BEHOLD, THE EMPEROR’S NEW CLOTHES

WRITTEN FOR THE STAGE BY EMILY HOUTLER

BASED ON THE STORY BY HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN
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**Setting:** The setting is a kingdom in olden days. The kingdom is not named and is not identified to any period or country of origin.

**Staging:** The play is performed using the SR, SL and CS areas on a stage. The set consists of six flats 8 x 5. Scene changes can be suggested using lighting. The set is made of two sets of two flats, with the ‘weavers’ flats laid over top of the ‘town’ flats on SR. The flats on SL are the throne room at the palace and remain the entire show. The throne room may have two free standing full length mirrors, or these may be built into the set pieces. There may be a throne.

**Cast:** The cast can be male or female. It is suggested that the Emperor be a male, all others roles are interchangeable.
Emperor  
Narrator/Fool  
Dewey Cheatum (Scoundrel 1)  
Robum Blind (Scoundrel 2)  
Minister of Robes  
Minister of Finance  
Minister of War  
T# = Townspeople by number  
C = Child  
Ladies of the court  
Other cast as directed
Scene 1

Scene: The SL side of the stage is set as the throne room and remains throughout the play. The scene on the SR side of the stage should suggest the main street of a town. The narrator enters SL, alone. He looks around the set then sees the audience. He acknowledges the audience;

Narrator: Hello, (calling) hello there, I’m so glad you came. I have a story to tell you today. It’s a wonderful story about an Emperor. An Emperor is like a king. He rules a country, makes all the laws of the land and everyone obeys and admires him. The Emperor is usually the wisest man in the land. Me, I’m the fool. A fool, or rather a jester is one of the Emperor’s assistants. I help the Emperor keep his schedule and make the Emperor laugh by doing foolish things. The Emperor in this story is the ruler of all of the land and all of the people. This Emperor in this story is also very vain. Vain means that he cares mostly for himself and his looks. You see, this Emperor spends most all of his time and most all of his kingdoms money on clothes. Yes, that’s right clothes! The Emperor was very fond of his clothes and always wants to look his best, so he was always getting new clothes. Most Emperors were found sitting in counsel discussing important matters with the ministers in their court. This Emperor is often found to be in his dressing room. This Emperor is so excessively fond of his clothes that he often had a different suit of clothes for each hour of each day. The Emperor often spend all of his money on clothes and did not even bother with taking care of the people in the kingdom, or his soldiers or any of the concerns about war. He did not go to the theater or on the chase, unless it was to show off a new set of clothes. Once each month the Emperor would lead a parade through town to display his newest set of clothes to all of the people in the town. You are lucky because today is parade day and (looking) I think I see the townspeople gathering for the Emperor’s parade. (Townspeople are gathering for the parade and talking excitedly). Let’s join. (The narrator moves to the crowd gathering on the stage).

The focus shifts to the two scoundrels who have entered at the far SR end of the stage. They have traveling bags.
Dewey: Hey, what town is this?

Robum: How should I know, I can’t even remember the name of the last town.

Dewey: You know, adventure awaits us in every town we visit.

Robum: Yes, adventure and money, if they don’t catch us.

Dewey: You know maybe we should give up our life of crime. *(They exchange a look)*

Both: Naw

Dewey: Look a crowd is gathering, this may be our opportunity to discover how we can make some money. *(They move towards the crowd)*

Narrator: *(steps out towards the audience indicating the scoundrels)* These two are scoundrels. They make their living by cheating other people out of their gold. They are clever and looking for an opportunity to make some money. *(The narrator steps back into place)*.

T1: I wonder what he will be wearing today.

T2: I wonder what color he will be wearing today.

T3: I think he will be in blue today with matching shoes and cape.

T4: I really liked his suit last month. It will be hard to top that one.

T1: All of these clothes. That is where our hard earned money goes. He taxes the people to pay for his new clothes!

T2: But, it’s very important for the Emperor to look good.

