

THE RICHEST MAN IN THE KINGDOM

This short play is suitable for an adult or younger audience. It was deliberately written so that it could be performed by a younger (or inexperienced) drama group – as there are a lot of small parts and hardly any demanding roles. The QUEEN has a non-speaking cameo role – and the part of the DOCTOR is undemanding.

SCENE 1: A country road. Enter two yokels (country bumpkins)

Cornish accents for whole scene

YOKEL 1 Have you 'eard?
YOKEL 2 Heard what?
YOKEL 1 What they're saying.
YOKEL 2 Saying where?
YOKEL 1 Down in the village.
YOKEL 2 Our village?
YOKEL 1 That's right.
YOKEL 2 No, what are they saying?
YOKEL 1 They do say that the richest man in the kingdom will die at midnight tonight.
YOKEL 2 Really?
YOKEL 1 Really.
YOKEL 2 How can they be sure?
YOKEL 1 They always are.
YOKEL 2 Ooo aarh.
YOKEL 1 The villagers.
YOKEL 2 Pardon?
YOKEL 1 Granted.
YOKEL 2 The richest man in the kingdom, you say?
YOKEL 1 That's right.
YOKEL 2 Will die tonight?
YOKEL 1 That's right.
YOKEL 2 At midnight?
YOKEL 1 That's right.
YOKEL 2 Well, it won't be me, that's for sure.
YOKEL 1 Me neither.

*Reflective - stroking chin.
Mistaking it for a question.
Puzzled.*

*YOKEL 1 and YOKEL 2
walk off together, chuckling.*

SCENE 2: The King's palace. The KING and QUEEN are seated on thrones. SERVANTS scurry to obey their every command.

*To SERVANT 1
Hurrying to do so.*

Obeying.

*SERVANT 1 looks puzzled.
Shrugs . Eats grape.
Running in.*

Relieved.

Spluttering

KING Bring me a grape!
SERVANT 1 Yes, your majesty.
KING Peel it for me!
SERVANT 1 Yes, your majesty.
KING Well, eat it for me.
SERVANT 1 Yes, your majesty.
SERVANT 2 Your majesty! Your majesty! Bad news!
KING What?! Bad news? The prince hasn't crashed the royal carriage, has he?
SERVANT 2 No, your majesty.
KING Oh, good.
SERVANT 2 It's worse than that.
KING Don't tell me - he wants to marry a commoner!
SERVANT 2 No, your majesty. Worse than that.
KING Worse?!

*The QUEEN faints.
SERVANTS hurry to attend her.
Stunned.*

*Offstage: "Call the king's advisers."
"Call the king's advisers."
The ADVISERS enter and
stand in a huddle together.
Dejected. To SERVANT 2*

*Altogether, in a huddle
Suddenly realising*

*The ADVISERS go into a
murmuring huddle as they discuss
the matter.*

*The KING hits ADVISER 1 on
head with sceptre.
The ADVISERS go into a
murmuring huddle as they discuss
the matter - again.*

Hesitantly.

*The QUEEN faints.
SERVANTS hurry to attend her.*

Not understanding in the least

*The QUEEN faints.
SERVANTS hurry to attend her.*

SERVANT 2 They do say, your majesty ... down in the village, your majesty ... that the richest man in the kingdom ... will die at midnight tonight.

KING The richest man ... in the kingdom ... midnight tonight ... ooh ... Call my advisers.

SERVANT 2 Call the king's advisers.

SERVANT 1 Call the king's advisers.

KING Tell them.

SERVANT 2 It has come to his majesty's attention - from the village - that the richest man in the kingdom will die at midnight tonight.

ADVISERS Oh dear ... terrible ... awful ... what a shame ... shocking

ADVISER 1 But, your majesty, that's you!

ADVISER 2 That's right!

ADVISER 3 What are you going to do about it?

KING Idiots! That's what I've called you here for.
You're my advisers. Advise me!

KING Well?

ADVISER 1 We think you should make a will.

KING Think again, numbskulls.

KING Well?

ADVISER 2 There is one idea, your majesty. If you were NOT the richest man in the kingdom then you wouldn't die at midnight tonight.

KING No ... but I AM!

ADVISER 3 Unless you were to give it away.

KING Give it away!??

ADVISER Yes, your majesty.

After all, would you rather be alive and poor - or dead.
KING DEAD! ... No, poor ... No, dead ... I'd rather be ALIVE ... and RICH!

ADVISER 2 And so you shall be, your majesty. When we said "give away" we didn't mean "give away" so much as ... "give away".

KING Pardon?

ADVISER 2 A royal pardon! Thank you, your majesty.

KING What are you on about?

ADVISER 2 Well, if your majesty were to give away his riches ... to "someone" ... then that "someone" would be the richest man in the kingdom ... and that "someone" would die at midnight tonight ...

KING With my money!

ADVISER 2 But, your majesty, he couldn't take it with him.
So, tomorrow morning, you could go and collect it from "someone" ... and ...

Realising.

KING I'd still be the richest man in the kingdom ... and still alive!
Brilliant!
ADVISER 2 Thank-you, your majesty.
KING What time is it?
ADVISER 3 Six o'clock, your majesty.
KING Well ... Don't just stand there. Give it all away!

*The QUEEN faints.
SERVANTS hurry to attend her.*

ADVISER 1 Who to, your majesty?
KING To this "someone" you keep going on about.
ADVISER 1 But which someone?
KING I don't know. Someone nobody will miss.
Someone like ... Old George.

