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Yes, Prime Minister

A comedy

Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn

Samuel French — London
www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk



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YES, PRIME MINISTER

A version of this play was first presented on 13 May 2010 at Chichester Festival Theatre with the following cast:

Sir Humphrey Appleby	Henry Goodman
Bernard Woolley	Jonathan Slinger
Jim Hacker	David Haig
Claire Sutton	Emily Joyce
Kumranistan Ambassador	Sam Dastor
Jeremy Burnham	William Chubb
Simon Chester	Tim Wallers

Directed by Jonathan Lynn
Designed by Simon Higlett
Lighting designed by Tim Mitchell
Casting Director: Gabrielle Dawes

Subsequently transferred to the Gielgud Theatre, London on 17 September 2010 with the same cast.

This later version of the play was presented at the Trafalgar Studios, London, on 6 June 2012 with the following cast:

Sir Humphrey Appleby	Michael Simkins
Bernard Woolley	Clive Hayward
Jim Hacker	Robert Daws
Claire Sutton	Emily Bruni
Kumranistan Ambassador	Sam Dastor
Jeremy Burnham	Tony Boncza
Simon Chester	Jim Barclay

Directed by Jonathan Lynn
Designed by Simon Higlett
Lighting designed by Tim Mitchell
Casting Director: Jonathan Russell

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(See also page ii)

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CHARACTERS

Sir Humphrey Appleby, Cabinet Secretary
Bernard Woolley, Principal Private Secretary
to the Prime Minister

Jim Hacker, Prime Minister

Claire Sutton, Special Policy Adviser

Kumranistan Ambassador

Jeremy Burnham, Director-General of the BBC

Simon Chester, BBC presenter

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in the Prime Minister's study at Chequers, an English Tudor country mansion.