T3: ...and he does look good, even if it costs us a lot of money.
T4: But it’s not good to neglect the army, or the people, just for the sake of fashion.

T1: That’s true, we may have the smallest army around, but we have the best dressed Emperor in all the land.

Dewey: (to towns people) Excuse me friend, my companion and I are new to your town and have noticed everyone gathering here. Is there to be festival?

T1: Not a festival really, more of a parade.

T2: It is the Emperor’s monthly parade to display his new clothes. We have the best dressed Emperor in all of the land you know.

Robum: Now that’s something to be proud of.

Dewey: How often does the Emperor parade a new suit of clothes?

T3: As often as we can afford.

T1: What do you think he will be wearing today?

T2: Last month he wore blue, but he looks good in green as well.

Narrator: We’ll know in a moment, here he comes. (to audience) The parade is led by the Minister of Robes who is the most trusted advisor to the Emperor. It is often the Minister of Robes who helps the Emperor choose his new clothes.

A general feeling of excitement, people straining to see. The trumpeters enter SR to announce the parade, followed by the ministers, then the Emperor. The Emperor looks handsome in his new clothes and is very proud of being seen in them. A general murmur of approval from the crowd. The parade slowly makes it’s way across the stage and exits SL. There are general comments from the crowd: how beautiful, what colors, a great design, this is my favorite outfit, how handsome your highness etc.
T3: That was a marvelous outfit, one of his best.

T4: I thought the color was just right, not too bright

T1: Oh this is a parade to remember.

T2: We do have the best dressed Emperor in all the land you know.

Dewey: Your Emperor looked especially well dressed today.

Robum: How often does he get new clothes did you say.

T3: He gets new clothes as fast as the weavers can make them and often changes his clothes for every event during the day.

T4: A well dressed Emperor can not have too many clothes.

T1: Even if the well dressed Emperor spends all of his time and all of the kingdom’s money on clothes.

Dewey: (excited) Does he spend a lot of money on these new clothes?

T2: He spends most all of the money in the kingdom on new clothes. His most trusted advisor is the Minister of Robes, who helps him choose his new clothes.

T3: He spend money on clothes but he does not spend money for his people, or his army.

T4: He often neglects visitors, he does not go to the theater or on the hunt, unless it gives him the opportunity to show off a new set of clothes.

Robum: If he changes his clothes so often how can the weavers keep up?

T1: The weavers work tirelessly for the sake of the Emperor

Dewey: Your Emperor sounds like a very wise man and he is very well
dressed. You are lucky to be a part of his kingdom.

**Scene 2**

*The Emperor and his court enter stage left and move into the throne room*

**Narrator:** Well, he *is* very well dressed. *(The narrator trails off as he moves to the throne room on stage left to join the Emperor and the court. The townspeople and scoundrels remain at stage right)*

**Emperor:** *(coming CS)* I looked great at the parade today did I not?

*A general murmur of approval from the court*

**Minister of Robes:** I believe this was your best display your majesty.

**Emperor:** *(looking in the mirror)* Yes, this is a very nice set of clothes. Do you think I should change now?

**Minister of Robes:** Your majesty has been wearing these clothes for more than two hours now.

**Emperor:** You are right, I will change now. *(he exits SL and the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of War enter from UC)*

**Minister of Finance:** *(to Minister of Robes)* Good morning Minister of Robes.

**Minister of Robes:** Good morning to you Minister of Finance.

**Minister of War:** *(nods to the Minister of Robes)* Minister of Robes.

**Minister of Robes:** Ah, Minister of War, good to see you.

**Minister of Finance:** *(to Minister of Robes)* Is the Emperor about this morning?
Minister of Robes: He is in his changing room, changing his clothes.

Minister of War: How long will he be?

Minister of Robes: One never knows does one?

The court stands around nervously, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of War trade places. The Emperor begins an entrance as the court looks expectantly for his entrance, he stops and says . . .

Emperor: I don’t know, this cape doesn’t look right with these pants. (He returns to off stage).

