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The Emperor's New Threads

An Original Adaptation of the Classic Tale

by Nancy Machlis Rechtman

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

EMPEROR; *the vain and foolish ruler of the land*

EMPRESS; *his wise and lovely wife*

HYSTER; *the court jester prone to panic attacks*

GONEV; *a sly, flattering thief posing as a "weaver"*

GONEVET; *his flirtatious female accomplice*

SIR EGGED; *the pompous advisor to the Emperor*

THE EMPEROR & EMPRESS'S CHILDREN (Ranging in age from 4-12);

ARTHUR, *the oldest*

ELIZABETH

VICTORIA

ERIC

GWEN

RICHARD

NANNY; *the young and saucy caretaker of the royal children*

THE PARADE CROWD (Mostly peasants);

CHILD #1

CHILD #2

CHILD #3

MOTHER

EXTRAS AS DESIRED

STREET PERFORMERS (Optional);

DANCERS

ACROBATS

JUGGLERS

MIMES

SETTING

A long time ago, in the Emperor's palace and in the street outside

SCENE 1; *The Emperor's chambers*

SCENE 2; *The weaving room in the palace*

SCENE 3; *The Emperor's chambers*

SCENE 4; *On the street outside the palace*

THE EMPEROR'S NEW THREADS

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SCENE 1

(AT RISE: Inside the EMPEROR'S chambers; the EMPEROR standing in front of a mirror admiring himself. He is wearing a terribly ostentatious robe. HYSTER, his aide and court jester, is nervously fussing about, trying to help but only confounding matters.)

EMPEROR

Well, what do you think?

HYSTER

It's marvelous! It's fantastic! It's really you!

EMPEROR

I despise it.

HYSTER

It's awful. It doesn't do you justice at all. Whoever suggested that you buy it should be hung.

EMPEROR

You suggested that I buy it, you numbskull!

HYSTER

Oh, well, if I did, and of course I did since you say I did, it must have been during one of my bouts of temporary night-blindness when I had to decide by touch. *(Closes his eyes and gropes around the room)* Like this.

(HYSTER touches the robe with his eyes still closed.)

HYSTER, *Continued*

You see, it felt so nice and smooth like silk at the time. *(Tugs at the Emperor's hair)* But I admit that I was mistaken because now I can tell that it has a rather coarse, greasy feel to it.

(HYSTER opens his eyes and jumps back in a panic, realizing his mistake.)

EMPEROR

(Glaring) What do you think you're doing?

HYSTER

Nothing! Just trying to show you...oh...oh! I feel it coming on again!

EMPEROR

What's coming on?

HYSTER

A bout of temporary jumping junipers. Everything makes me jump— (*Begins jumping up and down*) You see? (*Jumps towards the door*) I can't stop myself!

(*The door opens and the EMPRESS enters startling HYSTER who jumps backwards, almost knocking the EMPEROR down.*)

EMPEROR

Out of my sight, you lamebrain!

HYSTER

Immediately, Your Majesty. I jump at your command!

(*HYSTER jumps out of the room.*)

EMPRESS

What's the problem, my dear?

EMPEROR

I'm surrounded by buffoons.

EMPRESS

Didn't Hyster like your new robe?

EMPEROR

Of course he did, (*Pause*), and then he didn't ... And then he started pulling my hair and jumping around the room like a hyena!

EMPRESS

How strange. You mustn't let it get you hopping mad. But, I'm here to speak of more important matters.

EMPEROR

Ah, yes, my new outfit for the grand parade next week.

EMPRESS

No, my dear. More important than that.

EMPEROR

More important? What could possibly be more important than what I'm going to wear?

EMPRESS

The people of our land have been waiting to speak to you for many weeks. Many have no jobs and cannot feed their families. They need your help. You are their emperor.

EMPEROR

Yes, yes, some other time. Now what has been done about finding me a new tailor?

EMPRESS

Don't you care about your own people?

EMPEROR

Of course I do! I wish them all the luck in the world finding jobs and food. Now tell me who we can find to weave me a magnificent new costume?

EMPRESS

(Aside to the AUDIENCE) Now tell me who can we find who can weave him a magnificent new heart, suited for a leader of the people? *(To the Emperor)* I'll see what I can do.

EMPEROR

How I despise this coat. Hyster! Come back here you jackrabbit!

(The EMPEROR exits. LIGHTS focus on EMPRESS.)

EMPRESS

(To AUDIENCE) Hello. I'm sorry it's taken us so long to get acquainted, but I wanted to give you some idea of the way things used to be. Deep, deep, down, my husband was a good man. But first you had to peel off all those layers of fine clothing to even find the man! He neglected his kingdom, he neglected his friends, he neglected his children. All he cared about was clothes, clothes and more clothes. Only what was on the outside. I tried everything I could think of to get him to change, but I was ready to give up. Until one day... Well, I'll let you see for yourselves.

(The EMPRESS exits. LIGHTS restore as The EMPEROR storms back into the room followed by a cringing HYSTER.)

EMPEROR

If you don't stop your incessant babbling I'll have you hanged by your thumbs, you driveling, blithering...

(HYSTER starts gagging, pointing at his mouth.)

EMPEROR

What is it now?

HYSTER

Aaah...aaah...