ACT I

SCENE 1 Autumn, late afternoon on a Friday

SCENE 2 The same day, after dinner

ACT II

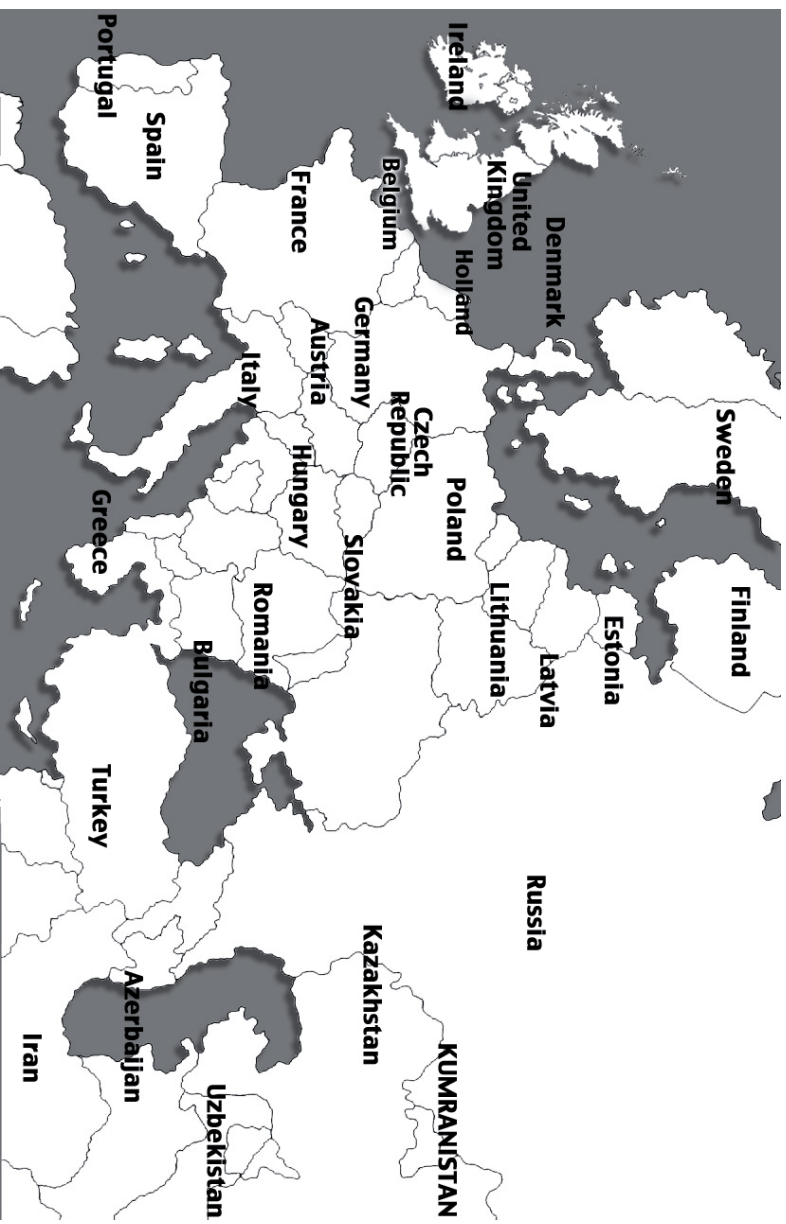
SCENE 1 The action is continuous

SCENE 2 The following Sunday, morning

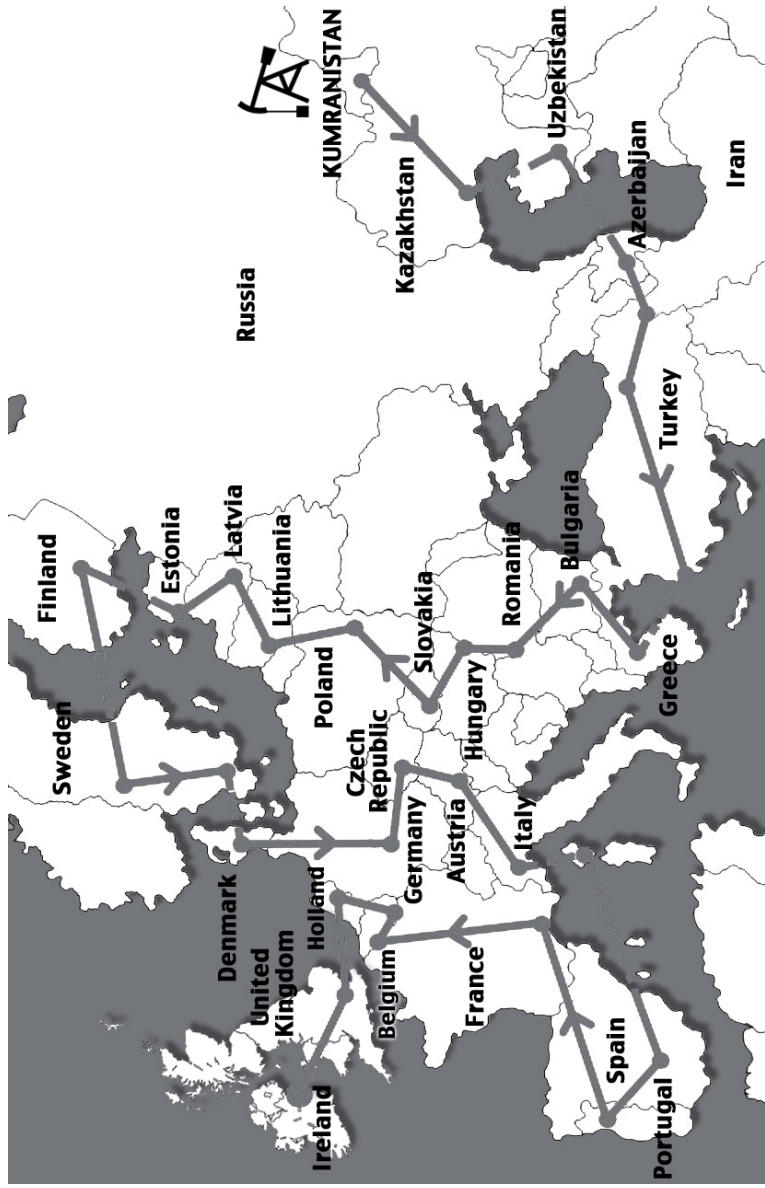


Set photographs from the Chichester Festival Theatre production of *Yes, Prime Minister* © Manuel Harlan





The first of the two pipeline map slides used by Bernard in Act I, Scene 1 (p.7). To download the image, visit the *Yes Prime Minister* page on www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk



The second of the two pipeline map slides used by Bernard in Act I, Scene 1 (p.8). To download the image, visit the *Yes Prime Minister* page on www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk

ACT I

SCENE 1

The Prime Minister's study at Chequers. Autumn, late afternoon on a Friday

The study is a comfortably furnished, panelled room at Chequers, an Elizabethan country mansion. It has a desk with a telephone and red binder on it, a chair, a seating area with a TV which is on and a remote, a coffee table, a side table, a globe, main double doors (stage centre, to the right), a smaller door (upstage left) and large windows looking out into the garden. Five red boxes containing files are stacked on top of each other on a chair or table

Sir Humphrey Appleby and Bernard Woolley are waiting. Humphrey is standing, Bernard is sitting, reading the "Evening Standard"

TV Newsreader And the main headline again: there is still no sign of agreement at the Lancaster House conference. The Prime Minister has denied that the European Union is sailing on the Titanic. And now, weather. Severe thunderstorms are forecast for London and the Home Counties ...

Using the remote, Humphrey switches off the TV. Bernard puts down the "Evening Standard"

Bernard It's awful, isn't it?

Humphrey What's awful, Bernard?

Bernard Well, all these jobs going. Repossessions. Fear of inflation.

Humphrey Oh yes. Terrible.

Bernard You don't sound terribly worried, Sir Humphrey.

Humphrey Bernard, I am not being sacked, repossessed or inflated. Neither are you.

Bernard Nor's the Prime Minister. But he's worried stiff.

Humphrey So he should be.

Bernard You don't sympathize with him?

Humphrey That's the deal. That's how Prime Ministers' careers go. They get to be on the front page every day for years, which they love. They travel the long path from euphoric triumph to ignominious

failure and then make way for the next saviour of the nation. It's called democracy.

Bernard It beats me why anyone would want to be Prime Minister.

Humphrey It's the only top job in the country that requires no previous experience. No training, no qualifications and limited intelligence.

Bernard Sir Humphrey ... You do believe in democracy, don't you?

Humphrey Do I, Bernard? Actually — no, not as most people understand it. Democracy should not be about executing the will of the people. It should be the process whereby we secure the consent of the people to the policies of those qualified to decide on their behalf.

Bernard Like who?

Humphrey Like us, Bernard!

Bernard I believe in democracy, Sir Humphrey.

Humphrey It does you credit. And if all the voters were as informed and intelligent as — say — me, or even you, it could possibly work. But that's hardly realistic.

Bernard Well, obviously we have to stop the government making stupid mistakes. If I did everything the Prime Minister told me to do, I'd be fired within a week, and rightly so. But I *am* there to help him.

Humphrey Bernard, we have a leadership crisis in this country. If the government can't or won't exercise it, it falls to us, whether we want it or not.

Bernard I know. Power abhors a vacuum.

Humphrey And we are currently led by one. It's even worse because he has no overall majority.

Bernard A hung parliament is a bad thing?

Humphrey Yes Bernard, hanging's too good for them.

Bernard At least the Coalition agreement that they came up with seems reasonable.

Humphrey Of course it is, Bernard, I wrote it for them. I managed to draft the coalition agreement so that we, in effect, are the elected government: if the government wants to do something silly we can make sure that their coalition partners stop them. And we *should* exercise power because we have nothing to gain or lose personally: we have respectable salaries, honours, an office and a chauffeur —

Bernard I haven't got a chauffeur ...

Humphrey You will, Bernard, when you grow up. We end up with an index-linked pension, a bank directorship, a couple of nicely remunerated quangos and a cottage in the Dordogne. So we can be entirely even-handed in our judgements and make them in the public interest.

Bernard Well, things may not seem so bad soon, when we tell the Prime Minister about Kumranistan. (*He taps the binder on the coffee table*) European Central Bank to the rescue.

Humphrey Bernard! Do not mention the ECB to the Prime Minister.

During the next four speeches, Humphrey takes the file from Bernard and places it in a red box. Bernard puts other files on top, closes the box, and methodically piles the other four boxes on top of it

Bernard No, Sir Humphrey.

Humphrey And, whatever happens, don't let him know that the plan is dependent on joining the euro.

Bernard Well, it says so in the ECB proposal but not until page sixty-seven. He never gets beyond page three of anything. Then he jumps to the last paragraph.

Humphrey I hope you concealed the report properly.

Bernard Bottom of the fifth box. Inside a Vehicle Licensing Centre folder, like you told me. He'll never find it.

Humphrey It had better work. You know his views on Europe.

Bernard Yes, he's afraid that Brussels will take away most of his powers.

