

# The Emperor's New Clothes

Hans Christian Andersen

- 1 Many Years ago there lived an Emperor who was so exceedingly fond of fine new clothes that he spent all his money on being elaborately dressed. He took no interest in his soldiers, no interest in the theater, nor did he care to drive about in his carriage, unless it were to show off his new clothes. He had different robes for every hour of the day, and just as one says of a King that he is "in his Council Chamber," people always said of him, "The Emperor is in his wardrobe!"
- 2 The great city in which he lived was full of excitement. Strangers were always coming and going. One day two



swindlers arrived. They made themselves out to be weavers and said they knew how to weave the most magnificent fabric that one could imagine. Not only were the colors and patterns unusually beautiful, but the clothes that were made of this material had the extraordinary quality of becoming invisible to everyone who was either unfit for his post or inexcusably stupid.

3 “What useful clothes to have!” thought the Emperor. “If I had some like that, I might find out which of the people in my Empire are unfit for their posts. I should also be able to distinguish the wise from the fools. Yes, that material must be woven for me immediately!” Then he gave the swindlers large sums of money so that they could start work at once.

4 Quickly they set up two looms and pretended to weave, but there was no trace of anything on the frames. They made no bones about demanding the best silk and the purest gold thread. They stuffed everything into their bags and continued to work at the empty looms until late into the night.

5 “I’m rather anxious to know how much of the material is finished,” thought the Emperor, but to tell the truth, he felt a bit uneasy, remembering that anyone who was either a fool or unfit for his post would never be able to see it. He rather imagined that he need not have any fear for himself, yet he thought it wise to send someone else first to see how

things were going. Everyone in the town knew about the exceptional powers of the material, and all were eager to know how competent or how stupid their neighbors might be.

6 “I will send my honest old Chamberlain to the weavers,” thought the Emperor. “He will be able to judge the fabric better than anyone else, for he has brains, and nobody fills his post better than he does.”

7 So the nice old Chamberlain went into the hall where the two swindlers were sitting working at the empty looms.

8 “Upon my life!” he thought, opening his eyes very wide, “I can’t see anything at all!” But he didn’t say so.

9 Both the swindlers begged him to be good enough to come nearer; and asked how he liked the unusual design and the splendid colors. They pointed to the empty looms, and the poor old Chamberlain opened his eyes wider and wider, but he could see nothing, for there was nothing. “Heaven above!” he thought, “could it possibly be that I am stupid? I have never thought that of myself, and not a soul must know it. Could it be that I am not fit for my post? It will never do for me to admit that I can’t see the material!”

10 “Well, you don’t say what you think of it,” said one of the weavers.

11 “Oh, it’s delightful—most exquisite!” said the old Chamberlain, looking through his

spectacles. “What a wonderful design and what beautiful colors! I shall certainly tell the Emperor that I am enchanted with it.”

12 “We’re very pleased to hear that,” said the two weavers, and they started describing the colors and the curious pattern. The old Chamberlain listened carefully in order to repeat, when he came home to the Emperor, exactly what he had heard, and he did so.

13 The swindlers now demanded more money, as well as more silk and gold thread, saying that they needed it for weaving. They put everything into their pockets and not a thread appeared upon the ‘ looms, but they kept on working at the empty frames as before.

14 Soon after this, the Emperor sent another nice official to see how the weaving was getting on and to inquire whether the stuff would soon be ready. Exactly the same thing happened to him as to the Chamberlain. He looked and looked, but as there was nothing to be seen except the empty looms, he could see nothing.

15 “Isn’t it a beautiful piece of material?” said the swindlers, showing and describing the pattern that did not exist at all.

16 “Stupid I certainly am not,” thought the official. “Then unfit I must be for my excellent post, I suppose. That seems rather funny—but I’ll take great care that nobody gets wind of it.” Then he praised the material he could not see and assured them of his enthusiasm for the gorgeous colors and the beautiful pattern. “It’s simply enchanting!” he said to the

Emperor.

