capture the vessel's essential meanness. The ship was of the tramp variety: too small for sugar, too large for coffee, too Spartan for passengers, and so she specialized in a little of each. She was about as long as two streetcars and about as wide as one. I could reach the water when she lay over sideways in the swells, which she did constantly, to the detriment of one's digestion. Turned to meet the mountainous peaks of the Pacific head-on, the Jupiter pitched like a see-saw. At one moment the bowsprit was taking a deadly aim at the sun in midheaven, and at the next it was trying to harpoon a shark in the bottom of the ocean.

I spent most of my time in the saloon, waiting for the bar to open, playing euchre, droughts, and dominoes with my fellow passengers. There I first met John Singer Sargent, three days out from Honolulu, when he emerged from his cabin, green as spring grass, and staggered into the saloon in search of sustenance and entertainment. He was pale as any ghost, and in fact reminded me strongly of my own personal ghost, the shade of my brother Henry. Sargent had the same clear brow, the same open, innocent, quizzical expression.

He was a polished, charming young man of about 25 years of age, earnest, poised, and confident; but I am always prepared to forgive that in a tenderfoot. There was something energetic and engaging about the sprout that made it hard to get shut of him. As to character, he was a raw nerve, an empty vessel, a swelling

bud, and my old pal Colonel Sutherland and I took pity on him. We resolved to soothe his nerves, fill his emptiness, and tap the swelling bud of his purse with a friendly game of Molokai Scratch.

At our invitation he demurred with the usual tenderfoot's protestations, as easily overcome as the average Sunday school teacher's claims of ignorance of drink, dice, or damsels of uneasy virtue.

"You would do us great honor if you would agree to complete our circle," I insisted.

"The honor is mine, Mr. Twain." He took his seat in surrender, running up the white flag and spiking all his guns.

Scratch is the preferred game of Honolulu's card sharks because it is Episcopal in its complexity, Presbyterian in its flexibility, and Quakerish in the silent, covert cooperation that is possible between two experienced devotees. Scratch is the bastard son of Euchre out of Stud Poker while Whist wasn't watching. Compared to Scratch, all other card games are like dancing with your sister. Colonel Sutherland and I were confirmed Scratchers and young Sargent was the perfect Itch.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Twain," John asked, "But did you say that fives and sevens are wild?"

"Only black fives and sevens, and only for face cards."

"Then I believe I have four Kings," he said, laying down his hand.

"Normally that would be true, but this is the third rubber, in which wild cards apply only to black queens. In this instance you have two fives and two kings, and the Colonel takes the pot with three queens."

"I see. Thank you for the clarification."

He was wonderfully polite, reminding me again of my poor late brother Henry. Someone, probably his maternal relative, had trained him well, but with application he would soon learn to overcome his limited upbringing. When we had cleaned him out he retired with good grace to his sketchbook. The next morning he presented me with a wonderfully detailed drawing of myself dealing three-handed Whist. I accepted it with thanks and admiration, and thus I first introduced the camel's nose of trust into my tent of native caution.

A Humorist, Not a Politician

William Dean Howells
Atlantic Weekly
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

May 22, 1879

Dear William:

Thank you for your warning, however belatedly received. Your letter arrived just as I was embarking on my voyage to Alta California—soon enough to take heed and have ample fodder for worry; too late to do anything about it. Actually, I never worry. I cannot fret myself over the future because I have so much in my past to regret that it occupies my mind entirely.

Yours was not the only rumor of war I have heard, but I discount them. I am a humorist, not a politician. I doubt strongly that the powerful and greedy of Alta California and Rossland will even notice my sojourn there. And at the first sign of trouble, I plan to cut and run. However, if any political morsels fall my way, I will duly report them to you and you may pass them on to your friends in Washington.

If I can find a suitable dark room somewhere, I will send you photographic specimens of my travels. I have brought along my new plaything, a tiny Submarine Super Camera from Japan that fits in the palm of my hand and uses high grade 2x3-inch dry glass plates, of which I have a ridiculously large supply in a cunningly fitted case that is lined in plush and proofed against light and moisture. I plan to make a portrait of myself in some wonderfully exotic locale, to use as the basis for an engraved frontispiece in my next travel book.

I am doomed to lecture yet again on the Sandwich Islands, Europe, the Holy Lands, etc. etc. I have translated some of my best stories and jokes into Spanish, Esperanto, and even Russian, in the hopes that I can get a visa to Rossland. The Spanish I find most humorous and commodious, with room for even the occasional pun. Esperanto is stiff and awkward, like dancing with your

granny. Being a recently and rationally constructed language, it lacks idiomatic expressions, regional accent, or literary history. One can tell a joke in Esperanto, but it is rough sledding. As for Russian, it is suitable for only the most scatological or physical humor.

Although I have reservations about the lecturing part of this trip, I am glad of the opportunity to pen some travel letters for you. I would relish including a visit to you in this trip, however I reckon finances will not permit. The train fare from California to Boston is shamefully dear, more of a tariff than a toll. I would encourage you to come west to meet me, if I did not know how you are shackled to the grind of weekly publication. The trip would take a week out here and a week back, and without two issues of the Atlantic, the poor old U. S. of A. might perish. And anyhow, the Californians are unlikely to issue a visa to a ruffian like yourself. You really should concentrate more on the literary side of things and take less interest in politics—then you could drop your news coverage, put out a monthly literary rag, and become an impoverished man of letters and leisure like the rest of us.

We dock tomorrow in San Francisco Bay, where I will post this.

Your obedient etc.
Mark Twain

The Venice of the West

I found Mr. Twain on deck the next morning, smoking and playing shuffleboard by himself. He pointed at the empty court opposite him.

"Keep an eye on my opponent," he said. "I think he's cheating. I can't abide a cheat at horse billiards."

I presented him with my sketch of him playing cards the night before.

"By Jove, what a remarkable likeness," he said. "I look just like my Uncle Sowberry Finn that was hung for card sharking." He held the paper at arm's length and squinted at it through a haze of cigar smoke. "You haven't finished these other two gents," he said.

"That is intentional," I explained, "you are the center of interest, and so are rendered in more detail. For the other figures and the setting, I draw just the impression of the thing, not every detail of the thing itself."

"Well, I reckon I can't complain about being the center of interest, but in my experience, I'd rather smoke a real cigar than an impression of one."

We conversed genially at the rail as the boat entered the Bahia de San Francisco, a vast expanse of choppy gray water with scarcely a reflection or horizon line. In between lengthy stories about his steamboat days, Mr. Twain told me about the lecture and writing tour he was beginning. He invited me to his first lecture in Petalumo, a small town to the north, where he would address the local intelligentsia on his travels and adventures.

I said, "I'm surprised that you do not start your tour in San Francisco. It is the capital, after all."

"Oh no, it is never done that way. My lecture agent has booked me into the smaller country towns first. I'll work my way up the coast, polishing my Spanish and spying out the local gossip. Then I'll swing inland to the east, and circle back to San Francisco in about four weeks. I need to sharpen my wits on the rural strop before trying to skin the city folks."

"I don't see how your wits could get much sharper."

"Aw, shucks." He shook his head, a pretty blush revealing

freckles across his generous nose. "Sharpening the wits is a matter of timing, mostly. Every region has a preferred pace, a rate at which they can best follow a story or a joke."

"Like a horse?" I asked, forcing myself to stop staring at his complexion. He was one of the most compelling men I had ever met.

"Yes, an audience is much like a horse. You dasn't lecture at a gallop to a critter that was born to canter."

Then it was time to get our luggage on deck to clear customs on Isla de los Angeles, a small island in the bay. The Customs official was curious as usual that I carry an American passport but have never been to the United States of America. I had to explain that I was born in England to American parents, reared in Switzerland, and educated in France and Spain. My parents did not return to America during my childhood, since the country was wracked by civil war and unrest. They say it is mostly peaceful now, but still economically depressed—not the sort of place an aspiring portrait artist longs to visit.

The customs man was very swarthy, burnt umber with a touch of scarlet and chromium yellow, perhaps a mixed blood with Spanish and Indio combined. His high cheekbones were almost Moroccan. On the crowded docks I saw complexions from peaches and cream to pure Negro.

When we were released from customs, I stuck close to Mr. Twain, following him to the booking office. There he was met by a short Spaniard in a custard yellow suit and a mismatched green overcoat with a seal collar. The man introduced himself to Twain as Hilario Amado, the local lecture agent.

"And this is Marina Milanova," the agent said, "who will be your guide and translator." He pushed forward a slim girl not much older than I. She was taller and more slender than most Mexican women, with sharp features, pale complexion, and very dark, arched eyebrows.

"Mucho gusto," she said to Twain, and gave him a lingering handshake.

From that moment, I ceased to exist for Mark Twain. He transferred the sunshine of his regard immediately to Miss Miranova, and I was cast into her shade.

I trailed behind the happy couple, and I bought passage on the same small stern wheel launch that would take us up the Rio Petalumo. The trip took nearly two hours, and Twain and his translator chatted as bright as two sparrows at the rail the whole time, addressing perhaps three words to me. I leaned on the rail and took in the landscape as the narrow, winding river revealed scene after scene.

Trumpeter swans and egrets dotted the reedy wetlands like little flecks of titanium white flake. The river twisted and turned like a lazy snake, pewter, silver and white under leaden skies backlit with a barely golden light—just one short shade beyond silver gray. Mr. Twain brought out a very small camera and photographed nearly every boat we passed, entirely ignoring the natural scenery.

The sun came out in true gold as we glided into the grand canal of Petalumo, which Mr. Twain immediately dubbed the "Venice of the West," with good reason. I began to ache for my paints. Like the real Venice, this is a paradise for the watercolorist: Where most cities have streets of dead dark cobbles, Petalumo and Venice have streets of water. Alternating wide and narrow canals reflect and multiply the light. Arching bridges cast velvety shadows enlivened with gleams of dark, pure cobalt blue and cadmium orange.

Petalumo differs from the original in several ways. Where Venice is all marble and plaster, Petalumo is timber frames of curly-cued redwood and oak, or thick adobe atop native sandstone foundations. The Steam Age is more prominent here, with railroad bridges across the canals, steam dredges dragging channels for steam launches to thread, and the gondoliers cursing them both. Both cities share tile roofs, but in Venice church spires dominate, whereas Petalumo boasts overtopping grain elevators, shot towers, and a Moorish minaret.

The Fair Marina

I first took Miss Marina, she of the sable tresses and honey complexion, to be a ravishing Spanish beauty; but on the way to the welcoming banquet in Petalumo she reminded me that her patronomic name was Milanova.

"So that would make you Russian," I remarked.

"Well, Rosslandic, originally. By half. My other half is Pomo and Mexican. My mother's people come from one of the local tribes."

"Would the proper term be Mexi-Pomoan Rosslandic? Rosslandish Pomomexic?"

She smiled wanly and murmured, "nechistokrovna,"

"I beg your pardon? Did you say 'naked crocodile?'"

"It means—how to put it politely? Mongrel." Her smile faded.

I had been trying all afternoon to get a genuine laugh out of her, without much luck. She had too much reserve by half, or perhaps merely high standards for humor.

For the mayor's dinner party, she was dressed in threadbare red velvet and black lace, with her hair pulled up in back, piled on top, and fixed with an abalone pin. She was of majestic form and stature, her attitudes were imposing and statuesque, and her gestures and movements distinguished by a noble and stately grace. Her dark eyes flashed as she introduced me to the mayor of Petalumo, a distinguished looking gent whose name I didn't quite catch.

"Senor Twain, many welcomes to you," he said, working my arm like a pump handle, taking me in tow, and setting a course for the main banquet table. Miss Miranova followed me and John Sargent followed her. He had attached himself to our party like a limpet.

There was a glittering crowd of finely-dressed ladies and gentlemen in the municipal meeting hall, a vast, barn-like space full of tables and chairs, bunting, conversational jabber, smoke, music, and some very promising aromas of roast meat and garlic.

