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The Emperor's Hot New Duds!

FARCE/WESTERN. Inspired by “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by Hans Christian Andersen. After taking all the townfolks’ money, and even the shirts off their backs, the mayor (aka “The Emperor”) of Cactus Patch needs yet another set of fancy duds. Two rodeo entertainers claim they can make the Emperor and Empress new clothes in just one night. When the “tailors” present the new “clothes” to the Emperor and Empress, they claim the fabric is invisible to anyone who is stupid. The Emperor and Empress pretend that they can see the clothing and proudly don their new “duds.” When the townsfolk see the Emperor parading down the street in his undershorts and the Empress in her slip, they are shocked but go along. After all, they don’t want to look stupid!

Performance Time: Approximately 60 minutes.



Hans Christian Andersen, 1836. Illustration by Vilhelm Pedersen from "The Emperor's New Clothes."

About the Story

Danish writer and poet Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) published "The Emperor's New Clothes" in Copenhagen, Denmark, as part of a collection of fairy tales entitled *Fairy Tales Told for Children* (1835). The phrase "emperor's new clothes" is now widely used to describe collective denial, hypocrisy, or pomposity and has come to describe a logical fallacy in which no one in the group believes, but the group members think everyone else in the group believes. Andersen has become one of the greatest children's writers of all time and his stories have been translated into more than 150 languages. Some of his other famous tales include "The Little Mermaid," "Thumbelina," "The Princess and the Pea," and "The Ugly Duckling."

Characters

(6 M, 7 F, 15 flexible)

EMPEROR HERMAN: Mayor of Cactus Patch, who wants to be called "Emperor" and loves wearing fancy clothing; sports a long fake beard; wears cowboy duds and an elaborate cowboy hat decorated with many colorful gems and brightly colored feathers; male.

EMPRESS YOLENDA: Mayor's wife who loves to wear fancy clothes; wears an outlandishly gaudy western dress with a very long cape or train that trails behind and is held by one or two servants; has an excessive number of jewels and clashing accessories, heavy makeup, and a huge wig; female.

ANNIE OAKLEAF: Entertainer in a rodeo and gun-shootin' tourin' show; wears cowgirl garb with fringe and western beads, cowboy boots, a holster and pistol, and a fancy western hat with a colorful flower in its hatband; female.

BUFFALO BEN: Entertainer in a rodeo and gun-shootin' tourin' show; has a huge handlebar mustache, wears traditional western garb, a humorously crushed hat, cowboy boots, and carries a lasso attached to his gun belt; male.

TOWN CRIER: Town crier who is constantly sobbing; elegantly dressed; carries a very large brightly colored handkerchief; flexible.

MA: Citizen of Cactus Patch and Spanki's mother; wears ragged clothing; female.

SPANKI: Child; wears ragged clothing; female. (Note: Can be played by an adult dressed as a child.)

SPOTTY: Spanki's dog; has a pink bow on her head and a squirt bottle of water attached to her collar; wears a dog costume; flexible.

BESSIE: Citizen of Cactus Patch, TX; wears a ragged dress and carries an old purse; female.

BALINDA: Citizen of Cactus Patch; wears a ragged dress; female.

TRAM: Old man who lives in Cactus Patch; wears a ragged shirt and pants; male.

JOE: Citizen of Cactus Patch; wears an old shirt and burlap pants held up with a rope belt; male.

HANK: Citizen of Cactus Patch; wears ragged clothing; male.

LUCKY: Citizen of Cactus Patch; wears ragged clothing; flexible.

TAILOR: Citizen who serves as the Emperor's tailor; male.

TAILORETTE: Citizen who serves as the Empress's tailor; female.

TRUMPETERS 1, 2: Have to sing the Emperor's fanfare because they do not have trumpets; elegantly dressed; flexible.

GUARD 1, 2: Emperor's guards; richly dressed and carry golden spears; flexible.

CAPE ASSISTANTS 1, 2: Have to carry the Empress's train; non-speaking; elegantly dressed; flexible.

BANKER 1, 2: Town bankers; flexible.

WAGON PULLERS 1, 2: In charge of pulling the Emperor and Empress's wagons; nonspeaking; flexible.

FLOWER GIRL 1, 2: Flower girls; nonspeaking; female.

EXTRAS (Opt.): As Emperor's entourage.

NOTE: For flexible roles, change the script accordingly.

Setting

Cactus Patch, 1800s.

Note: It might be fun to sponsor a contest for the best, wackiest, funniest name for the town in which the play takes place. You may use that name in the performance and award the winner free tickets to the show.

Set

Cactus Patch street. A dusty street with crumbling buildings in the background along with a few cactuses.

