

EVERYONE LAUGHS AT THE KING'S JOKES

a play in ten minutes

by

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SETTING

A courtyard of the palace

Elizabethan era - exact date undetermined

CAST

KING	A jester at heart, middle aged, early fifties
DAUGHTER	A commoner, in her twenties to thirties
FATHER	A weathered man, a working commoner, a few years younger than the King
CHAMBERLAIN	Of undetermined age, consult to the King
ARMED GUARD(S)	Also of undetermined age, but strongly built (one speaking role)

ADDITIONAL CITIZENS AS DESIRED

(At rise:

An Elizabethan courtyard with a well placed central throne. On the throne sits the King--or sat the King--because as we open upon the scene the KING is now standing, furious, hollering at the court full of people gathered; although not so furious as to spill any wine from his goblet--still, furious all the same.

Amongst those gathered in the courtyard (being yelled at) are a middle aged gentleman in his early fifties, weathered with time, but a few years younger than the King himself. Also amongst those present are the King's CHAMBERLAIN and preferably two ARMED GUARDS. The KING addresses both the audience as well as anyone else within eye or earshot:)

KING

GET OUT!! Get out. Everybody. Out. Now. Except him. Yes, you sir. You stay. Everyone else: out!!!

DAUGHTER

(Rushing to the side of the MAN singled out to stay:)

No. No, no, no, no, no, no: He didn't know what he was doing--he didn't know what he wasn't doing.

CHAMBERLAIN

Move along Miss.

DAUGHTER

There's been a mistake.

CHAMBERLAIN

There are no mistakes.

DAUGHTER

(As the rest of the gathered leave:)

But he's my father. He's old. He's half deaf. He didn't know.

FATHER (Man)

Didn't know what?

DAUGHTER

He's HALF deaf. Did I mention HALF? I can't stress "half" enough.

CHAMBERLAIN

He only hears women?

ARMED GUARD

Do you wish us to stay, sir?

KING

Why would I want that?

ARMED GUARD

Discretion.

KING

What do you take me for?

(He waves them off and reclaims his seat.)

CHAMBERLAIN

(To the Armed Guards as they leave:)

Stay close at hand.

DAUGHTER

Your Honor, your Excellency,

KING

What is she doing here?

DAUGHTER

Your Highness; he is my father.

(No reply.)

He's old.

KING

How old? He looks a wee bit younger than me. Am I old?

DAUGHTER

No, no, no sir, you are--you're Excellency, you are the perfect age.

KING

So, I've been told. When I was twenty I was the perfect age. When I was thirty I was the perfect age. Every year it seems the perfect age follows me around like a shadow.

(He laughs at his own joke. It is a silly laugh--a jester enjoying his own material.)

(The CHAMBERLAIN and DAUGHTER fall in step laughing as well, however the FATHER does not join in with them.)

DAUGHTER

And he sir:

(Referring to her father:)

is living in your shadow-- just shy of the perfect age.

KING

Poor fellow.

DAUGHTER

Poor indeed. Piss poor, can't even afford a bucket.

KING

Do you need a bucket?

(No reply. To the Daughter:)

Does he need a bucket?

(Calling out:)

Somebody bring me a bucket!!

CHAMBERLAIN

Bucket!!

KING

That was a joke.

CHAMBERLAIN

Cancel the bucket!!

KING

Why doesn't he laugh at my jokes?

DAUGHTER

If it please, your Honor.

CHAMBERLAIN

Miss.

KING

Oh, she can stray. Let her stay. She has fire. I like that.

(To the Father:)

Not that I like her in *that* way. I'm old enough to be--since obviously I'm older than you and you are clearly old enough to be her father--making her young enough to be my daughter and if my interests were in her in *that* way I could understand your not laughing at my jokes--being her father and all BUT *being* her father--piss poor that he can't afford a bucket--if I, the king, did have an interest in your daughter, in *that way*, I would think you'd be hysterically happy and would laugh at pretty much anything I said.