EMPEROR

Spit it out already or I'll hang you by your tongue!

HYSTER

(As if released from a spell) Oh! Oh! I was overcome by a bout of temporary tongue-tiedness! It was all knotted up, my tongue was. But you've cured me and I will be eternally grateful to you, Sire!

EMPEROR

And I will be eternally cursed with having to put up with you!

(There is a KNOCK at the door.)

EMPEROR

Enter!

(A man [GONEV] and a woman [GONEVET] enter. They are wearing plain working people's clothes, but there is something very sly and sneaky about them.)

GONEV

Aaah, Your Graciousness, so good to make your acquaintance.

GONEVET

Yes, Your Imperialness, it is an honor above all honors.

EMPEROR

(Confused, yet flattered) And who, may I ask, are you?

GONEV

(Approaching the EMPEROR) Aaah, excuse me, Sire, my eternal apologies for such a lack of manners. *(Pushing HYSTER aside)* I am Gonev, at your service. And this lovely creature accompanying me... *(Motions for GONEVET to approach)* ...is Gonevet.

(GONEVET winks at the EMPEROR, who is startled, yet pleased. GONEV motions more animatedly for GONEVET to approach the EMPEROR.)

GONEVET

(Curtsying almost to the ground) Oh, Sire, I could live the rest of my life at your feet.

HYSTER

He's already got a dog for that.

EMPEROR

Silence, you fool! *(Turns to GONEV and GONEVET)* Please, excuse this brainless unfortunate soul. He will be hung up by his thumbs in the morning.

HYSTER

(Shaking like a leaf) Hung...hung...hung...hung...

EMPEROR

By your thumbs.

HYSTER

Bbbbbbbbut....

GONEV

Poor fellow, can't speak without spitting either. Please don't string him up on our account.

EMPEROR

We'll see.

(HYSTER clings to the EMPEROR'S feet, but the EMPEROR'S glare finally forces HYSTER to sheepishly stand up again.)

EMPEROR

I still don't know what your business is with me.

GONEV

Aaah, clumsy oaf that I am. A thousand pardons, Your Emperorness, for the oversight. We are but poor, average, humble weavers who thought perhaps you might be in need of our services, hoping we might possibly weave something, anything that might be of the slightest interest to you.

EMPEROR

Well, I *am* looking for a new tailor to make a magnificent costume for me for the parade next week, but I don't know if average weavers can fill the bill.

GONEV

Average? Did I say average?

HYSTER

Average. That's what you said all right.

GONEV

(Muttering) I see that you have once again found your tongue. *(Turning to the EMPEROR)* Aaah, but what I meant to say, Your Imperial Clotheshorseness...

EMPEROR

What?

GONEVET

What he meant to say, Sire, is we're the best in town. Gonev sometimes gets a little too modest for his own good.

GONEV

Yes, quite right. You see, Your Majesterialness, we weave the most wonderful cloth in all the world.

EMPEROR

The most wonderful cloth?

GONEVET

In all the world.

GONEV

The colors are of such incredible richness, they would put a peacock to shame.

EMPEROR

A peacock?

GONEVET

To shame.

GONEV

The pattern is of such stunning complexity and originality it would take another weaver centuries to try to duplicate.

EMPEROR

Centuries?

HYSTER

(Jumping in) To be duped.

(GONEV and GONEVET scowl at HYSTER.)

GONEV

But...there is one thing that makes our cloth truly the most fantastic in the world.

EMPEROR

And that is?

GONEV

It can only be seen by the honest and wise. It is invisible to anyone who is incredibly stupid... *(Nods pointedly at HYSTER.)* ...or someone not *suited* for his position.

GONEVET

But of course, Your Handsomeness, you've got nothing to worry about. You're so wise and so...well-*suited* for your position. You'll be very pleased with your gorgeous new clothes.

EMPEROR

Yes, yes! I must have my costume made from this wondrous cloth. Then I will be able to discover who in my kingdom is fit or not fit for his office—and I will be able to tell the wise from the stupid. And, of course, I'll look fantastic, too. You must begin at once!

GONEV

Of course, Your Emperorship. Now, there is just the teensy weensy matter of...money.

HYSTER

Now we get down to business.

EMPEROR

(Waving his hand in the air) I will pay you whatever you wish.

GONEV

Well, we will need the finest looms, the finest silks, the finest gold thread, and...well...that's all I can think of for now.

GONEVET

Gonev, sweetie, aren't you forgetting one more itsy bitsy thing?

GONEV

(Rubs his chin) I don't think so.

GONEVET

The gold?!

GONEV

Aaah, yes, there is the small matter of the gold—operating expenses, you know.

EMPEROR

Yes, yes, you will be paid handsomely for your work.

HYSTER

(Aside to AUDIENCE) A handsome price for a handsome fool.

GONEV

Well, Sire, if you'll excuse us, we'll go to work right away.

GONEVET

See you later, Your Highnessness.

(GONEVET smiles at the EMPEROR. GONEV and GONEVET exit.)

EMPEROR

What a wonderful pair of weavers that is.

HYSTER

They're a wonderful pair of something—I don't know if it's weavers.

EMPEROR

Watch your tongue, you impudent rascal. I still haven't decided whether or not to have you hung by those thumbs.

