

The Duke's New Clothes  
A Fairy Tale Enchantress Short Story  
By K. M. Shea

Angelique shifted in her side saddle and worked to keep a genteel smile on her face. Her horse—a buckskin gelding—plodded steadily after Evariste and his gray mount.

For the sake of the event they were attending, Evariste had nudged Angelique into one of her fancier dresses—a white gown with wine red lace and heart shaped embroidery. Her horse was dressed to match—the blanket beneath her side saddle as well as the animal's barding were white with matching red embroidery.

But Angelique had the pesky feeling they were overdressed, particularly given the state of the land they passed through.

She narrowed her eyes as she looked out at fields of stunted crops that were quite obviously wilting. On the other side of the pothole-riddled road was a fenced pasture that held a herd of five bony horses. The grass was chewed to the dirt. The wooden fence posts were half rotted, and the stable just beyond it fared little better.

*This is not a prosperous land.*

It was surprising, considering they were riding through a dukedom in Loire—the most powerful country on the continent.

Angelique pressed her lips together and glanced at Evariste's back, wondering if she dared to ask him about the state of the fields.

Her horse snorted and shook his head, ridding himself of a fly.

“We have almost arrived,” Evariste called over his shoulder. “The duke's chateau should be visible after we pass that thicket of trees.” He pointed to a small woods ahead of them and twisted in the saddle so he could smile at her.

Angelique blinked owlishly. Between the sunlight, Evariste's brilliant smile, and his white clothes, it was a little hard to hold his gaze. (He wore white trousers and a fancy jacket, which of course had red embroidery to match Angelique's—though his hearts were more of a dark burgundy color.)

“Is everything alright?” he asked when she didn't respond.

“It's fine!” Angelique said with a sunny voice. “It is merely...you said it is a *duke* we are here for, yes?”

Evariste nodded. “He's throwing a rather extravagant party for his birthday.”

*How extravagant can it be when his lands are in shambles?* Aloud, she asked, “Isn't attending his birthday party a little too close to a political move?”

“It toes the line,” Evariste admitted. “If it weren't for you, I would never have accepted the job, but as you need experience our presence will not be viewed with the same scrutiny. The Veneno Conclave understands this.”

*But do they really?*

Angelique kept her skepticism to herself, and instead made a noise of approval. She glanced back to the countryside and frowned, watching a farmer attempt to hack at a patch of dry, hardened dirt with a chipped hoe.

“Officially, the job is for you to create a set of illusionary clothes for the duke to wear tonight for the entirety of his celebration,” Evariste said.

The way he phrased the directions made Angelique sit up. “Officially? Is there unofficial business I am expected to conduct?”

Evariste held his horse back for a moment or two so he could ride shoulder to shoulder with her.

He smiled again—but it wasn't his charming or brilliant grin. Instead, it was dangerously close to a smirk. "There is no unofficial business, but at all times we should be aware of our duties as magic users."

"We are to guard the continent from magic, and aid those in need," Angelique recited. The temperature cooled as the road meandered between the trees, shading them from the sun.

Evariste nodded. "Yes, and?"

Recalling the brat-who-cried-wolf from Boyne, Angelique added, "At times we might find it necessary to teach folk moral lessons."

"Exactly," Evariste said with great satisfaction. His smile turned warm again. "As long as you remember that, you will do splendidly."

Angelique was not so convinced, but she managed to hide it behind a false smile. It dropped from her lips, however, a few moments later when they emerged from the small forest, revealing the duke's home.

It was built more like a small castle than a proper chateau as it was three floors of sparkling white stone with a red tiled roof, four towers that Angelique could see, and a lush green yard with bushes trimmed to resemble animals.

A giant fountain with an obnoxious gold sculpture of a man—the duke, most likely—was plopped in the middle of the road—which switched from dirt to cobblestone the moment they crossed the green lawn.

*His vast lands struggle to survive, and this is how his home looks?*

She glanced at Evariste.

For once he wasn't smiling, but was surveying the chateau. His unusual colored eyes were half shut and his expressive lips were straight. "Yes," Evariste said. "This evening will be an excellent experience for you...and the duke, too."

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The Duke—or, His Grace, Duc Hubert of Aube—was in his wardrobe room when Evariste and Angelique arrived, and it was there he stayed as his valet escorted Angelique and Evariste to him.

"Thierry," Duke Hubert called to his valet in a voice of exaggerated sadness. "Thierry, you have failed me. I have nothing to wear, I shall be forced to meet magical greatness in a *robe*."

His voice became more audible when the valet led Angelique and Evariste inside the "wardrobe."