Humphrey They already have. And so they should.

Bernard Can't he stand up to them? Or would that be too controversial?

Humphrey It would be worse than controversial. It would be courageous.

Bernard That's worse?

Humphrey Oh yes. Being controversial loses you votes, being courageous can lose you the election. All we need him to do is preside at tonight's dinner, pretend he's read the Kumranistan plan, and leave the rest to us.

Jim Hacker enters right with a briefcase, in a hurry

He goes straight to his desk. So does Bernard, to help him unload his briefcase

Jim Sorry I'm late, it's been a terrible day.

Humphrey Any particular reason?

Jim You've read about the Cabinet split?

Humphrey Yes.

Jim You've seen what's happened to the Footsie?

Humphrey Yes.

Jim And the pound?

Humphrey Yes.

Jim And the inflation forecast?

Humphrey Yes.

Jim The dreadful unemployment figures?

Humphrey Yes.

Jim *So how many particular reasons do you want?*

Humphrey Well —

Jim And now this Lancaster House conference is turning into a catastrophe.

Humphrey But it was your idea to convene it, Prime Minister.

Jim Humphrey, if you become President of Europe in the middle of the biggest financial crisis for eighty years —

Bernard Um — with respect, Prime Minister, there is no such title as President of Europe.

Jim You're so pedantic, Bernard, what's my official title then, President of the European Council?

Humphrey No Prime Minister, the Presidency of the European Council has gone to the Belgian Prime Minister.

Jim Who is completely unknown!

Humphrey (*with contempt*) Well, obviously! He's Belgian!

Jim And not elected. Appointed, in secret! 'Course, you wouldn't have a problem with that, would you Humphrey?

Humphrey You do me an injustice. I am all in favour of elections provided the right people do the voting.

Jim I can't understand it, I'm sure that I'm President of the Council. I was in the Chair.

Bernard Well it is a bit confusing, Prime Minister. You see we, the British, have the Presidency of the Council of the European Union which is held for six months by each country, not by individual leaders and not by you personally. The European Council and the Council of the European Union are not the same thing.

Jim So which of them really runs Europe?

Bernard Oh, neither!

Jim So who does?

Humphrey The President of the European Commission. But what it all boils down to for you, Prime Minister, is the difference between being head of an empire of five hundred million people and chairing the Council of Ministers for six months.

Jim Humphrey, we were talking about why I convened the conference on this dreadful recession. I had to do something.

Humphrey And the conference was something. So you did it! Well done.

Jim Exactly. But now it's falling apart, which might just about finish me.

Humphrey It may not be falling apart, Prime Minister.

Jim Haven't you been reading the conference reports?

Humphrey I have. Have you?

Jim The spadework wasn't done properly. The Foreign Office and the Treasury let me down badly. The Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor are probably plotting to get rid of me already.

Humphrey That's why I didn't suggest inviting them this weekend.

Jim Everyone knows that you have to agree the final bulletin before the conference begins. But instead of having everything nailed down before they all convened they left it to chance. Useless!

Bernard "*Forsan miseros meliora sequentur.*"

Jim What?

Bernard "For those in misery, perhaps better things will follow."

Humphrey (*with a superior chuckle*) Ah yes, well said, Bernard.

Bernard I didn't actually say that. That was Virgil.

Humphrey I know that, Bernard.

Bernard At least I did say it, just now, but not originally.

Humphrey Thank you, Bernard, we get the point.

Jim It was completely predictable: the Krauts don't want a stimulus plan, they're terrified of runaway inflation because that's what destroyed the Weimar Republic and brought them Hitler. The Wops and the Dagoes are up to their armpits in debt already. The Frogs only want it if France gets the benefits —

Bernard (*interrupting*) Prime Minister, I really think you should stop using these pejorative epithets to describe our allies, they might slip out in public sometime.

Jim Quire right, Bernard. Thank you. And the Micks and the Polacks aren't getting the subsidies they were promised, which they regard as a betrayal. So it's time for me to take a hands-on approach and give some leadership.

Humphrey Good.

Jim So — tell me what I should do.

Humphrey That's just the kind of leadership we need.

Jim Thank you, Humphrey.

Humphrey And we have good news for you, Prime Minister ...

Bernard Late last night we had a breakthrough at Lancaster House. A new player has appeared on the scene.

Jim (*excited*) The Americans? Are they coming after all?