The court is disappointed and starts pacing again. The narrator who has joined in the general movement continues to walk stage right and joins the scoundrels and the townspeople. The scene continues at SR. The scoundrels move down stage together.

Scene 3

Dewey: I think I have a plan, would you care to hear?

Robum: I would love to hear your plan Is it dangerous?

Dewey: It may be dangerous, it may also make us rich!

Robum: Rich is good, dangerous not so good . . . let’s hear it.

They huddle together DS whispering, gesturing and laughing. After several beats, they rejoin the townspeople.

T2: Well I don’t care what you think, I still think that capes are in fashion at this time of year.

Dewey: I couldn’t agree with you more. In my experience capes are always an important fashion accessory.
T3: Really. Are you quite familiar with fashion?

Dewey: I am, my partner and I have traveled extensively throughout the land. We have seen many kingdoms and many Emperors, but few as well dressed as your Emperor.

Robum: Oh yes, you are very lucky indeed to have such a wise and well dressed Emperor.

T4: You must be wise yourselves to have seen so many kingdoms.

Dewey: Oh thank you but I do not think we are wise, we are but humble weavers who live to serve others by making clothes for them. I am Dewey Cheatum and this is my partner is Robum Blind (they bow).

Robum: Some may think we are very special, but we are simple weavers who are happy to serve any Emperor, or anyone who may need our services.

Narrator: (confused) You are weavers then?

Dewey: Oh yes, humble weavers.

Robum: Our garments are often fit for an Emperor, but we don’t like to brag.

Dewey: Oh yes, very humble weavers.

T1: What type of cloth do you weave? Is it brightly colored cloth?

T2: Does it have beautiful designs? Is it unusual in any way?

Dewey: I can tell you that we weave a special magical cloth.

T3: Magical you say! How is this possible?

T4: If you weave a magical cloth, can you make this cloth into clothing?
Robum: We can, but we do not like to talk about how beautiful and magical and special is our cloth.

Narrator: (to audience) A beautiful, magical and special cloth that can be made into clothing fit for a king. They may have something here.

T1: How can we get this cloth?

Robum: We can weave you this special cloth, but because it is so special, it is very expensive to weave. Would you like us to weave some for you?

Dewey: We could weave you a new set of clothes and you would be dressed better than the Emperor.

A general murmur of disagreement, no one should be dressed better than the Emperor

T4: How much does this cloth cost?

Dewey: Two bags of gold. (crowd reacts). When shall we start your new clothes?

T2: No, no I thank you for your kind offer but I have little money for clothes.

T3: I have no money for clothes either but I am wondering what makes your cloth so special?

Robum: (He does a look around, then gather in gesture) The cloth we weave is magical. This cloth is so special because it can not be seen by anyone who is simple, foolish or unfit to hold his office.

T4: Really, is this true?

Dewey: We are but humble weavers but take my word for it, it’s true! Only the wisest people can actually see the cloth.
Scene 4

The scene moves back to the throne room where the Emperor emerges from SL and re-enters in a new outfit. There is light applause and noises from the court. He moves about the stage admiring himself in the mirror and getting praise from all.

**Emperor:** Well, how do I look? (*noise from the court*)

**Minister of Robes:** You are stunning, as always your majesty.

**Minister of Finance:** Sire if I may, how much did that cost? I just mean that we are getting dangerously low on money. It seems that all of the money in our treasury is being spend on clothing.

**Emperor:** Ah, but it is worth is, just look at me! Am I not the best dressed Emperor in all of the land?

**Minister of Robes:** You are sire.

**Minister of War:** Your highness, if I may have a word. The army is suffering for lack of funds. We need more money to buy supplies.

**Emperor:** I gave you money last year what did you do with that?

**Minister of War:** You generously gave us very little money and we were only able to buy one new weapon.

**Emperor:** So, why is this a problem?

**Minister of War:** Your majesty the other solider is still using a stick as a weapon.

**Emperor:** (*suddenly turns to Minister of Finance*) They do have handsome uniforms don’t they?
Minister of War:  Well yes sire, but they . . .