Hung...hung...hung...hung...
HYSTER

By the thumbs.
EMPEROR

But Sire...Oh! Oh! Oh!
HYSTER

What is it now?
EMPEROR

Oh! Only a bout of temporary knock-kneedness! They just keep knocking and knocking!
Knock knock!
HYSTER

(There is a loud KNOCK at the door as HYSTER says, "Knock knock.")

Who's there?
EMPEROR

Sincha.
HYSTER

Sincha who?
EMPEROR

Sincha don't know, I'm not gonna tell you!
HYSTER

You lamebrain! The door! Open the door!
EMPEROR

(HYSTER opens the door and the EMPRESS enters.)

Excuse me, Your Majesties, but it's my knees—the noise must be deafening with all of that knocking. If you'll just excuse me...
HYSTER

(HYSTER edges towards the AUDIENCE.)

Get back here, you yellow-bellied bumbler! *(To the EMPRESS)* Excuse me, my dear, I'll be right back. Hyster! Get back here or you won't have any knees left to knock!
EMPEROR

(The EMPEROR chases HYSTER through the AUDIENCE.)

EMPRESS

(*To AUDIENCE*) And so the weavers went to work – or so they said. They *did* set up two weaving looms, and they *did* order a great deal of the finest silk thread. And they *did* work from dawn ‘til dusk... but, I’ll let *you* be the judges.

(*The EMPRESS exits. LIGHTS FADE OUT.*)

SCENE 2

(*AT RISE: GONEV and GONEVET busily at work at their empty looms.*)

GONEVET

Gonev, I’m getting awfully tired of sitting here making noise at this loom all day. Why can’t I just sit here and read a magazine or something?

GONEV

Because, my simple beauty, first of all, the printing press hasn’t been invented yet! Second of all, it must *sound* as if we’re working so that everyone will *think* that we’re working. And today is going to bring our first big challenge.

GONEVET

What’s that, honey?

GONEV

The Emperor is sending his most trusted advisor, Sir Egged, to check out our work.

GONEVET

Today?

GONEV

Today. What’s the big deal? We can pull it off.

GONEVET

But I’m not even half done!

GONEV

What?

GONEVET

I’ve got a lot more to do here before anyone can see it.

GONEV

See what?

GONEVET

See the...oh...I see what you mean.

(There is a loud KNOCK at the door. GONEV and GONEVET work busily at their looms as SIR EGGED enters.)

GONEV

(Does not turn around) Who's there?

SIR EGGED

It is I—Sir Egged.

GONEVET

Oh, sir, so good of you to come.

SIR EGGED

Yes, well, the Emperor has sent me to be the first to view the wondrous cloth. *(Looks at the two empty looms)* Now where is it?

GONEV

Where is it?

GONEVET

Where is it?

SIR EGGED

Where is it?

GONEV

(Chuckles) Ha ha ha! Sir Egged, I must say that I do enjoy your sense of humor!

GONEVET

(Giggling) And I thought all you minister types were all stuffy old men with no sense of fun. But you, sir, you're a crackup! Why, the cloth is right here on our looms—as if you didn't know.

SIR EGGED

Heh heh. As if I didn't know.

(SIR EGGED walks closer to the looms. He walks around the looms, sticking his face practically into the looms. He takes off his spectacles and wipes them clean, then puts them back on and stares at the looms once again.)

SIR EGGED, *Continued*

(*To AUDIENCE*) Could it be that I'm stupid? Horror of horrors, it can't be that I'm unfit for my position! No, no, the ultimate responsibility for the resolution of the solution must lie with my new spectacles! (*Approaches an AUDIENCE MEMBER*) Could you please clean these for me? I don't seem to have done a very successful job.

(*SIR EGGED hands his spectacles to THE MEMBER and after they are cleaned, places them back on his nose.*)

SIR EGGED, *Continued*

Oh, thank you for your overwhelming kindness. (*Focusing*) What?! I still can't see any cloth on those looms! But I can't let on that I can't see anything or the Emperor will think I'm not suited for my position!

GONEV

Sir Egged, what is your opinion of our work?

SIR EGGED

Magnificent! Truly a tribute to our trusty, tantamountly terrific tyrant – oops – I mean leader!

GONEVET

(*Pretends to hold the cloth*) Don't you just love the blending of the colors?

SIR EGGED

Oh yes, a formidably confounding confabulation of...red and blue?

GONEV

Gold and silver.

SIR EGGED

Gold and silver! That's what I said, isn't it?

GONEVET

And what about the unusual design we did around the border?

SIR EGGED

Yes, yes. I have always been infatuated with a border of... (*Looks to the AUDIENCE for help*)...diamonds?

GONEV

Snowflakes.

SIR EGGED

Snowflakes? Oh, you're quite right, quite right, now that I've gotten a closer look.

GONEVET

Sir Egged, honey, maybe you should get yourself new glasses or something. It doesn't seem like you're seeing things too well.

SIR EGGED

Yes, yes, my dear, perhaps you're right.

GONEVET

You know, my most favorite part of the whole thing is the design right here in the middle. Isn't it wonderful? Come here and touch it!

(SIR EGGED walks over to GONEVET and tries to touch the cloth.)

GONEVET, *Continued*

Not there, silly, right here in the middle! You must be working too hard or something. Maybe you should ask the Emperor for some time off.

