



THE AUDIENCE

BY PETER MORGAN



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

THE AUDIENCE
Copyright © 2015, Peter Morgan

All Rights Reserved

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that performance of THE AUDIENCE is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth), and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission for which must be secured from the Author's agent in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for THE AUDIENCE are controlled exclusively by DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., 440 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission of DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., and paying the requisite fee.

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to Independent Talent Group Limited, 40 Whitfield Street, London W1T 2RH, United Kingdom. Attn: Michael McCoy.

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce THE AUDIENCE is required to give credit to the Author(s) as sole and exclusive Author(s) of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears, including printed or digital materials for advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. Please see your production license for font size and typeface requirements.

Be advised that there may be additional credits required in all programs and promotional material. Such language will be listed under the "Additional Billing" section of production licenses. It is the licensee's responsibility to ensure any and all required billing is included in the requisite places, per the terms of the license.

SPECIAL NOTE ON SONGS AND RECORDINGS

For performances of copyrighted songs, arrangements or recordings mentioned in these Plays, the permission of the copyright owner(s) must be obtained. Other songs, arrangements or recordings may be substituted provided permission from the copyright owner(s) of such songs, arrangements or recordings is obtained; or songs, arrangements or recordings in the public domain may be substituted.

THE AUDIENCE was presented on Broadway by Matthew Byam Shaw, Robert Fox, and Andy Harries, at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre, on March 8, 2015. It was directed by Stephen Daldry; the lighting design was by Rick Fisher; the sound design was by Paul Arditti; and the composer was Paul Englishby. The cast was as follows:

QUEEN ELIZABETH II Helen Mirren
YOUNG ELIZABETH Sadie Sink, Elizabeth Teeter
EQUERRY Geoffrey Beevers
JOHN MAJOR Dylan Baker
WINSTON CHURCHILL Dakin Matthews
HAROLD WILSON Richard McCabe
BOBO MacDONALD..... Tracy Sallows
GORDON BROWN..... Rod McLachlan
ANTHONY EDEN..... Michael Elwyn
TONY BLAIR/DAVID CAMERON..... Rufus Wright
MARGARET THATCHER..... Judith Ivey
JAMES CALLAGHAN/BISHOP/CAMERA LOADER/
POLICEMAN/DETECTIVE..... Tony Ward
CECIL BEATON/BISHOP/DETECTIVE Anthony Cochrane
FOOTMAN Graydon Long, Jason Loughlin
PRIVATE SECRETARY/ARCHBISHOP..... Michael Rudko
QUEEN'S SECRETARY/
MISTRESS OF THE ROBES Henny Russell

CHARACTERS

QUEEN ELIZABETH II

YOUNG ELIZABETH

EQUERRY

JOHN MAJOR

WINSTON CHURCHILL

HAROLD WILSON

BOBO MacDONALD

GORDON BROWN

ANTHONY EDEN

TONY BLAIR

MARGARET THATCHER

DAVID CAMERON

JAMES CALLAGHAN

THE AUDIENCE

ACT ONE

A darkened stage. Bare. The Queen's equerry-in-waiting, a lieutenant-commander, LVO Royal Navy, walks on. Black military uniform, with braided gold cord on the right shoulder, red stripe on the side of the trousers. On his shoulders, small black epaulettes with a gold crown and the Sovereign's insignia as a fastener. One or two medals. He turns to face the audience ...

EQUERRY. Every week the Queen of the United Kingdom has a private audience with her Prime Minister. It is not an obligation. It is a courtesy extended by the Prime Minister to bring Her Majesty up to speed. The meeting takes place in the Private Audience Room, located on the first floor of Buckingham Palace. *(The equerry turns, indicating the darkened space ...)* A large, duck-egg-blue room. High ceilings, a fireplace, a Chippendale bureau. Four gilt-framed paintings, two by Canaletto, two by Gainsborough. At the centre of the room, two chairs made by François Hervé, acquired in 1826. Their original colour was burgundy, but Queen Mary had them re-upholstered in more optimistic yellow Dupioni silk. One drawback to the yellow is that it stains easily, and the chairs have needed several refreshments. According to household records, they were last re-upholstered in a yellow that almost matched the original half-way through the second term of Her Majesty's ninth Prime Minister, John Major. *(The equerry walks off. As he goes, we reveal the Audience Room, with two yellow chairs. Freshly upholstered. In one chair is the 69-year-old Queen Elizabeth II. Opposite her is John Roy Major, 52.)*