Humphrey No, their position is immutable. They won't come to the conference because you wouldn't let them chair it.

Jim I can't let them chair a European conference, Humphrey, look at the map! (*He pours himself a Scotch*)

Humphrey It could become an intercontinental conference, if that would save the whole European financial system from melting down again.

Jim Don't be silly, Humphrey, I'd lose face.

Humphrey Oh yes, of course. Silly of me.

Bernard Prime Minister, Kumranistan has joined us.

Jim Has it? Good. (*A beat*) Have I heard of them?

Humphrey They have oil. Massive new reserves have been found there. They're offering a possible ten trillion dollar loan to Europe, secured against future purchases.

Jim But — that could solve everything.

Humphrey Yes.

Jim Save the conference!

Bernard Yes.

Jim Save Europe, in fact!

Humphrey } (*together*) Yes.

Bernard }

Jim (*seeing the headlines*) "Triumph for the Prime Minister!" "Victory for the President of Europe!"

Humphrey Prime Minister, you're *not* the —

Jim (*firmly*) Victory for the *President of Europe*, Humphrey.

Bernard The Kumranistan deal may solve your problems.

Jim Great. Where do I sign?

Humphrey Well. We're not quite there yet. They do want something in exchange.

Bernard You know where Kumranistan is?

Jim Yes. (*A beat*) Well, sort of. You know, over there.

They stare at him

East. Of Suez.

Bernard It lies in Turkestan, north of Uzbekistan, Kazakstan and Afghanistan. (*He goes to the globe*) Here, in fact.

Jim As I said, exactly.

Humphrey They had been planning to take their oil to Europe through the Soviet pipeline.

Jim They're not Soviets any more, Humphrey. They're Russians. They haven't been Soviets for twenty years.

Humphrey They still are in spirit, and always will be.

Bernard But the um Russians want a pretty huge payment ...

Humphrey Which Kumranistan doesn't want to pay, especially since the Soviets will have their hands on the tap.

Bernard So, with a little prompting from us, Kumranistan came up with plan B: a pipeline through Turkey, Greece and southern Europe, avoiding Russia altogether.

Humphrey What they need is European agreement. And that's what they're prepared to lend us ten trillion dollars for.

Jim Why?

Humphrey They want a guarantee of future oil purchases by everyone in the EU.

Jim (*after a beat*) I don't get it.

Humphrey It's *awfully* simple, Prime Minister. Kumranistan will lend Europe the money to buy Kumranistan's oil.

Jim And Europe borrows another ten trillion? More debt!

Humphrey It's not a problem, it doesn't have to be repaid for years. We get the money now, interest free, and we repay it in the future when we buy the oil that we'll need anyway.

Jim So how do they make their money?

Humphrey Ah — well. We'll pay a premium on the oil —

Jim Aha! I knew there was a catch —

Humphrey But not for many years to come. When there'll be a different government.

Jim Oh, all right then. Are all the Europeans on board?

Humphrey They are. And the problems are what we've been negotiating, as you will have seen in your red boxes.

Jim stares blankly at the five red boxes

Jim Yes. Um — remind me.

Humphrey Well, as you'll doubtless remember, the Turks refused to cooperate unless they were admitted to the European Union. I see their point. I've always had a soft spot for Johnny Turk.

Jim Johnny Turk? (*He sniggers*) You're on first name terms then?

Humphrey (*chuckling mirthlessly*) Very droll, Prime Minister. Turkey is an important ally, the only Muslim country with a secular democracy. We need —

Jim (*interrupting*) Johnny Turk, yes.

Bernard Germany, France and Italy were against the plan on principle.

Jim What changed their minds?

Humphrey A ten trillion dollar loan.

Bernard Actually, that surprised me, Sir Humphrey. Surely, if a principle was involved ...?

Humphrey I think you'll find ten trillion dollars is a bit above the going rate for principles in the EU, Bernard.

Jim What *was* the principle?

Humphrey They don't like Muslims.

Jim Ah.

Bernard Anyway, everything is agreed. Everyone gets a share in the construction.

Using a remote, Bernard lowers an electrically operated screen. Then he brings up the first of two slides, a map of Europe and the Near East

Here's the route.

He brings up a second slide of the first map but with a superimposed absurd zig-zag pipeline route through Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, Italy, Corsica, Spain, Portugal, France, Belgium, Holland, United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland

Jim That looks pretty straightforward. We're saved! But why didn't I know about all this?

