

The Emperor's New Clothes

By Michele L. Vacca

(Based on Hans Christian Andersen's famous tale.)

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CHARACTERS:

THE EMPEROR – His Imperial majesty, the most serene, royal, magnificent, wondrous, unique, and – above all – well-dressed Emperor Abu Abdullah Abdul, Sovereign and Supreme Monarch, Opulent overlord, and Righteous Ruler of our Glorious Land Zanadam Zanadu Zan.

THE EMPRESS – Fatimah of the royal family of Fazi-Shah-Fazi from the country of Fez.

THE PRIME MINISTER – Lord Babah-Shah-Bah, Prime minister in charge of the Emperor’s Wardrobe, Keeper of the Imperial Closet, and Guardian of the Royal Dressing Room.

THE EMPEROR’S GRANDMOTHER – The Lady Scheherezade, the Most Honorable Mother of the Most Honorable Mother of the Honorable Emperor.

THE EMPRESS’ ATTENDANT – Lady Bubarah Bubaydah of Banzibar.

TWO SWINDLERS – Ali-Ka-Zam and Ali-Ka-Zoo.

THE EMPEROR’S NEW CLOTHES PRODUCTION NOTES:

CHARACTERS:

EMPEROR ABU – the ruler of the country Zanadam Zanadu Zan. He is extremely vain, pompous, and selfish. He spends everything on his clothes and still wants more.

EMPRESS FATIMAH – his charming young wife. Fatimah tolerates Abu’s excessive vanity because she cares about him and hopes he will eventually change.

GRANNY – Abu’s 129-year old, outspoken grandmother. Her main regret is that she didn’t turn Abu over her knee more often when he was a boy. She is practical, honest, and speaks her mind.

LORD BABAH – Abu’s Prime Minister of Wardrobe, a pompous, snobbish, though somewhat weak personality. His devotion to the Emperor almost destroys the Kingdom.

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LADY BUBARAH – Fatimah’s lady-in-waiting, giggly, charming, devoted, and not overly intelligent.

ALI-KA-ZAM – a swindler and a very crafty, slicktongued con artist. He intends to get something for nothing and almost succeeds.

ALI-KA-ZOO – his partner, loyal in his own way, but not bright enough to strike out on his own.

SETTING: One multiple setting is all that is necessary for this show. Areas required are: An interior receiving room in the palace, a smaller interior area, an area which can be used as a corridor or antechamber, and also an exterior area where Granny can hang the laundry and where the “Welcome to Zanadum Zandu Zan” can be located.

COSTUMES: The play is written with a somewhat Eastern flavor, and the costumes and character names can reflect this. However, the country is mythical and the exact period is deliberately undefined, so the costumes could be a combination of styles and influences. Emperor Abu, of course, should have the richest looking variety of costumes that the budget can afford. His taste should run a bit toward the gaudy and the outlandish; i.e., not just a large turban, but an extra large turban that creates problems going through doorways.

At the end of the play when Abu is supposedly not “wearing any clothes at all,” he, of course, is not totally nude. In the original production the actor undressed behind a screen that covered everything but his head, and then emerged wearing a set of one-piece pajamas or red “union suit,” complete with feet and a back flap. The pajamas, naturally, looked like long underwear, and the audience enjoyed the effect enormously.

THE LOOM: A book on weaving should be consulted so that the loom looks as real as possible. It should be large, so that it can be seen easily, but it does not actually have to work. After all, the two swindlers never actually do make any cloth.

SPECIAL NOTE: The use of music, live or taped, greatly enhances the production of this play.

THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

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by Michele L. Vacca

ACT I

(MUSIC: THE STAGE IS SET FOR SEVERAL PLAYING AREAS, WHICH INDICATE ROOMS AND HALLWAYS OF THE PALACE. A RECEIVING ROOM IN THE CENTER, FURNISHED WITH TALL COLUMNS, A NUMBER OF BRIGHT PILLOWS, A THRONE, FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS, ETC. A GONG. A SMALL ROOM IS ON ONE SIDE OF THE STAGE, AND ON THE OTHER SIDE, A PALACE GATE WITH A SIGN “WELCOME TO ZANADUM ZANADU ZAN.” BRIGHT RICH COLORS EVERYWHERE.)