Emperor's rundown shack. There is a full-length mirror SR and SL. A grandfather clock stands UCS. Instead of a grandfather clock, a sound effect may be used.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: Cactus Patch street.

Scene 2: Emperor's rundown shack on the other side of town.

Scene 3: Cactus Patch street.

Props

Corncob pipe	Dress that easily comes off
Pocket watch	in one piece, for Balinda
Purse	Funny ugly slip, for Balinda
Big ball of lint (dryer lint)	Rope belt, for Joe
Lasso	Torn, filthy undershorts, for
Belt	Joe
Pistol (toy) and holster	2 bags in which to accept
Hat with a hatband and a	“gifts”
flower in it	Miscellaneous items of little
Cowboy hat, for Hank	value to drop into the gift
Dog collar	bags
Squirt bottle filled with	Shirt that easily rips off, for
yellow-colored water	Tram
(yellow food coloring)	Large easily removable wig,
2 Large brightly colored	for Empress
handkerchiefs	Large bone (or a dog bone)
Flower petals or small	2 Measuring tapes
pieces of crepe paper	Grandfather clock (or
2 Golden spears	chiming sound effect can
Leash	be used)
2 Children's wagons, highly	Plate
decorated	Two or three rolls of thread
Outlandishly gaudy	One square the same color
western dress with a long	as one of the rolls of
train or cape, for Empress	thread
Elaborate cowboy hat	“Loom” composed of 1” x
decorated with colorful	3” boards of various
gems, feathers, etc., for	lengths attached at odd
Emperor	angles so that it looks like
Elaborately decorated	a big stick puzzle
cowboy duds, for	Two trunks large enough
Emperor	for Spanki or Spotty to
Long fake beard	safely hide inside

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Gold colored necklaces and
assorted gems
Wig that is shot off
Tailorette's head

A few gold colored items,
such as necklaces, goblet,
coins, etc.
Ugly slip, for Empress
Dirty, baggy long johns, for
Emperor

Special Effects

Clock chiming

Clank sound

Pistol firing (can use a recording or slam two pieces of 2" x 4" blocks together or have Annie yell "bang" when she fires)

Hat flying offstage. Use a long pole like a fishing pole and tie a thin fishing line to the end of it. Tie the other end to Hank's hat and Tailorette's wig. When Annie "fires," yank the pole so that the hat and wig fly up and into the wings.

*"Nobody wants to prove
that hisself is stupid."*

—Annie

Scene 1

(AT RISE: *Cactus Patch, mid-1800s. A dusty street. Crumbling buildings are in the background along with a few cactuses. Several poor, impatient Townspeople are standing SR awaiting the arrival of the "Emperor" SL.*)

HANK: (*Looking at his pocket watch.*) He's late, dad-burn it.

LUCKY: (*With a corn cob pipe in his/her mouth.*) As always, dad-burn it.

HANK: I don't see why he makes us stand out here on this dad-burn dusty street here in Cactus Patch, [Texas], jist so's he can parade around in his dad-burn expensive duds. [*Or insert another state.*]

LUCKY: Duds? The dad-burn mayor don't wear no "duds." He wears royal clothes...like tunics an' capes an' crowns.

BESSIE: Yeah. Calls hisself a "emperor"...like in them old days. But he ain't no emperor. He's the mayor of this here Cactus Patch, Texas, an' the worst dad-burn mayor in all of the wild Wild West.

HANK: Ever'time he gits new dad-burn duds, he has one of these here dad-burn parades.

LUCKY: And this here's the fourth dad-burn parade this week. And this is only Monday.

HANK: So's he can take up a dad-burn collection from us to pay fer his dad-burn duds.

BESSIE: Well, ah cain't pay no more. Mah purse is empty. (*Opens purse and looks inside.*) Nuthin' in here but a big bunch o' lint ah swept up from the floor this mornin'. (*Pulls out a big wad of lint and stuffs it back into her purse.*)

HANK: Anybody that don't pay winds up in his dad-burn jail.

LUCKY: Half the town's in there already. Dad-burn it. Ain't enuff room fer nobody else.

HANK: 'Ceptin' he's buildin' a dad-burn new one across the dad-burn street.

BESSIE: *(Sobbing.)* He's gonna send us all to jail...an' I don't wanna go to jail! *(Pulls out the lint, wipes her eyes and blows her nose with it, and then stuffs it back inside her purse.)*

HANK: And to thank, ah voted fer the dad-burn rascal fer mayor. Didn't know he was gonna act all uppity an' the like.

LUCKY: Yep. He done took over this here town an' rules it like he was a dad-burn king.

BESSIE: *(Correcting.)* "Emperor." He don't like to be called a "king." He makes us call him "emperor."

HANK: Yeah. Emperor Herman something er other.