Humphrey It's top secret.

Jim Good God, Humphrey, I'm the Prime Minister!

Humphrey (*soothingly*) I know, Prime Minister, and what an excellent Prime Minister you are! But it had to be kept under wraps. If it had leaked this week, money markets would have gone mad ...

Jim I see. Well ... is that everything I need to know?

Bernard There is one other thing.

Humphrey (*warning*) Bernard ...

Jim gives Humphrey an inquiring look

Bernard A power group in Kumranistan still wants the Russian route.

Humphrey Ah. (*He relaxes*) Yes, Bernard's right, they don't want to upset the Soviets. It's understandable, they share a border. But the Kumranistani Foreign Secretary has come over here to offer the deal to us if we want it.

Jim Invite him to dinner! Tonight!

Bernard I did, Prime Minister.

Humphrey (*patiently spelling it out*) That's why we're here.

Jim And he can do the deal? Now?

Humphrey He has the authority. But he needs careful handling, they're very sensitive about respect.

Jim You get an awful lot of respect for ten trillion dollars. He can have all mine, for a start.

Humphrey Excellent, Prime Minister.

Humphrey exits

Bernard is following

Jim Bernard.

Bernard (*turning*) Yes, Prime Minister?

Jim There's something you're not happy about. What is it?

Bernard Oh. Um ... um ... I'm not sure I can ...

Jim Spit it out, Bernard.

Bernard Um — "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*"

Jim What?

Bernard "I fear the Greeks, especially when they bring gifts." Remember the Trojan Horse, Prime Minister.

Bernard exits

Jim (*puzzled*) The Greeks can't afford gifts. (*He gets out his Blackberry and dials*) Claire? You at Chequers yet? ... Come to my study please ... Now.

Jim rings off, hurries to the pile of red boxes and pulls the bottom box out from beneath the top four. He opens it and starts looking through all the files

Claire knocks on the door

Come in.

Claire enters. She is an intelligent, attractive university lecturer, now serving as Head of the Policy Unit at Ten Downing Street

Jim Ah. Claire.

Claire What's the agenda for the weekend?

Jim I'm not sure. Dealing with the Europeans is like herding cats. Being President of Europe isn't enough. Europe is an empire and it needs an emperor.

Claire (*amused*) Meaning you?

Jim (*with modesty*) Well, of course, it's not for me to —

Claire Please don't ever say that to the BBC. Or anyone else, for that matter.

Jim What I want to know is, is this pipeline plan for real?

Claire Seems to be. But then, why wasn't the Foreign Secretary invited to Chequers?

Jim The Foreign Secretary?

Claire He does have an interest.

Jim His only interest is in pushing me overboard and taking my job.

Claire OK. But the Chancellor wasn't invited either ...

Jim Yes, Sir Humphrey advised me not to ask either of them.

Claire Why not?

Jim Because... there's something I don't know about this pipeline plan.

What is it that Humphrey's not telling me?

Claire Let's look. Was that the bottom box?

Jim Of course.

Claire Try the file at the bottom.

Jim (*reading the label*) Vehicle Licensing Centre, Swansea. (*He opens it*) Yes! "Kumranistan Loan". (*He hands it to Claire. He wants her to find the answer*) Bernard was blathering about Trojan Horses.

Claire So he must be talking about the pipeline mechanics.

Jim I don't care about the mechanics, I'm not an engineer.

Claire Fiscal mechanics, Jim. Financial engineering. We can't run Europe without joining the euro ...

Jim Why not? We ran India without joining the rupee.

Claire (*with a sudden insight*) Perhaps Humphrey has arranged for the proposed loan to go through the European Central Bank, and isn't mentioning it.

Jim Would that matter?

Claire Yes. If so, if we want any of the loan we'd have to join the euro.

Jim What?!? We can't join the euro! It would be a catastrophe! Hand over control of interest rates? Control of exchange rates? Control of money supply? When I need to inflate to get re-elected, if the Germans are worried about rising prices the ECB might deflate and I could get kicked out!

Claire Candidly, I'm not sure if that would bother Sir Humphrey.

Jim Well, let's find out. (*He picks up phone*) Yes, tell Sir Humphrey that I want to see him ... No, any time within the next *ten seconds* will do. (*He slams the phone down*)

Claire I think I'll disappear.