(AFTER THE OVERTURE, PROCESSIONAL MUSIC BEGINS, ACCOMPANIED BY THE SOUND OF CANNED CHEERS AND APPLAUSE. THE EMPEROR APPEARS WITH HIS PRIME MINISTER, THE EMPRESS, GRANNY, AND LADY BUBARAH. THE EMPEROR IS MAGNIFICENTLY DRESSED AND IS VERY PROUD OF HIS WONDERFUL APPEARANCE. THE OTHERS, OF COURSE, ARE NOT SO WELL-DRESSED. MORE CANNED APPLAUSE AND CHEERS. THE PROCESSION REACHES THE STAGE AREA. THE EMPEROR BOWS TO HIS FOLLOWERS. THEY BOW LOW TO HIM. CANNED CHEERS ARE HEARD. THE PRIME MINISTER STRIKES THE GONG AND GESTURES FOR SILENCE.)

PRIME MINISTER BABAH: (READS TO AUDIENCE FROM A SCROLL.) His Imperial Majesty, the Most Serene, Royal, magnificent, Wondrous, Unique, and – above all, Well-Dressed, Emperor Abu Abdullah Abdul, Sovereign and Supreme Monarch, Opulent, Overlord, and Righteous

Ruler of our Glorious Land Zanadum Zanadu Zan – will now speak unto you, his honorable and respectful subjects! Hear and obey the words of our Gracious Emperor! (CANNED CHEERS.)

ALL ON STAGE: (POLITE APPLAUSE.)

EMPEROR: Thank you, Babah. That was well done. (STEPS FORWARD, SMILES, SPEAKS TO THE AUDIENCE.) Good and humble people, we are well pleased with you today. Your applause and cheers show the great love and respect you feel for Us. Soon you will have yet another reason to adore Us. In three days' time all the great kings, sultans, shahs, emirs, and all the other rulers of the civilized world will gather in Zanadum Zanadu Zan. They come here to honor Us – the Famous Emperor of Zanadum Zanadu Zan as the Best-Dressed Ruler in the world! (CANNED CHEERS AS EMPEROR NODS AND SMILES.)

BABAH: (PULLING EMPEROR ASIDE.) Oh, Glorious one, it is time for you to change the Royal Raiment.

EMPEROR: Time to change clothes already, Babah?

BABAH: Yes, Oh Fashionable One.

EMPEROR: (TO THE AUDIENCE.) Oh People, We must remove Our Stylish Presence from you now. (CANNED GROANS OF DISAPPOINTMENT.) Lord Babah Shah Bah, Our Prime Minister, summons Us to important state business. (CANNED CHEERS.)

(THE CHARACTERS THEN CONTINUE THE PROCESSION. AS THE MUSIC PLAYS, THEY GO INSIDE THE PALACE TO THE CENTRAL ROOM.)

EMPEROR: (AS HE SEATS HIMSELF ON HIS THRONE CUSHIONS.) Ahhhh! I'm so tired. Fatimah, take off my slippers, will you? (FATIMAH BECKONS TO LADY BUBARAH TO HELP HIM.) These State Occasions are so boring and tiresome.

LADY BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.) I think they're fun.

FATIMAH: Would you like to rest awhile, Abu, dear?

EMPEROR: Of course not! I have to change my clothes. It's my duty. You, the Empress, my wife, must surely understand that

much.

FATIMAH: Yes, dear. I was only thinking of you.

EMPEROR: My dear Fatimah, a Famous Emperor – such as I – cannot afford to think of himself. Such responsibilities! Ah, how tiresome it is! I must constantly change my clothes to keep my reputation as the Best-Dressed Ruler in the world. (SIGHS.) What an obligation it is to be an Emperor. Ah, me.

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.)

GRANNY: (A LITTLE SARCASTIC.) Dear Gracious Grandson, as you say, you are the Emperor. Therefore, you don't really have to change your clothes if you don't want to.

EMPEROR: (SIGHS.) It's my duty.