17 The whole town was talking about the splendid material.

18 And now the Emperor was curious to see it for himself while it was still upon the looms.

19 Accompanied by a great number of selected people, among whom were the two nice old officials who had already been there, the Emperor went forth to visit the two wily swindlers. They were now weaving madly, yet without a single thread upon the looms.

20 “Isn’t it magnificent?” said the two nice officials. “Will Your Imperial Majesty deign to look at this splendid pattern and these glorious colors?” Then they pointed to the empty looms, for each thought that the others could probably see the material.

21 “What on earth can this mean?” thought the Emperor. “I don’t see anything! This is terrible. Am I stupid? Am I unfit to be Emperor? That would be the most disastrous thing that could possibly befall me.”

22 “Oh, it’s perfectly wonderful!” he said. “It quite meets with my Imperial approval.” And he nodded appreciatively and stared at the empty looms—he would not admit that he saw nothing. His whole suite looked and looked, but with as little result as the others. Nevertheless, they all said, like the Emperor, “It’s perfectly wonderful!” They advised him to have some new clothes made from this splendid stuff and to wear them for the first time in the next great procession.

<sup>23</sup> “Magnificent!” “Excellent!” “Prodigious!” went from mouth to mouth, and everyone was exceedingly pleased. The Emperor gave each of the swindlers a decoration to wear in his buttonhole, and the title of “Knight of the Loom.”

<sup>24</sup> Before the procession they worked all night, burning more than sixteen candles. People could see how busy they were finishing the Emperor’s new clothes. They pretended to take the material from the looms, they slashed the air with great scissors, they sewed with needles without any thread, and finally they said, “The Emperor’s clothes are ready!”

<sup>25</sup> Then the Emperor himself arrived with his most distinguished courtiers, and each swindler raised an arm as if he were holding something and said, “These are Your Imperial Majesty’s knee-breeches. This is Your Imperial Majesty’s robe. This is Your Imperial Majesty’s mantle,” and so forth. “It is all as light as a spider’s web. One might fancy one had nothing on, but that is just the beauty of it!”

<sup>26</sup> “Yes, indeed,” said all the courtiers, but they could see nothing, for there was nothing to be seen.

<sup>27</sup> “If Your Imperial Majesty would graciously agree to take off your clothes,” said the swindlers, “we could fit on the new ones in front of the long glass.”

<sup>28</sup> So the Emperor laid aside his clothes, and the swindlers pretended to hand him, piece by piece, the new ones they were supposed to have made. And they fitted him round the

waist and acted as if they were fastening something on—it was the train. And the Emperor turned round and round in front of the long glass.

29 “How well the new robes suit Your Imperial Majesty! How well they fit!” they all said.

“What a splendid design! What gorgeous colors! It’s all magnificently regal!”

30 “The canopy which is to be held over Your Imperial Majesty in the procession is waiting outside,” announced the Lord High Chamberlain.

31 “Well, I suppose I’m ready,” said the Emperor. “Don’t you think they are a nice fit?” And he looked at himself again in the glass, first on one side and then the other, as if he really were carefully examining his handsome attire.

32 The courtiers who were to carry the train groped about on the floor with fumbling fingers and pretended to lift it, then walked on, holding their hands up in the air. Nothing would have caused them to admit that they could not see anything.

33 And so the Emperor set off in the procession under the beautiful canopy, and everybody in the streets and at the windows said, “Oh! how superb the Emperor’s new clothes are! What a gorgeous train! What a perfect fit!” No one would acknowledge that he didn’t see anything, so proving that he was not fit for his post, or that he was very stupid.

34 None of the Emperor’s clothes had ever met with such a success.

35 “But he hasn’t got any clothes on!” gasped out a little child.

- 36 “Good heavens! Hark at the little innocent!” said the father, and people whispered to one another what the child had said. “But he hasn’t got any clothes on! There’s a little child saying he hasn’t got any clothes on!”
- 37 “But he hasn’t got any clothes on!” shouted the whole town at last. The Emperor had a creepy feeling down his spine, because it began to dawn on him that the people were right. “All the same,” he thought to himself, “I’ve got to go through with it as long as the procession lasts.”
- 38 So he drew himself up and held his head higher than before, and the courtiers held on to the train that wasn’t there at all.