Claire slips out of the upstage door

Humphrey knocks and enters

Jim Ah, Humphrey, do sit down.

Humphrey Prime Minister.

Jim Let's talk about this loan. It is all good news, isn't it?

Humphrey Tremendous news.

Jim There are no hidden snags? You know. Terms and conditions, penalty clauses, tough guarantees?

Humphrey Oh no. Nothing like that. Standard agreement.

Jim Great. An ordinary treasury loan. As far as we're concerned?

Humphrey In a sense. Yes.

Jim (*pouncing*) In a sense?

Humphrey In due course. Following agreed procedures. After certain formalities.

Jim But the money goes straight to the Treasury?

Humphrey It goes to the Treasury, yes.

Jim *Straight* to the Treasury?

Humphrey Broadly speaking, yes. More or less.

Jim Broadly speaking? How would you describe it if you were narrowly speaking?

Humphrey is silent

Does it have to go through the European Central Bank?

Humphrey We get the money, that's what matters.

Jim Let me put this another way. Will the loan be in euros?

Humphrey Prime Minister, I urge you not to clutter your mind with procedural detail and monetary trivia.

Jim Humphrey. In words of one syllable, is this plan dependent on our abandoning sterling and joining the euro?

Humphrey (*chuckling*) De-pen-dent has three syllables and a-ban-don-ing has four. Seriously, though, Prime Minister ... (*checking his watch*) ... it's almost time for your dinner with the Foreign Minister of Kumranistan, you really mustn't be late.

Jim Humphrey! Answer my question.

Humphrey All right, Prime Minister, you've asked a straight question and I'll give you a straight answer which, however, clearly has to be considered in its proper context. In the course of all financial negotiations, certain provisos have to be pre-cogitated and preconditioned, various caveats have to be postulated, designated, investigated and specified and a number of unequivocal considerations have to be determined, acknowledged and indeed sometimes conceded so that we are able to facilitate the finalization of preliminary plans to create an epistemological basis for all parties to proceed towards a mutually beneficial consummation which will acknowledge and safeguard the vital interests of all the participants without jeopardizing in any material way the underlying collective benefit ultimately accruing to the signatories or leaving unresolved certain anomalies and irregularities that might precipitate operational uncertainties down the line, so that there will be a presumed modicum of ironclad reciprocity which, in the broad scheme of things, will be to everybody's advantage.

Jim Did that mean yes or no?

Humphrey Don't you think yes and no are rather broad and unspecific in their application?

Jim No. I don't. I want a clear unambiguous answer.

Humphrey Certainly. (*A beat*) What was the question again?

Jim Is joining the euro a condition of getting the loan?

Humphrey Well, in the sense that, if an agreement is, at the end of the day and depending on how —

Jim Humphrey!

Humphrey (*penitent*) Yes it is.

Jim And you were going to hide this from me until it was too late!

Humphrey No, but, yes, I mean, they all insisted ... the ECB insisted ... Prime Minister, it is the only way! You need this deal. I did it for *you*!

Jim For me?

Humphrey Prime Minister, I'm trying to save you from yourself.

Jim Humphrey, why *on earth* would you want to join the euro *now*?

Humphrey Same reasons: European unity, the loan —

Jim Another austerity package. Disastrous interest rates, public expenditure cuts, more interference from Brussels in every damn thing ... No ECB. No euro. Or no deal!

Humphrey But the Germans will have so many objections.

Jim Ten trillion dollars worth of objections?

Humphrey is silent

As I thought. And you were just going to let them get away with it? It would be the ultimate victory for Brussels. Britain becomes an outpost of the collapsing European empire.

Humphrey Of which you're the President.

Jim Don't be silly Humphrey, I just chair meetings for six months.

Humphrey If you would just take another look at the computer models —

Jim No. Computer models got us *into* this whole financial mess to start with.

Humphrey That's different. Nobody knew that those computer models in the City were being given faulty information. Everyone assumed the mortgages were worth their face value.

Jim But they were worth nothing! Why didn't anyone know? Why didn't *you* know?

Humphrey (*humiliated*) Everyone thought that everyone else understood what was going on and nobody wanted to admit that they couldn't make sense of it.

Jim Why couldn't they?

Humphrey Because it didn't make sense! Everybody thought that all the others knew, and there *were* some who knew, but the ones who didn't know didn't believe that the ones who *did* know *knew*.

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