We sat with the mayor at the head table, with about a dozen Dons and Doñas whom he introduced in flowery Spanish and

wilted English. Everyone smiled and bowed agreeably. The gentry of Petalumo are a convivial lot, hungry for occasions to gather and dine and palaver together. Miss Miranova kept me delightfully informed with the name, rank, and station of everyone I met.

The grub was ample and spicy, the musicians loud and enthusiastic, and the oratory predictably long-winded and boring. As my official translator, Miss Milanova sat at my off elbow where she could make a running summary of the Spanish speeches in English. There was a spice of deviltry in the girl's nature, and it cropped out every now and then when she was translating the speeches of slow old Dons who did not understand English. Without departing from the spirit of a distinguished gentleman's remarks, she would, with apparent unconsciousness, drop in a little voluntary contribution occasionally, in the way of a word or two that made the gravest speech utterly ridiculous. "The tradition of English literature" became "the transgression of English lingering," with a sly glance across the table at young John. "We extend our hospitality" became "We extend our hostility." "A famous writer" became "famished rider." She was careful not to venture upon such experiments, though, with the remarks of persons able to detect her. I loved her for it, but wished she would direct her sly glances my way.

In time I was asked to make a few remarks in self-defense, and I did so cautiously, with a bouquet of Spanish phrases I had prepared beforehand. In English I told a couple of brief jokes and the fair Marina translated them into Spanish for the crowd. I will wonder to my dying day whether the laughter I drew forth was due to my unadulterated native wit or thanks to the annotations of my translator.

The mayor kindly presented me with a gift from the municipality, a beautiful abalone shell fountain pen in a redwood box. I was quite moved and thanked them effusively.

"I'm sure this is what my writing has required all these years," I said, holding up the pen and letting the lamplight flash on its abalone inlay. "I have always wanted a writing implement worthy of the language I butcher. I'm sure this pen will improve the quality of my hand, my grammar, and my garments."

Over brandy and cigars, the mayor drew me a map in my notebook with my new pen, giving me the lay of the land and

suggesting how I might visit every little hamlet and pueblo in between my lecturing engagements. If Napoleon had enjoyed the mayor's services as tour director and booking agent, his winter jaunt through Russia would have been a much more enjoyable and rewarding trip.

It was late after the meal. I offered to hire a gondola to take Miss Marina back to our hotel, but she declined.

"Tonight I am staying with a friend on the other side of town. I will meet you tomorrow evening for your lecture, seven o'clock at the theater."

"What if I need some translating tomorrow during the day?"

"I'm sure Mr. Sargent here can help out until I return."

With that she shook our hands in the vigorous Alta Californian manner, turned and strode away alone, soon lost in the misty darkness.

"I'll take you up on that gondola ride, Mr. Twain," Sargent said.

"Sorry son. If it's just you and me, we'll walk." And so we did walk, back to our lonely bachelor rooms in the Alta Mira hotel.

A Candide Character

William Dean Howells
Atlantic Weekly
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

May 22, 1879

Dear William:

I write you from Petalumo, at my hotel room window, overlooking a canal that could easily be in Venice, if'n it warn't for the smell of cow flop. Tomorrow night is my first lecture here, but during the day I aim to scout out this town and get to work on the first of my travel letters for you.

My lecture agent this time is called Hilario Amado, and I suspicion he is not "a gent" at all. He met me briefly when we docked, introduced me to my translator, then skedaddled back to San Francisco with a cheery *hasta luego*, leaving me to storm the provinces on my own.

On the other hand, the translator is a comely wench, much more *simpatica* than Señor Amado, despite his amorous patronomic. I've never had a woman translator before. I reckon it's a specimen of Alta California's vaunted freedoms. Tonight she piloted me through the shoals and sandbars of a testimonial dinner in my honor. We put on the feedbag with a quorum of Petalumo's finest society: the conniving politicos, debauched clergy, crooked lawyers, guilty philanthropists, and drunken newspapermen without whom no thriving Republic can be run on a paying basis. I think I'm going to like this place.

Also in the party was a young artist named John Sargent, an expatriate Yankee painter, educated in Europe, whom I first met on the steamer from Honolulu to San Francisco. He has followed me to Petalumo and I gave him a complementary ticket to tomorrow night's lecture. He seems inclined to tag along, and I aim to encourage that, so I can observe his untutored reactions to California—I reckon he could function as a Candide, a naïve

observer that will underline the humor and irony—like the Brown character in some of the *Innocents Abroad* pieces.

Your erstwhile correspondent,
Mark Twain

A Swan Among Geese

Our host for Mr. Twain's welcoming dinner was Alejandro Natalio Vargas i Diamante, the *Alcalde* of Petalumo. In Spain, *alcalde* means "mayor," but in California it seems to have acquired overtones of "innkeeper" and "procurer." Mayor Diamante was a short, rotund, overly jolly man, all convex greasy curves, with large drooping mustachios and well-oiled hair. He held one's hand too long and stood an inch too close, so you could smell his *eau de cologne* and the garlic he had for breakfast.

In painfully broken English he welcomed Mr. Twain, Miss Miranova, and I to the banquet and seated us at a long table on a modest dais at the head of the room. He would have made a good waiter, but as a mayor he was a disappointment. He did, however, make an interesting subject for a caricature, which I sketched in my book surreptitiously during the speeches.

Already seated at our table were various city council members and civic functionaries, with names like Vega and Santiago indicating their blood ties to Old Spain. But one man and one woman had guttural native names and earthy complexions that marked them as Indians. I tried to follow the introductions and remember the names and stations of my tablemates, but they were mostly lost in the tumult. Everyone was talking at once, in Spanish and Esperanto and various debased versions of English, with the result that nobody listened to anybody. I felt like a swan in a flock of honking geese.

The hall was decorated with atrocious murals of an historical nature. There were wooded landscapes with helmeted figures on poorly drawn horses, jabbing crosses and Spanish flags into an unconvincing riverbank. Dredges scooped up river muck, with adobe churches under construction in the background. Indians were baptized while doves and *putti* fluttered above their heads. A few painted medallions in the corners held murky portraits of bearded gentlemen who all looked alike, undoubtedly Petalumo's founding fathers. If this was the best the local painters could offer, I felt confident I might arranged a portrait commission or two.

The food was common and over-spiced, but no one cared. They shoveled it into their mouths like coal into a boiler, damping the

fires with schooners of ale and raw red wine. The faces around me took on an overstoked glow, and I amused myself imagining how many tubes of burnt umber and crimson lake it would take to paint all the flushed complexions.

The manners of the Dons were boorish. They ate everything with their knives and sopped up sauce with wads of tortilla. They brayed and cackled at each other, screaming idiomatic and ungrammatical Spanish with their mouths full of half-chewed food, spraying beans and flecks of rice all about.Five musicians added to the din, strumming guitars, sawing violins, and tooting on trumpets. It was not subtle or even musical, but it was loud and lively and made primary colors explode in my mind's eye.

Every few minutes one of the dignitaries in attendance would be overcome with emotion and stand up, signaling the trumpet player for a shrill fanfare that mostly silenced the room. He would make a little speech about Señor Twain and propose a toast. The speeches were drunken and wandering, without flair or style. Miss Miranova translated the speeches for Mr. Twain and myself into better English than they deserved. She would occasionally mistranslate a word for comic effect, which mostly went right over the heads of the audience, although I saw Mr. Twain catch her eye a time or two and grin.

Mark Twain was amazing in his ability to communicate, considering his lack of facility for any language other than English. He could construct whole speeches out of the ten words of Spanish and twelve of Esperanto that he had by heart. He held his audience's attention with his magnetic glare, a comic smirk, or imperious gesture—while he dived into his right coat pocket for his Esperanto dictionary, or the left for his Spanish one. He pushed his chair quite close to Mirss Miranova's and frequently turned to whisper in her ear, using her as his third dictionary.

Near the end of the dinner, the *alcalde* caught sight of me drawing under the edge of the table. He came around to my place and looked at the caricature of himself in my sketchbook. Fortunately for me, he did not recognize himself or the satirical nature of caricature. "Señor Sargent," He said, leaning over me, "Please, you must to make a picture of my daughter Constanza. In fall she will have ten and five years and we make a grand party for her."

The prospect of a portrait commission immediately raised the

mayor in my estimation, and I forgave him the wine fumes he breathed in my face.

"Of course, your honor," I replied, "I am at your service."

On the way back to our hotel, I told Mr. Twain about the possibility of a portrait commission from the *alcalde*, hoping to plant the idea of portraiture in his mind. But he seemed tired and uninterested. We walked the rest of the way in silence, and parted to go to our separate rooms without another word.

So Much?

Violet Paget
17 Rue Des Jardins
Montparnasse
Paris, France

My dear Violet:

I must write you about my first adventure as a *portraitste* in the New World. The mayor of Petalumo invited me to his *palacio* this morning to discuss painting a portrait of his daughter for her fifteenth birthday. I was so excited I could hardly sleep last night. I spent two hours dressing and checking and rechecking my appearance and my sketchbook. I marked several pages to show the mayor and his wife as samples of my work.

His home was not the grand palace I expected. Apparently, any dwelling facing on the grand canal, however commonplace and shabby, is called a *palacio*. The old man and his even older wife hovered around me like vultures, while I made a preliminary sketch of their daughter. She was a plump child with a high complexion, as if she had a fever. She posed like a sack of turnips upon a divan, holding a puppy that squirmed and squealed the entire time I was there. I included the puppy in my sketch, but the mayor said, "No, not the dog. She must look like an old woman, with dignity."

By this I think he meant that he wanted a stiff, formal pose, along the lines of the portraits I had seen in the municipal hall the night before. I crosshatched over the puppy, making it part of a dark background.

Then the mayor added, "And the pearls. Make them more big."

"Like goose eggs?" I asked.

"*¿Que?*"

I pretended not to hear him.

"How much it costs?" he asked, "a picture in paints of oil color?"

"How large a painting do you want?"

He held his arms wide to indicate a canvas over a meter square.

I said, "750 pesos," and he immediately reduced his gestures to indicate a much more modest size canvas.

"I said, "650 pesos," and his eyebrows shot up.

"So much?" he said. "Why so much?"

I told him that a small painting takes almost as much time as a large painting. "You are paying mostly for my time, not the paint and canvas."

He said, "I have to think about it." He took the sketch from my left hand and started shaking my right hand. He stood up and hauled me to my feet as well, spraying me with rapidfire Spanish: "Thank you so much for coming to our home. It is my pleasure. Mucho gusto, mucho gusto." He steered me out the door so quickly that I left without my stick of charcoal and eraser.

So far, Alta California is not paradise for a *portraitste*.

Your disillusioned chum,
John

Gibralter the Egg Mule

Reprinted from the *Atlantic Weekly*, June 6, 1879
Mark Twain
Petalumo
Republic of Alta California

Dear Reader:

This curious town is situated athwart and within the Rio Petalumo. By that I mean that she has never been content to emulate drier and less fanciful sisters such as St. Louis or New Orleans, who merely huddle around their rivers in a companionable conspiracy of transport and trade. No indeed—through profligate dredging and canal building, Petalumo has invited the river into her very streets, transforming what would otherwise be a commonplace river hamlet into the Venice of the West.

Please do not dismiss this as a fancy. If you could see the watercolor sketch completed the other day by my countryman and fellow traveler, John Sargent, you would think it done in Italy a hundred years ago by Canaletto, were it not for the grain elevators and steam launches. So taken was young Master John with the aqueous potentialities of the scene that he perched several hours atop a reeking tailings barge to record his view of the Grand Turning Basin. When he returned to the hotel to show me his masterpiece, he was so daubed with mud and muck from the barge that the doorman refused him entrance. I had to pay a bellman to hose him off. I used to have spotted pup that would do the same thing: dig up a mole in the spring garden and proudly bring it to me in the drawing room, trailing dung and daffodils through the house.