BESSIE: Emperor Herman Guddenglamorgoose er somethin' like that.

LUCKY: Yeah. Ah cain't even pronounce it.

(They huddle and continue their conversation in mime. Ma, her young daughter Spanki, and her leashed dog Spotty enter SL and look around.)

SPANKI: Looks like the parade ain't started yet, Ma. Guess we'll have to wait.

MA: Well, at least him an' his wife, Empress Yolenda, always wear beautiful clothes. Ah cain't wait to see whut they have on today.

SPOTTY: *(Pleasantly.)* Arf-arf!

SPANKI: *(Petting her.)* Yeah, good girl, Spotty. Good girl. It won't be long now.

(Buffalo Ben and Annie Elmtree enter SR and cross to CS. They notice the Townspeople.)

ANNIE: *(To Ben.)* What do ya s'ppose them folks er lookin' fer, Buffalo Ben?

BEN: Well, Annie Elmtree, ah'm thankin' maybe the ice-cream man's on his way.

ANNIE: They shore don't look none too happy.

BEN: Well, ah don't know why. The ice-cream man would make me plenty happy.

ANNIE: That ain't whut they're waiting fer, Buffalo Ben. Otherwise, they wouldn't look so glum.

BEN: Maybe not. *(Gets an idea.)* Hey! We done learnt to entertain folks with our Rodeo and Gun-Shootin' Tourin' Show. Ah thank ah can [hep] 'em smile a bit more. [*"help"*]

ANNIE: Naw, now don't do that.

BEN: *(Ignores her.)* Jist watch this. *(To Townspeople.)* Hey, folks! Look at this. *(Makes an ugly face and strange noises. Townspeople look at him like he's crazy and turn away.)* They ain't smilin', Annie Elmtree.

ANNIE: Yew cain't do nuthin' right, Buffalo Ben. Jist watch this. Ah'll make 'em smile. *(Makes an ugly face and stranger noises. Townspeople look at her like she's crazy. To Ben.)* They didn't laugh. They didn't even smile.

BEN: They must be real unhappy. Come on. Let's do it together.

ANNIE: Won't work. But let's give er a try.

(Ben and Annie make several ugly faces accompanied by yelling and laughing. They "gallop" in different directions and back to CS and pause. Townspeople watch them curiously.)

HANK: *(To Lucky, indicating Ben and Annie.)* Who're them two? Ain't seen 'em around here afore.

LUCKY: They're dad-burn [furriners]. [*"foreigners"*]

BEN: *(To Annie.)* Huh! Folks always laugh at that routine in our tourin' show.

ANNIE: Yep. These folks must be the unhappiest ah ever seen.

BESSIE: *(Pointing off SL.)* The Mayor –

HANK: *(Correcting.)* The Emperor!

BESSIE: Well, whichever. He still ain't in sight.

BEN: Okay, Annie Elmtree. I got it. *(Pulls a lasso from his belt.)*
Ah'll show 'em some fancy ropin'.

ANNIE: Don't do that. Yer dangerous when yew swing that rope.

(Ignoring her, Ben twirls the rope as if he is going to rope something, but he accidently releases the entire rope, and it twirls onto the ground.)

BEN: Oops! *(Picks up rope.)* Guess ah need more practice on that there trick.

ANNIE: Practice don't hep yew none, Buffalo Ben. The last time yew tried to rope a calf in our Rodeo an' Gun-Shootin' Tourin' Show, yew caught the tuba player in the band instead, an' pulled him right through the bass drum an' into the dirt.

BEN: A small mistake.

ANNIE: A small mistake?! He was almost trampled by a bull!

BEN: T'weren't mah fault. That tuba player shouldn't a been where ah was a-ropin'.

ANNIE: But ah got a idee. *(Pulls out her pistol.)* Ah'll show 'em the best shootin' in all of Texas.

BEN: Don't do that, Annie Oakleaf. The last time yew [fahred] that pistol o' yer's, yew shot the hats off six cowpokes sittin' in the front row with one bullet. The whole crowd runs fer cover when yew pull that there gun. [*"fired"*]

ANNIE: Don't worry, Buffalo Ben. Ah been practicin'. *(Pulls a flower on a short stem from her hat band and steps toward him.)* Here. Now put this in yer mouth... *(Before he can say anything, she shoves the flower into his mouth.)* ...an' stand over there. *(Points to SR.)*

BEN: *(With the flower still in his mouth.)* No. Not me. Ah don't trust yew.

