

CHAPTER 1

A new government

It was the May 1, 1997. Britain's election was over and its people had chosen a new Prime Minister. His name was Tony Blair – the youngest Prime Minister of the century. Mr Blair promised to make the country more modern and the people agreed with his views. Now he and his wife, Cherie, were on their way to Buckingham Palace to see the Queen. She would ask Mr Blair to form a government.



As their car drove through the main gates, Tony Blair turned to his wife and said, 'It's strange, but I'm feeling quite nervous.'

'I don't know why,' said Cherie. 'You've met her quite a few times already.'

'Yes, but I've never been alone with her before.'

'You'll be all right. Don't forget that the whole country has just voted for you as their Prime Minister. They didn't

vote for the Queen.'

'Yes, but she's still ... you know, ... the Queen.'



The Queen's Private Secretary, Robin Janvrin, was looking out of the window of the Queen's meeting room on the first floor of Buckingham Palace.

'The Prime Minister and his wife are arriving now, Ma'am*,' he said.

'Mr Blair is not the Prime Minister yet, Robin. Remember, I have to ask him first.'

'Of course, Ma'am.'

The Queen had met Blair before but she didn't really know him. She wondered about his personality. 'I don't know what to think of him,' she said. 'What's your opinion, Robin?'

'He's difficult to understand, Ma'am,' Janvrin replied. 'His family and his education is quite traditional. However, his wife is certainly not a fan of the Royal Family. And Mr Blair has promised to make Britain more modern.'

'Oh dear. Is he going to try and make us more modern, too?'

'It's possible, Ma'am. I was told that in Downing Street now, they address people by their first names.'

'You mean people call him "Tony"?''

'Yes, Ma'am.'

'Oh dear! I hope he doesn't try to do that here. Did we send him a protocol list?'



* 'Ma'am' and 'Your Majesty' are polite ways to address the Queen.

At the main door of the palace, one of the Queen's servants met Mr and Mrs Blair and led them upstairs. On the way, he was telling them the rules of how to act when they were with the Queen. 'When I knock at the door, we enter. We don't wait for her to call us in. And remember, you must never show your back to Her Majesty.'

'Right,' said Blair. He looked at Cherie, who tried not to laugh.

The servant offered Cherie Blair a seat in the hall. She sat down and waited. The man knocked at the door, then opened it and stepped to one side as Blair entered the room.

'It's lovely to meet you again, Mr Blair,' the Queen said, in welcome. 'And well done. Your children must be very proud of you. You've got three children, haven't you?'

'Yes, Your Majesty.'

'That's wonderful. Please, do sit down.'

'Thank you, Ma'am.'

'My job as Queen is to advise and guide you. Also, I will let your government know if I see any problems ahead. I will do this during our weekly meetings.'

'Your opinion will always be very valuable to me, Ma'am.'

'Thank you, Mr Blair. And now, I think we have some business to complete.'

Tony Blair didn't know what she meant. Then he suddenly realised and went down on his knees. He spoke nervously.

'Yes, Ma'am. Er Your Majesty,' he began. 'The people of Britain have chosen me as their new Prime Minister. So I would like to ask for your agreement to form a ...'

The Queen shook her head and smiled. 'No, no, Mr Blair. It is me who asks you the question.'

'Oh ... er, yes, of course Your Majesty.'

'As your Queen, I invite you to become Prime Minister and to form a government in my name.'

Blair looked at the Queen. 'Now what do I do?' he thought. He was feeling more and more nervous. After waiting for a few seconds, the Queen continued softly, 'If you agree, Mr Blair, it is normal to say *yes*.'

'Oh, then 'yes', Your Majesty.'



Their business was over. The Queen called her servant. Seconds later, he brought Cherie Blair into the room.

'Mrs Blair,' said the Queen, shaking Cherie's hand. 'It's very nice to see you again. You must be very proud. And very tired, too, I think. You probably feel like a holiday. Are you going anywhere this summer?'

'France,' said Cherie Blair. She didn't address the Queen correctly.

The Queen noticed. Blair noticed, too, and said quickly,

‘Are you going to Balmoral, Ma’am?’

The Queen smiled. ‘Yes. It’s in a wonderful part of Scotland. There, you can forget the world and all its problems.’

At that moment, Janvrin came into the room. He went up to the Queen and whispered something in her ear. The Queen looked serious. When Janvrin had left the room, she turned to Mr and Mrs Blair and said, ‘I’m sorry, but I’m afraid I’ll have to end our meeting now.’



‘What do you think Janvrin told the Queen?’ Blair asked Cherie as they walked back downstairs. ‘She looked rather upset.’

Cherie gave a short laugh. ‘Something to do with Princess Diana, I expect.’