GRANNY: Well, if you ask me –

EMPEROR: I didn't ask you!

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.)

GRANNY: Too bad. I'll tell you anyway. Now, I'd say your duty is to rule your kingdom – and not to spend all your time changing from one ridiculous outfit to another. That's what I'd say.

EMPEROR: Silence!

GRANNY: Hmph! (TO HERSELF.) He never could take criticism.

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.)

EMPEROR: Be quiet!

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.)

EMPEROR: (TO FATIMAH.) Tell Lady Bubarah to stop that stupid giggling!

FATIMAH: (TO LADY BUBARAH.) Shhh! You know Abu's temper.

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.) Yes, Your Majesty.

FATIMAH: (TO EMPEROR.) Oh honorable husband, you really shouldn't shout at your ancient grandmother. It isn't respectful.

GRANNY: That's right. After all, (To FATIMAH.) I am almost 129 years old, and I deserve a little consideration.

FATIMAH: Almost 129 year old! My goodness, I didn't know!

GRANNY: Oh, yes indeed.

FATIMAH: That's amazing. When is your birthday?

GRANNY: Next month. You'd be surprised at the things I can remember, too. Why, I remember –

EMPEROR: Quiet! Both of you!

BABAH: Oh, Highest Highness, what August Apparel does your

majestic Mood require?

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.)

GRANNY: (TO FATIMAH.) Now, why can't he just say – what do you want to wear?

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.) Is that what he said?

FATIMAH: I never know what he's talking about.

GRANNY: Neither does he.

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.)

EMPEROR: Silence! (To BABAH.) How do I know what I want? Bring everything out.

GRANNY: Here we go again.

BABAH: Everything?

EMPEROR: Yes, yes, yes! And be quick about it! (HE STOMPS AROUND THE ROOM IN A FIT OF TEMPER.)

GRANNY: (TO FATIMAH.) He used to have these tantrums all the time when he was a child.

FATIMAH: Really?

BABAH: (BOWS.) To hear is to obey, Oh Elegant Emperor. (STRIKES GONG.)

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.) I just love that gong!

(LADY BUBARAH AND THE MINISTER BRING OUT VARIOUS AND SUNDRY ITEMS OF APPAREL FOR THE EMPEROR. GRANNY AND FATIMAH ASSIST.)

EMPEROR: (AS THEY BRING CLOTHES TO HIM – HE THROWS SOME ASIDE, TOSSING THEM OVER HIS SHOULDER, AS HE PACES BACK AND FORTH. LADY BUBARAH TRIES TO RETRIEVE THEM AS THEY ARE TOSSED ASIDE.) NO, no, no! I hate that! Too bright! Too dull! I can't stand that shade of blue! Green looks terrible in the afternoon. This is torn! Ugh! This is out of fashion! This is too small! This is too large! I've worn that a hundred times! Throw that away! No, no, no! None of these will do. Is this all? (HE THROWS THE LAST ITEM UNDERFOOT AND STOMPS ON IT.)

BABAH: (WHO IS EXHAUSTED FROM MOVING THE CLOTHES.) Yes, Oh Stylish One, that is all.

EMPEROR: This is terrible! Tragic! Disgraceful! I have nothing to wear! Oh, woe is me!

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.) “Nothing to wear?”

EMPEROR: Oh, this is too much! Nothing to wear! My reputation will be ruined. Ruined!

FATIMAH: Abu, dear, perhaps you could find something else to interest you – something besides clothes?

EMPEROR: What!?!?

FATIMAH: I mean – couldn’t you find another hobby to keep you busy?

GRANNY: How about stamp collecting? It’s a lot cheaper.

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.)

EMPEROR: Silence!

BABAH: Magnificent Majesty –

EMPEROR: Now what?

BABAH: I was about to suggest that – perhaps instead of worrying about your clothes – Your Majesty might wish to spend some time going over the affairs of the kingdom. There are papers to sign, matters such as new laws, taxes, import duties, the price of bread, and the shortage of corn this year –

EMPEROR: No, no, no! How can I concentrate on stupid things like taxes and the price of bread at a time like this? I have nothing to wear! Me! The best-dressed ruler in the world! And all the kings are coming in three days. And I have nothing to wear! What will they think of me?