ANNIE: Jist stand over there an' be still. *(Pushes Ben SR.)* Go on, now. *(Scared, Ben wobbles to SR.)* Don't be afraid. Ah

can do this...ah [thank]. (*At SR, Ben faces her. She takes aim, but stops.*) Don't face me, Buffalo Ben! Turn a bit. (*Ben turns.*) Okay, good. (*Aims at Ben. He's so nervous the flower bounces up and down in his mouth.*) Be still! I cain't shoot it if'n you're a-movin' it. (*Ben shuts his eyes tightly and places his hands over his eyes.*) Okay, now. Ready, aim... (*Aims gun and "fires." Yells.*) Fire! [*"think"*]

(Ben ducks and Hank's hat flies up into the air and into the wings. Note: See special effects. Townspeople gasp in horror.)

HANK: Aaaeeiii! My hat! She shot my dad-burn hat off my dad-burn head!

ANNIE: Oh, sorry. When I fahred it, I hiccupped at the same time. Threw my shot off.

(Ben faints and falls to the floor. The flower in his mouth now stands straight up. Bessie rushes to him, kneels, and waves her hand over his face.)

BESSIE: (*To Annie.*) You could have killed this poor man!

HANK: (*Rubbing scalp.*) That poor man? Ah'm the one she nearly kilt!

LUCKY: He's right, dad-burn it.

BEN: (*Awakens.*) Ohhhh!

(Bessie pulls the flower from Ben's mouth, helps him to his feet, and stuffs the flower back into his mouth. She moves away. Spotty growls at Annie and pulls Spanki with her.)

SPANKI: Stop, Spotty! Stop, stop! (*Spotty stops. To Annie.*) That was mighty dangerous, ma'am.

ANNIE: Naw. I never miss.

BEN: (*Shocked. Pulls the flower from his mouth.*) Yew never miss?! You missed just now!

ANNIE: Well, ah mean, other than jist now. (*Holsters pistol. To Spanki.*) So, little girl, what's yer name?

SPANKI: Spanki. (*Spotty barks and whines.*) And this here's my dog Spotty.

ANNIE: Why is she called Spotty?

(Ben dusts off his hat and clumsily crosses to Annie.)

BEN: First, you nearly kilt me, an' now yew don't know why this here dog's called Spotty. It looks mighty clear to me. She's called Spotty 'cause she's full of spots.

SPANKI: Nope. That ain't it. She's called Spotty 'cause she leaves spots ever'whar she goes.

ANNIE: She leaves spots ever'whar she goes? Whut does that mean?

(They watch as Spotty whines, takes a squirt bottle of water that is attached to her collar, rubs against Ben's legs, and squirts water on Ben's boots.)

BEN: Whaat? She...she just...she...aaaaeeiii! (*To Annie, dancing around trying to shake off the water.*) Did yew see that?

(Spotty reattaches the bottle to her collar, smiles, and sits beside Spanki.)

SPANKI: Well, ah guess that there answered yer question. Like ah said, she's called Spotty 'cause she leaves spots ever'whar she goes.

(Even more poor Townspeople enter and look toward SL.)

ANNIE: Ah guess she did. Well, Spanki, whut's goin' on here? Ever'body looks kinda down in the dumps.

BEN: (*To Spanki.*) An' angry.

SPANKI: Oh, well, ever'day the Mayor an' his wife dress up like a emperor an' empress an' have these here e-vents so they can raise more money.

ANNIE: Emperor? We don't have no emperors in wild Wild, West [Texas].

SPANKI: Well, actually, he's the mayor. But he thinks he's a emperor. An' he acts like one.

BEN: Why does he need more money?

BESSIE: *(From SR.)* So he an' the "Empress" can fancy up their duds with gold crowns an' diamonds an' pearls an' rich tunics an' capes made of armadillo hides an' rattlesnake skins an'...an' all kinds of expensive clothes.

ANNIE: They want more money from these here people? *(Indicates Townspeople.)* But they're wearin' rags. They don't have no money.

SPANKI: An' me an' my ma don't, neither. *(Elegantly dressed, Trumpeters 1, 2 enter, stand on either side of the stage, and face the audience. They pretend they have trumpets, but their hands are empty.)* Looks like the parade's about to begin. Them's the trumpet players.

ANNIE: But they ain't got no trumpets.

SPANKI: They work fer the Emperor, but he's too cheap to buy them real trumpets, so they jist pretend. *(Trumpeters lift their arms as if they have trumpets in their hands and sing a terrible fanfare that has no real tune. Townspeople cover their ears and moan in pain.)* Ya see?

(Ben and Annie scratch their heads. Carrying a very large, brightly colored handkerchief, the elegantly dressed Town Crier enters, crosses to CS, and faces the Townspeople. Town Crier sobs for a few seconds before blowing his nose.)

TOWN CRIER: *(To audience, sobbing so loudly he has difficulty speaking.)* As you can tell, I'm the town crier.

[END OF FREEVIEW]