

THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

By Steven Schutzman

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ISBN: 1-60003-391-1

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CHARACTERS

Ludwig

Otto

Morris

Boris

The Emperor

*Minister 1

*Minister 2

Servant

*Keeper of the Calendar

Princess Marigold

Princess Petunia

Empress

*Emperor of Japan

*Audience Member 1

*Audience Member 2

*Audience Member 3

Child

*Can be doubled

TIME

Some centuries ago.

SETTING

A jail cell. The Emperor's palace. Outside the Palace walls. A tailor shop. Empress's bedchamber. A street in the capital city.

PROPS

Harmonica

Ring of prison keys

Detective magnifying glass

Royal clothes (can be absurd) for the Emperor, Empress, Marigold and
Petunia

Mirror

One perfectly ridiculous hat

Feather duster

Trunk

Long underwear for Royal family

Bags of gold

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Scene One - Jail

LUDWIG and OTTO in adjoining jail cells. LUDWIG pacing in his, OTTO sleeping in his. They can't see each other and never have.

LUDWIG: Two months in this God-forsaken jail, nothing to do but sleep, eat (if you can call it that) and walk around and around and around. I'm wearing a rut in the floor. I'm making myself dizzy. Heck, I'm making the spiders dizzy.

OTTO: *(wakes up, looks around, disappointed)* Aww no! Still here. It was all just a dream. The satin couch, the dancing girls, the chocolate sauce. . . *(dozes off again)*

LUDWIG: *(looking at spider's web)* Just like this spider weaves a web, I'm a man who needs to weave a scheme. Look at him there, so still and ready to snare his next unsuspecting victim. Ah, the thrill of seeing your plans in action, relieving a fool of his hard-earned cash, and the money wasn't bad either.

OTTO: The satin girls, the dancing sauce, the chocolate couch. When do we eat? Bread and water, yum, yum, yum. Bread and water, dum te dum te dum. Hey, dat's good.

(Takes out harmonica, plays the song HE's just invented.)

LUDWIG: *(drawing on wall)* Two hundred forty eight more days to go, minus, say, fourteen days for good behavior, comes to. . . hey, what's that sound?

(LUDWIG knocks on wall. OTTO answers with a knock. They knock back and forth for a while then OTTO gets bored and walks back to his cot, leaving LUDWIG knocking on his own. LUDWIG stops, listens, quits.)

I knew it was too good to be true. *(shrugs, leaves wall)*

OTTO: *(calling out)* Hello.

LUDWIG: *(back at wall)* Hello. Who are you?

OTTO: Uh, your next door neighbor.

LUDWIG: What's your name? What are you in for?

OTTO: Name's Otto. Been in so long I forgot what I did but it must'a been pretty bad.

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LUDWIG: I'm Ludwig. You name it, I probably did it. I once talked a blind old woman into buying a cow.

OTTO: Uh, what's wrong with that?

LUDWIG: The cow was dead.

OTTO: Yeah? Well, how'd she get it home?

LUDWIG: She rode it.

OTTO: Must'a taken a long time.

LUDWIG: Yes, it did, a very long time.

OTTO: Hey, now dat you mentioned the cow, I remember a rabbit I bought at the Bunny for a Buck Shop. Guess how much I paid for it?

LUDWIG: I'll take a wild guess: One dollar.

OTTO: Exactly. But guess how much I sold it for that very night?

LUDWIG: I don't know. How much?

OTTO: A hundred bucks.

LUDWIG: How did you do that?

OTTO: With sleight-of-hand and hocus pocus, I convinced a crowd at a country fair that the rabbit was magic. Picked some pockets too. Had my hand in more pockets than the tax collector.

LUDWIG: Mere child's play, my man. I'm talking about honest, ha ha, to goodness, ha ha, deception. I don't have to pick pockets. People line up to reach into their own pockets and give their money to me. I'm not talking hocus pocus tricks. I'm talking schemes to fool nobles and kings, high class stuff. Ever heard of the Tasmanian Diamond.

OTTO: No.

LUDWIG: It's a huge diamond I stole from King Arty.

OTTO: Uh, isn't that King Arthur?

LUDWIG: No, those of us who knew him always called him Arty. He had the brains of a doorknob. In fact, most kings are really quite stupid. It's all the inbreeding, you know.

OTTO: Uh, what's inbreeding?

LUDWIG: Forget it. I just had an idea to make use of both of our talents. Do you think if I can keep the jailers busy with my silver tongue, your quick fingers could relieve them of their keys?

OTTO: Sure. Great idea, Boss. And after we're out we should work together. Why, with your brains and my uh. . . uh. . .

LUDWIG: Quick fingers.

OTTO: Right. Quick fingers. We'd make a great team.

LUDWIG: Shhh, here they come now.