SIR EGGED

Oh, you mean right here! Yes, it does have quite a magnificently opalescent opulence to it.

GONEVET

(To GONEV) What did he just say?

GONEV

That it feels good. But Sir Egged, what do you think of the design itself? I ask you, have you ever seen anything quite like it in your entire life?

SIR EGGED

No, no, I honestly can't say that I have.

(There is a KNOCK at the door. HYSTER enters.)

GONEV

What do *you* want?

HYSTER

Her Majesty has sent me to view the cloth.

GONEV

Well, Jester, what do you think?

(HYSTER walks around the loom, repeating the path that SIR EGGED took. Since he doesn't wear spectacles, he keeps rubbing his eyes, trying to clear his vision, hoping to see the cloth.)

HYSTER

(To AUDIENCE) What is this? I know that I'm not stupid. Could this mean that I'm unfit for my position? Oh, horror of horrors, it can't be! And there's that swell-head, Sir Egged, admiring the cloth! How is it that he can see it and I can't? Oh, please don't tell them that I can't see anything or I'll lose my job! I'll just have to pretend that I can see it, too.

GONEV

Well, clown, what do you think of our wondrous cloth? Or, can't you see it?

HYSTER

Of course I can see it. What do *you* think of it, Sir Egged?

SIR EGGED

Why, it's simply the most surprisingly satisfying stitchery I've ever seen! Don't you agree?

HYSTER

Anything you say.

SIR EGGED

Don't you just love the blending of the colors?

HYSTER

Oh, yes! Green and orange are my favorite colors.

SIR EGGED

Gold and silver.

HYSTER

That's what I said, gold and silver!

SIR EGGED

No you didn't!

HYSTER

I know what I said, liar, liar pants on fire!

GONEV

Gentlemen, please!

SIR EGGED

And what do you think of the unusual design around the border?

HYSTER

Oh, it's just wonderful. I've always loved... *(Looks to the AUDIENCE for help)* ...circles?

SIR EGGED

Diamonds.

Snowflakes. GONEV

Snowflakes, that's what I said. SIR EGGED

No you didn't, that's what *I* said! HYSTER

I know what I said! SIR EGGED

Gentlemen! GONEV

Come over here and look at the design right in the middle. Come feel the fabulously fantastic flaxen fabric. You'll be flabbergasted. SIR EGGED

What did he say? HYSTER

That you'll like it. GONEV

Where should I touch it? HYSTER

Right here in the middle. SIR EGGED

(*Pretending to touch the cloth*) Oh, it's wonderful! The softest thing I've ever touched. The Emperor will be so pleased. It's softer than a bunny! Softer than a cotton ball! Softer than a baby's... HYSTER

You're touching the edge, fool! I *said* the center! SIR EGGED

I know what I'm touching! HYSTER

I bet you can't even see it, Jester! SIR EGGED

I bet *you* can't even see it, fathead! HYSTER

GONEV

Gentlemen!

GONEVET

Excuse me, but you haven't even said what you think of the intricate design in the center.

SIR EGGED

(Excessively polite) You first.

HYSTER

(Same tone as SIR EGGED) Oh, no Sir, I couldn't. After you.

SIR EGGED

I insist!

HYSTER

And I persist! No, Sir, a sir must go first.

SIR EGGED

Well, I must say, it is genuinely the grandest, most grandiose, glittering...er...**geranium** I've ever seen!

GONEV

It's not a geranium.

HYSTER

Of course it's not a geranium! My dear Sir Egged, you should really get your spectacles cleaned. No, it's quite a work of art. You are both to be congratulated.

SIR EGGED

For what?

HYSTER

For what? Why, easy for you to say. For the most lovely...er...**lion** that I've ever seen!

SIR EGGED

Lion! That's a laugh! Lion! Ha ha! You should get your eyes examined! Lion! *(Stops laughing and turns to GONEV)* It's not a lion, is it?

GONEV

Why, I'm surprised that neither one of you has guessed what it is. Gonevet, my dear, you tell them.

GONEVET

Me? Why me? Oh well, it's a ...ah...it's...ah...ah...ah...peacock!

SIR EGGED & HYSTER

(Simultaneously) A peacock?

GONEV

A peacock? Aaaaah yes, of course, a peacock. And a truly magnificent one at that, wouldn't you say?

HYSTER

Why, it's wonderful!

SIR EGGED

Outrageously outstanding ostentatiousness! I must offer you my congratulations.

(There is a KNOCK on the door. The EMPRESS enters with her CHILDREN, ranging in age from approximately four to twelve years old. They are ARTHUR, ERIC, RICHARD, ELIZABETH, GWEN and VICTORIA. They are also accompanied by an extremely harried NANNY.)

GONEV

Aaah, Your Beauteousness, welcome to our humble working conditions.

GONEVET

What an honor, Your Empressness.

(ARTHUR, ERIC, RICHARD, ELIZABETH, GWEN and VICTORIA break free of their NANNY'S hold and begin racing around the room; chasing each other, running back and forth between the looms, knocking down tables and causing general havoc.)

GONEV

(Staring haughtily at CHILDREN) What wonderful...aaah...little ones you have my lady.

(ARTHUR runs up to GONEV and stomps him on the toe.)

