

The King's New Clothes

Long, long ago there lived a king who loved fine clothes so much that he spent all his money on them. Military parades, the theater, and country outings interested him only because he could then appear in a new outfit. For every hour of the day he had a special garment, and whereas other kings are often said to be "in council," people said of him: "The King is in his dressing room."

Life in the king's capital was very merry; almost every day foreign guests arrived. Once, two swindlers came. They claimed to be weavers who could produce such wonderful fabric that nothing finer could be imagined: besides having an extraordinarily beautiful pattern and colors, it possessed the marvelous property of becoming invisible to anyone who was "not fit for his office" or hopelessly stupid.

"Yes, that would be just the suit for me!" thought the king. "Then I could find out which of my officials is unfit for his post, and who is wise and who is foolish. Let them make such fabric for me at once."

So he gave the swindlers a large advance payment so they could begin work immediately.

They set up two looms and pretended to work diligently, though there was absolutely nothing on the looms. Without the slightest shame, they demanded the finest silk and the purest gold for their work, pocketed it all, and continued sitting at the empty looms from morning until late at night.

"I would like to see how the work is progressing!" thought the king. But then he remembered the marvelous property of the fabric, and he felt somewhat uneasy. Of course, he had nothing to fear for himself, but... still, let someone else go first! Meanwhile, rumors about the miraculous fabric had spread throughout the city, and everyone was eager to quickly ascertain the stupidity and unworthiness of their neighbors.

"I shall send my honest old minister to them," thought the king. "He will examine the fabric: he is wise and holds his office with honor."

And so the old minister entered the room where the swindlers sat at the empty looms.

"Heaven help us!" thought the minister, staring wide-eyed. "I see nothing!"

But he did not say this aloud.

The swindlers politely asked him to come closer and say how he liked the pattern and the colors. At the same time, they pointed to the empty looms, and the poor minister, however hard he stared, still saw nothing. And indeed, there was nothing to see.

"Oh, my God!" he thought. "Can it be that I am stupid? That is the one thing I never thought! Heaven forbid if anyone finds out!... Or perhaps I am not fit for my position?... No, no, I absolutely cannot admit that I do not see the fabric!"

"Well, why do you say nothing to us?" asked one of the weavers.

"Oh, it is charming!" replied the old minister, looking through his spectacles. "What a pattern, what colors! Yes, yes, I shall tell the king that I am extremely pleased with your work!"

"We are glad to serve!" said the swindlers, and they began describing the pattern and the combination of colors. The minister listened very carefully so that he could repeat everything to the king. And that is exactly what he did.

Now the swindlers demanded even more silk and gold, but they merely stuffed their pockets; not a single thread went into the work.

Then the king sent another official to the weavers. The same thing happened to him as to the first. He looked and looked, but saw nothing except the empty looms.

"Well, how do you like it?" the swindlers asked him, showing off the fabric and explaining patterns that did not exist.

"I am not stupid," thought the official, "so does that mean I am not fit for my office? Well, I never! However, I must not let on!"

And he began praising the fabric he did not see, admiring the wonderful pattern and the combination of colors.

"Charming, charming!" he reported to the king. Soon the whole city was talking about the magnificent fabric.

Finally, the king himself wished to admire the curiosity before it was taken off the loom. Accompanied by a whole retinue of chosen courtiers and officials, among whom were the first two who had already seen the fabric, the king arrived at the swindlers', who were weaving with all their might on the empty looms.

"Magnifique! (Wonderful!) Is it not?" the first two officials exclaimed. "Would you not care to admire it? What a pattern... what colors!"

And they poked their fingers into empty space, imagining that everyone else could see the fabric.

"What, what is this?" thought the king. "I see nothing! This is terrible! Am I stupid, then? Or am I not fit to be king? That would be the worst of all!"

"Oh, yes, very, very charming!" the king said at last. "It fully deserves my approval!"

And he nodded his head with a satisfied air, examining the empty looms: he did not want to admit that he saw nothing. The king's retinue stared with all their eyes, but saw no more than he did; nevertheless, everyone repeated in one voice: "Very, very charming!" and advised the king to have a suit made from this fabric for the upcoming solemn procession.

"Magnifique! Wonderful! Excellent!" was heard from all sides; everyone was in such ecstasy!

The king awarded each swindler an order and appointed them court weavers.

All night before the celebration, the swindlers sat working and burned more than sixteen candles—so hard did they strive to finish the king's new suit on time. They pretended to take the fabric off the looms, cut it with large scissors, and then sew it with needles without thread.

Finally, they announced:

"It is ready!"

The king, accompanied by his retinue, came personally to dress. The swindlers raised their hands as if holding something, saying:

"Here are the trousers, here is the vest, here is the coat! A wonderful suit! Light as a spider's web, and you won't feel it on your body! But that is precisely its charm!"

"Yes, yes!" said the courtiers, but they saw nothing: indeed, there was nothing to see.

"Kindly undress now and stand right here, in front of the large mirror!" the swindlers said to the king. "We shall dress you!"

The king undressed, and the swindlers began to "dress" him: they pretended to put one piece of clothing on him after another, and finally attached something to his shoulders and waist: this was how they "put" the royal mantle on him! Meanwhile, the king turned in all directions before the mirror.

"My God, how it suits him! How wonderfully it fits!" whispered those in the retinue.
"What a pattern, what colors! A luxurious suit!"

"The canopy awaits!" reported the Lord Chamberlain.

"I am ready!" said the king. "Does the suit fit well?"

And he turned once more before the mirror: after all, he had to show that he was carefully examining his outfit.

The chamberlains, who were supposed to carry the train of the royal mantle, pretended to lift something from the floor and walked behind the king, stretching their arms forward—they dared not even hint that they saw nothing.

And so the king proceeded through the streets under a luxurious canopy, while the people said:

"Oh, what a suit! What a luxurious mantle! How wonderfully it fits!" Not a single person admitted that he saw nothing: no one wanted to expose himself as a fool or an incompetent person. Indeed, no suit of the king had ever aroused such enthusiasm.

"But he is quite naked!" suddenly cried a little boy.

"Oh, listen to what the innocent child says!" said his father, and everyone began whispering the child's words to one another.

"But he is quite naked!" finally shouted the whole crowd.

And the king felt uneasy: it seemed to him that they were right, but the ceremony had to be carried through to the end!

So he marched under his canopy even more majestically, while the chamberlains walked behind him, holding up the train that was not there.