(The jailers/detectives MORRIS and BORIS enter. The escape is pantomimed to video arcade music, with LUDWIG talking, OTTO pick-pocketing keys and MORRIS and BORIS winding up knocked out and all tangled in each other. LUDWIG and OTTO exit. When MORRIS and BORIS come to, BORIS tries to disentangle himself from MORRIS as if

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HE was still fighting the criminals. HE finally subdues him on ground with a foot to his back, twisting his arm.)

BORIS: You're under arrest. . .

MORRIS: But. . .

BORIS: No wait. He already was under arrest. You're under? . . . under? . . . under? . . . You're in big trouble. . .

MORRIS: But. . .

BORIS: Assaulting a police officer, escaping from jail, failure to obey. . .

MORRIS: But I'm your best friend, Detective Morris. . .

BORIS: Ah ha. Impersonating an officer of the law. This time we'll throw away the key.

MORRIS: But I am Detective Morris. . .

BORIS: Morris wouldn't assault me. We've been friends for twenty years.

MORRIS: Twenty three. . .

BORIS: We were going to retire and go sea fishing together. . .

MORRIS: . . . in a nice little boat name of Annabell. . .

BORIS: Wait a minute. . . *(examining MORRIS closely)* Morris! It's you. *(embracing MORRIS)* I'm so glad you're safe.

MORRIS: *(getting up, dusting off, trying to recover his dignity)* Thank you very much. Now let's go.

BORIS: *(with building emotion)* But Morris, we can't go. We might as well stay in jail and guard each other, now that we let our only prisoners escape. *(in tears)* Oh, Morrie, how can we retire now? We had just two prisoners and lost them both. There will be no sea fishing for us. No fishing at all. Goodbye Annabell. Goodbye. *(cries pathetically)*

MORRIS: You got to pull yourself together, man. Pull. Pull.

(Gritting his teeth and squeezing his arms, BORIS tries to pull himself together.)

BORIS: *(through gritted teeth)* Like this?

MORRIS: Harder.

BORIS: *(tries harder to pull himself together, through tighter gritted teeth)* This?

MORRIS: Yes, I guess, it'll have to do. Now, if we're to proceed methodically, we can't cry pathetically.

BORIS: Sorry, Morrie.

MORRIS: We'll simply have to recapture them, Boris. And desperate desperados those two are, dangerous to all we hold dear. They're a disgrace, a menace, a nuisance, a bad influence, an inconvenience

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and many other 'ences' too. In short, no one will be safe until those men are safely back behind bars.

BORIS: No safe will be safe either.

MORRIS: Exactly. For if those two tricky tricksters could trick crack detectives like us, think what pranks those cranks could cook up on your average dorks and dorkesses and so, dear Borkus, in conclusion, let's track those crooks until they're back in the clank. What's our first step?

BORIS: First, we must look for clues and, second, we must figure out what the clues mean.

MORRIS: Exactly. I'll go this way and you go that.

(They start but MORRIS pulls BORIS back.)

No, you go this way and I'll go that.

(They start again in the opposite direction but MORRIS pulls BORIS back again.)

No, let's go together and find twice as many clues as we could apart. *(takes out magnifying glass and searches.)* There. I've already got my first clue.

BORIS: What is it?

MORRIS: *(using magnifying glass)* The criminals aren't here.

BORIS: Some clue.

MORRIS: But the meaning, the meaning of the clue is what's important? What is the meaning, Boris?

BORIS: They've escaped.

MORRIS: Exactly. And if they've escaped from here, they must be somewhere else. Now let's search somewhere else, all the somewhere elses around here. The empire is depending on us and we cannot fail.

(MORRIS exits with a flourish, BORIS trailing behind.)

END OF SCENE

Scene Two - The Emperor's Palace

EMPEROR: (*singing as HE models clothes in mirror.*)

Look at me, Look at me
Dressed so fashionably
Showing just enough knee
And I'm sure you'll agree
That I'll make history
with my clothes, with my clothes
From my head to my toes
That I make history
As everyone knows
(*A flourish*) With my clothes!

MINISTER 1: (*rushes in*) Your Majesty, your Majesty, our food stocks are gone and the people are ready to riot. You must do something.

EMPEROR: Perhaps if I appear before them in this new outfit.

MINISTER 1: I don't think that would work, your Majesty.

EMPEROR: And why not?

MINISTER 1: You know how disturbed people get when they haven't eaten for weeks at a time.

EMPEROR: Perhaps if I give it a tuck here, and another here. Yes, that should calm their bellies down.

MINISTER 1: But your majesty. . .

EMPEROR: Oh, all right, I'll do something about the starvation later in the week. Go see the Keeper of the Royal Calendar to set up a date and time.