ARTHUR

I am *not* little! I am Arthur and I am twelve!

GONEV

(Hopping around on his good foot) So sorry for misspeaking.

(ELIZABETH and VICTORIA knock over one of the weaving looms.)

GONEVET

Oh, my goodness! Look what you've done to my beautiful creation, you little...you little...
(Looks up to see the EMPRESS staring at her)...you little darlings! Don't worry; I'll have it fixed in a jiff.

ELIZABETH

Sorry.

VICTORIA

Me, too.

GONEV

(Jumps in swiftly) No harm done. We'll just dust off the cloth and it will be as good as new.

ERIC

What cloth?

GWEN

Yeah, what cloth? You mean all this gold stuff?

GONEVET

(Grabs the gold thread from her hands) Uh, little girl, can I have that back please? We're in the middle of making a beautiful costume for your daddy.

ARTHUR

Stop calling us little!

(GONEVET backs away from him, afraid ARTHUR will stomp her toes, too.)

NANNY

Children, please behave yourselves! You promised your mother you would be good if she let you see what the weavers were working on.

ERIC

All I see is a bunch of thread.

GWEN

Yeah. And some looms.

ELIZABETH

And those tables.

VICTORIA

And these silly weavers.

NANNY

Victoria, hush child!

RICHARD

Well, they are silly, pretending...

GONEV

(Pleadingly addressing the EMPRESS) Your Graciousness, what a delightful surprise, gracing us with the presence of your absolutely adorable offspring. I could never have asked for so much joy in one day.

GONEVET

(Rolling her eyes) Neither could I.

(HYSTER sidles up to NANNY and gives her a wink. She blushes and turns away, but the CHILDREN have noticed and begin to giggle.)

SIR EGGED

Children, you are being rambunctiously and ridiculously rude.

(HYSTER kisses the air as he stares at NANNY and the CHILDREN laugh even harder.)

GONEV

But is it really fair to such...aaah, active young souls to keep them inside on such a glorious day as we have today?

NANNY

Your Majesty, perhaps I should take the children outside so they can unleash their joy outdoors away from tables and looms.

EMPRESS

(Nods in agreement) Perhaps you are right, Nanny. Fresh air will do them some good.

(NANNY tries not to look at HYSTER who is now winking and making kissing motions towards her.)

NANNY

Come, children. Perhaps we can run races and the swiftest one will get the lion's share of the sweet candy I have in my bag here.

HYSTER

(Unable to control himself) Ooooh! Ooooh! Me! Me! I can run fast! I can run like a rabbit! Candy, candy, candy!

SIR EGGED

Control yourself you nattering nincompoop!

NANNY

(Flirtatiously to HYSTER) I will save you a piece of candy myself, Jester, if you wish to join us when you are done here.

HYSTER

I will run like the wind!

SIR EGGED

Just be sure not to trip over your own tongue, fool.

(HYSTER glares at SIR EGGED and puts up his fists as if preparing to fight when the EMPRESS shakes her head and turns toward her CHILDREN.)

EMPRESS

Okay, my angels, off you go. Arthur, Eric, Richard, Elizabeth, Gwen and Victoria, you listen to Nanny now and don't give her any trouble, do you understand?

THE CHILDREN

(Simultaneously) We promise, Mother. We'll be good.

ARTHUR

We'll be very *very* good for our darling Nanny, won't we?

ELIZABETH

Very very *very* good!

(The CHILDREN nod their heads and continue to giggle as they race out of the room.)

NANNY

Come along now. You have done enough mischief for one day!

(NANNY turns back to smile at HYSTER as she flounces out of the room. GONEV sighs with relief and begins straightening out the work area.)

GONEV

Such lovely, lovely children. Aaah, Your Loveliness, to what do we owe this high and mighty honor?

EMPRESS

I have come to see the cloth.

GONEV

Yes, it is right here, Your Imperialness, on the loom. These two fine gentlemen here have been admiring its wondrous beauty.

EMPRESS

Have they? What have you to say, Sir Egged?

SIR EGGED

Well, Your Majesty, I must say that never in my life have I seen anything quite like it.

EMPRESS

And you, Hyster?

HYSTER

What he said.

GONEV

Your Majesty, if you come closer, you'll be able to see the intricate workmanship we've done.

SIR EGGED

The blending of the colors is remarkable.

EMPRESS

Is it?

HYSTER

The black and blue blend together so nicely.

GONEV, GONEVET & SIR EGGED

(Simultaneously) Gold and silver!

GONEV

And the design around the border is so unusual.

EMPRESS

I hadn't noticed.

HYSTER

Oh, but Your Majesty, look at all the...uh...all the ...uh...uh...

SIR EGGED

Diamonds.

GONEV & GONEVET

(Simultaneously) Snowflakes!

EMPRESS

Is that what they are? What a strange choice for a border design.

GONEVET

If you please, Your Empressness, it's the best thing we could come up with on such short notice.

GONEV

(Nervously) Aaaaah, Your Royalness, please come here and examine our most incredible achievement—the design in the center.

EMPRESS

Why don't you just describe it to me?

(The EMPRESS waits for someone to speak.)

EMPRESS, *Continued*

Well, gentlemen?