MAJOR. I only ever wanted to be ordinary. *(A silence. The Queen stares.)*

ELIZABETH. And in which way do you consider you've failed in that ambition?

MAJOR. What's going on in my political life at the moment is just so *extraordinary*. My government is tearing itself apart. I withdrew the whip from eight of my backbenchers in an attempt to restore party discipline, but it's achieved nothing. When they're not out there briefing against me morning and night, they seemed to be engaged in a never-ending game of political hara-kiri with toe-sucking scandals ... cash for questions, auto-erotic suicides. And now Margaret sniping at me all the time from the wings. Claiming I am betraying her legacy. I'm not. We're just all caught up in a transition that none of us yet fully understands. And the papers are being so *awful* ...

ELIZABETH. It's a dangerous business reading newspapers. Most of your predecessors claimed not to, and I can't help thinking that's wise.

MAJOR. I know. I just can't help myself. Can't walk past one of the things without picking it up, hoping for a lift. And then I get crushed when they're so ... *vile*. Most of my political life it was fine because I was generously overlooked. I was barely mentioned as Foreign Secretary, nor as Chancellor. Did you know eighteen months before I became Prime Minister, just two per cent of the country had even heard of me?

ELIZABETH. Beware the quiet man!

MAJOR. Beware the invisible man! When I walk into a room, heads fail to turn.

ELIZABETH. (*Sighs.*) How lovely ...

MAJOR. I remember how my heart sank when I was asked to take the Foreign Office. And when Margaret told me she wanted me to be the "centrepiece" of her reshuffle ... I almost ran away. To be thrust like that. Into the spotlight.

ELIZABETH. So why on earth did you stand for Prime Minister?

MAJOR. I did it reluctantly, I assure you. With a heavy heart. And never expected to win. And now with all these problems.

ELIZABETH. What problems, Mr. Major? We're not at war. The people aren't on the streets.

MAJOR. No, but ten per cent interest rates, the fall-out from Black Wednesday, an increasingly belligerent anti-European caucus; it's hardly a happy ship, either. My polls ratings are at a historic low.

ELIZABETH. There are summits and there are valleys. We've all been there.

MAJOR. Twenty-four per cent approval, ma'am?? You've never been anywhere close.

ELIZABETH. I beg to differ. And you should remember better than anyone. That day ... in December? Three years ago.

MAJOR. You were unwell that day.

ELIZABETH. It was unconscionable. What I said. How I behaved.

MAJOR. You had the flu.

ELIZABETH. I crossed the line. It was unforgivable.

MAJOR. You had a temperature ...

ELIZABETH. Cold.

MAJOR. It was flu. The equerry made it quite clear ...

ELIZABETH. *It was a cold!!*

MAJOR. Quite. And long forgotten now.

ELIZABETH. It will *never* be forgotten. Nor the help you gave me. It was a difficult lesson to learn, but we learned it. You proved yourself a loyal ally to m ... (*Wants to say "me," but checks herself...*) this family. Which is why I am keen to help you now. (*She thinks...*) Why don't you resign?

MAJOR. Don't think I hadn't considered it. Resign at lunchtime, at Lords by the afternoon. I'd be happy as Bunter in a bakery.

ELIZABETH. No, in order to stand *again*. For re-election. Throw down the gauntlet. To all those nasty rebels.

MAJOR. "Sack me or back me."

ELIZABETH. Something like that.

MAJOR. "Put up or shut up."

ELIZABETH. Even better. A real show of strength.