Emperor:  *(with a wave of his hand, talking to mirrors)* That is enough. Does this make me look fat?

Minister of War:  *(sighing)* No, you highness. About the weapons . . .

Emperor:  Weapons, yes, I see what you mean. Do make sure it’s a sturdy stick. That will be all. *(The Minister of War backs off).*

Minister of Finance:  Sire, about the treasury, we need more money to provide service for your people.

Emperor:  We allow the people to look at my new clothes every month, what else do they need?

Minister of Finance:  Well sire a teacher would be helpful.

Emperor:  I just build a new school last year, why would you need a teacher?

Minister of Finance:  That was very generous of your highness, but a school with no teacher does not help the people, and books would be helpful also.

Emperor:  Haven’t I always said fashion is more important than education. The people only respect a well dressed Emperor. If I am not well dressed they will not respect my authority. Oh all right, buy two new books but this teacher person will have to wait until next year.

Minister of Finance:  Thank you, you are more than kind your grace.

Emperor:  *(looking at himself in the mirrors)* This *(mirror)* one shows how elegant I look, *(turns to look into the other mirror)* but this one shows how beautiful I really am.

*The narrator moves away from the townspeople and moves into the throne room scene. He whispers to the Minister of Robes for a moment.*
Minister of Robes: Your highness, it has just been brought to my attention that there are two new weavers in town. They claim to weave a special, magical cloth.

Emperor: A special magical cloth you say. What type of cloth is this? (to court) Would this look better in lavender?

Narrator: Your highness the weavers I have met say that they weave a cloth that can only be seen by those that are not simple or foolish. This cloth can only be seen by one who is worthy of the office he holds. That is why the cloth is so special, but the cloth is expensive to weave.

Emperor: Expense is no matter!

Minister of Finance: Your majesty. . the treasury.

Emperor: Ah, I am glad you are still here, make that one book for the school. (to the narrator) Bring these weavers to me immediately. (to the court) What do you think? More lace?

Scene 5

The narrator moves to SR to speak with the scoundrels

Narrator: (to scoundrels) Friends, I have just come from the palace. I told the Emperor about your magical cloth and he is very excited. The Emperor wishes to see you.

Dewey: But we are just humble weavers and the Emperor is so wise.

Narrator: This is a great opportunity for you and you would not want to disappoint the Emperor.

Robum: This is true, and even though we are but humble weavers, show us
the way to the cash, I mean castle...um, palace.

*The narrator leads the scoundrels to the throne room, they drop their bags at the edge of the town set. On the way the scoundrels make a quick attempt at grooming themselves. They enter the throne room and remain at the edge of the room.*

**Scene 6**

**Narrator:** *(approaching the Emperor)* Your majesty, I have brought the weavers who claim to weave the magical cloth, and may I say you look very handsome in that outfit.

**Emperor:** Oh course I do, I mean why thank you. Where are the weavers?

**Dewey:** Here we are your highness, *(drops to knees)* we are but humble weavers. Poor humble weavers.

**Robum:** Yes, *(drops to knees)* but we live to serve your majesty. It would be our pleasure to serve such a wise and very well dressed Emperor as yourself.

**Emperor:** I am well dressed aren’t I?

**Minister of Robes:** *(to Emperor)* The special cloth your highness. Ask them about the special cloth.

**Emperor:** Oh yes, tell me about this special cloth you weave.

**Dewey:** We hate to brag your grace, but it is true that we are the only weavers in the world who can weave this special magical cloth.

**Robum:** A very special and somewhat expensive magical cloth.

**Minister of Robes:** What makes your cloth so special?
Minister of Finance: What makes your cloth so expensive?

Dewey: The cloth we weave is special because you are not be able to see this cloth if you are simple, foolish or unfit for the office you hold. However if you are not a fool and you are fit to hold your office you will be able to see the most beautiful cloth in all of the land.