Gondolas just like those in the original Venice ply the canals of Petalumo, and the young Mexican *vaqueros de agua* sing and shout in a perfect imitation of the Italian gondoliers, complete with maniacally insouciant airs and the obtuse arrogance of deposed dukes. I took passage on one of these gondolas late last night, bearing a sack of hard boiled eggs that were to be my breakfast. Observing the sloppy poling technique of the gondolier,

I resolved to learn him a lesson in rivercraft. I placed an egg on the transom, grabbed the pole from the startled lad, and proceeded to show him how one could propel the boat so smoothly that the egg would never roll off into the water. Unfortunately my first few attempts were less than perfect, and I was soon out of eggs. The gentle reader will never know what a consummate ass he can become until he goes abroad.

And so this morning I sit writing to you, hungry and wishing I had an egg. The egg is King here. From Petalumo to the coast stretch vast egg ranches. These *huevos rancheros* supply all the omelets and pickled bar eggs for San Francisco, Sacramento, and points East. Eggs are packed in straw and cooled with wet sacking, floated down the Rio Petalumo to San Francisco Bay, then up the Sacramento River, where they are off-loaded and packed into the Sierra Nevada gold fields by mule train.

These famous egg mules have backs as steady as a gyroscope. Their "skinners" equip them with pack frames in gimbals, and claim they could bring their fragile cargo safely through Armageddon. A sober and honest mule-skinner I met in a canal-side tavern told me a story about one such fabulous mule, a jug-headed specimen named "Gibralter," for its stability.

Gibralter once carried fifty dozen eggs over the spine of the Sierras into the Mexican state of Nevada. At the height of the pass, an earthquake opened a chasm into which the hapless beast pitched headlong. Two days later the mule was spit out of a mineshaft in the eastern foothills, one hundred and forty-nine miles away. Nary an egg was broken, although Gibralter was skinned of more than half his hide and in fact became known as "Baldy" ever afterwards.

At first hearing about Baldy née Gibralter, I reckoned I had been sold a preposterous yarn, but I now believe it to be no more than the unvarnished truth, since its teller swore to me on the weeping eyes of the Virgin of Guadeloupe, an infallible guarantor of veracity in these parts.

Your Servant in Truth,
Mark Twain

An American Vandal Abroad

I had from Mr. Twain a handbill announcing his lecture, "An American Vandal Abroad," with hand-written details of time and place. My Castilian Spanish, with help from the Esperanto summary at the bottom, were sufficient to give me the gist. He would speak on "Our Fellow Savages of the Sandwich Islands and the Holy Lands… Doors open at 7 o'clock, the trouble to begin at 8."

Mark Twain spoke in a drawling, twangy Spanish, referring frequently to a thick sheaf of notes in Spanish, translated from one of his London lectures, and reading passages from the Spanish edition of *The Innocents Abroad*. Marina Miranova was on hand at the side of the stage, to translate questions from the audience and the offhand remarks Mr. Twain made in English.

He did passably well on his own. He threw in many English and Esperanto words, even a few Russian and French terms. Some of his jokes fell flat, victims of translation and his Confederate accent. But his enthusiasm and warm, lively delivery carried him and the audience over the rough spots. The applause for Mr. Twain was sustained and sincere. However, on the landing in front of the hall during the interval, I talked to two Serran clerics who took issue with his remarks about missionaries. (In church on Sunday morning the missionaries will make you wish you were back with the mosquitoes.)

"He judges all missionaries by the Protestants," priest number one complained to me. He had large bushy eyebrows that caught the light from the torches lining the jetty and cast ever-changing shadows over his cheeks.

Priest number two had a prominent nose with a rat-like hump in the middle. He pointed to the entablature above the door to the lecture hall. "This hall is named after Junipero Serra," he explained. "He was the founder of our order and the greatest missionary of all time."

"Didn't he become pope?" I asked

"Eventually, yes," the priest with the eyebrows replied, "But at first he was a humble Franciscan friar. Father Serra came to Mexico City in 1750, just another Spanish refugee like all the other religious dissidents, free thinkers, conversos Jews, and Moors fleeing the Inquisition in Spain."

"He was washing the floor in a chapel in Mexico city," Father Ratnose chimed in, "When he had a vision. A voice told him to travel north and bring the good news to the Indians."

"Is it a vision," I had to ask, "If you don't see anything? If you just hear a voice?"

They looked at me with pity, as if I had inadvertently made a scatological reference in an unfamiliar tongue.

"Serra was a different kind of missionary," Father Eyebrows continued. "He considered the Indians people, just like white men. His idea of the good news included making sure the Indians had arable land, tools, and the time to use them. He fought the Viceroy's friends who wanted to reserve the best land for themselves."

Ratnose laughed. "Mexico city was very upset. The better he treated the Indians, the more he fell behind his superiors' timetable. They wanted him to claim all of California for Spain, before Russia could grab it. Serra wanted to create heaven on earth. So naturally he was defrocked, excommunicated, and ordered back to Mexico City. And just as naturally, he declared himself Innocent the First, the first Western Pope."

They cackled gleefully, savoring the joke.

I asked, "But how could he get away with that? Why didn't they arrest him and drag him back?"

"You have to realize," Eyebrows explained, "this was when Mexico was fighting for independence from Spain. Most of the Spanish soldiers in Alta California had been recalled to Mexico and replaced with native militia, who were loyal to Serra above all."

"A detachment was sent from Mexico City to arrest Serra," said Ratnose, "But they mysteriously disappeared. While Mexico was busy breaking away from Spain, Serra quietly walked off with Alta California, proclaiming it a Republic. His militias seized the large ranchos and broke them up. Serra instituted land reforms and some canny ex-Jesuits set up our courts. Now anyone can own land or hold office—Indians, merchants, blackamoors, Jews, cowboys, miners—whoever. There are even some white Protestant Americans farming the marshes down in San Rafael."

"By the time Mexico City could spare troops to object," Eyebrows concluded, "It was too late. They had been outflanked by the greatest missionary of all time."

Daisy and Oscar

Henry James
Lamb House, the Willows
Rye, East Sussex
England

May 29, 1879

Dear Hank:

Thank you for your epistle of the 18th. You have no idea how your subtle wit and affirmations of affection buoy me up as I drift around this cold and lonely world. The more manly arts of love and comradeship seem almost unknown in the New World. The people I meet here are uniformly too coarse and insensitive to sustain for long the kind of refined discourse that I find so effortless and gratifying with you.

Last night I attended Mr. Twain's South Sea Island Lecture, a pastiche of rustic humor, mockery, and sly wit that induced occasional paroxysms of mirth in the local Philistines.

His remarks about the similarities between missionaries and mosquitoes were coolly received. Alta Californians revere their missionary past. The Franciscan missionary Junipero Serra was not only the Saint Paul but also the Saint Peter of New Spain. As the founder of the Western Papacy and the architect of much of the Californian social experiment, he was the kind of rebel I find so fascinating, and you find so alarming—an Oscar Wilde of religion, if that is not too sacrilegious.

Has Auntie Oscar committed any interesting atrocities lately? I find his flamboyance and flaunting of convention shocking, but fascinating. Sometimes I almost applaud him for his bravery and daring. I think to myself, in the privacy and safety of my apartment, "Why should he hide away like some timid lavender aunt in Belgravia?" But other times, having observed the blatancy of the Parisian chestnut gatherers in the Champs-Élysées, I reflect on my own circumstances and ambitions, and I shudder at the prospect of carrying on with such wanton disregard for decency.

I think it has something to do with being a painter rather than a writer. The need for portrait commissions precludes blatancy and requires circumspection.

Here in Alta California they talk much about equality and tolerance, but I suspect their tolerance does not extend very far in the direction of sexual inversion. I am not very impressed by the many political freedoms they have won, because they have paid a high price, artistically. In rejecting control by Mexico and Spain and the Church, they have also rejected their artistic and cultural heritage. To my knowledge, the last decent painter they had was Francisco Goya, and he was actually a displaced Spaniard. He did not immigrate to California until 1776 or 77, I think. The Californian painters whose work I have seen are little more than folk artists, decorating bull carts for farmers and painting murals in cantinas. The churches and public buildings such as last night's lecture hall are plain and uninspired. Basket weaving is more respected as an art than oil painting.

During our voyage from the islands, I re-read your novel and enjoyed it even more the second time. I especially admire the way you allow your reader to eavesdrop on Daisy's thoughts, as if one were inside her head. One comes to know her deeply and intimately, without exactly loving her, for she reveals more to the reader about her own foibles and failings than she knows herself. You are such a clever imp.

I strive to accomplish the same trick in portraiture, presenting my subject in a pose and setting and light so characteristic that he recognizes, approves of, and delights in the likeness. At the same time, the perceptive viewer can see beyond the surface, to the vanity, insecurity, and social pretensions that prompted the sitter to commission his portrait; or to the nobility and dignity of a genuinely great man; or to the affection or lack thereof that I myself feel for the subject. Heady stuff to be contained in a thin layer of pigment on canvas…

A Chance Encounter

In addition to the chance of securing a portrait commission from Mr. Twain, I had two other reasons to follow him to Petalumo: I wanted to see some important murals by Velasquez, and I hoped to meet Goya's grandson, who still lived in Petalumo and was his ancestor's artistic executor.

Velasquez fled the Spanish Inquisition in 1638 and came to Alta California, where he spent 22 years as the premiere painter of the New World Renaissance. The altarpiece in the chapel of the municipal palacio in Petalumo is a mural of six panels, larger than life, painted in oil on linen attached to plaster walls, ranged in a semicircle around the asp.

No one was in the chapel on the day I went to see the murals. The sky was mostly overcast, but a chance ray of sunshine through a leaded glass dome illuminated a corner of one of the panels, spot lighting the head of a peasant boy. I opened my sketchbook and copied the head while the light was good. Velasquez had painted him in the foreground, looking back toward the virgin Mary, in an almost three-quarter rear view. I captured the essence of the pose before the sun went behind the clouds and the light dimmed.

I put my sketchbook away and began a close examination of the brushwork on the panels. I borrowed a votive candle from a stand near the altar rail and held it close to the surface of the wall. The finish was very fine, with highlights laid on creamy, smooth, and slightly translucent. The shadows seemed nearly a foot deep, thanks to a generous, almost reckless amount of medium—walnut oil, I'm sure—and a well-laid coat of varnish with very little cracking or surface dirt.

"Last year you would not have seen half the detail," a voice remarked in the crisply articulated Spanish of Alta California. I turned to see a stooped man in a stained smock, leaning on a cane.

"The paintings do seem very fresh and bright," I replied, in my more slurred, Castilian version of the same language.

"We have just finished cleaning them, freeing the master's work from over 200 years of dirt, dust, and candle smoke." He glanced at my candle and I moved it away from the painting.

"They are magnificent. I have wanted to see them since I was a boy. I am a painter myself and I have come from Paris to learn from these walls."

"What can they teach you?"

"Oh, to my eyes they are like a text book. Look here how Velasquez has created the highlight on Cortez' forehead with one perfect stroke."

The old peasant leaned forward, squinting at the surface.

"It is only paint."

"That's my point," I explained, "With one daub of paint smeared on a flat canvas, he creates the illusion of round form, of a real human head, lightly perspiring on a sunny day. More than that, the shape of the edge somehow informs us that Cortez is noble, intelligent, brave, and passionate."

"He was the father of the New World. This painting is called *Discovery*. It is 1518 and Cortez is claiming New Spain for the Spanish king. However, in later pictures he is of a different mind."

The panel shows Cortez planting the Spanish flag in the sand of a stylized tropical beach. He is surrounded by brutish *conquistadors* in silver helms, their poses echoed and slyly mocked by three amused Indians in the background.

"This is so clever, so simple." I pointed to the lower part of the panel. "Velasquez uses the noon shadows of the figures to tie them all together with one strong horizontal dark shape, like a solid border on a lace mantilla."