GRANNY: Well, I never thought I’d see the day when an Emperor in our family would be famous for his clothes. Our ancestors thought the kingdom was more important than themselves. They thought of the people.

EMPEROR: (TO GRANNY.) Are you finished?

GRANNY: No I’m not.

EMPEROR: Oh, yes, you are! Who’s the Emperor around here? You or me?

GRANNY: Well – I wish I were.

EMPEROR: Well, you’re not. So there! Babah!

BABAH: Yes, Oh Well-Dressed Majesty?

EMPEROR: You are the Prime Minister in Charge of the Emperor’s Wardrobe, Keeper of the Imperial Closet, and Guardian of the Royal Dressing Room, are you not?

BABAH: Yes, Oh Generous and Gracious Emperor.

EMPEROR: Then find me some clothes to wear for the Great Celebration. Something unusual.

BABAH: Your wish is my command, Highness.

EMPEROR: I want clothes the like of which have never been seen before. Clothes that will make the world take notice. You have three days.

BABAH: To hear is to obey, Masterful One.

GRANNY: (TO FATIMAH He was a bossy child, too.

EMPEROR: (TO GRANNY.) Bah! (STARTS TO STOMP OUT OF THE ROOM, KICKING CLOTHES OUT OF HIS WAY.) Bah! Bah!

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.)

FATIMAH: (STOPS HIM.) Abu, dear, as long as you're going to have some new clothes, do you think I could have a new dress for the State Occasion?

EMPEROR: What did you say?

FATIMAH: Well, I haven't had a new dress in such a long time –

EMPEROR: How can you expect me to worry about your clothes – when I – I, the Best-Dressed Emperor, have nothing to wear?

FATIMAH: I'm sorry, Abu, I didn't think.

EMPEROR: I'm in rags and she wants a new dress. What a burden to be an Emperor! (HE STOMPS OUT – A CRASH IS HEARD.)

GRANNY: There he goes – breaking things as usual.

FATIMAH: Oh, dear, I wish he wouldn't do that. It just makes him angrier when he breaks things.

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.)

GRANNY: Well, Lord Babah-Shah-Bah, what are you going to do?

BABAH: I'm not sure, Honorable Grandmother.

FATIMAH: Lord Babah, you must try as hard as you can to find someone who can make some new clothes for the Emperor.

BABAH: Yes, Your Majesty.

FATIMAH, GRANNY: I hate to see Abu so upset. It's bad for his digestion. It's bad for mine, too.

BUBARAH: (GIGGLES.)

(THE THREE LADIES GO OUT. BABAH BOWS TO THEM.)

BABAH: (ALONE.) Well, I believe I shall write a proclamation. Somewhere in the kingdom there must be a tailor who can make some new clothes for the Emperor. (GOES OUT.)

(MUSIC: THE TWO SWINDLERS APPEAR ON THE STREET IN FRONT OF THE PALACE. THEY ARE OBVIOUSLY RUNNING AWAY FROM SOMEONE. ALI-KA-ZAM IS A CRAFTY, QUICK-WITTED INDIVIDUAL, AND ALI-KA-ZOO IS VERY STUPID, THOUGH BASICALLY A SOFT-HEARTED TYPE OF PERSON. THEY BOTH ARE DRESSED IN RAGGED CLOTHES, AND CARRY LARGE BUNDLES.)

ZAM: (RUNNING.) Come on, stupid! Hurry up! (HE CARRIES A LOAF OF BREAD UNDER HIS ARM.)

ZOO: (LOOKING BEHIND THEM – CARRIES BOTH BUNDLES.) Is he still after us? Huh? Huh?

ZAM: I don't think so. (LOOKS.) No, we're safe now. (SITS, PULLS OUT THE BREAD.) At least we got away with the food. That was close. He almost caught us.

ZOO: How was I supposed to know the storekeeper was watching me? Huh? How was I supposed to know?

ZAM: You've got eyes, don't you?

ZOO: Oh, yeah.