SIR EGGED

Why, Your Majesty, it's such an astonishingly astounding artistic achievement... I just can't find words for it.

HYSTER

(Aside) Could've fooled me!

EMPRESS

And you, Hyster? Can you find the words to describe the design of this "miracle cloth?"

HYSTER

Well, Your Majesty, it's so incredible that I'm tongue-tied. See?

(HYSTER shows the EMPRESS his tongue.)

EMPRESS

The problem is that I seem to be having some trouble making out the design. What is it exactly supposed to be?

SIR EGGED

Why, it's a...

HYSTER

You see, it's a...

SIR EGGED

Geranium!

HYSTER

Lion!

GONEV & GONEVET

(Simultaneously) Peacock!

EMPRESS

A peacock, is it? No one seems to be too sure about it. *(To AUDIENCE)* Do **you** see a peacock there? *(To GONEV & GONEVET)* Now, where exactly did you say that design was?

GONEV

(Wiping the sweat from his brow) Right here, Your Majesty, in the center.

EMPRESS

(Walking over to GONEV & GONEVET at the loom) The center, you say? Well, I must be exceedingly slow today but I really am having trouble finding the center. Why don't you place my hand on it so I can see it more easily?

(GONEV and GONEVET each take one of the EMPRESS'S hands and place them at opposite ends of the loom. Realizing their mistake, they try to rectify the situation by moving the EMPRESS'S hands again, but end up criss-crossing her arms and getting very tangled up. Finally, the EMPRESS pulls herself free.)

EMPRESS

Is the design at the center so small that you can't even find it?

GONEV

Aaah, Your Highnessness, please forgive all the confusion. It's just that we're so nervous having someone of your great importance and astounding beauty in our humble chambers...

EMPRESS

How you do flatter me! All the same, you all seem to be having great difficulty in remembering what the design looks like when it's right here in front of you. I find that rather strange, don't you? Sir Egged, Hyster, how do you account for this?

SIR EGGED

Why, Your Majesty, it must be my new spectacles. I must need a new prescription because I am in a peculiarly pathetic plight posed by my sight...or lack of it, so to speak.

GONEV, GONEVET, HYSTER & EMPRESS

(Simultaneously to AUDIENCE) What did he say?

SIR EGGED

I'm having trouble seeing, you see.

EMPRESS

And you, Hyster?

HYSTER

Well, Your Majesty, you see, I can't, ah, ah, oh, oh!

EMPRESS

What is it?

HYSTER

I'm suffering a bout of temporary lame-brainedness!

GONEV

Temporary? Ha!

EMPRESS

Oh, you poor dear.

(HYSTER is mugging for sympathy. He drops his head all the way to the side and then pushes it up with his hand so it is only slightly tilted.)

HYSTER

Oh, yes, Your Majesty, poor me. When my brain goes lame I must hold my head with my hand since there are no canes for brains.

GONEV

It seems to me the Emperor would be doing you a favor if he had you hung by your thumbs.

(HYSTER'S head snaps into an upright position once again.)

EMPRESS

Oh, dear Hyster, I'm so glad to see that you've recovered.

GONEV

Looks like miracles still happen.

EMPRESS

I have a question I wish to pose to you.

GONEV, GONEVET, SIR EGGED & HYSTER

(Simultaneously) Yes, Your Majesty?

EMPRESS

Do any of you feel that I am lacking in brains?

ALL

Oh, *no* Your Majesty!

EMPRESS

Well then, do any of you feel that I am not suited to be Empress?

ALL

Oh, **NO** Your Majesty!

EMPRESS

So far so good. That leaves me with one more question. *If* I am not stupid... *(ALL shake their heads emphatically)* ...and *if* I am well-suited to be Empress, why is it that I don't see any cloth? No gold and silver, no snowflakes, no peacock? *(ALL stare at the floor)* Sir Egged, I ask you, could it be that the reason you are so confused over what the cloth looks like be because you really can't see anything at all?

SIR EGGED

Well, I, uh...

EMPRESS

The truth, please.

SIR EGGED

No, Your Majesty, I can't see the cloth.

(HYSTER mugs for the AUDIENCE, thinking he has triumphed over SIR EGGED.)

EMPRESS

And, Hyster, I now ask you the same question.

HYSTER

Well, uh, I, er... *(Falls to his knees)*...I love my job!

EMPRESS

Hyster?

HYSTER

No, Your Majesty, I can't see the cloth.

EMPRESS

Thank you. Now, for my next question—if I can't see the cloth and Sir Egged can't see the cloth and Hyster can't see the cloth and my children couldn't see the cloth...is it that we're all incredibly stupid and unfit for our positions? Or is it that there really isn't any cloth at all?

(SIR EGGED and HYSTER brighten; GONEV & GONEVET are visibly panicked.)

GONEV

Aaaah, well, Your Majesterialness, you see...

EMPRESS

You know that if there is no cloth, and I don't think there is, you have tried to deceive the Emperor of this land and all of his people – all for gold. Do you have any idea what the punishment is for such a terrible offense as yours?

GONEVET

A train ticket out of town to a nice out-of-the-way place in the country?

EMPRESS

The punishment would be ...for you both to be...hung by your thumbs.

GONEV & GONEVET

(Simultaneously) Hung...hung...hung...hung...