Minister of Robes: How can this be? I do not believe that you can only see the magic cloth if you are not a fool.

Robum: Minister you are entitled to your beliefs and we respect your opinions. Just as we did with a former Minister of Robes who did not believe us either.

Dewey: I believe that former Minister of Robes is now a swine herder. But that is better than having his head cut off as his Emperor suggested after he was not able to see the beautiful cloth we had produced.

Robum: I think he said something very similar to what you just said. But I may be wrong.

Minister of Robes: Well of course the Emperor always decides about his new clothes, I am merely an advisor.

Emperor: . . and what do you advise Minister?

Minister of Robes: My advise is for your majesty to decide if this new cloth is acceptable.

Emperor: I think, I think . . (to audience, as if thinking to himself) if I were to have some of this cloth made for clothes, I would be able to tell who in my kingdom is foolish, who is simple and which of my advisors are unfit to hold his office. That may be very helpful to me. (back on stage) I think that we should let these weavers make their special magical cloth for a new set of clothes.

Dewey: We will begin immediately. That is, we would except that we have
no money to buy the materials to weave the cloth.

Robum: We will need two looms in which to weave, and golden thread, the finest silk and a private room in which to work, maybe some where here in the palace.

Emperor: It shall be done. The Minister of Robes will see to your needs. How much money will you need?

Dewey: Two bags of gold will do nicely, I mean, will cover the expenses.

Minister of Finance: Your highness the cost, as the Minister of Finance I must object.

Emperor: Object all you want, then pay these two splendid weavers and let them begin their work. (to the court) Do you like these boots?

Scene 7

During scene 6, two looms are set on the SR side of the stage. The table and chairs are set behind the looms. The ‘weavers’ set is placed over ‘town’ set.

The Minister of Finance pays the two bags of gold and the Minister of Robes shows the two scoundrels to a work room in the palace on SR.

Narrator: (enters with two guards, they carry spools of golden thread and silk for the loom) We have brought you some of the supplies that you request to begin weaving the magical cloth. Can you really weave a magical cloth?

Robum: Just wait and see for yourself. (the guards leave, the two scoundrels are left alone with the narrator)

Narrator: Oh I will. It may be amusing, even to a fool. (exits SR).

Dewey: What do you think of our plan so far?
Robum: (jingling the bags of gold) I think it sounds like a good way to make some money.

Dewey: (walking over to the looms) Do you know how to work one of these?

Robum: Actually...no. I just became a weaver a few minutes ago. It can’t be that hard, let’s get started. (They sit down at the looms and start to work them.)

Dewey: I think you move this thing over here. Then you put that other stuff over here. Then you pull this thing back and forth and pull this again.

Robum: That’s all there is to it? This will be a breeze. We will make the Emperor’s new clothes in no time. Let’s get started. (They both sit at their looms and work them back and forth for a few minutes.)

Dewey: Say this is a lot of work. I think I’ll take a break. You are really good at this weaving.

Robum: I seem to have a natural talent for weaving. And look at the bright colors I am using. See how the colors blend so nicely with the pattern.

Dewey: Colors...patterns...What are you talking about?

Robum: My weaving, my beautiful weaving. We are being paid a lot of money for this. It should be high quality work.

Dewey: (Dewey slowly moves behind Robum, looks intently at Robum’s loom, blinks, shakes his head and realizing the loom is empty. He slaps Robum on the side of the head) You nincompoop. Your beautiful weaving is invisible! We are being paid a lot of money because the Emperor is a fool.

(The narrator enters SL. The focus switches to the throne room where the Emperor and his court are standing)

Narrator: (reading from long scroll) At noon the cooks will serve lunch in
the dining room. At one o’clock ...