ZAM: (BITES INTO BREAD.) Ugh! As long as you were stealing bread, dodo, you could at least have grabbed a fresh loaf. Yick! This is stale!

ZOO: Well, then, next time you can steal the food.

ZAM: All right. I will. And we'll get something better than this, I can tell you that right now.

ZOO: What would you get, huh? Huh? What?

ZAM: Oh, how should I know? Some pheasant under glass, maybe.

ZOO: Yeah? What's that?

ZAM: Never mind.

ZOO: Say, I want to get some bubble gum. Gimme a penny, will you?

ZAM: Nope.

ZOO: Why not? (SNIFFLES.) I want some bubble gum!

ZAM: Too bad.

ZOO: Why can't I have a penny? Why? Huh? Huh? Why?

ZAM: 'Cause I don't have a penny. That's why.

ZOO: Oh. (PAUSE.) Not even one?

ZAM: Not even one.

ZOO: Not even a half a one?

ZAM: Not even a half a one.

ZOO: Not even a fourth of one?
 ZAM: No!
 ZOO: Not even a –
 ZAM: No!
 ZOO: Not even a –
 ZAM: NO!
 ZOO: Well, I was just asking.
 ZAM: So now you know. We're broke.
 ZOO: What are we going to do? Huh?
 ZAM: I'm thinking. I'm thinking. This time we need something really big.
 ZOO: Yeah! Big!
 ZAM: Something stupendous!
 ZOO: Yeah! (TRIES IT.) Stup – stup – stup – Yeah! Big!
 ZAM: Something that will make us rich!
 ZOO: Yeah! Rich!
 ZAM: Rich as kings!
 ZOO: Yeah! Kings!
 ZAM: The question is – how can we do it?
 ZOO: Yeah! How!
 ZAM: Will you be quiet!
 ZOO: Yeah! Quiet!
 ZAM: BE QUIET!
 ZOO: Oh. (PAUSE.) Yeah.
 ZAM: (LOOKING AROUND.) I wonder where we are. Seems to be a pretty rich looking country.
 ZOO: (POINTS TO GATE.) What does that say?
 ZAM: (READS.) Welcome to Zanadum Zanadu Zan.
 ZOO: (GIGGLES.) That's a funny name.
 ZAM: (PACING.) Now what have I heard about this place? Something about clothes. Now what was it? Hmmm. Emperor Abu Abdullah Abdul
 ZOO: Say, isn't he the one who changes his clothes all the time?
 ZAM: That's right!
 ZOO: It is?
 ZAM: We couldn't have come to a better place. An Emperor who buys clothes all the time must have a lot of money]
 ZOO: Yeah! Are we going to get some?
 ZAM: That's what I have to figure out.
 ZAM: Oh, you'll think of something. You always do. You're smart.
 ZAM: I know.

(AT THIS POINT GRANNY APPEARS WITH A BASKET OF LAUNDRY. SHE CROSSES TO THE GATE. THERE IS A CLOTHES LINE ATTACHED TO IT. SHE DOES NOT SEE ZAM AND ZOO. SHE STARTS TO HANG UP THE CLOTHES.)

ZOO: (POINTS.) Look at her!

ZAM: Shh! I'm trying to hear what she's saying.

GRANNY: (MUMBLES TO HERSELF AS SHE WORKS.) It's disgraceful – that's what it is. My own grandson. He shouts and stomps around and expects everything in the world to be perfect – just for him. I should have turned him over my knee when he was a child. But now it's too late. He's the Emperor now. And I can't spank him even if he does behave like a naughty little boy. All he thinks about are his stupid clothes! He spends all of his gold on clothes! Won't even buy his wife a new dress. Makes his own grandmother do his laundry. Disgraceful. He's a disgrace to the family – that's what he is.

ZAM: Excuse me –

GRANNY: (STARTLED, SCREAMS.) Ahh! Careful, sonny. You can't go around scaring sweet old ladies like that, you know.

ZAM: I'm very sorry.

ZOO: Yeah, me, too.

GRANNY: Well, all right. Just don't do it again.

ZAM: Oh, we won't.

ZOO: We promise.

GRANNY: Who are you anyway? What are you doing around here?