I spent more than two hours examining Velasquez' work in detail, and the old gentleman stuck with me the whole time. He became my personal tour guide, as we worked our way around the asp with votive candles, like monks of art performing the stations of the brush. I was amazed at how much he knew of history, and how quickly he grasped the finer points of my explanations of composition, color, and brushwork. The old man pointed out that in *Conquest*, the second panel, the same three Indians reappear as the chiefs of the Aztecs, Zapotecs, and Mixtecs, surrendering to Cortez in 1522. Cortez' silver helm is now trimmed with quetzal feathers and he receives a symbolic golden mace from the conquered chieftains.

The third panel is *Repentance*. It shows Cortez bent over a stone altar, stripped to the waist, his helmet lying in the dust, being lashed by a tonsured monk in a coarse brown robe.

"Why is a lowly monk beating the Emperor?" I asked.

"Here it is 1524, and Cortez is not yet emperor. After the conquest he asked the bishops of Old Spain to send him priests from the Franciscan and other mendicant orders—priests who took a vow of poverty and ministry to the common people. Cortez feared that the corrupt secular clergy of Spain would enslave and murder the Indians. He wanted priests who might help him to include the Indians a new society. Cortez had himself lashed in public to show the natives that even he was a sinner and not above the rule of the Church."

"The composition is wonderful, but the subject matter is not to my taste."

We moved on to the *Apparition*, the most famous panel and the one my teacher Carolus Duran raved about as the perfect depiction of ethereal light. It shows the Virgin of Guadalupe appearing to Juan Diego in 1531. The Indian peasant boy and the dusky Virgin are bathed in shimmering light that surrounds their heads with soft-edged, not-quite-halos.

"Look how Velasquez blends his colors from white to yellow to brown. From a distance you would swear he had used gold leaf and not simple oil paints."

"The apparition," my guide explained, "was confirmed as a genuine miracle by Bishop Zumarraga of New Spain, in defiance of Rome. This miracle is considered the founding event of the Western Church, the slender edge of the wedge that eventually split the Catholic Church into the Western, Roman, and Eastern rites we know today."

"This painting is the miracle." I was spellbound, consumed with envy, almost inarticulate. "The spiraling, interlocking shapes of dark and light… the lost and found edges… it takes your breath away."

My guide just smiled. I could not tell if he approved of my enthusiasm or was merely amused.

The least successful panel is the *Cleansing*. Cortez appears again on another beach, banishing the Papal Nuncio to a deserted offshore island, along with seven of his own more vicious lieutenants guilty

of murdering Indians. Burning in a bonfire are all of New Spain's copies of the 1545 Index of Forbidden Works issued by Pope Paul III. Even Velasquez' compositional genius was foiled by the necessity of including such a large cast of characters and their stage props.

In *Coronation*, the sixth and final panel, Cortez crowns himself Emperor of the New World and protector of the faith in 1546. He sits on a throne-like chair and smiles triumphantly, but seems pale and thin. At his elbow is a sheet of parchment.

"That is the letter he wrote to Pope Paul III," my guide explained. "Cortez demanded that the Pope make Juan Diego a saint and Bishop Zumarraga a cardinal. Naturally, the Pope excommunicated him for his arrogance. Cortez was sick and died soon after. He didn't live to see New Spain become an independent empire, but his vision inspired later reformers."

The old conservator showed me where serious water damage had been repaired. As he explained how the linen had been removed, the roof and wall rebuilt, and the linen replaced and artfully retouched, I finally realized that he had done the repainting himself. It dawned on my poor, stupid brain that I had been lecturing someone who probably knew more about technical painting matters than myself.

I apologized for my single-mindedness and at last took the time for formal introductions.

I said, "My name is John Singer Sargent," including my mother's family name in the middle, so it sounded more like a Spanish name.

"Pleased to meet you." He bowed slightly over his cane. "My name is Francisco Goya y Sanchez de Goya y Lucientes."

As I deciphered his name, my mouth gaped wide open. "Then you are . . ."

"Yes, I am. Francisco Jose de Goya was my grandfather."

Here was the second object of my pilgrimage to Petalumo, the grandson of the great painter Goya. I apologized again and told him how much I admired his grandfather's early work that I had seen in Spain.

"I feel such a fool, to have come halfway around the world to visit you, then act like a know-it-all and actually explain your countryman Velasquez to you, like a boarding school drawing master. I am exceedingly embarrassed."

He laughed. "Not at all. I was charmed by your enthusiasm. And you actually know quite a lot about the master's painting, for a boarding school drawing master."

"You are too kind. This is wonderful. I was hoping for the chance to meet you and talk with you about your grandfathers work."

"If you like, I would be pleased to receive you in my studio. I have some works of my grandfather's that you might find interesting, and I'd like to hear more of your observations of the state of art in the Old World."

Later that same afternoon Señor Francisco showed me his grandfather's old studio, the sky-lit upper floor of an enormous adobe palacio on Canal Hildalgo. It was full of my host's own work, mostly oil portraits, plus a few still lifes and landscapes. I admired them dutifully. To my surprise and disappointment, they were barely competent, with boring compositions, crude color, and numerous subtle drawing errors. Francisco had not inherited the Goya genius.

That genius survived on the walls. Grandfather Goya had painted the walls with dark, fantastic scenes: a Greek Colossus towering over a tranquil California pueblo; an Iberian Saturn devouring his children; conquistadors drawing and quartering a peon farmer; heraldic pumas attacking Spanish imperial eagles; a carnival of infants; a jury of baboons. Some were allegories in which Vice triumphs over Virtue. Others recast mythological creatures as characters in the history of New Spain. All were unique and vastly different from the bravura portraits that I had seen in Europe. Goya's *alla prima* strokes and dynamic compositions were present, but in service of a darker vision, one more individual, more tragic, more insane than I would ever have imagined possible. The more one looked at these fantastic murals, the more peculiar and upsetting they seemed.

Señor Francisco confided in me, leaning close with his hand on my arm, as if it were our dirty secret, "I never receive the *alcalde* or council members up here. Them I entertain downstairs."

"I can see why," I said.

"Alta California has become a nation of miserly merchants. Cowards and dunces. No one wants a real painting. They just want their boring, excremental lives illustrated in gilt and aquamarine."

He pulled six canvases out of a rack in the corner and leaned them against the wall.

"These are the only easel paintings of my grandfather's I have left."

They were studies actually, not finished pictures. The figures and forms were roughly blocked-in, lacking detail and refinement.

The most complete was a half-size reclining figure.

"Grandfather called her 'The Maja Reformed.' She was mistress of a grand rancho to the east. Here you see her fully clothed like a Hellenic maiden. Her first portrait was a nude, same pose, but life-sized. One of the best things grandfather ever did, but he was nearly hung for it. You see, it wasn't Athena or Diana or some other classical slut. It was a real, contemporary slut and the local jefes could not tolerate that. Grandfather repainted her clothed, and this is the study for that painting. The nude he hid away for years. After he died, my Papa retitled it 'Helen Reclining During the Sack of Troy,' and sold it for pocket change to the Tsar's bastard third cousin across the river."

We had a good laugh over that, and I studied the study for "the Maja Reformed." Even though it was a rough study, it had been varnished, and on top of the varnish were traces of another layer of oil paint.

"It looks like he varnished it and then started to over-paint it."

"Oh, that is my fault. Years ago I thought I might finish it enough to sell it. My 'improvements' looked terrible, so I wiped them off. I am a better restorer than forger."

"It's fortunate you protected the original with varnish."

"Yes, of course. It would never do to permanently alter his work."

"Yes, of course." I could understand the temptation. A little refinement here and there, adding a darker background, some softening of edges, enhancing of lighting, and it would be a charming, fresh study by a master painter. It was beyond Francisco's skills, but I could do it.

"It is a pity," I said, "That Goya did not take it a little further and sign it. Small easel paintings by 18th century masters are scarce and in great demand. They bring good prices in Paris these days." I turned the painting over and examined the stretchers and tacks on the back.

"Is there much interest in these kinds of studies, unfinished and unsigned?"

"A little, surely." The back of the painting looked genuinely old and undisturbed. "There are dealers in Paris who would strip the varnish off a painting like this, get somebody to finish it off with some "authentic" touches, forge a signature, give it a new coat of varnish, cook it a little over the fire to age it, then sell it for thirty thousand francs."

"I don't suppose you've done any of that sort of work yourself?"

"No, not exactly."

He raised his eyebrow, but said nothing.

I shrugged, "When I was in school in Paris, I copied a couple of the Dutch masters in the Louvre. A dealer bought one of them for a few francs, and I heard that he later passed it off to an English collector. As students, we weren't supposed to do that sort of thing, so I never looked into it too deeply."

"Interesting." He began putting the paintings back in the rack and said no more, but a seed had been planted.

I thought that perhaps I had been too forthcoming about my possible forgeries, so I changed the subject. I told him about traveling with Mark Twain, who hoped to visit Rossland to the north.

"Go with him if you possibly can," He said, "In Rossland they still commission portraits worth painting, and they're aristocratic enough to like what they like, not what the peons or the church tell them to like."

"I'm tempted to take your advice. Alta California is a charming, colorful place, but I don't sense much of a market for portraits here."

"You are correct. In our so-called classless society, no one cares a fig about art. In Rossland you might have a chance. I know their Minister of Culture, Krepotsky is his name. He has the power to commission paintings, sculpture, and monuments for the crown. Here in California that job is performed pueblo by pueblo, by committees of cretins."

Before I left, he set me a task, as if he were Carolus assigning homework at l'Ecole des Beaux Art: "You have an interest in forgeries. While you are here, go see the mantle of Juan Diego. It is on display this month in the cathedral. Examine it closely and tell me what you think."

Goya's Studio

Violet Paget
17 Rue Des Jardins
Montparnasse
Paris, France

June 3, 1879

My Dear Violet/Vernon:

I have met Goya's grandson and passed yesterday afternoon in the master's studio! It is covered with amazing murals that would surprise and shock you! They are much more fantastic and symbolic than any we have seen in Europe.

Goya's grandson especially reminds me of Carolus Duran in his manner of assigning homework. He insisted that I go to the cathedral and examine the Cloak of St. John, so this morning Mr. Twain and I did exactly that. The cathedral is dark and heavy in the mission style. A long line of peasants was inching toward the altar rail, where a friar and two bored looking acolytes presided over an easel draped with cloth of some kind. I joined the line so that I could get close to the relic. Twain sauntered about with his hands in his pockets, murmuring satiric asides about the Catholic Church to himself, and looking decidedly too casual for the setting.

Supposedly, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin (Indian for "Talking Eagle") saw a vision of the Virgin Mary, who told him to build a chapel out in the desert. The local bishop didn't believe him. Then the Virgin told Juan to gather some roses and take them to the bishop, even though it was winter and no roses were in bloom. He found some miraculous out-of-season roses and wrapped them in his mantle, an apron of sorts, and took them to the bishop. When he dumped the roses out, they found an icon of the Virgin imprinted on the mantle.

The peasants were lining up to kiss the grime-blackened hem of the alleged mantle. When I got to the head of the queue I pretended to kiss it so I could lean in for a good look and a deep sniff. The image was dim in the poorly lit church, but I could catch

a hint of turpentine and linseed oil. The fabric was a fine weave of linen, not the cactus fiber cloth that tradition says Juan Diego wore. And if the icon was of divine origin, then the Almighty used the same palette and iconographic conventions as the students of Velasquez. I worked very assiduously to present a reverential demeanor on the outside, because I was chuckling heartily on the inside, along with Goya.

If you and I and the other hopefuls of Beaux Arts cannot find employment flattering our social betters with portraits, perhaps we can cobble together "relics" for the lords of the church.

With one blasphemous foot in brimstone, I remain,

Forever yours,
Juan

Holy Relics

Reprinted from the *Atlantic Weekly*, June 13, 1879
Mark Twain
Petalumo
Republic of Alta California

Esteemed Reader:

My erstwhile traveling companion John Sargent and I have been initiated into the mysteries of the Catholic Faith, Western Division. Our guide was an amiable Jesuit named Carlos Gustavo Enrique Jose de los Santos y Maria, and proud of it. He greeted us at the door of the local cathedral and invited us in to view the relics on display. As a quondam practicing Protestant, I offered to apply for a visa, supply references, and post a bond, but diplomatic protocol was graciously waived.