MINISTER 1: Yes, your Majesty. (*exits*)

EMPEROR: (*tries on new outfit, preens in mirror*) That I make history
Showing just enough knee
With my. . .

MINISTER 2: (*rushes in, interrupting*) Your Majesty, your Majesty, the dikes are about to burst and soon the whole kingdom will be under six feet of water.

EMPEROR: Water, did you say? Water stains silk, you know, and I won't have it, I won't have stains on the royal silk. . . that's my decision.

MINISTER 2: Yes, your Majesty. But the flood. Shouldn't we do something about the flood and all the drowning?

EMPEROR: Oh, all right. All right. Can't you see I'm busy? I'll take care of it later in the week.

MINISTER 2: But your majesty, drowning people don't like to be kept waiting.

EMPEROR: I think this outfit is worth waiting for, don't you?

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MINISTER 2: Yes, your Majesty. I'll go see the Keeper of the Royal Calendar to set up a date and a time.

(MINISTER 2 rushes out. SERVANT enters.)

EMPEROR: *(to servant)* What do you think of this outfit? I'm not sure about the collar. It seems a little too. . . too. . .

SERVANT: Mysterious.

EMPEROR: Exactly. This collar is too mysterious. I must have it altered.

(MINISTERS 1& 2 come in, dragging the KEEPER OF THE ROYAL CALENDAR.)

Now what? Can't you ministers take care of anything without my help? What am I paying you for?

SERVANT: Speaking of pay. . .

MINISTER 1: *(to KEEPER OF CALENDAR)* Tell him.

MINISTER 2: Yes, read him his schedule for the rest of the week.

KEEPER OF CALENDAR: Monday, May 22, in the Year of our Lord Sixteen Hundred and Twenty Two, his royal majesty will be trying on clothes; Tuesday, May 23, in the Year of. . .

MINISTER 1: *(interrupting KEEPER with a smack.)* Cut the jive, Clive.

MINISTER 2: And get to the point.

KEEPER OF THE CALENDAR: Tuesday, May 23, trying on clothes, Wednesday, May 24, trying on clothes, Thursday, May 25, trying on clothes. . .

MINISTER 1: See, there's no time to get anything done because you're always trying on clothes.

EMPEROR: I am not. Read on and you'll see.

KEEPER OF THE CALENDAR: Friday, May 25, manicure, pedicure, pedigree, filigree, don't you agree, massage, facial, blow dry, corn removal and PSYCHO-therapy.

EMPEROR: As you see, I'm a very busy man whose collar is too mysterious. Now, get out, all of you.

(All exit but EMPEROR who continues looking in mirror and pays no attention to his daughters during this next section. Enter SERVANT.)

SERVANT: Their Royal Highnesses, Princess Marigold and Princess Petunia. *(aside)* What we need around here is more mirrors.

(MARIGOLD and PETUNIA enter. SERVANT exits.)

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MARIGOLD: Father, I have wonderful news. I'm getting married.

PETUNIA: Oh, that's nothing, you should hear my news.

MARIGOLD: What is it?

PETUNIA: I'm getting married.

MARIGOLD: You? Ha! Who would marry you?

PETUNIA: Prince Dogwood.

MARIGOLD: Prince Dogface, you mean.

PETUNIA: Yeah, well who is your prince charming?

MARIGOLD: Prince Redwood.

PETUNIA: Prince Deadwood, if he's marrying you!

MARIGOLD: Well, my wedding will fill the palace.

PETUNIA: Well, my wedding will fill the valley.

MARIGOLD: Well, I'll have my wedding on the mountaintop.

PETUNIA: Well, I'll have my wedding on the moon.

MARIGOLD: Well, I don't need to have my wedding on the moon because my wedding will be so colorful and bright, you'll be able to see it from the moon.

MARIGOLD: No one will come to your wedding because they'll all be at mine, won't they, Father?

PETUNIA: Papa!

MARIGOLD: Daddy!

PETUNIA: Dada!

EMPEROR: That's good, that's all very good, you've always been good girls, now run along. Daddy has an empire to run you know.

MARIGOLD: We're your daughters.

PETUNIA: And you act like you don't even know we're alive.

EMPEROR: Alive? Why of course you're alive, Dears.

MARIGOLD: Father, we have to discuss the wedding. . .

PETUNIA: The guest list. . .

MARIGOLD: . . .the floral arrangements. . .

MARIGOLD and PETUNIA: (*posing*) . . .the official portraits. . .

MARIGOLD: I want mine to be. . .

PETUNIA: . . .the biggest. . .

MARIGOLD: . . .the fanciest. . .

PETUNIA: . . .most exquisite. . .

MARIGOLD: . . .most expensive. . .

MARIGOLD and PETUNIA: . . .wedding in history!

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