HYSTER

By those pretty little thumbs!

(HYSTER sticks out his tongue and puts his hands behind his ears, waving his fingers at GONEV and GONEVET who fall to their knees and cling to the EMPRESS.)

GONEV & GONEVET

(Simultaneously) Oh, Your Majesty, please spare us!

GONEV

Have pity! We meant no harm. We just thought we could make some easy money.

GONEVET

You and your bright ideas.

GONEV

What do you mean *my* idea? It was your idea, you little...

EMPRESS

That's enough of that! Now get up, both of you! I think that you have learned your lesson.

GONEV & GONEVET

(Simultaneously) Oh, *yes* Your Majesty!

EMPRESS

I'm thinking that I might spare you.

GONEV & GONEVET

(Simultaneously) Oh **YES**, Your Majesty!

EMPRESS

Under one condition.

GONEV

Just name it, Your Compassionateness.

EMPRESS

That you don't tell the Emperor that there isn't any cloth. Let him go to the parade thinking that he is wearing his magnificent new costume.

GONEV

But, Your Highnessness, he'll only be wearing...

HYSTER

His underwear!

EMPRESS

That's right.

GONEV

He'll have us killed for sure!

EMPRESS

No, I won't let that happen. He needs to be taught a lesson and this is my last hope. Now not a word to anyone about this... It must remain a secret just between us.

ALL

Yes, Your Majesty.

EMPRESS

Good. Now off with you.

(ALL exit except for the EMPRESS, who addresses the AUDIENCE.)

EMPRESS, *Continued*

Well, what do you think of my little plan? This is the only way we'll ever teach the Emperor how foolish he has been, only caring for his clothes and not his people. It's almost time for the grand parade. We must let him think at first that he is wearing clothes, although we know better, don't we? But when the time comes to tell him how foolish and silly he has been...well, I'll need your help. Excuse me, but I must get ready.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT: Optional Intermission.)

SCENE 3

(AT RISE: The EMPEROR in front of his mirror wearing nothing but his crown and his long johns. There is a KNOCK at the door.)

EMPEROR

Enter!

HYSTER

(Entering nervously) Excuse me, Sire, but the weavers are here.

EMPEROR

It's about time—the parade is about to begin. Well, numbskull, don't just stand there...show them in!

(GONEV and GONEVET enter, trying not to show how nervous they are. They are pretending to carry the costume. The EMPEROR'S back is to them.)

EMPEROR, *Continued*

Well, you've come just in the nick of time. Let me see my magnificent new costume!

(The EMPEROR turns around and his eyes bulge, seeing nothing in their hands.)

GONEV

Aaaah, Your Imperialness, here is your costume to end all costumes.

EMPEROR

Where?

GONEV

Right here, Sire. Let us help you get dressed since there isn't much time. We had a few last minute...aaah...alterations to make so it would be even finer.

GONEVET

Your Majesterialness, you're not saying a word. Don't you like it?

EMPEROR

Why, why, of course I do! It's even more astonishing than Hyster or Sir Egged described.

HYSTER

I bet you've never seen anything like it before, eh, Your Majesty?

EMPEROR

There's a great deal of truth to that.

GONEV

(Pretending to hold pants) Here are the pants, Your Foolishness.

EMPEROR

What was that?

GONEVET

(Giving GONEV a dirty look) The pants, Your Emperorness...why don't you step into them?

(GONEV holds his hands out and the EMPEROR pretends to step into the pants.)

GONEV

Aaaah, they fit you like a glove, Sire!

EMPEROR

(Looking into the mirror) They're not bad at all, you know?

GONEV

And here's the shirt—magnificent, isn't it? The cloth is as light as a shadow...you can barely feel it at all.

EMPEROR

Yes, barely at all. Well, help me get into it.

(GONEV helps him. The EMPEROR has his arms out, pretending he's getting into the shirt.)

GONEV

Oh, Your Majesty, hold still for a moment. I can't seem to get the collar on over your head!

EMPEROR

(Gasping for air and falling to his knees) Hurry! I'm suffocating in this shirt!

(GONEV gives a great pretend tug and then helps the EMPEROR to his feet.)

GONEV

There we go, Sire!

EMPEROR

Oh, that's better. That shirt almost strangled me! But it is quite beautiful—and I've never had one that fit me better.

(There is a KNOCK at the door and SIR EGGED enters.)

SIR EGGED

Excuse me, Sire, but Her Majesty asked me to tell you that she still isn't ready. She said for you to proceed in your pompous plans for the parade and she will promptly meet you there.

EMPEROR

Fine, fine. Tell me, Sir Egged, what do you think of my costume?

SIR EGGED

A marvelous melee of magnificent munificence, truly, Sire.

EMPEROR

Oh. But do you like it?

SIR EGGED

A spectacle of spectacular significance!

GONEV

(Pretending to hold a cloak in his hands) Excuse me, Your Highness, but now, for the finishing touch. The cloak.

EMPEROR

(Straining to see) Remarkable! A work of art! I salute you for your superb craftsmanship.

GONEV & GONEVET

(Simultaneously) Thank you, Your Majesty.

(GONEV pretends to carry the cloak while GONEVET joins him and pretends to fasten it around the EMPEROR'S neck.)