(No reply.)

We've established he's not deaf, am I correct?

DAUGHTER

Half deaf.

CHAMBERLAIN

Shall I remove the daughter?

KING

No. She stays.

(Still seated but leaning in towards the Father:)

Have you ever heard said the phrase: "Everyone laughs at the King's jokes"?

(No reply.)

Do you know why everyone laughs at the King's jokes? Because he's the king.

FATHER

I was hoping it would be because he's funny.

(A beat.)

DAUGHTER

He fell on his head as a boy.

KING

Well, this is almost interesting. And in the spirit of the ten minutes I almost have I will grant you an audience.

DAUGHTER

(Confused:)

Thank you, m'Lord.

(There is a pause as the King and in turn the Chamberlain and finally the Daughter wait for the Father to reply.)

DAUGHTER

(Aside:)

In the name of everything sacred, please.

FATHER

Thank you, m'Lord.

KING

Very well. Why . . . do you not think I am funny?

DAUGHTER

He was dropped as a child.

KING

We heard that. I want to hear it from him.

(No reply.)

I have an appointment in under ten minutes for both a pedicure and a concubine. So, please, do not waste my time.

DAUGHTER

. . . Sir?

KING

Yes?

DAUGHTER

A . . . pedicure and a concubine?

KING

The one is a disgusting and vile display of cleaning between my toes while the other is an exquisite form of pleasure that lasts all too briefly so I had in mind that if I were to combine the two: the one would distract me enough that the pleasure of the other would last an incalculably longer time.

(A beat.)

DAUGHTER

What if, your Excellency, the pleasure of the one, your great Excellency, is instead turned vile and disgusting by the commission of other, oh most reverend and honored Excellency?

KING

(Thinks on it a moment;)

You're quite right.

(Hollers off:)

Cancel the concubine.

(Shrugs in terms of explanation:)

My feet are filthy. In need of a good scrub. We have less than eight minutes to go. Why didn't you find me funny?

(Not waiting out the lack of response:)

I'll tell you. Are you one of those religious nuts who sees humor in nothing because God is angry at us all? Or are you one of those religious nuts who . . . are just . . . there?

DAUGHTER

My father is neither more nor less religious than any other man.

KING

More nor less religious than a king?

DAUGHTER

Than a man. There is no comparison to a king.

KING

Oh, she's good.

(To the Chamberlain:)

You should be writing this down.

(Back to the Father:)

Are you--(I like a good game)--are you a . . .

(Rewording his thought:)

Do you have a cause? And you are consumed by your cause and you're angered by your king who wishes to jest that He (the king [me]) should be more focused on the causes of the kingdom and his (my) people that there should be no time wasted on such frivolity--and after all: why can't I just take my job seriously in the first place--that you find nothing funny?

FATHER

Could you repeat the first part--

DAUGHTER

He doesn't have a cause.

KING

Your wife died. You are sick with grief and even the thought of a smile you fear would tarnish her memory--it would be like cheating on her if you were to abandon your sorrow even for a moment?

(A beat.)

DAUGHTER

His wife . . .

FATHER

My wife isn't dead, sir . . . but she does scream a lot.

KING

In pain?

FATHER

In frustration.

KING

That I understand.

(A beat.)

FATHER

I just don't think you're funny.

DAUGHTER

Daddy.

CHAMBERLAIN

Shall I remove him?

KING

No. No, this is rare. This is . . . remarkable. An honest man. I would give half my kingdom for an honest man--although I'm not going to--I think I'll keep it all the same--yep, all for me: still mine--but I am impressed with your . . . What is the word for it?

CHAMBERLAIN

Insolence? Insubordination? Foolishness?

KING

No, no, no, none of those--

CHAMBERLAIN

Lack of dignity? Lack of foresight? Lack of . . .

KING

Something like that . . . something "lacking" . . .

CHAMBERLAIN

I can't think of the word.