ZAM: We are two weary travelers, madam. We've come to visit your beautiful country.

ZOO: We have?

ZAM: Shh!

GRANNY: How nice.

ZAM: And you, madam? You seem to be someone of too much importance to be doing laundry.

GRANNY: You said it, sonny. I'm the Honorable Mother of the Honorable Mother of the Honorable Emperor.

ZAM: No!

GRANNY: That's right.

ZOO: (To ZAM.) Who? Who is she?

ZAM: The Emperor's Granny, dodo.
ZOO: Oh. Then why is she doing the laundry? Huh?
GRANNY: That's a long story, sonny.

(LORD BABAH NOW APPEARS, CARRYING A LARGE SCROLL. HE CROSSES TO CENTER, PREPARES TO READ.)

GRANNY: Hmph! Time for another proclamation.
ZAM: (TO GRANNY.) Who is that?
GRANNY: He's my grandson's Prime Minister of Wardrobe.
ZAM: He must be a very important man.
GRANNY: Hmph! All he ever does is help my grandson spend all the Treasury's gold for more stupid clothes.
ZAM: I see.
GRANNY: Clothes that I have to wash.
ZOO: Gee, that's too bad.
GRANNY: You said it, sonny.
BABAH: (CLEARS HIS THROAT, STRIKES THE GONG.)
GRANNY: Well, you can listen to him if you want to, but I'm leaving. Proclamations always put me to sleep. (SHE GOES OFF, CARRYING HER LAUNDRY BASKET.)
BABAH: (STRIKES GONG; UNROLLS SCROLL.) Hear Ye! Hear Ye! A Pompous Proclamation from Our Imperial Majesty, the Sovereign and Supreme Monarch!
EMPEROR: (HIS VOICE IS HEARD OVER SOUND SYSTEM AS BABAH MOUTHS THE WORDS.) "We, Abu Abdullah Abdul, Your Most Serene, Royal, Magnificent, Wondrous, Unique, and above all – Well – dressed Emperor speak unto the people of Zanadum Zanadu Zan. (CHEERS.) "We, the Elegant Emperor, desire new clothes for the Great State Occasion in three days' time. "These new clothes must be the most beautiful, unique and unusual clothes in the world. "We command anyone who can provide the Edifying Emperor with such splendid clothes come forth and present himself to us at once. We will reward such a person with a fortune beyond his greatest dreams.""
BABAH: Hear, Ye! Hear Ye! You have heard the words of our Most Fabulous, Famous and Fashionable Emperor. To listen is to hear. To hear is to obey! (HE STRIKES THE GONG; ROLLS UP THE SCROLL.)

ZAM: (TO HIMSELF.) “A fortune beyond his greatest dreams . . .”

ZOO: Yeah! Say, how much is that?

ZAM: (CALLS OUT TO BABAH.) Sir! Oh, sir!

BABAH: Excuse me, peasant, I cannot converse with you. It is time for his Fashionable Majesty to array himself in another ensemble of Radiant Raiment. (GOES.)

ZOO: Huh? What did he say?

ZAM: It’s time for the Emperor to change his clothes.

ZOO: Oh.

ZAM: You know, I think we’ll apply for that job!

ZOO: Job? What job?

ZAM: Weren’t you listening? The Emperor needs somebody to make him some new clothes.

ZOO: But we don’t know anything about making clothes.

ZAM: Of course we don’t.

ZOO: Then I don’t get it.

ZAM: I didn’t say we were going to actually make any clothes. I just said we’re going to apply for the job. See?

ZOO: I still don’t get it.

ZAM: You will.

ZOO: I hope so.

ZAM: We’ll need disguises. What have we got in the bags?

ZOO: (PULLS OUT SOME THINGS, COSTUMES AND HATS, ETC., FROM VARIOUS PERIODS OF HISTORY.) Just these things.

ZAM: No, those won’t do. No, no! Aha! I have it!

ZOO: What?

ZAM: Shh! (LOOKS AROUND CAREFULLY THEN POINTS TO THE GATE.)

– **END OF E-MAIL “SAMPLE” SEGMENT** –
(There are 48 pages in the complete playscript.)