*All exit, congratulating one
another.*

SCENE 3: The palace. Nearly midnight. The KING and QUEEN enter to sit on their thrones. The ADVISERS huddle nearby. A DOCTOR (white coat and stethoscope) is in constant attendance on the KING. The SERVANTS watch from a distance.

KING What time is it?
ADVISER 1 Five minutes to midnight, your majesty.
KING How am I?
DOCTOR Fine, fine, your majesty.
KING Has it all been seen to?
ADVISER 2 Yes, your majesty. Everything is under control.
KING What time is it?
ADVISER 1 Four minutes to midnight, your majesty.
KING How am I?
DOCTOR Fine, fine, your majesty.
KING You did give ALL of it away?
ADVISER 2 Yes, your majesty. Every last gold piece.
KING Do you think he suspected anything?
ADVISER 2 Who, your majesty?
KING Old George.
ADVISER 2 No, your majesty, not a thing.
KING What time is it?
ADVISER 1 Two minutes to midnight, your majesty.
KING How am I?
DOCTOR Fine, fine, your majesty.
KING He is definitely the richest man in the kingdom, isn't he?
ADVISER 2 Certainly, your majesty.
KING What time is it?
ADVISER 1 One minute to midnight, your majesty.
KING How am I?
DOCTOR Fine, fine, your majesty.
KING You are sure? Everything's alright, isn't it?
ADVISER 2 Certainly, your majesty.
KING Oooh. What time is it?

To DOCTOR. Worried.

Whispering.

To DOCTOR. Very worried

To DOCTOR. Panicking.

Weakly.

*A clock strikes BONG! BONG! etc. Everyone turns to look at the KING. The KING is horror-stricken.
At the twelfth BONG the QUEEN faints. SERVANTS attend.
As the KING realises he is alright, he resumes an air of bravado.
The SERVANTS applaud. THE ADVISERS mop their brows in relief.*

ADVISER I suggest, your majesty, that we all get a good night's rest.
KING A jolly good idea.

SCENE 4: Outside Old George's cottage. A cock crows to indicate morning. The KING and QUEEN arrive, attended by SERVANTS. The ADVISERS fuss behind. The KING, once more his usual commanding self, strides to the door of the cottage and knocks. There is no answer. The KING knocks again.

Gradually realising.

Opening the door & going inside.

A moment or two passes.

ADVISER 3 comes out and hastily confers with ADVISERS 1 and 2. They all go inside. After a moment or two they all come out again.

Going into the cottage to look for himself.

YOKEL 1 and YOKEL 2 come onstage and watch with interest. Coming out, dazed and unbelieving.

The QUEEN faints.

SERVANTS hurry to attend her.

Remember the accents!

Groaning.

Hopeful.

Excited.

Ecstatic.

Looking at each other knowingly.

Confidentially

KING He doesn't appear to be Oh!
ADVISER 3 Allow me, your majesty.

KING Well?
ADVISER 1 It's not there your majesty.
KING But it must be. You did deliver it?
ADVISER 2 Yes, your majesty.
KING This is the right cottage?
ADVISER 3 Yes, your majesty.

KING Stand aside.

KING It's not there ... no treasure ... no gold ... no silver ... no jewels ... just ... his body.

YOKEL 1 What you lost then?

KING My money. All my lovely treasure.

YOKEL 2 Was it in five big sacks?

KING Yes!

YOKEL 1 And was they tied up with red string?

KING Yes!

YOKEL 2 And was they full of gold and silver and jewels and things?

KING Yes!

YOKELS 1 & 2 Aaarh!

KING What do you mean, "Aaarh"?
Do you know where it is?

YOKEL 1 Yes, I've got it ... Well, a tiny bit of it.

YOKEL 2 And me ... well, a bit.

YOKEL 1 And Albert.

YOKEL 2 And Betty.

YOKEL 1 And Charlie.

YOKEL 2 And Davey.

YOKEL 1 And Ethel.

YOKEL 2 And Fred.

YOKEL 1 And Ginger.

YOKEL 2 And Harold.

KING Stop! Stop! What is going on?

YOKEL 1 Well, you see, last night, I was tucked up in my bed all warm and snug-like, when I hears this knock on the door and it's Old George.

YOKEL 2 That's right. He come to me, too.

YOKEL 1 And Albert.

YOKEL 2 And Betty.

YOKEL 1 And Charlie.

YOKEL 2 And Davey.

YOKEL 1 And Ethel.

Impatient.

YOKEL 2 And Fred.

KING Yes, yes. Get on with it.

YOKEL 1 Well, Old George comes inside and he tells me he's come into a bit of money rather sudden ... and he wants to share his good fortune. So will I be so good as to accept a bit of it?

YOKEL 2 That's right. That's what he said to me.

YOKEL 1 And Albert.

YOKEL 2 And Betty.

YOKEL 1 And Charlie.

YOKEL 2 And Davey.

KING Oh no! He's given it all away.

The QUEEN faints.

SERVANTS hurry to attend her.

*The KING begins to weep -
then realises.*

KING But ... wait a minute ... he couldn't. The richest man in the kingdom! The prophecy said "the richest man in the kingdom" would die at midnight. But, if he'd given all my money away - then he couldn't be.

YOKEL 1 Oh, I don't know. Old George always used to say to me - "I reckon I'm the richest man in the kingdom. I haven't got a lot," he would say, "but I've got a roof over my head, food for my belly, and I'm at peace with the Lord."

YOKEL 2 "I reckon I'm the richest man in the kingdom," he used to say. And do you know what...?

EVERYBODY What?

YOKEL 2 I reckon he was right!

Reflective.

The QUEEN faints.

*Nobody can be bothered with her.
Exit all.*

- END -