MAJOR. But what if they *did* back me? We'd only be back here again in a month.

ELIZABETH. Mr. Major, I detect you're a man who is uncomfortable in his own crisis — yet you were so good in mine. Which places you at a distinct disadvantage. Since, from where I've been sitting all these years, it seems crisis in your job is the natural setting. At some point *all* your predecessors have been hated or rejected. By their own party. By the electorate. But the good ones fight against it. Turn it around. To their own advantage.

MAJOR. Perhaps because they're more aggressive personality types. Better suited to be Prime Minister. Someone told me once, inhumanity is a primary requirement of the top job.

ELIZABETH. Oh, no. For the most part I've found my Prime Ministers to be *very* human. (*A beat.*) All *too* human. Complicated

souls. Having suffered early parental bereavement. Or illness. Or depression. Or bullying in the corridors of Eton ...

MAJOR. Ah. Not me. Rutlish Grammar.

ELIZABETH. Which part of the world is that?

MAJOR. Merton Park. (*From the Queen's blank look ...*) Near Morden? (*Another blank look.*) A suburb of South West London, ma'am. Near Mitcham? (*A beat.*)

ELIZABETH. Never been. Pity. (*A beat, then ...*) At least you *had* a formal education. I wasn't that lucky.

MAJOR. You were at home? With a tutor?

ELIZABETH. Yes.

MAJOR. I'm curious. Was that because you were ... female?

ELIZABETH. You're ahead of me, Prime Minister. I was banking on the idea that I still *am*. (*Major can't help smiling ...*)

MAJOR. I meant the home education.

ELIZABETH. You mean had my sister and I been boys, would we have been sent to boarding school? Probably.

MAJOR. So, you were victims of gender discrimination?

ELIZABETH. I suppose we were. Do you think I should sue? (*Major smiles ...*)

MAJOR. When I read about the home education — I didn't know whether to envy or pity you.

ELIZABETH. I suppose that depends on whether you have happy memories of your own time at school or not.

MAJOR. Not so happy, I'm afraid. You may know my father performed in a circus. As a trapeze artist.

ELIZABETH. Yes. How wonderful.

MAJOR. Wonderful?

ELIZABETH. Well, it's just so ... exotic.

MAJOR. Your father was King of England and Emperor of India. If I may say, *that's* exotic. (*The Queen smiles ...*) Regrettably, the other way round. As a consequence of my father's eccentric circumstances, my schooldays were marked somewhat by bullying and ridicule.

ELIZABETH. Oh, dear. How did you cope? You immersed yourself in your studies.

MAJOR. Cricket. It was what I was good at. Academic work and I didn't see eye to eye. I believe I have the dubious distinction of being the only Prime Minister to have ... (*Looks up.*) Will what I'm about to tell you stay between us?

ELIZABETH. Prime Minister, whatever you say in this room stays between us.

MAJOR. Of my ten O Levels, I passed only three. A miserable failure that must have been quite devastating to my parents. Through sheer idleness and disinterest I let them down. And when I went home with those *dreadful* results, you could see the hurt on their faces ... (*Becoming emotional.*) But there was no reproach. Ever. (*He relives a private trauma. The Queen, frozen, offers him a handkerchief.*)

ELIZABETH. Well, I passed no examinations at all. (*A beat.*) What fine hands the country is in. Now, we have only a few minutes left, we really must get to the business in hand. You returned from the G7 last week and we haven't even mentioned it, and you're due in Cannes next week for a Heads of European Government meeting and I want to know all about that ...

MAJOR. Well, starting with the G7, we received a very warm welcome from our Canadian hosts — since, if you remember, we'd taken their side over a recent fishing dispute ...

ELIZABETH. Which fish?

MAJOR. I believe the turbot, ma'am.

ELIZABETH. That's a flat fish, isn't it?

MAJOR. Yes, ma'am.

ELIZABETH. With eyes in the middle of its head?

MAJOR. Yes.

ELIZABETH. Like the halibut.

MAJOR. I believe it *is* a halibut.