Young Mr. Sargent dragged us up to the marble hitching rail at the front of the church to get a close view of the principle sacred object on display: the Mantle of Saint John Diego, bearing a self-portrait of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. I do not know much about art, but I do know what I don't like, and in my opinion, it was a tolerable likeness. I doubt my own mother could have painted one half as good with her full paint box, and the Virgin was working in the hot sun, without a mirror, without a real canvas, without even a brush or paints. It is indeed a miracle.

Father Carlos Gustavo Enrique etc. bragged that the Virgin had painted herself on the back of Saint John's ragged cactus fiber cloak, which struck me as a callous and cavalier confiscation of a poor man's wardrobe. However, he pointed out that Catholics, especially native Aztec Catholics, are famous for their self-sacrifice.

To my astonishment, John knelt before the graven image and kissed the hem of the cloak, already black and damp with the admiration of previous art lovers. Now, I'm not certain, but at the moment of John's kiss, I thought I detected a nimbus of light around his head, a genuine halo. I admit it was dim in the cathedral, filled with the gloom of the Holy Spirit, and my eyes were watering a bit, since the cloak emitted what I believe is called

the odor of sanctity. I was deeply moved, reminded of when I attended my parents' wedding and witnessed my pap's cousin Elderberry Pope toast their union with a spittoon.

Padre Carlos ushered us from one relic to another. John seemed to float in a state of mystical transport, moving as if on tiny wheels. He crossed himself, bowed his head, and periodically genuflected to the cardinal directions. We saw wonder after wonder: one of Saint Sebastian's arrows, the right forefinger of Saint Junipero Serra, and the donkey's jaw bone Sampson used in the old testament battle, showing remarkable little wear after slaying a thousand Philistines. I was minded of cousin Elderberry's prize possession, the axe George Washington used on the cherry tree, kept in good repair over the years by replacing the head twice and the handle thrice. I noticed several other icons of the Virgin by lesser artists, each with a different complexion, from whitest Castilian to brownest Indio, beauty being notoriously in the race of the beholder. I have noticed this tendency before; painters make Christ a Spaniard in Spain and Irish in Ireland.

To me, the prize of the collection was a minute speck of sawdust from the cross of Jesus. Papa Chuck assured me that Holy Mother Church has preserved enough pieces of the True Cross to build the Pope a steamboat. I was not blasphemous enough to inquire whether he referred to the pope in Monterey, the pope in Rome, the pope in Constantinople, or Elderberry Pope, who since he runs a tannery in Hannibal, Missouri is the only one of the quartet who possesses any real need of a steamboat, or has a river at hand to float it. Knowing the Roman Church, I suspect their steamboat will never be launched. Rather, it will be encased in glass, surrounded by a Carrara colonnade, and touted three hundred years from now as the private launch of Saint John Singer Sargent.

Despite my native skepticism, I returned to my hotel room a changed man. Before retiring I created a literary shrine on my nightstand, arranging in a mystic triangle one of Shakespeare's fingernail trimmings, a lock of Dante's hair, and a pocket watch that once belonged to Homer. In my prayers I asked the Presbyterian God to bless me with a tenth of the pure storytelling imagination bestowed on the Catholics. I fell into blissful sleep, knowing that if my prayer were answered, my stories would be

chiseled into stone, pilgrims would line up to kiss the ink stains on my fingers, and my publisher would scurry to reply to my correspondence within a year of receipt.

Devoutly yours,
Mark Twain

Boundary Values

Marina dragged Twain and me from door to door, trying to find lodging of any kind. After fruitless inquiries at five hotels, all bursting at the seams, we settled into a "boarding house" at the end of a dusty street baked by the sun. The structure was wooden, with ugly black iron shutters on all the windows and even over the doors. Only two rooms were available , both small and expensive. Mr. Twain and I shared the basement compartment, a dim cave smelling of damp, but blessedly cool. I did not relish sharing a room, but I welcomed the chance to save a little money, my resources not being the equal of Mark Twain's fortune.

He and Miss Marina were in high spirits despite our long hot search for quarters. They jostled and mocked each other like siblings of an age, although he had to be over twenty years her senior. In the last few days, she had focused her teasing attention on Mr. Twain instead of me, much to my relief. I found her company exhausting, although she had proved to be an excellent model She knew by instinct how to strike an interesting pose, relax into it, hold truly still, and return to the exact same position hours or even days later. I wondered what she would look like draped in cashmere, surrounded by ferns in some lush, bucolic setting out of a Wordsworth poem.

I stowed my belongings quickly and ran out to escape the confines of the horrible room. The street was thronged with wagons and horses and men afoot, stirring up a choking dust, even on the streets paved with cobble or macadam. I made my way down to the Embarcadero, by the river.

Shiny black carriages twinkled past with noble crests on the doors and curtains open to catch the breeze, giving me a glimpse of a silk hat, a bit of lace or braid on a sleeve. Burly drovers urged their teams forward against an almost impenetrable wall of traffic. Small boys and Chinese ducked and bobbed and weaved in and out of the traffic, darting like swallows through the smallest opening in the crowd.

Vendors sold roasted grain, parched corn, skewered meats, donuts, sorghum candies, and honey-sweetened barley water and

lemonade. I had a berry turnover and a lemonade, sitting on a pile of stone blocks, in the corner between a buttress and a levee wall, where I was out of the way and had a good view of the docks. When I finished my sweets, I wiped my fingers on my trousers and took out my sketchbook. I did a quick study of the scene, in black and white only, no shading.

After an hour's sketching, I felt relaxed and calm, having completely forgotten Twain, Marina, our mean boarding house, and our tedious search for a place to stay. I looked up and discovered that I had collected a small crowd of children watching me. I smiled briefly at them, but did not say anything or maintain eye contact. I like children as a rule, but they can ruin my concentration with their endless questions. I've found it best not to give them an opening.

The Unholy Family

When I received the Tsar's invitation for a visit to Rossland and a command performance, I was as relieved as the woman whose baby came white. Travel letters from California, and a subsequent book on the California experiment would have been all well and good, but the real jewel in my literary crown would be impressions of the Tsar and his tin pot empire. As a rule, journalists were as welcome in Rossland as typhoid fever, but my two book-length efforts had apparently elevated me to the status of a novelist. No more a Shklovsky, exiled to write about the fishing in Minsk—I was now a Tolstoy, honored and admired and safe enough to be let into the capitol city. I had felt very smug, two weeks ago, anticipating the solid blows I would land on the body politic of tyranny, bragging to Howells that against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand. I even thought I would do a bit of business in photographic chemicals for Jaime Rodolpho, cementing my association with the photo-engraving genius.

But Rossland had turned out to be largely a feudal swamp, mired in the past, inefficient and backwards. And the Tsar and his minions had apparently forgotten me. No one to meet the train, no hotel reservation, no booking agent in sight. Like the unholy family, we slunk into town with humbled crest, knocking fruitlessly on every inn door, me as Joseph, Marina as Mary, and John a very premature and precocious Christ Child. I was left on my own like a cub reporter fresh off the boat, forced to scrounge for a bunk and buy my own drinks.

Marina was at a loss, embarrassed once again by her betters in this horrible country.

"I'm sure it is just a mistake," she said. "The hotel cancelled our reservations because the train was delayed. They must have thought we returned to Fort Ross."

"We telegraphed ahead with all our particulars."

"I know, but sometimes the telegraph office is not entirely reliable."

"This place is a dump," I said, referring to the basement room she had rented, the street outside, greater Sakrametska, and the

entire Northwest Empire. I dropped my satchel on one of the narrow beds, creating a jangle of springs and stirring up a musty smell. Sargent said something about mushrooms growing in the corner.

"At least it will be cooler here," Marina said with a sniff. She picked up her own bag and started up the stairs on the long climb to her garret.

Sargent and I unpacked, fighting for space between the beds and in the narrow cupboard that served as a wardrobe.

"There's barely room enough to swing a cat in here," I said, "but not vigorously, and not with entire security to the cat."

Sargent said nothing. Not even a chuckle. I believe he was practicing that virtue so many mothers teach their children: "If you can't say something nice, say nothing at all." He shoved his half-full bag under his bed, grabbed his sketchbook and a straw hat, and left without a word.

I was glad to be alone. I stretched out on the bed in socks and shirtsleeves, closed my eyes, and set to work restoring my sunny disposition by meditating on my many excellent qualities, the failings of my enemies, and the hope of revenge in future.

I was asleep almost immediately. I dreamed I was in the pilot house of a Mississippi steamboat, pushing upstream in low water, beset on all sides by snags and sandbars, no clear path ahead and not the foggiest notion of the whereabouts of the channel.

"Mark? Wake up. You're having a bad dream." It was Marina, sitting on Sargent's bed, poking me, leaning over me so close I could see tiny beads of perspiration on her brow at the hairline. The top two buttons of her shift were undone and she was glowing with the heat of the day.

I was confused for a moment, still dreamy, and I took her hand. She brushed a lock of my hair off my brow, leaned over further, and kissed me. However many times this had happened in my imagination, I was still unprepared for the enormity of the act in reality. I rejoiced in my good fortune and kissed her back. Events unfolded in the usual way, given the weakness of the flesh, and I forgot all about the Tsar, his piddling empire, and my poor mother stuck on the steamboat.

Boom Town

Violet Paget
17 Rue Des Jardins
Montparnasse
Paris, France

July 18, 1879

My dear Violet:

Sakrametska is nothing like I imagined it would be. As the capital of a Russian Colony, I expected a miniature Moscow or Saint Petersburg. However, it is more like Nashville or Louisville, or one of those other Wild West boom towns, as described in the dime novels I used to find hidden under your sofa cushions. If only your editors knew your true taste and preferences in literature. They would be appalled!

You would love it here. I saw two native women mucking out a stable today, wearing very manly canvas trousers. Since the Gold Rush, when all of the able-bodied men ran away to pan for gold, women here have held down men's jobs, wearing the pants as well.

I have included a black and white sketch of the dock area, done in a kind of woodcut style. I think it is a good example of the primacy of value in communicating your subject. It is the light and dark of things that the mind sees first, not the color. The portrait of the Duke's wife that I wrote you about last time is a possible exception. I wish you could see it. It is in such a high key that I do not think I progressed more than three fifths the way to black, even in the darkest details. And yet, perhaps the Duchess makes my point as well. When the value range is restricted, the more subtle differences between dark and light take on even more importance. I almost asked the Duke to loan me the painting for the Paris salon next year, but decided it is not quite the right thing.

Mr. Twain has not taken any of my recent hints about painting his portrait, although he did watch me paint the Duchess several times, while we were waiting for the train tracks to be repaired. He and I are sharing a basement room in a dreadful house, so I will

have ample time to work on him. For an older man of letters, Mark Twain sometimes acts younger than I. He is carrying on like Tom Sawyer himself, swaggering about in miner's boots, shirtsleeves, and a long tan duster. He is talking about buying a pair of "six shooters" like the sports in town have strapped on their hips. He loves their tall tales of panning for gold, claim jumping, gunplay, brawling, and wenching. To me it seems silly braggadocio. My artist's eye is drawn to the extremes of human behavior, but my practical burgher's soul likes things settled and civilized.

So I will remain,
Your stodgy admirer,
John

New Dog, Old Tricks

William Dean Howells
Atlantic Weekly
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Dear William:

How goes business at the Atlantic—Weakly?

Sorry, the Demon Rum has set loose the Demon Pun in me. I am refreshing myself with some capital Barbados rotgut, enjoying the idle luxury of my suite of rooms at the Imperial Hotel in Sacramento. Tsar Nicholai has finally recalled my existence and come through with free hotel rooms, a carriage at my command, and an honorarium of 600 roubles. Although I reckon his largesse is the tsarist equivalent of me buying you a drink, it is welcome nonetheless. Old Nick o' Lie has done much to temper my disdain for monarchs. He has almost convinced me not to steal his towels.

