Audition Extract **10**. CHURCHILL & COSMO LANG

CHURCHILL (*toasts from a hip flask*) To our new King.

COSMO LANG Let's sincerely hope.

(*They look at each other, silent.)*

COSMO LANG Winston, do you read the newspapers?

CHURCHILL Only the vulgar ones.

COSMO LANG They say he is dim.

CHURCHILL Runs in the family.

COSMO LANG They say he has epilepsy.

CHURCHILL Maliciously untrue.

COSMO LANG Fragile, prone to illness . . .

CHURCHILL Some correctness in that.

COSMO LANG They predict he'll be unable to complete the full Coronation ceremony,

CHURCHILL You prepose a private initiation?

COSMO LANG My idea exactly!

CHURCHILL I rather thought it might be. Yet what we really need is a pageant of pomp and prosperity to impress the world.

COSMO LANG What we need, and what we'll get may be two rather different things. You heard his pathetic attempt at the Accession Council.

CHURCHILL So you'd plonk a tinsel crown on his head and send him off to a remote country estate? As they did with his brother Johnny? Who then will spiritually lead this great nation into battle? Who will address the far-flung corners of the Empire, rallying and to our defence? Your good self? Is that what you have in mind?

COSMO LANG And why not? You clearly feel qualified for leadership, Winston; so do I. The church has provided guidance before. From the time of Augustine.

CHURCHILL You refer to Sigeric The Serious?

COSMO LANG I'm referring to the likes of Saint Thomas á Beckett.

CHURCHILL He was murdered. Archbishop Simon Sudbury was beheaded during the Peasants Revolt. You've a lot to look forward to.

COSMO LANG Mock, Winston, mock . . . if you find the notion of a nation guided by moral precepts and shepherded by a churchman amusing.

CHURCHILL Cosmo, you may have been elected by God, but he only has one vote.

COSMO LANG Whereas the King is not elected at all.

CHURCHILL Whereas a Prime Minister is.

COSMO LANG That includes the Chancellor of Germany, he too was elected. What I'm suggesting is instead of being led by an unfortunate accident of birth, or a lurid politico acclaimed by the unwashed, what if we were guided by a man of God?

CHURCHILL And you're just the man?

COSMO LANG (*a glimpse of his fervent dream*) I do feel it! With our nation in peril, it is my calling. (*Beat.*) Would that be such a calamity?

CHURCHILL Best ask our new King.