ELIZABETH. Oh.

MAJOR. It's just marketed as Greenland turbot in America to prevent any confusion with the Pacific halibut.

ELIZABETH. (*Not seeing.*) I see.

MAJOR. However in Europe we call it Greenland halibut, not to confuse it with the *real* turbot.

ELIZABETH. It's like the Duke of Normandy also being called the Lord of Mann.

MAJOR. I dare say.

ELIZABETH. Or the Duke of Lancaster being called the Lord High Admiral of the Royal Navy.

MAJOR. I'll take your word for it. I'm afraid I don't know these people.

ELIZABETH. Actually you do. You've met them all. In fact you're sitting with them now. They're all me. And some of my other titles.

MAJOR. Oh.

ELIZABETH. Kotoku, the “White Heron,” Paramount Chief of Fiji. Me, too.

MAJOR. The real turbot.

ELIZABETH. Yes. Just with slightly more attractively positioned eyes. *(As they walk off, lights change, the stage is plunged into darkness. The equerry enters. He turns to face the audience ...)*

EQUERRY. Audiences between the Queen and Prime Minister take place every Tuesday evening, and this has been the case with each of Her Majesty’s PMs — with the exception of her tenth. *(While the equerry speaks, an august, elderly silhouette wearing a top hat and frock coat walks across the stage ...)* He suggested that the audience be moved to Wednesday evenings — to allow him time to better prepare for Prime Minister’s Questions. The Queen expressed “surprise” at this break with tradition, and was comforted when Mr. Blair finally left office in the hope that the audiences might move back to Tuesdays again, as they always had been right from the beginning ... *(The equerry exits, to be replaced by an august, elderly silhouette wearing top hat and frock coat ...)*

CHURCHILL. Your Majesty ... *(Winston Churchill removes his hat, white-faced, bows deeply in deference, with difficulty, wheezing conspicuously, clearly experiencing discomfort, then straightens ... The year is 1952 and sitting opposite him is the 25-year-old Queen ...)*

ELIZABETH. Please ... Prime Minister. *(Indicating seat. Elizabeth, as befits the protocol, is in mourning, and still wearing black. We are in the period of time after her father’s, George VI’s, death, before her coronation. When she speaks, we notice the voice is quieter. More uncertain. Thinner. Higher. That of a girl.)* I’ve ordered tea. Or would you prefer water? *(Churchill stares in horror, “Water?”)* Something stronger, perhaps?

CHURCHILL. Oh, dear. Did no one explain? The Sovereign *never* offers a Prime Minister refreshment. Nor a chair. The precedent set by your great-great-grandmother was to keep us standing, like Privy Councillors. To waste time is a grievous sin. If there’s one thing I have learned in fifty-two years of public service, it’s that there is no problem so complex nor crisis so grave that it cannot satisfactorily be resolved within twenty minutes. That also was certainly your dear father’s view. Headlines only. No chat. So — in respect to His late Majesty’s memory, shall we make a start?

ELIZABETH. Please. *(The Queen reaches for something ...)*

CHURCHILL. Second drawer. On the right.

ELIZABETH. What?

CHURCHILL. The notepad. Your papa always took notes as I spoke.

ELIZABETH. I wasn't looking for a notepad. I was going to get my box. (*The Queen bends down, picks up the red Sovereign's box ...*) I'm sure you can imagine, most of my time since my father's funeral has been taken up with our move to Buckingham Palace — but I have now had the chance to read the boxes. And I have the following questions. Can you give me a date for the end of rationing of sugar, butter, and meat? What more can you tell me about our development of nuclear weapons? And do you envisage a military engagement by U.N. forces against China — in support of their allies in Korea?

CHURCHILL. No, no, stop! Goodness. Your Majesty ... (*A patronising laugh.*) Did your father not explain how these sessions work?

ELIZABETH. Yes, of course. But this *is* my first.

CHURCHILL. It's quite simple. The Prime Minister comes to the palace every Tuesday evening and explains what of note has transpired that past week in Cabinet, Parliament, and Foreign Affairs. He then gives a brief indication of what is *going* to happen the following week. Throughout this the Sovereign *listens*, makes notes, maybe on the *rare* occasion asks a question, and unconditionally *supports*.

ELIZABETH. Even when I don't agree?

CHURCHILL. The Sovereign *always* agrees. Those are the rules. Then the Prime Minister goes. That is how it is, that is also how it reflects — in microcosm — how a constitutional monarchy works. The unimpeded flow of information from one institution to the next. There is no finer system in the world.

ELIZABETH. I can see why you think that. You get to do all the talking. I get to take notes. And *agree*.

CHURCHILL. It's true. The British Constitution at first sight is a little odd. That's why it works so well. It's like a great ancient city — that's grown and evolved with time — organic and mutant, full of cul-de-sacs and short-cuts, blind alleys, contradictions, and follies. No planners could have come up with it. And at the heart of it — wrapped in a knot of mysteries and inconsistencies, is the relationship between you and me, Crown and Government.

ELIZABETH. The mystery being how YOU got so much power and I, as Head of State, get none. Wasn't it Gladstone who compared the British Prime Minister to a dictator? He was right.

CHURCHILL. Yes, but remember this dictator is still a human being.

Ambitious. Grasping. Venal. That's how he got into office. And which ambitious, self-regarding dictator could fail to be overwhelmed by all this? (*Gestures at their surroundings.*) By *you*? To a man they will be rendered speechless. Weak-kneed. One by one your Prime Ministers will fall under your spell. In here. In this audience. In this room. Then they will be yours to guide, and steer. Perhaps even influence ...

ELIZABETH. Are you weak-kneed now, Mr. Churchill?

CHURCHILL. (*Smitten.*) Oh, ma'am. I am.

ELIZABETH. I meant literally. Would you like to sit?

CHURCHILL. (*Proud.*) Certainly not. I would not dream of it. Who knows where things might end?

ELIZABETH. They might actually end in your comfort. Please ... ignore my great-great-grandmother and sit. (*Churchill finally relents and gratefully sits.*) Let it be written into our unwritten constitution that from now on the audience will always be conducted this way. Now I have a question for you. My coronation. I've heard you wish to delay it until June next year. Why?

CHURCHILL. For your benefit entirely.

ELIZABETH. *My* benefit?

CHURCHILL. A long period between accession and coronation was of great value to your father —

ELIZABETH. He had five months. You're proposing I have *sixteen*.

CHURCHILL. There is never time enough. Especially now, with this dreadful business of televising it. A quite unconscionable vulgarisation ... (*Stretching.*) Cables will have to be laid, angles worked out ...

ELIZABETH. Mr. Churchill, I know I'm young and have led a sheltered life, but that does not make me a fool. The delay is for *your* benefit. Your party wants you to resign and make way for a ... younger man. Mr Eden. They think your clinging on to power has hurt the party and is now hurting the country. They even came to see my father hoping he'd talk you into stepping down — but his death robbed him of the opportunity. You know no one would bring up your resignation while you were actively engaged in planning the coronation. So by delaying my investiture, you are in fact clinging on to power. In which case I would suggest you are somewhat in *my* debt. So *if* I agree to the delay, perhaps you would consider returning the favour — quid pro quo — and supporting me on another matter. My husband. It is his fervent wish, and mine, that I and our children take his name. Mountbatten.

CHURCHILL. No, ma'am. You must not. It would be a grave mistake.

ELIZABETH. Why? For a wife to take her husband's name is the law of this country, is it not?

CHURCHILL. It is the custom, not the law. Mountbatten was the adoptive name your husband took when he became a British citizen. His real name, you'll not need reminding, was Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg of the Royal Houses of Denmark and Norway, and latterly of Greece. A convention of genealogists couldn't pinpoint that man's roots. Your grandfather, George V, already changed his name from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor to spare his subjects the embarrassment of appearing to be ruled by the very people we were at war with. And let's not forget Mountbatten *itself* is an anglicisation of Battenburg. (*Exasperated.*) Just how many foreigners can we *have* in our royal family?

ELIZABETH. Prime Minister, I fear you're not taking me seriously.

CHURCHILL. I am an old man. Many have questioned my relevance. Whether I still have something to offer in public life. The answer is I *have*. Which is to leave in place a Sovereign prepared for office. Equipped. Armed for her duty. Great things have happened to this country under the sceptres of its queens. And you should be no exception.

ELIZABETH. Yes, I am Queen. But I am also a woman. And wife. To a man whose pride and whose strength are in part what attracted me to him. I want to be in a successful marriage. I would argue that stability under this roof might even be in the national interest. Had you considered *that*?

CHURCHILL. Your husband knew what he was getting into.

ELIZABETH. He fell in love with me before he knew what he was getting into.

CHURCHILL. He was a citizen of no country. With no home of his own. England has given him both. He is fortunate, as are you. The duty which has befallen you both is the greatest honour on earth.

ELIZABETH. I might struggle, on occasion, with that honour.

CHURCHILL. Just never show that struggle, ma'am. It's not what your subjects want from you.

ELIZABETH. And is what my subjects want from me so important?

CHURCHILL. Yes. Even when we have no idea what that may be. (*Looks at his watch —*) Now we have overrun. My fault. Until next Tuesday. (*Gets to his feet, bows deeply, and goes ... The Queen is left*

alone. Suddenly feeling the full weight and burden of her destiny. Shaken by the conversation. A dresser comes on — and starts dressing the Queen — changing her outfit. Presently, a voice:

YOUNG ELIZABETH. I don't like this place. *(A little 11-year-old girl walks onstage.)*

ELIZABETH. I know you don't. *(The Young Elizabeth joins the Queen as she is being dressed by the window ...)*

YOUNG ELIZABETH. It's like being trapped in a museum! The rooms are cold. The corridors are dark. At night the wind moans in the chimneys. Like a thousand ghosts. *(A beat.)* I miss our old home.

ELIZABETH. I know you do.

YOUNG ELIZABETH. We had neighbours then. This place has no neighbours. Just lots of people scurrying about doing funny jobs. *(Thinks.)* Like the Mistress of the Robes. The Yeoman of the Cellars.

ELIZABETH. The Keeper of the Privy Purse.

YOUNG ELIZABETH. The Fendersmith. The Vermin Catcher!

ELIZABETH. Ah, but you like him.

YOUNG ELIZABETH. It's true. At least he smiles. Probably because there are so very many mice for him to kill.

ELIZABETH. And you like the lake in the garden?

YOUNG ELIZABETH. I do.

ELIZABETH. And the summer house?

YOUNG ELIZABETH. I do.

ELIZABETH. And the rolly-down hill at the end?

YOUNG ELIZABETH. Yes, from which you can see the tops of the automobiles tearing down Buckingham Palace Road ... *(A silence.)* I also like this particular window. It has the best aspect.

ELIZABETH. *(To herself.)* There's a word I'd forgotten.

YOUNG ELIZABETH. The people outside all seem so busy. I can't help wondering what they are doing, where they're going, what they're all thinking of. *(They stare for a while — then Young Elizabeth sees something, and pushes her older self away ...)* Careful! Get back!

ELIZABETH. What?

YOUNG ELIZABETH. One of them was looking up. *(Young Elizabeth leans round the corner ...)* I don't want them to see me.

ELIZABETH. Why not? Everyone knows you live here. They've seen you on the balcony. With Mummy and Papa.

YOUNG ELIZABETH. But that's me as ... the other person. This is me as ... me. *(The dresser finishes her work, then exits. The Queen*

has become an older woman. Behind them, the door opens, and an equerry appears.)

EQUERRY. Ma'am, the Prime Minister. Mr Wilson. *(The Queen lets the curtain drop, turns, and walks back into to find the silhouette of a squat man in his late 40s in the doorway. It's Harold Wilson. He wears a Polaroid camera around his neck ...)*

WILSON. I suppose I should kick things off with an apology.

ELIZABETH. Whatever for?

WILSON. Winning. Labour has just won the general election — by four seats. It's 20th October, 1964. I'm aware of your affection for my predecessor. Doubtless you would have preferred him to continue in office, but the country said otherwise ...

ELIZABETH. It is my duty *not* to have preferences ...

WILSON. We all do, though, don't we? We can't help it. It's human nature. And I can see the attraction of someone like "Posh Alec."

ELIZABETH. The Earl of Home.

WILSON. Someone you can chat with about the racing. Someone well-bred. High-born. Who knows how to hold his cutlery. As opposed to a ruffian like me.

ELIZABETH. Hardly.

WILSON. Still, I know a look when I see one, and when I came to the palace to clock on — with Mary and the boys — don't think I didn't notice the looks on your courtiers' faces.

ELIZABETH. Did you see a look on *my* face?

WILSON. No ...

ELIZABETH. Well, then. It's just the wives and children are not generally invited to the kissing of hands.

WILSON. Why? Did they get in the way?

ELIZABETH. No.

WILSON. Did they make a mess? Or an unwelcome noise?

ELIZABETH. Of course not.

WILSON. Well what's the problem, then? *(Indicates, turning 360.)*
It's not like there was a lack of space.

ELIZABETH. The kissing of hands is a sober ritual, full of meaning and symbolism — where the Prime Minister takes the official oath, receives seals of office, and kisses hands in a symbol of fealty and loyalty, before being asked to form a government in his Sovereign's name ...

WILSON. It's also a jolly good day out if you happen to come from Huddersfield and your idea of a posh building is the public library.

ELIZABETH. I'm just saying it's not the custom.

WILSON. "Not done." "Not acceptable." "Don't bring your children." "Don't bring your wife." "DO wear top hat and tails." (*A beat.*) I don't even *own* a top hat and tails.

ELIZABETH. Whatever did you get married in?

WILSON. A church. (*Stops, apologises ...*) Forgive my impertinence, ma'am. I'm a simple man, intimidated by my surroundings. (*Hesitates ...*) My nerves are also an indication of the hopelessness of the situation.

ELIZABETH. Which situation?

WILSON. The one I find myself in. Four seats! Whatever am I to do with a majority like that?

ELIZABETH. The danger of winning a protest vote is — you tend to inherit the mess which people have protested against.

WILSON. And what a mess those Conservatives left us. What a diseased and poisoned appendix of a small and unrepresentative section of society. And what havoc they wreaked. Soaring land and house prices. Race riots. Sex scandals. Large-scale unemployment. Rejection from the EEC and an annual trade deficit of £800 million.

ELIZABETH. Yes, it's an unenviable legacy. What will you do about the balance of payments? Will you devalue?

WILSON. No, ma'am. A Labour government devalued the pound once before with little success, and my party cannot risk being seen as the "Party of Devaluation." (*A beat.*) It is also a matter of national pride. This is still a great country, and the pound is a powerful symbol.

ELIZABETH. Never underestimate the value of a symbol.

WILSON. Especially one with one's face printed on it. (*A beat.*) Can't be an easy one to get used to.

ELIZABETH. What's that?

WILSON. Having one's face on every coin and banknote.

ELIZABETH. No. I remember seeing my father's face on a shilling for the first time. And thinking how odd it looked. At the same time realising I would probably one day have to look at my own face. (*Quiet.*) But one never knows what destiny has in store for one. Did you ever imagine you'd be Prime Minister?

WILSON. Goodness, no. There's a photograph of me taken outside Downing Street, aged eight, which some people interpreted as such. But no, there was never a "scheme" or "plan." No, half the children in Milnsbridge — where I grew up — never had any boots or shoes

FOR LICENSING INFORMATION AND
TO PURCHASE ACTING EDITIONS, PLEASE VISIT

WWW.DRAMATISTS.COM