Sakrametska's Embarcadero reminds me of Mississippi river towns like Vicksburg and Greenville in the old days. To wit, the sultry sun brooding in the white sky, the slow pulse of river traffic quickening with a big steamboat's arrival, the fine gentlemen and ladies mixing with louts and layabouts on the wharves. But it is a bigger concern altogether. Three story hotels and swank restaurants lie cheek by jowl with squalid vodka mills and bordellos. There is even an opera house, with a great show of gilt cupids and red plush wallpaper and crystal doodads on the lamp fringes. Sakrametska is a city of contrasts: dogs and diamonds, swine and swells, mud and mademoiselles.

Like the Mississippi river gentry of my youth, the Russian upper "crust" refers in the main to the mud on their boots and the dried vomitus on their cravats. Away from the river, life on the streets is very like the American Wild West. A man of quality is not properly dressed without his six gun and spurs and a wide Panama sombrero. The code duello, although technically illegal, is alive and well. The soft nights ring with whoops and hollers and gunshots. Cattle may be driven down Main Street from midnight

until six in the morning, and during those hours they are the most well-behaved citizens one will meet.

Still, I cannot deny the appeal of swaggering down main street at high noon with one's teeth clamped on a fine cigar, one's feet stamping regally through the pig droppings, the sun shining off a pair of silver six-shooters, women and children and dogs scurrying out of one's way. I have a mind to acquire a pair of pistolas. Double action Nagants are the weapon of choice here, being manufactured just a few leagues north of town at the royal armory. A pair of the gas-sealing cavalry model with 160 centimeter barrels may be had for only R500, price including cartridge belt, holsters, and long straps to keep the guns out of the mud if one drops them at a gallop. The local swells cut a fine figure on the street, their belts bristling with brass and their red leather horse thongs brushing their boot tops. In this town, the proper revolvers are a more important male accoutrement than cufflinks or repeater watch. It is a surprising fashion to find in the capitol city of a governmental system so given to assassination.

Tomorrow we meet Old Nick himself in the Hall of Audience of the Winter Palace, which I reckon is what Emperors call the front parlor. Then I will perform my tricks for the Royal Family in the evening, lecturing in the back parlor, or Topaz Ballroom as it is known here. Mrs. Clemens would be so proud of her little Sammy, asked to roll over and play dead by the rulers of the earth.

Enough of this. One is very drunk and must have one's beauty sleep. One must rise early, and give oneself a good currying.

Your earnest interrogator,
Mark Deadeye Twain

Commission of a Lifetime

July 19, 1879

Mary Sargent, c/o Sanderson
Apartments Genessee
10 Clarastrasse
Berne, Switzerland

Dear Mother:

I am to paint the portrait of a Monarch! Tsar Nicholai himself! But wait, let me start at the beginning: This morning Mr. Twain and I were received in audience by His Excellency Nicholai Romanovsky, Tsar of Rossland and Lord Protector of the Southeastern Realm. He is a tall, slender gentleman of about forty, very imperial in bearing, with an erect, military carriage. Mr. Twain presented the Tsar with a leather-bound copy of The Innocents Abroad, which he received graciously.

His Excellency greeted us in heavily accented English, then switched to Russian, speaking through Miss Miranova, our translator. He asked Mr. Twain, "How are you finding your visit to the Americas? Will you write a new book about us?"

Mr. Twain answered in English, "I reckon there are lots of opportunities for my peculiar style of writing."

"How would you compare the Spanish and ourselves?" the Tsar asked, getting right to the point.

"Unfavorably to both, of course. That is my style. For example, in Alta California, half the people suspicion you will attack them, and half that you will not, whereas in your country, the situation is reversed."

The Tsar frowned at this. I could not tell if he had taken offense at the allusion to impending hostilities, or if he was merely confused by a quirk of Marina's translation from Twain's frontier English into courtly Russian. I paraphrased Twain's remarks in French, since I knew the Tsar was fluent in that tongue. He smiled then and nodded.

"Ah, *quelle drôle*," he said, and we were off on a long *détour* in French. At first, I translated Twain's remarks into French for

the Tsar. Later, Nicholai and I conversed in French and Miss Miranova murmured English into Twain's ear. Neither of my companions was pleased by my commandeering the conversation, as they informed me later in no uncertain terms. But I couldn't help myself—the Tsar and I hit it off from the start. He asked me about my family, my education, and my painting. He knew all about the wedding portrait of Siska Django I had done for the Count of Hopland.

"I would like for you to paint my portrait," he said, and I stammered that I would be honored to paint him. He said, "Very good. My chamberlain will make all the arrangements." And that was that: The commission of a lifetime, one that most painters labor all their lives to received, granted to me at age 22, after twenty minutes of conversation.

At that point, the Tsar turned back to Twain and switched back to Russian, welcoming him again to Rossland and expressing his pleasure in the author's visit. But it was clear that the audience was drawing to a close, and I had taken up most of it chattering in French. Mr. Twain has been decidedly cool toward me since then.

I am floating along like my body is made of cloud. Tomorrow I have an appointment with the Tsar's chamberlain at the palace to settle all the financial and practical details of the portrait. I must find a studio, procure the best canvas and paints. So much to do and it is night and all the shops are closed and I cannot sleep and must stay up all night writing to you and everyone I know.

Your Loving and Ecstatic Son,
John

Bushwhacked

William Dean Howells
Atlantic Weekly
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Dear William:

If my last letter to you was intoxicated, this one is the hangover. It is all my fault for succumbing to flattery, for placing my hope in monarchs, for failing to extinguish in myself that instinctive awe that hereditary rulers evoke in the common-born.

Despite my republican values, I approached my audience with Tsar Nicholai in a state of giddiness. I polished my boots, trimmed my moustache, and had Marina coach me in several phrases of well-turned Russian. Then I made one mistake: I brought Marina and Sargent along, in the guise of translator and secretary, to fill out my *entourage*.

To my disappointment, we were received by the Tsar in a large drawing-room, rather than in a genuine throne room. A few chairs around the walls were occupied by miscellaneous courtiers and hangers-on, whispering in the background. The Tsar is a tall, skinny gent, with that poker-up-the-backside carriage I associate more with Prussians than Russians. He and I got on tolerably well, with a minimum of bowing and scraping. He seemed truly glad to receive the leather-bound *Innocents* you provided me—thank you for that, by the way.

I had just started to relax and enjoy myself, when Sargent bushwhacked me. The whelp stole my thunder! One moment I was trading Russian and Esperanto witticisms with the emperor, the perfect image of the visiting literary lion; and the next moment I was holding Master John's coat while he gossiped endlessly in French with *my* Tsar.

Sargent has taken to Sakrametska like a bear to honey. He scoops up the attention of all those around him and plays the Russians like a cello. He and Nicholai were chattering like a pair of schoolgirls at a party. The Tsar even offered him a commission for a portrait! I can just imagine the sort of flattering, sugary image

that will result. In France and Italy I saw miles of such paintings by the old masters. Some of them were beautiful, no doubt, but their nauseous adulation of princely patrons was more prominent to me than the charm of color and expression which are claimed to be in the pictures.

Sargent has been baldly hinting that I should allow him to paint my portrait. To my shame, I have occasionally been attracted to the notion—he is undoubtedly talented in that line. But his fawning behavior with the Tsar has hardened my heart against that project.

I have enclosed another piece for the Weekly, dealing chiefly in the elevation of the downtown streets. Since it is somewhat critical of the regime, you should probably save it for publication after I am safely back in California. Believe me, I could have given the rascals an even harsher scouring, had I chosen to speak of the laborers who are doing the work—they are little better than slaves. It seems to me that the Russians build nothing for themselves. The Summer Palace in Fort Ross was built over decades by Aleuts from the Straits of Kamkatchka. When those died off, the onion domes of the cathedral there were completed by Pomo and Miwok Indians. The Winter Palace here in Sakrametska is steeped in the blood of poor Chinese, Yankees, and yet more local Indians. Their descendants, no better off, no further up the ladder of society, are now raising the very streets to the level of the Tsar's driveway, without any hope of raising their own prospects.

Twenty-five years after the discovery of gold in the Sierras, you can still feel the bustle of the gold rush in this town. I have tried to limn that feeling in the enclosed piece, for the entertainment of your readers. But it is not a healthy excitement. It is like the final fever of typhus, when the patient seems to become more animated and alert, just before the last decline. I sense a fatal fervor in the tone of civic discourse here, that speaks to me of revolution and civil war. I think the Tsar's contemplated invasion of California is more desperate distraction than true ambition. You may pass that along to your Washington cronies, for whatever it may be worth.

Meanwhile, I remain…

Your faithful correspondent
Mark Twain

A Minor Moon of a Minor Planet

Violet Paget
17 Rue Des Jardins
Montparnasse
Paris, France

July 23, 1879

My dear Violet:

Thank you for the news of the first round of submissions to the Paris Salon. I am not surprised that there are so many. Year after year Beaux Arts and the other schools churn out more and more graduates, and we all must compete for space on the same walls.

I do no think my portrait of the Tsar will ever grace those walls, however. It seems doomed from the start. Following hard on my last letter, you will find my mood in this one much deflated. As Mark Twain would say, I have at last been to see the elephant, and it was a disappointment. I should not have allowed my expectations to rise so high.

After wasting a day looking for a studio, I learned from the Tsar's Chamberlain that I will be required to paint in the Palace atelier, a large, crowded room he showed me this morning. It is a sort of gymnasium or factory for artists, with lockers, work stations, and a small staff of painters and sculptors turning out royal portraits and busts like carpenters hammering together tables and chairs. I have been assigned an easel, workbench, and a taboret in a corner, away from the best light. I have a locker to store my supplies, and one fellow painter told me to be sure to lock up all my paints and brushes or they will be stolen. He is a fat, nervous type with a persistent cough, which he blames on the sculptors' dust that gets into everything. Naturally, the sculptors blame the pervasive smell of turpentine. Are you experiencing déjà vu? It is art school all over again, with the same bickering, the same maneuvering for advantage, and the same petty jealousies.

The Chamberlain showed me a portrait of Tsar Nicholai in oils on a large canvas, competently done, but nothing special.

"This is what we want," he said, "Same size, same pose, but in this costume." He handed me a photograph of the Tsar in a turban, a shirt with billowing sleeves, and an elaborately embroidered vest or doublet—very middle eastern.

"This one will go to a Kazak Baron in Montana," the Chamberlain said.

"When will the Tsar pose for me?" I asked.

"Oh, not till the very end. Meanwhile, you have Ivan the Terrible."

Ivan is a dressmaker's dummy who will wear the Tsar's costume and pose for me. I am to work on the costume and the background first, bringing them to a high degree of finish. The hands will be my own in a mirror—the Chamberlain says they are close enough to Nicholai's. I am to block in the head from the photograph. Then the Tsar will come in for an hour at most, probably posing for several artists at once.

It is a dreadful way to work. I had imagined leisurely hours in a private studio, laboring at a masterpiece of sensitive, bravura brushwork while trading witticisms and state secrets with the Tsar, almost as equals. In reality, he is the sun and I am no more than a minor moon of a minor planet.

But all is not darkness. My fee for the portrait is 1,500 roubles, a very decent wage hereabouts. As an advance for materials, I have received a draft on the exchequer—don't you love the sound of that?—that any bank will honor with gold. And I have saved the best for last. As a hint that all may not be as cut and dried as the Chamberlain says, Tsar Nicholai himself paid a visit to the atelier while I was there. He made a special point of speaking to me.

"Ah, my dear friend John Sargent," he said, placing a hand on my shoulder, "I am looking forward to posing for you." He gave my arm a squeeze and laughed, indicating the Chamberlain with a nod of his head. "This man has many rules for artists, but do not be discouraged. You and I will make a beautiful picture together. Baron Druschek will hang it in his dining hall, and everyone will be happy."

The Tsar then told the Chamberlain to put me on the list for an invitation to a royal ball! I stammered my thanks. Maybe my expectations of intimate têtes-à-têtes with the Tsar are not pure fantasy. When Nicholai left the room, it was like the sun going

behind a cloud—everything seemed a little darker and dimmer. That is the effect of true nobility.