The room was easily the size of the workshop back at Evariste's house, and clothes hung from rods fastened to the walls, from wires hung from the ceiling, and were tossed in great mounds that so cluttered the floor it was difficult to navigate.

Angelique lifted her skirts to step over a shoe ornamented with a large blue bow and ducked to avoid getting an apple green cape in her face.

"Your Grace, Lord Enchanter Evariste and his apprentice, enchantress-in-training Angelique, have arrived," the valet announced.

"Come in!" Duke Hubert called. "Come in—and you can see why I so badly need your help!"

Angelique and Evariste stepped around the last pile of clothes and found the duke dressed in a brocade robe and perched on a spindly footstool.

Duke Hubert was a short, skinny man who vaguely reminded Angelique of a drenched cat. His eyes bulged a little—from emotion—and his wispy goatee made his already pointed chin appear downright angular. (And he shook. With disdain, likely, but still. Angelique suspected she could have broken the man in half—*without* using her magic.)

The duke flung his arms up and motioned to the piles of cloth that surrounded him. “It’s terrible, simply *terrible!* I am a fashion setter. All Loire nobles are *green* with envy over my brilliant taste and beautiful clothes. But alas, I have *nothing* that can contain my glorious self!” He sighed with great melancholy.

Angelique had to smile. If she opened her mouth, she’d give him a tongue lashing. *How can he complain about his lavish clothes while his lands are on the brink of starvation? Or did he push them to this stage as a result of his thirst for luxuries?*

“We read as much in the letter you attached to the work details,” Evariste said, his voice melodious and smooth.

Angelique didn’t know how he managed to be polite—she wanted to squeeze the duke for his excess until his eyes popped more than they already did.

“Then you will help me!” The duke imperiously stated.

“Angelique will provide you with the magic you require this evening.” Evariste took her hand and bowed over it like a knight honoring his lady. “I am here for her support.”

Angelique curtsied when the duke peered at her—though she was distracted when Evariste raised her hand towards his lips and spent most of her attention on discreetly yanking her appendage free. “It will be my...duty, Duke Hubert,” she said, lacking any better description. (Because it *certainly* wasn’t her honor!)

Duke Hubert stood and tried to look down his nose at her, but she was so much taller than him, he instead had to crank his neck to meet her eyes.

“I expect *magnificent* clothes,” he said. “Made of cloth from the likes of which no one has seen!”

Angelique dipped her head. “Understood, however, I must remind you the clothes will be an illusion. It is not an outfit you will be able to keep.”

Duke Hubert scoffed. “Of course—that is why I sought to hire a *mage!* I must have an outfit so *glorious*, no one will have anything like it, nor will they be able to reproduce it. I shall wear sheer *power* this evening!”

His propensity to emphasize words was starting to grate on Angelique’s nerves, but she kept smiling.

Duke Hubert rubbed his scraggily facial hair and studied her. “It will be even *more* valuable given that an enchantress-in-training is performing the spell. Though I should like it more if you were an *official* Lady Enchantress.” He swung around to face Evariste. “Can you not be convinced, Lord Enchanter, to do the spell in place of your pupil?”

“I must reject your request, Duke Hubert.” Evariste’s polite smile didn’t so much as flicker.

“I’ll double the price,” the duke offered.

The Lord Enchanter shook his head. “Angelique needs the practice, and to do such a thing would forsake my vow of impartiality when it comes to politics.”

The duke rolled his eyes and planted his fists on his hips. “Magic is *wasted* on you upper mages. None of you seek to use your powers in a *useful* way—you could make peasants bow before you! But never mind, the work of an apprentice shall be good enough for tonight—as long as she makes a good show! Now, as for what I wish to wear...”

*This is not just greed, but a power move,* Angelique realized as she listened to the man rail on. *He means to inflate his ego and show off his grandeur—that he has the money to hire an enchantress-in-training to weave a spell for him for a single night.*

Her smile twitched for a moment as she recalled the broken duchy she had ridden through. *His vanity and pride spring from a source that will only bring ruin.*

She watched as he yammered on while he picked up a dark blue cape and pointed to the fancy jewel buttons before thoughtlessly tossing it on the ground. He stepped on it as he yanked a waistcoat from a hook on the wall.

*Unfortunately, it will be his lands that suffer. He needs to be taught better. But who...*

“It should sparkle in the candle-light, perhaps in this shade of plum—”

“If you’ll forgive the interruption,” Angelique smoothly cut in. “But if you truly wish for a magnificent outfit, as the magic user responsible for the spell I must insist on being given full creative rein.”

Duke Hubert frowned. “Why?”

Angelique’s lips curled up in a smile that had a predatory gleam she couldn’t quite hide. “No one knows my abilities as a mage better than I—and I know the spells available to me as well. I can create clothes beyond your wildest imagination. And tonight I will do *just that.*”

“Oh.” The duke blinked, then grudgingly nodded. “I suppose that’s true. But if I am not satisfied, you shall have to improve upon them!”

“Worry not, Duke Hubert,” Angelique promised. “I will make you the clothes you so dearly deserve.”

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“The time has *arrived!*” Duke Hubert swept out of his bathroom and scuttled across his dressing room, wearing a new robe—this one made of crimson velvet. “The guests have been greeted, I have washed, you must now *dress* me!”

Angelique had been busy staring at the mounds of clothes cluttering up the room, but turned to face the bossy noble.

She watched as he started to throw the robe off his skinny shoulders before Evariste placed a hand over her eyes.

“Um?” she said.

“*Duke Hubert,*” Evariste’s normally cheerful voice was smoky with anger. “Though she is fulfilling a job, my pupil is a *lady*. You will act and treat her according to her station, and will not sully her eyes. Put. On. A. Shirt.”

“My apologies,” Duke Hubert gulped.

*Evariste must look quite fierce to get that sort of response.*

But Angelique was not surprised to see that, after he removed his hand from her eyes, his sunny smile was back in place.

*Figures.*

She glanced at the duke, who was studiously avoiding eye contact with her as he stood in black stockings and a white dressing shirt that was several sizes too big.

Evariste patted her on the shoulder. “Good luck, Apprentice.” He smiled, then edged backwards, joining Duke Hubert’s valet in standing by the entrance. There he slightly tipped his head as he watched her.

*How perfectly splendid—and not at all worrisome!* Angelique eyed the duke, attempting to disguise her dislike of the man. *But I had better perform well—or I’ll hear from the Conclave, I’m sure, when Evariste’s monthly report goes out.*

Angelique set her shoulders and put a smile on her lips. “It will take just a moment so I can get a proper measure of you.” She strolled in a circle around the knobby-kneed duke.

“Of course!” Duke Hubert puffed up his chest, straining to stand as tall as possible.

As Angelique walked, she reached deep within herself and released the tiniest stream of magic. She carefully unwound it, measuring out only what she thought she would need before corking up the trickle and shoving her magic down again.

Her silvery magic splashed across her fingers as she twisted it, transforming it from the sharp, icy feel of her core magic into a delicate illusion spell.

Her magic wrapped around the duke, and though she had changed it, its core state must have still poked through, for Duke Hubert shivered and hunched his shoulders when it brushed him.

Angelique furrowed her brow in concentration as she directed her magic, building the base of the outfit. Ruffled cuffs and collar appeared, before a stiff red doublet reinforced with boning enfolded his torso.

Silk breeches the same red as the doublet puffed around his thighs and gathered at the knees. An elaborately embroidered slashed leather jerkin slipped over the top of his doublet, and Angelique finished the look with a wide-brimmed black cap.

Though the clothes appeared solid, Angelique continued with the illusion, adding sparkles and fancy swirls to the doublet and jerkin, and a fancy feather to the cap.

*It’s a shame this is only an illusion, and not alteration magic.* She thought as she added a thick, jeweled necklace of rubies. *An illusion only looks real, alteration changes something—for as long as I pour magic into it anyway. If I merely altered some of his clothes I could have made them itchy and too small. For he certainly deserves some discomfort for his terrible management of his duchy.*

“Thierry! A mirror,” the duke demanded.

His valet carefully carried a full-length mirror, setting it down in front of him. He bowed before he scuttled off, but the duke took no notice as he admired himself in the mirror.

“Very fine.” Duke Hubert again puffed up his chest. “I look *magnificent*, indeed! Clothes *worthy* of me and of this very fortunate evening—they display my excellent taste and station!”

Angelique bit her cheek to keep from glaring at the man.

She blinked as she watched him, carefully keeping her expression even. *And now, time for the second part of this job—the self-appointed part, rather.*

She glanced at Evariste, but he was involved in a conversation with the valet, and wasn’t even looking her way anymore.

Angelique smirked as she drifted closer to the duke. *It’s entirely my duty,* she thought. *After all, Evariste has frequently reminded me our position might require us to deal out moral lessons.*

“You do cut a fine figure,” Angelique said in a sing-song tone. “But I think I can do something more for you. You intend to give a speech to your esteemed guests, do you not?”

“Indeed, I shall!” The duke declared.

“How perfect,” Angelique said. “At the height of your speech I will perform a *special* piece of magic, one that will perfectly reveal how worthy you are of your station, a spell that only the most intelligent of folk will be able to see.”