KING

Me either. But we're obviously thinking the same thing. This is an incredible moment. This man. Your father. What is your name, sir?

FATHER

Sexton, m'Lord.

KING

Sir Sexton.:

(Playing with the words:)

I am honored by your honesty .

(To the Daughter:)

And Miss Sexton. That you would stand beside your father at this hour would . . . such devotion I could only pray I would receive.

(Saying it himself:)

I'm not funny. Chamberlain, do you think I'm funny?

CHAMBERLAIN

I laugh, your Highness; I laugh until I don't even remember what I'm laughing for.

KING

Am I that daft that I can't hear that you've told me nothing?

(Mulling it over.)

I'm not funny. I so want to be funny. This isn't fair. Everyone laughs at the King's jokes because he's the king. He doesn't have to be funny. But I WANT TO BE FUNNY. Why has nobody told me this before!??

(To the Father:)

You have done your king a great service. You will teach me to be funny.

FATHER

Me, your Honor?

CHAMBERLAIN

Him?

KING

Well, certainly not you.

(A beat. To the Father:)

Tell me a joke. Make me funny.

(FATHER and DAUGHTER stare at one another a moment in search of an answer.)

DAUGHTER

Your Excellency, my father doesn't really have a sense of humor.

KING

Of course he does, everyone does--except, it seems, me.

CHAMBERLAIN

Sir, the time.

KING

What?

CHAMBERLAIN

The pedicure.

KING

Already?

(Looks to his feet.)

Ahhh, damn. Fine. Take them out: have them killed.

(The CHAMBERLAIN signals offstage for the ARMED GUARDS, who then return to escort off the FATHER and DAUGHTER, who are both standing still and in shock at the King's decree. The CHAMBERLAIN signals again to the ARMED GUARDS who then move to the right and left of the FATHER and DAUGHTER. Just as the Guards reach for the couple's arms the KING snickers: a good natured laugh steels through his kingly composure. It is the laugh of a practical joke being let out of the bag. The CHAMBERLAIN is unsure whether to laugh or not. The DAUGHTER *wants* to laugh, *wants* it to be a joke and so she laughs along with the King. The ARMED GUARDS pick up the laugh alongside the King and the Daughter. The laugh becomes infectious. The CHAMBERLAIN falls into line as the laugh grows more genuine from all. Even the FATHER smiles as he realizes the jest was all in good play. Finally all are laughing.)

KING

(Enjoying the moment immensely:)

Ohhhh, I had you there. I had you there. You have to admit: that was funny.

FATHER

That . . . had its moments.

KING

Yes, it did, sir. Yes, it did. God, I'm funny.

DAUGHTER

Just to be clear: you're not going to kill us?

KING

Kill you? No.

(Laughs more.)

My God, if I'd kept this going I think he would have peed his pants.

(All laugh.)

FATHER

I think I did a little.

(All laugh even more.)

KING

Oh my God: a genuine laugh. A genuine laugh.

(Takes a drink from his cup but it's empty.)

Ohhhh, my cup is empty.

DAUGHTER

So, you were never going to actually kill us.

KING

(Laughing all the while--as is everyone:)

Stop. You'll have me peeing myself.

CHAMBERLAIN

Your appointment awaits.

KING

(To the Armed Guards:)

Take them through the town, escort them safely to their homes, so everyone may see the their king is not a killer. He is a funny man.

FATHER

You are a funny man.

KING

I am a funny man.

FATHER

You are . . . I misjudged you . . . you are a funny man.

(The ARMED GUARDS begin to escort the two out.)

KING

(Laughing as they go:)

King. I am a funny king.

FATHER

(As they go:)

You are a funny king.

KING

Thank you.

(There is a brief moment of silence as KING and CHAMBERLAIN compose themselves following the Father and Daughter's exit during which the KING considers his empty cup. He then turns to the Chamberlain discreetly:)

KING

Have it done quietly. In their sleep.

(He then hollers out to the kitchen staff:)

Cup!!!

END