**Emperor:** (Steps to audience) I am the most clever man. With my special cloth I will be able to tell which members of my court are wise and fit for office. I will also be able to tell which members of my court are fools and unfit for office. I can’t wait till to see my new clothes. *(Turns to court then swings back to audience)* What if I can’t see my new clothes? That would mean...no, impossible of course I will be able to see my new clothes because I am a most clever man. . . I think. *(He steps back to court.)*

**Narrator:** . . . the royal mail is delivered. Speaking of mail, you have a letter from. . .

**Minister of Robes:** *(Steps out to the audience)* I will be most interested to see the Emperor’s new clothes. At least I hope I will be able to see them. If I am not able to see them, that would mean I am not fit to hold my office. If I was not the Minister of Robes, what would I do? Surely I am not a fool, of course I will be able to see the new clothes. *(He returns to the court)*

**Narrator:** . . . the Emperor two kingdoms to the north of here. He requests that you . . .

**Minister of Finance:** *(steps to the audience)* More new clothes, more money for new clothes! When will it all stop? Maybe with this new magical cloth the Emperor will see that spending all of his money on clothes is not wise. When I see his new clothes, I will . . . at least I hope I can see the Emperor’s new clothes. I would not want to be seen as a fool. Well, I will definitely be able to see the Emperor’s new clothes, no matter what! *(Returns to the court).*

**Narrator:** . . . join him for the summer festival, which will be held on the second Saturday . . .

**Minister of War:** *(Steps to the audience)* How can I make the Emperor understand that we need money for the army, we need to defend the kingdom if we are attacked. Perhaps I should use this special cloth to make uniforms
for the army, then I could tell which of the soldiers are fit to hold rank in the army. Unless I was unable to see the cloth myself. Surely I will be able to see it as I know I am fit for my office. At least I believe I am. Am I? Maybe we will just keep the old uniforms for a while longer. (He returns to the court).

**Narrator:** . . .of the month following the full moon. He requests that you bring a jello salad . . .

**Emperor:** *(to audience)* I trust the members of my court to tell me the truth. I believe each person will be able to see the cloth. If they do not, if they do not, then what will I do? I will remove them from my court, that’s what I will do. I will declare that person unfit for his office and send him out in to the street. That’s what I will do!

**Narrator:** . . . and that you wipe your feet when entering the castle. That is the agenda for today your majesty.

**Emperor:** Very good. And now I must change my clothes. *(He exits)*

**Scene 8**

*(The scoundrels have moved the table and chairs DS from the looms. They sit down to play cards as a means to pass the time)*

**Dewey:** This weaving is exhausting work *(looks at his cards)* Go fish! *(Robum picks up a card)*

**Robum:** Hey, do you know why sailors don’t play cards?

**Dewey:** No, why don’t sailors play cards?

**Robum:** Because the captain is standing on the deck, get it? Standing on the deck. Oh, sometimes I crack my self up.
Dewey: I will agree that this whole set up is rather funny. Do you think they will discover that we are not being completely honest?

Robum: I hope not, I rather like living in the palace, eating well, getting paid and only working when we feel like working, which is never. It does seem like a fairy tale.

Dewey: Speaking of fairy tales, what do you call a princess with a broom? (Robum shrugs) Sweeping beauty of course.

Robum: You think that’s funny? Why doesn’t Cinderella make a good Baseball player? (Dewey shakes his head) Because she runs away from the ball. (they both crack up).

Dewey: Wait, oh wait, okay, why do gorillas have large nostrils? (Robum shakes his head) Big fingers! (they crack up).

Robum: I’ve got one. What is the difference between broccoli and boogers?

Dewey: I do not know.

Robum: Is that your final answer? (Dewey nods) What’s the difference between broccoli and boogers? Kids won’t eat broccoli. (they crack up).

Scene 9

(The focus switches back to the throne room where the Emperor has re entered).

Emperor: How do I look, (admires himself in the mirror, responses from the court). I do wonder how my new clothes are coming along. Perhaps we should check on the weavers. Minister will you check on the progress of the weavers and find out how long before I may get my new clothes.
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