GONEV

Ah, Sire, you are truly a specimen to behold.

EMPEROR

Why, thank you.

GONEVET

We'd really like to stick around and see how your parade goes and everything, Your Emperorship, but we've kind of got to run.

EMPEROR

Oh, are you sure you can't stay?

GONEV

Aaaah, so kind of you to ask, but alas, we've got other engagements...and a long way to travel.

GONEVET

A long, *long* way.

EMPEROR

Wait.

(GONEV & GONEVET nervously look at the EMPEROR.)

I owe you some money.

GONEVET

(Edging toward the door) Oh no you don't, Your Highnessness. It's OK. Just forget it...we've got to go.

GONEV

(Edging toward the EMPEROR) Of course we could stick around another minute or two...

(GONEVET yanks GONEV out the door.)

GONEV, Continued Offstage

But we've really got to run! Bye!

EMPEROR

(To SIR EGGED and HYSTER) Well, let's go. Each of you take an end of my cloak so it doesn't drag on the ground. Off to the parade!

(The EMPEROR, HYSTER, AND SIR EGGED exit. LIGHTS OUT.)

SCENE 4

(SFX: MUSIC AND PARADE SOUNDS; PEOPLE CHEERING. AT RISE: a large CROWD eager to see the EMPEROR. Optional STREET PERFORMERS [Dancers, Acrobats, Jugglers, Mimes, Etc.] The EMPEROR enters, still wearing only his long johns and his crown. SIR EGGED and HYSTER are following, pretending to carry the back of the cloak. A group of CHILDREN in the crowd begin pointing and laughing at the EMPEROR. Their PARENTS try to quiet them, but begin laughing, too, as they watch the EMPEROR strut through the streets.)

EMPEROR

How they love me—and why not? *(Waves and blows kisses to the CROWD, including the AUDIENCE)* You know, I can't tell if they're cheering for me or for my beautiful new costume. It must be the combination. *(Approaches the AUDIENCE)* I bet you've never seen anything like this in your life have you? Or you? What about you?

(The EMPRESS enters.)

EMPEROR, *Continued*

Oh, my dear, I'm so glad you made it. Listen to them cheer for me!

EMPRESS

Is that what they're doing?

EMPEROR

And how they love my new costume!

EMPRESS

Ah, your new costume. Perhaps we should listen more closely to hear what they are saying about your costume.

(The CROWD grows increasingly boisterous as they point at the EMPEROR and laugh.)

FIRST CHILD

Look how silly he looks!

MOTHER

Hush, child, he'll hear you!

SECOND CHILD

Well, Mother he does look like a fool!

EMPEROR

What's that they're saying? That my costume looks cool?

MOTHER

Quiet, I tell you. He'll hear you and that will be the end of us all.

THIRD CHILD

But Mother, he's just standing there in his underwear!

FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD CHILD

His underwear! He's standing there in his underwear!

CROWD

(Chanting) His underwear! He's standing there in his underwear!

(The EMPEROR looks down frantically searching for any sign of his costume. He looks pleadingly at the EMPRESS.)

EMPEROR

My underwear? Nonsense! How can I be in the middle of a parade in my underwear?

(The EMPRESS motions to the AUDIENCE.)

EMPRESS

Tell him, please. Is he standing before you in his underwear?

(The EMPRESS waits for AUDIENCE response. The truth finally dawns on the EMPEROR and he frantically tries all sorts of contortions in order to cover himself up. SIR EGGED has inched his way into the crowd during this exchange and HYSTER tries to follow.)

EMPEROR

(Roaring) Hyster!!!!

HYSTER

Yyyyyyyes, Yyyyour Majesty?

EMPEROR

Why did you let me come out here in my underwear?

HYSTER

Wwwwell, I, uh, oh, ah, oh!

(HYSTER clutches his chest, falls down, gets up, falls down, gets up, etc.)

EMPEROR

What is it now?

HYSTER

(Continuing to fall and get up) Oh, my—a temporary bout of faint-heartedness. My heart keeps fainting and I haven't any smelling salts to revive it. Oh, oh!

EMPRESS

It's not his fault, my dear. It's mine.

(HYSTER breathes a sigh of relief and remains seated on the floor.)

EMPEROR

Yours?!

EMPRESS

Yes, mine. I swore everyone to secrecy about the fact that there is no cloth.

EMPEROR

But why?

EMPRESS

Well, first tell me this...How do you feel right now?

EMPEROR

Pretty foolish.

EMPRESS

And, if you hadn't placed such importance on your clothes and instead had spent all of that time caring for your people...

EMPEROR

I'd be feeling pretty smart. Oh, you're right. I can't believe how I've let myself be carried away with this foolishness all of these years. I promise I'll try to change. Things will be different in my kingdom from now on. And all because of you.

EMPRESS

I'm so glad.

(The EMPEROR and EMPRESS hug.)

EMPEROR

(Winks at the EMPRESS) And my first change regards getting a new court jester once I've had Hyster hung by his thumbs.

HYSTER

Hung...hung...hung...hung...hung...hung...

EMPEROR

By the thumbs. Anyone with so many maladies must suffer terribly. I'd be doing him a favor to put an end to his misery.

HYSTER

Bbbbbbbbut...

EMPEROR

Yes? Speak if you can.

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes