



THE AUDIENCE

BY PETER MORGAN



DRAMATISTS
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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.

THE AUDIENCE

by Peter Morgan

9M, 4W (doubling)

For sixty years, Queen Elizabeth II has met with each of her twelve Prime Ministers in a private weekly audience. The discussions are utterly secret, even to the royal and ministerial spouses. Peter Morgan imagines these meetings over the decades of the Queen's remarkable reign, through Prime Ministers from Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher to the 2015 incumbent David Cameron. **THE AUDIENCE** is a glimpse into the woman behind the crown, and the moments that have shaped the modern monarchy.

"What a great if faintly guilty pleasure this play proves. ... In this marvellous piece, [Morgan] penetrates at least some of [the Queen's] mystery, with compassion, grace, affection and humour."

—**The Telegraph (UK)**

"The surprise element in Peter Morgan's highly entertaining play ... is its imaginative range, lack of sentimentality and incisive intelligence."

—**WhatsOnStage.com**

"Hugely enjoyable and cumulatively very affecting."

—**The Independent (UK)**

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