

## Sewing

by temi rose

**Time:** 1987

**Place:** Isabelle's sewing room in her apartment (or house) in a small city or a large town.

**Character:**

**Isabelle:** A young woman, well-educated, thin, almost fragile looking. She is obviously influenced by New Wave fashion. What she is making and what she is wearing and how her room is decorated.

**Set:** Isabelle's sewing room is not cluttered but filled with the symbols of Isabelle's creativity. A dummy with a dress partially made. A collection of old sewing machines. Odd hats and jewelry hung around the room. Black and white postcards and posters of women on the wall. This is the room where Isabelle *creates*.

**Lighting and Sound:** Exaggerated effects emphasize Isabelle's spiritual nature. The sound of the sewing machine is controlled by the actress. No sounds other than her voice and her machine.

**Style:** The actress will establish a rhythm based on an exhale and inhale pattern. On the exhales she will speak, on the inhales she will be silent with her work, concentrating, or hum to herself or stretch her body after so much sitting. (this is not on the literal exhales and inhales) There must be silences. Her relationship to the audience is comfortable and informal, she does not treat them as an audience, but as her friend.

*Isabelle hums to herself as she sews.*

Isabelle: I don't know. It's all the same to me. But two men is probably too many. Three is better because then they all give up and accept their lack of control. (*beat*) Four?

Impossible. Then I might as well get paid. Which is ok except I'd rather sew. (*pause*) One man? It sounds good but there are problems with it. (*pause*) Like attention. Men don't want to pay attention to women as often as women want the attention paid. With one man, I'm always dissatisfied, bored. Even though I have my sewing. (*pause*) Life is stretchy, have you noticed that too? It will open and admit more and more enjoyable

things but it closes up when things get nasty, then suddenly it will be all tight, with no room at all for even - brushing your teeth. Strange. Then it can open and expand to include the most impressive amounts of love, connection and creativity - immense.

I don't know. Some days I think I'm more in love with Frank. Frank wants to live in a big city, so we can become famous. Harold wants me to live in the country so I can pay more attention to his children and food. I do like to cook but it gets boring after awhile, repetitive. Sewing has a lot more aspects. Harold says I can sew in the country, but for who? To go where? The country club is not the best showplace for original Isabelle designs.

Frank, when I like him the best, like today, it's because he's exciting, more exciting than Harold. His standards are higher. And he has a beautiful, rigid body. Like a needle. And he plunges into things in a pointed, directed way. Into me, too. It is fun. But it can be annoying. When he's pointing away from me, which is most of the time, it can become quite frustrating. He's ambitious. He has the kind of ambition that women like to marry because they think it will take them somewhere. But it won't. everyone only gets where they take themselves. That's what all the moaning and groaning is about: everyone wanting a free ride. I like it too; or I dream about it: a French Count who has everything comes and sweeps me off my feet and we live happily ever after while I manage to satisfy his European hunger and become the next Coco Chanel. Not bloody likely. Right. But why? Because he'd have other things for me to do. Especially if he was intending to take care of me, right? He'd be wanting me to give up sewing, which of course, I wouldn't do. So here I am divorced in my fantasy. Already. *(pause)*

With Frank, life is very dry. No chance to kid myself there. We would go and make a place for ourselves in the world of others. I could wear all my gowns. Sell them to movie stars. Success. I love him. He's very beautiful and he lets me dress him up, like a big doll. He's vain.

Harold is easy and gentle and everything around him is wet, almost drippy. He even cries. No, it's good. I love him too but his dream for me is to be there. Which is much harder than it sounds. My family has bunches of be there women in it and they are all extremely strange. After years of being there for everyone else, they have a sort of faraway look and their skin looks like some sort of tide is carrying it away from their bones. But it's a nice dream, I like to think about it sometimes: Myself as the rock upon which a family is built. It's very satisfying except it's not true. It's a slave existence. If I could be satisfied with cooking and raising babies and gardening, it wouldn't be so bad but all those things sound like hobbies which is not like sewing which sounds like real work. *(pause)*

You know that story, The Emperor's New Clothes? That story is my mantra. I think about it all the time because it applies to a lot of things - the sort of flip-flop way we have of naming things backwards of what they really are. Like when the hot water faucet has a C on it and you go to rinse your face on a hot summer day and burn the fuck out of your hands. Like that. Like work. People call work the thing you do that kills you slowly but you do it anyway out of a sense of duty because you think you owe your life to the people or the ideals that you love. But that's not work, that drudgery is meaningless, a constructed emptiness. It's not organic.

*Isabelle stands to pin and fit pieces of the gown onto the dummy.*

Nakedness fascinates me. The relationship between the person - naked - and the clothes they want or need to express - what? Something true or something false? There lies the excitement, the enchantment. People can express the obvious about themselves, a long neck, long legs or flaunt their bizarreness, long arms can be mesmerizing in the right

sleeves. They can bring out something subtle like the color of their eyes. or enhance a bubbly nature. Or they can mask themselves. Masking is alluring, challenging.

Sometimes a woman wants to mask her breasts because she has to go to a meeting where she'll be the only woman and she has truly extraordinary breasts and she knows from experience that the men will not hear a word she has to say if they become aware of her breasts too soon during the meeting. Of course this is bullshit but she knows from experience and chooses to manipulate the men rather than try to whack through the swamp grass of corporate conflicts. Then she might want to go to a party and we can mask her breasts so that the particular man-fly her spider-eye has caught can be captured. *(she laughs)* Anyway, it's fun.

*Isabelle returns to the sewing machine.*

Even men's suits have subtle and not so subtle dynamics. So, when the Emperor had hassled his tailors to the point where they could not longer deal with his false beliefs - his complete immersion in the illusion of the permanence of human hierarchies, for goodness sake! That Emperor was forgetting his work, his job. His purpose was to be a servant of the people, a glorious emptiness which is love, which can be filled with the people's love. He is meant to be the vessel. But he lost contact with his yin nature while he wallowed and brayed inside his yang character, and the tailors, who are often quite bright people, if I do say so myself, threw up their hands in despair and refused to dress him anymore.

Of course, there was one rather older tailor who, being more cautious, recommended a modified course of action which might, if they were lucky, not lose them their heads, but rather illuminate the Emperor's self to himself. Since the Emperor had indeed forgotten the power of his true being, of his nakedness, his essential sameness

with all nature... so, the old tailor counselled that they be honest with the Emperor, that they tell him exactly what they intended to do, that they intended to fit him with his ultimate robe. These clothes, his best suit, would accurately render him, clearly revealing his true nature which is, of course, divine and his power which is, of course, eternal.

This worked wonderfully. The Emperor loved it but he had it all flip-flopped in his head and that's why he's remembered as a fool.

*Isabelle is now sewing by hand.*

Now, the people come into the story because they were a big part of it. Their flip-flopped ideas and backwards notions had led them into a place of fear and intimidation. Even when they saw this naked man, they couldn't see him because he still had this wrong name in their heads. He was the Emperor who has to be feared and not the fertile emptiness of naked humanness.

The people were stunned because the Emperor's nakedness made them feel their nakedness, not as in the holy beautiful reflection of divine spirit manifesting in matter... no, they felt their nakedness as a blank, a fault, a mistake, a shame, a mis-take. Except for the child who, in my version of the story, is a little girl. She can see his nakedness, love it, accept it and through that love and acceptance, accurately name it.

The truth is that the Emperor has no clothes on.

It's simple when you think about it. All the people rushing to the city to find the Emperor and win his approval, to find the source of power to be sanctified by being accepted. But there is nothing there. No *thing* at all. No person, no institution that isn't looking for the same thing. No one can grant the acceptance to anyone else. there is only nakedness and clothes masking nakedness for various purposes, all of them manipulative in some way.

I won't go to the country with Harold because drudgery is helplessness. I won't go to the city with Frank because the fame he's chasing is a mirage. I'm going to stay here and practice my sewing.

So when the little girl saw the Emperor was naked, her voice was powered by her love. "The Emperor is naked!" she connected everyone with the electricity of the truth, just for a second. But that second reverberates all the way to now... and beyond. The End!

*Isabelle puts the finishing touches on the gown. It's gorgeous.*

Once I had a dream that changed my life. I was holding the whole world in my lap. Gently. I could see the clouds and the oceans and all the worlds within. I saw that there were huge gashes, slashes, in places where the earth herself had been split, wounded. They were rips in the fabric of her being. In my dream, I was sewing up the tears so the wounds could heal.

The lights slowly fade as Isabelle returns to her sewing machine. The soft sounds of the machine is heard for a brief moment after the theatre is dark.

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