The Chamberlain explained that the paintings and busts were an important part of government here. He said, "It is a mark of favor and distinction to receive an official portrait of Tsar Nicholai. It sends a silent message of loyalty, support, and certain expectations. Your painting will help ensure that the Baron will not fall short of his full levy of wheat for the winter, mounts for the cavalry and conscripts for the army."

So it seems that in my small, carpenter's way, I am helping to rule the empire.

Imperially yours,
John

Wetbellies

When Marina told me John Sargent had been arrested, I swept my wretched Atlantic letter into the wastebasket.

"Why did they arrest John?" I asked, "I'm the one who was dueling, not him."

"It has nothing to do with the duel. The Tsar has been assassinated. Apparently John was at the palace at the time, so he was arrested."

"Balderdash. John couldn't assassinate a sparrow."

"Exactly, but people are arrested for balderdash all the time here."

"We have to do something. Where are they holding him? Can I get in to see him?"

She took me by the hand. "No, Mark, you can't get involved. John is still at the palace, and I have been ordered to report there. I will see what can be done. I fear that they will round up everyone connected to John, starting with you. You are in great danger."

"Pshaw and piffle."

"Stop joking, Mark." She started throwing her things into her carpet bag, shaking her head at my patent stupidity. "The best thing you can do is pack your things and be ready to leave Sakrametska at a moment's notice. You might have to leave John and me here, and get across the border while you can."

"You can't be serious. I'd never leave John in a pickle. You nuther. We need to bust John loose, then we can all go together."

"Impossible."

She wouldn't listen. She was panicked in a way that I had not seen before. In five minutes she had packed all her things, erasing every hint that she been in the room.

She paused in the doorway, torn between haste and some secret she had not the time nor temerity to confide.

"Mark, whatever ugly things you hear about me, whatever happens next, you must believe I love you."

"Of course, I believe it with all my heart, but…"

"I have to go. I hope I can see you again."

She kissed my hand and left.

I was flummoxed. Marina gone, John imprisoned, the authorities presumably after me. Every instinct of self preservation urged me to flee, but I could not abandon John, nor give up on Marina. I determined to break John out of jail.

I carefully reviewed all the methods I knew from my wide reading of escape literature, to wit the Man in the Iron Mask and The Count of Monte Cristo. One by one I discarded the options for which I was not equipped: I lacked the cavalry for a large mounted assault. My stock of explosives was not adequate to blow my nose, much less blow up a jail. I had neither steel file nor culinary skills to bake it into a cake. What remained was bribery and trickery. I would have to make do with a wad of ruble notes and my native chicanery. I got all my money out of the Imperial Hotel safe and sharpened my wits with a dram of vodka. Just in case, I wrapped up one of my loaded pistols in a box with white paper and a red ribbon.

The palace was in turmoil. I went round to a side court overhung with trees, where the cooks and chambermaids loiter for a breath of air, playing hooky from their duties. There I found an under-butler being interviewed by two reporters from the local paper. By hanging about I found out that John had not left the palace, as far as the butler knew, and butlers know everything. John was somewhere in the suite of chambers occupied by the Ministry of Culture. That made sense to me. I had long suspected that Ministry of Culture was the local Russian idiom for Secret Police or Department of Spying and Lying.

That suited me just fine. It meant that John wasn't locked away in an iron cage yet. I approached the guards at the front entrances and said that I had an appointment with the undersecretary of literary affairs, one of Krepotsky's flunkies.

"I am presenting him with copies of my collected works," I said, holding up the gift-wrapped box.

One of the guards recognized me from the recent command performance, and passed me inside. A few roubles got me to the office of the undersecretary, who was not in, thanks to Providence. I convinced my escort to leave me in the antechamber to wait. When he left, I skedaddled down the hall and around the corner to Krepotsky's neighborhood. If anyone was involved in a frame-up, it would be that sly weasel.

Krepotsky's secretary was not at his post. I heard voices from his office. I laid my ear gently against the oak panel of the door, but it was opened out from under me by two soldiers. Past them I saw Krepotsky at his desk and John sitting in a side chair, rubbing his wrists.

"Mr. Twain," Krepotsky called out, "You are welcome. Come in, please come in."

I went in and the soldiers went out and closed the door.

Krepotsky indicated my package and said, "Is for me?"

"No, it's for John," I said. "It's his birthday." I handed John the package and he took it with a wry lift of his eyebrows. Krepotsky looked at some papers in his hand and said, "is not Mr. Sargent's birthday. He was born January 12."

"The Tsar has been murdered," John said to me, an adroit change of subject.

"I know, I came as soon as I heard." I turned to Krepotsky. "I have made a deep study of modern police methods. I can help find the assassin. Have you ever heard of the science of finger-prints?"

"That will not be necessary. We know who killed Tsar."

"Really, who?"

He indicated John. "Mr. Sargent."

John went white, then Krepotsky laughed.

"Sorry, Mr. Sargent." he said. "I joke. But is not funny. Is serious. You are both in serious trouble."

I asked, "What are you talking about?"

"Allow me to explain." Krepotsky went to a door nearby and opened it to reveal Marina. She entered the room without a word and sat down on a spindly gilt chair. She looked grim and distant, avoiding our eyes. Krepotsky lowered himself to a chair and pulled a sheaf of papers from his desk drawer. He leaned across the desk and tossed them into my lap.

"You know these letters, yes?"

I riffled through them and my heart dropped into my boots. The letters were in Marina's handwriting, in Russian, with Bill Howells name and address at the top of each and my name at the bottom. They were Russian transcriptions of all my satiric Atlantic pieces. I glanced at Marina but she would not meet my eye. I now knew one ugly things

I handed the letters back to Krepotsky and said, "Sorry, I don't read Russian."

"Of course. You do not. Why learn language of stupid people?"

I shrugged, at a loss for words, for once.

Krepotsky continued, laying out his points on his fingers, like the terms of an indictment: "You write lies about Rossland for USA newspaper. You sneak into Rossland to spy on quicksilver mine. You try to buy dangerous, illegal chemicals. You ask everyone questions. You hide from my man and spy on gold mines. Just today you make illegal duel. You make…" He turned to Marina and rattled off some Russian for her to translate. "You make embarrassment for me."

"It was just for fun," I said. "Nobody takes my writing seriously."

"Everything I take seriously. Tsar Nicholai is dead. He has no son, so right now army rules. They make me ruler of State Security. Everything I take serious."

He turned to John. "You also spy on quicksilver mine,. You make drawings of mines, docks, ships…" he looked to Marina for another word. "…fortifications."

He was frustrated with his own lack of vocabulary, although I thought he was doing quite well, considering: clear, forceful, and very damning in a certain light. He began speaking in Russian with pauses for Marina to translate.

"Mr. Twain," she said, as if she had not been rubbing my feet and buttering my biscuits for weeks, "You and Mr. Sargent are in serious trouble, for more than just dueling or writing letters. The cabal to which Minister Krepotsky belongs has seized power in the interim and is trying to prevent civil war. In their eyes, you are both spies."

"You have been spying on me," I said. "Those copies of my letters are in your handwriting."

"Quiet. I told you, everyone spies on everybody here. I was just doing my job: copying your letters, reporting all your activities." She put little quotation marks around "all" with her eyes, letting me know that not all our activities had been in her reports.

John said, "But we are just tourists. We have merely been seeing the sights and writing letters home."

"Oh John," she sighed, "You and I know that, but think how it appears to the secret police. To state security, everyone is guilty."

Krepotsky cleared his throat and said something to her in Russian. He understood enough English to know that she was not on his topic.

She continued: "Times have changed now. With the Tsar dead, there will be a great purge of dissidents. All enemies of Rossland will be rounded up and executed, or put in prison for years, until they are too old and feeble to be a threat.

Krepotsky chimed in with more Russian, and Marina translated his speech:

"We know you are innocent, but you have been very careless. The cabal is full of hotheads who want an immediate purge of all foreigners. If you remain in Rossland, you will be held in custody for a very long time, and might even be executed."

Krepotsky handed me a thin stack of bank notes.

"Use this money to book passage on the six o'clock steamer to Alta California, under the names Mr. Dostoevsky and Mr. Turgenev. You won't have any trouble leaving the country if you are on that boat, using those names. Remain in this room for twenty minutes, to give the minister time to clear an exit path for you. Leave by the same door Mr. Sargent used to enter this afternoon."

Krepotsky and Marina left the room. We sat in silence for a moment, then John asked me, "What was that all about?"

"The end of the vacation."

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to bust you out of jail."

"like the Man in the Iron Mask?"

"Exackly. I can't let the Russkies nab my pardner."

"Well, thank you

"You're welcome."

I looked at my watch. It was awfully quiet in the room.

"Now why," I said, "do you reckon Krepotsky wants us sneaking out on our own? Why not just waltz us out the back door himself, and turn us loose?"

"Marina said he had to clear the way."

"I know, but something don't smell right about this situation."

"You've never trusted him."

"Correct, and I'm not starting to trust him now."

At that moment, Marina came back into the room and threw her arms around my neck. She was breathing hard and struggled to catch her breath.

"Oh, Mark, thank God you haven't left yet. You can't leave the way Krepotsky told you. He has two sharpshooters waiting

outside that door. They'll kill you the moment you leave. He'll say you were shot trying to escape, and save them the risk of a trial and the truth coming out."

"What is the truth?"

"I don't know. But if Krepotsky's involved, it's a nasty truth."

John said, "How can we get out of the palace? It's full of soldiers with guns, and we're unarmed."

"Happy birthday," I said, pointing at the package in his lap. He looked at me like I was crazy, but he unwrapped the gun.

"I never thought I'd be glad to see one of these," he said.

I said, "To get out of here, we'll have to fit in. We need to get the drop on a couple of palace guards and take their uniforms."

"No," John said. "I have a better idea."

He led us to a closet in the portrait studio where he had been working on the Tsar's Portrait. He opened the door and began pulling out uniforms, formal gowns, fancy peasant dress, and other Rosslandish finery.

"We dress up Ivan the Terrible in these when their owners can't pose in person," John said.

"Who in blazes is Ivan the Terrible?" I asked.

He pointed to a dressmaker's dummy in the corner.

I became General Gogol, with a fine brocaded coat, a red sash heavy with medals, and a long gold scabbard with a broken sword in it. John put on the jodhpurs, boots, and gold-appliquéd horse coat of a cavalry commander. Marina became a Kazak princess with paste pearls and a veil.

John and I lead Marina, wearing John's shackles loosely about her wrists, out the front door, bold as brass. The guards and palace functionaries we passed were all too accustomed to deferring to uniforms, and no one wanted to question high ranking officers about what they were doing with a beautiful young prisoner.

In the Grand Plaza we hailed a cab and I sat up top with the driver to keep a lookout. As we pulled away there was a commotion on the front steps of the palace. A captain of guards ran down them and shouted to our driver to halt. I pushed the driver from his perch, grabbed the reins, and shook them out over the horse's back. We clattered out of the plaza and onto the wide boulevard leading to the bridge over the Sakrametska.

I looked over my shoulder to see men and horses milling in the courtyard. All too soon a mounted pursuit was after us. We shot over the bridge, John yelling to me to "Turn left, turn left." I hauled the terrified animal around to the left and careened down the strand. After a couple of blocks John and Marina yelled to me to stop. We spilled out of the cab and Marina grabbed the gun. She shot twice over the horse's head and it took off down the street like scalded cat, the empty cab bouncing and jouncing behind.

John led us down a passage alongside some pilings, to the waterside between warehouses. He had us wade among the confusing piles until we emerged inside a warehouse, where we climbed up a ladder to the upper floor level.

"This is a boat loft we almost rented as a studio," John explained. "It's empty now and the owner is unlikely to come around."

We sat on nail kegs and sawhorses under some high windows and watched the day slowly dim. From time to time traffic would pass outside and we would freeze, then continue our quiet conversation.