“*Truly?*” the duke asked.

“Yes,” Angelique promised. “And when they see it, the eyes of your people shall be opened.”

*Hopefully it won't forever mentally scar them.*

“Excellent, I approve of this artistic direction, mage...mage,” he repeated, apparently having already forgot her name.

Angelique's smile turned true. “It will be my pleasure.”

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Angelique bit her lower lip, fighting back the impulse to yawn. *Why is it that whenever someone thinks highly of themselves, they talk incessantly and are great bores?*

The Duke stood on a stone staircase that abutted the back side of his chateau, delivering his rambling speech to a group of barely-listening nobles, dressed in bright and glittering clothes.

The party was starting outside, where candles lined stone walking paths and blooming hedges walled in the courtyard area that was to serve as the first location for the evening's merry making.

(The party would, Angelique had been told, move indoors for dinner and end the night in the ballroom.)

Servants skulked around the edges of the courtyard, adding more candles and silently presenting guests with refreshments.

Angelique stood with Enchanter Evariste and Thierry—Duke Hubert's valet—off to the side of the courtyard, visible but apart from the rest of the party attendees.

She busied herself with brushing off the skirts of her white and red gown as she listened to the duke prattle on.

“Thank you all for attending this celebration of *me*—the Duc of Aube. It is my greatest delight to host this birthday celebration, to welcome friends and family alike to view the *splendor* of my duchy and join me in merry making and joy.”

Angelique pursed her lips, caught between anger and worry. *If I go through with this...am I overstepping my boundaries as a magic user? Teaching Duke Puffed-Up a lesson could be interpreted as a political move after all.*

Her gaze was momentarily drawn to Thierry. The lanky young man had a bright smile, but the angles of his face were enunciated, and he appeared leaner than a man of his age should.

The rest of the servants ghosting around the edges of the party were of a similar state—skinny and tired-looking.

But the nail in the coffin was the so-called “splendid duchy.”

That afternoon—while Duke Hubert had greeted his guests—Thierry had taken Evariste and Angelique on a mini tour of the best lands in the duchy. All of the greenest places—the only fields that had *not* been over grazed, and the lushest forests filled with any sort of wild game—were for the duke's exclusive use. (He had taken the best field and turned it into a circuit for horse races, and an archery range for his guests.)

Duke Hubert had a lot of money—it was undeniable—but it was obvious he had earned so much in a short amount of time by neglecting his lands and failing to invest any back into his property and staff.

*It's a quick path to ruin that he's on, and he'll drag his duchy down with him. No, political or not, I've got to do something. Particularly since I can use the excuse of a lowly apprentice mishandling a spell. Evariste might be a bit disappointed, but I don't think the Conclave could exile me over an 'accident.' At least one that involves illusion magic, and not my core magic.*

Her mind made up, Angelique straightened and listened to the duke's speech with the intensity of a wolf listening for prey.

She tuned in at the perfect time, for he glanced in her direction, giving her a significant look.

*That's my cue.*

Angelique released a tendril of her magic, and prepared to change her illusion spell.

“To showcase my remarkable taste, I have arranged an evening of luxuries of the like you have never seen before,” Duke Hubert boasted. “May it prove to you—and reflect—the superior taste of the Duchy of Aube, the worthiness of *my* character, and the nobility of my family!”

He threw his arms wide and Angelique gestured, using her magic...to cut the illusion spell the duke wore, shattering it so his fine clothes were gone, leaving the duke in his undershirt and black stockings.

At first, the duke didn't appear to notice. He was gloating, his smile so big it was almost a grimace.

His noble peers however, certainly saw.

A number of ladies dropped their feather ornamented fans, mouths fell open everywhere, and Angelique heard the telltale chime of crystal breaking—dropped chalices for certain.

The duke's servants, had a very different reaction.

More than one of them slapped a hand over their mouths to keep from laughing. Their eyes bulged, and they—knowing the magic user behind the spell—yanked their gazes from Duke Hubert to Angelique.

Angelique delicately placed a hand on her cheek. “Oh my,” she said in false horror, her eyes wide. “I have terribly bungled this!”

The duke finally appeared to realize something was wrong, for he looked down at his chest and his eyes nearly popped out of his head. He made a loud squeaking noise and his face turned red with anger.

Angelique slightly angled herself to the side so Evariste wouldn't be able to view her expression head on. In doing so she was able to meet Duke Hubert's gaze, and she dropped her expression of horror.

Instead she raised an eyebrow and looked from the duke to his undershirt, then mouthed the words “how worthy you are of your station.”

Duke Hubert went from bright red to an ashen pallor, perfectly grasping what she was trying to get at.

Her spell had revealed just how worthy he was...and had found him wanting.

*With some help from me, of course.*

Angelique met his gaze for several moments, until the duke went back to awkwardly staring out at his guests.

Sensing it was time for the moral lesson to end—lest she go *too* far—she turned back to Evariste. She blinked her eyes, giving the appearance of tears of regret—although really they were more tears born from holding back the great guffaws of laughter she wanted to release. “I'm so sorry, Enchanter Evariste—I-I will make amends!”

Angelique snapped her still waiting magic into place, reconstructing the broken illusion in moments.

Clothes reappeared on the startled duke, but he didn't so easily recover his bravado. Instead he brushed his doublet and cleared his throat. “Ahem, yes. Let the celebration begin,” he weakly said.

His guests murmured as they finally recovered their air of sophistication. Every eye was on him as he hurried down the stairs.

Thierry coughed several times, covering what suspiciously sounded like a chuckle before he turned to Angelique and Evariste. “If you’ll excuse me, Lord Enchanter, Lady Enchantress, I believe His Grace may need my help.” He bowed and hurried off.

“I’m not an...enchantress,” Angelique finished even though it became apparent Thierry wasn’t stopping to hear her correction. She frowned—which transformed into a smile when she watched Duke Hubert cling to Thierry’s arm.

*Yes, that might not have fixed anything, but with luck it at least planted a thought.*

“That was a very smooth—and quick—recovery!” Evariste praised.

Angelique almost jumped in her shoes, having forgotten about his presence. “Thank you, but it was very shameful I dropped it.” She made a show of biting her lip and glanced at the duke. “I shall redouble my efforts to keep the spell stable for the rest of the evening!” She then bowed her head to the Lord Enchanter. “I am sorry for failing you,” she added in real honesty.

*I don’t like to let Evariste down, but I still don’t regret it. This one instance, anyway.*

“Accidents happen,” Evariste said serenely. He took Angelique’s hand and briefly patted it before releasing her and clasping his hands behind his back. “You’re an apprentice. It is expected you would make the occasional mistake,” he said. “And this was a relatively small one, given how quickly you righted it.”

Angelique whipped her head up to gawk at her teacher—for in what continent could this be construed as a *small* error? But Evariste had begun moving away, and only his back was visible.

“Come, apprentice,” he called. “We should mingle with the guests—it’s a chance for you to meet the most powerful nobles in Loire, after all.”

*Does he approve of my “error?” Angelique wondered as she briefly studied his back. He doesn’t know I did it on purpose, does he? If he did, I think he would at least scold me—not even Evariste can be that even tempered.*

Some of her glee subsided at the thought, and Angelique shook her head. *Yes, he can’t know. Evariste would never praise me for purposefully failing at a task. Even if the duke deserved it! ... Would he?*

She pushed the thought from her mind and instead fixed a smile on her lips as she glided after her teacher, winking at the maid she passed who was bearing a tray of drinks.

*Regardless, with that illusion snipped, I can consider tonight a true triumph!*

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Evariste had to speed walk away from his apprentice to keep her unaware of the laughter he was struggling to hold in.

*Duke Hubert is such a pompous, self-centered man. She devastated him and shattered that pride without uttering a single threat or harming a single person.*

*She is incredible!*

When he first agreed to the job for Angelique’s sake, Evariste dreaded the party. He had seen Duke Hubert before when visiting the Loire royal family in Noyers. He *hoped* Angelique might attempt to teach the man a lesson...but he never imagined the delivery method she would use to do such a thing!

*I thought if I hinted before we arrived, she might make a threat or extract some sort of promise from the duke to treat his land better. Instead, she took him to task herself!*

It had been a steep gamble on her part. If she had been a graduated enchantress, there would be repercussions. But she was a mere apprentice, and Evariste’s reputation wouldn’t even rock from the events of this evening.



*She is special.* He paused long enough to look over his shoulder and smile as she glided after him with the practiced grace of an elf. *Though she might be afraid of her own magic, she's not afraid to stand for what is right. I hope she can keep that spirit—no, I must see that she remains that way. For the good of the continent.*

His reasoning rang hollow even in the privacy of his own mind. Evariste was not nearly delusional enough to think that perhaps he cared a little too much for the well being of his apprentice only for the sake of the continent.

Still, he couldn't find it in himself to care.

*She's worth fighting for, worth protecting...and worth waiting for.*

Evariste barely kept himself from cringing—for that last thought was a dangerous one. But he didn't retract it, instead he smiled brightly as he chose a noble at random to greet.

“Ahh, Lord Foix. Please allow me to introduce you to my apprentice, Angelique.”

*The End*