

A Grim Fairy Tale

The Emperor's Robe

Once upon a time not long ago, in a kingdom not far away, some gnomes decided they wanted to make the wardrobe of the new Emperor, which had been made for Emperors since time immemorial by a guild of genies and elves. The gnomes, who worked in ivory towers, did a lot of arithmetic and talked a lot, but they were not rich. They thought they could become richer if they could clothe the emperor. In fact, the clothing guild clothes were expensive although very good, and they lasted a long time although they took along time to make. In part, the gnomes were simply jealous of the favor the old Emperors had given genies who very inventive and elves who were very well read in laws and customs

Now the gnomes didn't really work in the clothing trade, they only discussed the workings of the town's market and advised vendors and taught would-be vendors. They thought that auctions in the market of the right to make the Emperor's clothing would find non-guild tailors who would do the fastest and cheapest work. The gnomes would be paid by advising the Emperor, the auctioneers and the tailors in how to make gold from all this. They could also teach the tailors how to sell piecework.

They convinced the new Emperor, the auctioneers and the tailors that they would be enriched by all this. The guild rightly objected that wardrobe is not the gnome's business, and the present quality supplied the Emperor was the result of eons of trial and error, experimentation and experience, but to no avail.

The auction went very well and lots of money was made by all. But trouble soon set in because the auctions enabled the tailors to choose the cloth, decide what to make, and in what style. It also gave them the right to decide when to make the clothes and to sell the rights they had to other tailors or seamstresses.

Very soon, the Emperor noticed that he was missing parts of his wardrobe, that the cloth was of poor quality and the style resembled that of his peasants. He heard reports that some tailors worked hardly at all but became rich by selling the contracts to others, and some had gone bankrupt from the cost of the auction. More seriously, the peasants were paying much more for their clothing to help the tailors pay off the auction.

The Emperor decided that he had to show to everyone that this was a good idea, and would do so by having a parade to show off his new clothes. None of the robes supplied by the tailors looked very good so he went to the guild and asked them to make one of very expensive cloth, very quickly. They did so, and the next day the Emperor held his parade. As he passed through the town square a big wind came up and blew the robe away, and the peasants saw that he was dressed like them and they laughed and laughed, and he ran home to the castle

The guild sent an elf to the castle who said, "Sorry, milord, but we had to buy the cheapest clasp in the market, since you decreed the marketplace prevails."

The End