I asked Marina, "Have you been copying all of my letters?"

"Yes, and John's as well, when I could find them." She did not seem particularly embarrassed by this. In fact, she added, "You both lie to your mothers. You should be ashamed."

"How could you spy on us?" John asked, "I thought we were friends."

"We are friends now, but when we met, you two were my job, nothing more."

"Some job," I said.

"I had no choice. If I didn't report on you to Krepotsky, he could have me arrested as a spy for the Dons. It wouldn't matter that I was a spy for him too."

"So you are a half-breed double agent, which makes you two and half people. It's a wonder you can keep it all straight."

"You are angry, of course. Anyone would be angry. But look where I am now—at your side, not back in the palace, standing with Krepotsky over your dead body. If they catch us, I will hang as surely as you."

"Then I reckon they better not find us."

"Wait a minute," John said, "Can't we let things calm down a little, then give ourselves up to the police? At a trial, we'd have a chance to tell our story and prove our innocence."

Both Marina and I laughed.

"But we are just tourists."

"That is how I have been trying to paint you: both just silly tourists, with no good sense, but no political motives. It would have been enough , in normal times. But you made too good a pair of scapegoats for Krepotsky and his cabal. You arrived just in time to take the blame for the assassination—a foreign journalist of known Democratic ideals, and a foreign youth from artistic circles in Paris, long known for breeding revolution."

"Then what are we going to do?" John asked. "We can't just buy a ticket on a train or a boat, and it's too far to walk to Alta California.'

"We could float down the river," I said. "We could be Wetbellies."

"That's crazy," John said.

"Not at all. I did it all the time on the Mississippi when I was a boy. We'll make floats out of these nail kegs, and drift out of town in the dark of night. What do you say?"

John looked at the keg he was sitting and sighed. "All right. You did get me this far, and you were right about not trusting Krepotsky. But I could have made something of that portrait. Some hack will finish it now, if it gets finished at all."

"So we are a couple of Wetbellies?"

"Sure." We shook hands.

"Make that three Wetbellies," Marina said. "I'm going with you all the way."

Alternative History Timeline

Events as they occurred in our ordinary universe are in regular type. **Events as they occurred in the alternate universe are in bold type.**

1519-1522

Cortes conquers Aztecs, Zapotecs, Mixtecs, etc.

1524

Friars arrive. Cortes asked for mendicant orders such as Franciscans instead of corrupt secular clergy. He wanted to incorporate Indians into the new society, not annihilate or enslave them. Allowed himself to be publicly scourged by monks for his sins to impress the Aztecs with the preeminence and seriousness of Catholicism.

1531

Apparition of the dark Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego, denied and resisted by local Bishop Zumarraga. **Confirmed as a full miracle by Zumarraga. Founding event of the Western Church.**

1540-47

Cortes' lieutenants warp his original vision and begin to massacre and subjugate Indians.

1547

Cortes dies. **Cortes lives three more years and purges the most vicious of his lieutenants.**

1550-1750

200 years of gradual expansion and ruin of Indians. New Spain struggles along as old Spain declines as a world power. Many greedy and corrupt viceroys rule.

1550-1750

New Spain becomes a haven for free thinkers, religious dissidents, Spanish *conversos* Jews and Moors fleeing the

Inquisition. The Western Spanish Church fights constantly with Rome, refusing to institute many practices of the Spanish Inquisition.

1578
Russian Cossacks attack the Tartars and begin expanding to the east toward Siberia.

1600
Spanish playwright Félix Lope de Vega y Carpio arrives in Monterrey for the premiere of his play *La Hermosurea de Angelica*. Stays to become the father of Alta California Theater.
1742
Russian Cossack expansion reaches Kamchatka and fur traders start exploring islands in the Bering Sea.

1750
Junipero Serra, age 37, arrives in Mexico City. Teaches and works among Indians there for the next 17 years. **Has a St. Paul experience, departs for upper California 12 years earlier. Becomes Pope Innocent I of the Western Church in a schism from the Roman papacy. As Pope he is dedicated to the spiritual and political sovereignty of the indigenous people of Alta California.**

1767
Jesuits expelled from Mexico. **Some sneak north to join Serra, providing the Franciscans with the political and economic savvy they need to prepare for independence from Spain and autonomy from Mexico City. Painter Francisco Goya immigrates to San Francisco to paint portraits of the prosperous upper classes.**

1769
Portola and Serra sent to upper California to colonize it and keep it out of the hands of the Russians and English.

1776
American Revolution. Reform efforts in Mexico fail to break the *gachupin* (settlers born in Spain) monopoly on land ownership.

Time is ripe for Mexico to break with Spain. **While Mexico is occupied with becoming independent from Spain, Serra institutes land reform in Alta California, breaking up vast ranchos and redistributing property to a middle class of merchants, farmers, miners, and Indians. Alta California secedes from Mexico.**

1784
Serra dies at age 71. **Succeeded by Innocent II.**
Russian fur traders reach Alaska and start probing south along the coast.

1799
Russians found New Archangel on the site of modern day Sitka. **They move more quickly south, establishing colonies in present day Washington and Oregon, building Fort Ross in California in 1802 rather than 1812.**

1803
U. S. president Jefferson sends James Monroe to Paris to buy the port of New Orleans from Napoleon. Monroe negotiates the $15 million Louisiana Purchase, essentially the entire Mississippi watershed.
Under pressure from eastern seaboard senators who want to limit the number of potential new states in the union, Monroe buys only the port for $4 million. Napoleon peddles the rest to Spain and Russia, who want a large buffer between their west coast settlements and the USA.

1810-1823
Mexico's war of independence from Spain. Mexican leaders were Hidalgo, then Morelos, then Iturbide. Morelos wrote a republican constitution and convened a fairly representative congress, but Iturbide defeated him, weakened the constitution and the congress, declared himself emperor, was overthrown within a year, and fled to Europe.
Morales and Iturbide establish a representative, republican form of government. Morales, the Mexican George Washington, is elected by a large middle class as the first civilian president of Mexico in 1819. He is succeeded by Iturbide in 1825.

1820
Sea otter population on the north Pacific coast depleted, Russian fur trade and colonies begin to decline. Foggy, gopher-ridden coastal land around Fort Ross cannot support the colony of fur hunters turned reluctant farmers.
Commander Kushov of Fort Ross moves most of his people to a colony on good arable land in the Sacramento Valley, recruits local Indians as agricultural serfs, and sends many untrainable Kodiak Islanders home.

1828
Russian American Company bankrupt.

1830
Kushov declares himself Tsar of Rossland, stretching from the Russian River in California north to Vancouver Island. Assassinated by Tsarist agents in 1833. Tsar sends his son Alexander with 1,000 troops to establish a traditional government.

1834
After 11 years of confusion and strife, Santa Anna takes over as military dictator of Mexico.
Mexicans and Alta Californians no longer need to own land to vote. True land reform breaks up the last of the ranchos. Friars in the north create false birth certificates so that many Indians and mestizos can claim homesteads and exercise their franchise. In the north, United States citizens are expelled unless they renounce the USA and become citizens of the Republic of Alta California. Poor immigrant Yankees become the lowest class, below the peons, below the Indians.

1836
Battle of the Alamo. Texas wins independence from Mexico and is recognized by the USA, England, France, and Belgium as a sovereign nation.
Texas remains part of Alta California, governed by Santa Ana, who becomes an enemy of USA slavery and sets up an underground railroad for escaped slaves through Louisiana. Many work their way north to Alta Californian provinces of New Mexico, Arizona, & Nevada.

1845
Texas admitted as a state to the USA.

1846
USA declares war on Mexico. Doniphan conquers New Mexico and Zachary Taylor captures Monterrey.
USA never declares war because Mexico and Alta California are too strong. Washington is more isolationist, less expansionist. Manifest Destiny fizzles.

1847
Kearny takes California, Winfield Scott takes Vera Cruz and advances to Mexico City, become military governor of Mexico.

1848
In the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexico cedes New Mexico, Arizona and California to the USA, gets $15 million, keeps Baja California.

1849
Gold discovered by Americans at Sutter's Mill.

1854
Gold discovered by Californians under General Vallejo in Grass Valley.

1855
Gold discovered by Russians on the middle fork of the Sacramento near Buck's Lake. Alta Californians and Russians divide the gold fields at the Yuba River. Since the Gold Rush occurs in a more densely settled and law-abiding area, it is more orderly. Miners are Russian, Indian, Mexican, and Chinese, with very few Americans crossing the Mississippi, the Rockies, and sneaking over the Sierras to take part.

1855
Santa Ana ousted, flees abroad.

1857
Juarez becomes president of Mexico, first civilian to rule. Civil war begins in USA. European armies invade Mexico. French take Mexico City in 1863 and install Maximilian Hapsburg as Emperor. Juarez flees to New Orleans and organizes resistance.
France sends an expeditionary force to Vera Cruz that is soundly trounced by the Mexicans.

1865
USA civil war ends.
USA civil war drags on until 1871, with guerilla skirmishes and economic collapse. Alta California enters a golden age of building, invention, statesmanship, learning, scholarship, etc. Rossland likewise enjoys gold-funded prosperity, although the wealth is concentrated in the upper classes and the serfs don't see much trickling down.

1866
Mark Twain tours California and Nevada lecturing on life in the Sandwich Islands.
Twain tours New York and Massachusetts lecturing on the Sandwich Islands.

1867
Maximilian executed. Juarez regains power, resumes democratic reform efforts.
Mark Twain contracts to write 50 letters at $20 each for the *Alta California*. His letters become his first book-length work, *"The Innocents Abroad."*
Twain writes letters for the Atlantic Weekly, William Dean Howells' newspaper in Boston.

1871
Mark Twain settles in Hartford and takes up the literary life.
Twain returns to Sandwich Islands to escape war-torn and economically depressed USA.

1872
Juarez dies. Porforio Diaz overthrows his legally elected successor and becomes dictator in 1876.

1876
In a close and fraudulent election, Ulysses S. Grant secures a second term as president of the USA. Reconstruction flounders in the south, inflation and stock panics plague the economy, and several western states are under martial law.

1879
Mark Twain, age 44 and newly married, is living on royalties from *Tom Sawyer*, touring and lecturing, working on *A Tramp Abroad*.
John Singer Sargent, age 23, has just finished his studies at the Beaux Arts school in Paris, and has exhibited *Oyster Gatherers* to great acclaim at the Paris Salon. Tours Spain and Italy looking for fresh subject matter for salon paintings, aiming to build his reputation and attract portrait commissions.
USA recovers economically from civil war. William Dean Howells, editor of the *Atlantic Weekly,* contacts his friend Mark Twain in the Sandwich Islands, where he has been living, unmarried, to escape the war. Twain has been invited to lecture on the islands and his European travels in Alta California, and Howells commissions him to extend his tour to include Rossland to the north, so that he can contribute a series of letters to the *Weekly* describing the Mexican and Russian coastal empires.

John Singer Sargent is taking an around-the-world trip, sketching and painting, looking for exotic subjects to exhibit in Paris and London. He meets Twain on the ship from the Sandwich Islands to San Francisco. They agree to travel together for awhile, Singer wanting to paint Twain's portrait and Twain wanting to use Singer as a tenderfoot character to write about in his *Atlantic Weekly* letters.

About Patrick Fanning

Patrick Fanning is a writer and painter living in Sonoma County in northern California. He always thought that the real history of the region was a little boring: native peoples, Mexican missionaries, ranchos, American Gold Rush, etc. While painting the landscape around the Russian River, Fanning thought it would be more interesting if the Mexican settlers and the Russian fur traders had stayed longer, found the gold, and set up two competing empires on either side of the Russian River. The illustrated Venice of the West is the result.

The cover watercolor of the Venice of the West is by Patrick Fanning, as are the following sketches:

Mark Twain playing cards (in "I Meet Mark Twain")

The mayor (*alcalde*) of Petalumo (in "A Swan Among Geese")

Copy of a the head of a peasant by Velasquez (in "A Chance Encounter")