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ALL HANDS ON DECK PRINCESS ELIZABETH PLAYS TAG WITH MIDSHIPMEN ON BOARD THE HMS *VANGUARD* IN 1947.

CROWN HEIGHTS

It ain't easy being queen.... **Amanda Foreman** charts the ups and downs of Elizabeth II's 60 years on the throne.

As the Diamond Jubilee celebrations to mark Queen Elizabeth II's 60 years on the British throne reach their grand finale this summer, not just her loyal subjects but the entire world will be treated to the kind of royal pageantry and spectacle that happens once in a lifetime. Bigger than President Obama's 2011 state visit, bigger even than last year's royal wedding between Prince William and his dimpled bride; for the British, whose wistful memories of England's empire run deep, the Diamond Jubilee is a wish-fulfilling moment—especially since it will be swiftly followed by the nation's hosting the XXX Olympic Games (the third time in history that the Games have come to Britain). But for the queen herself, whose accession in 1952 coincided with the beginning of the end of the British Empire, the extravagant festivities and mass adoration come at a hefty price and with a large dose of irony.

Given the mood of the moment, it's hard to remember that not so long ago, Queen Elizabeth occupied a very different place in the public's affections than she does today. There is a backstory to the queen's current popularity, one that reveals her to be less the staunchly correct monarch going through the traditional motions of duty and more the extraordinary comeback artist who has fought to save her crown.

In 1997, things could hardly have been worse for her. With the worldwide uproar over her refusal to indulge in the public grief surrounding the Princess of Wales's untimely death, the monarchy itself was in crisis, with nearly one in four Britons calling for a republic. In Stephen Frears's 2006 movie *The Queen,* Helen Mirren (who won an Oscar for her performance) acts out this drama, with Elizabeth expressing her dismay at the exhibition of emotion demanded of her. "Nowadays," she says, sighing, "people want glamour and tears, the grand performance." The film depicts then–prime minister Tony Blair coaxing Elizabeth into giving what the country wanted—a royal acknowledgment that feelings are important. In the final scenes, the crisis has passed, and the queen has come out of it a chastened, though enlightened, woman. To keep things the same, she must adapt. When she was growing up, it was always "duty first, self second," Elizabeth tells Prime Minister Blair. "I can see that the world has changed—and one must. . . modernize." Blair then offers to steer Elizabeth through the modernization process.

The reality, as revealed by British royal expert Robert Hardman in his recently published book *Her Majesty,* was a little different. Even before Diana's sudden death, Elizabeth had begun to suspect that many people preferred the princess's way of doing things to hers. The scandals and financial *lives >68*

QUEEN APPEAL

rows of the mid-nineties—many of them instigated by Diana and Charles and the public breakdown of their marriage—had already badly corroded the monarchy's popularity.

But rather than Prime Minister Blair's ordering the changes, it was the queen herself who, shocked by the depth of public antipathy toward her, decided to set up a covert commission to study the monarchy's public role. Sir Antony Jay, a famous British television writer whose credits include the political comedy *Yes Minister,* became an important adviser who helped redraft her job description and turn it into a mission statement. It was later posted on the new, user-friendly royal Web site. Instead of simply being the head of state, the queen recast herself as chief cheerleader for the nation. In addition to state duties, the statement reads, the queen "acts as a focus for national identity, unity, and pride."

As much as anything, Elizabeth was determined to understand why she had fallen so completely out of step with the nation to which she had spent her entire adult life in service. Like most survivors of World War II, she did not relate to the "me" generation and its fixation on feelings. Yet in every other respect, she had always prided herself on being a modernizer: It had been her decision to end the socially divisive practice of presenting debutantes at court, to allow cameras to film royal events, and to encourage her children to mix naturally with people (without looking fake or forced, as some European royal families did).

Staffed by a young team of management consultants and civil servants on loan from the British government, the commission was given the innocuous-sounding title of the Coordination and Research Unit (CRU). Its rather bland offices and low-key personnel disguised the frenetic activities taking place behind its doors. "The pace of change was dramatic," Hardman says. "I believe that you judge institutions and leaders by the way they respond to adversity. And the queen had two choices in those years: She could either ignore her critics and pull up the drawbridge. Or she could change things. Egged on by her senior advisers—and Prince Philip—she went for stealthy but radical reform. But one thing was non-negotiable. She would never change herself." And that, as we shall see, has been her masterstroke.

During the terrible months that followed Diana's death, which brought the royal family to its knees, the CRU picked over every aspect of the status quo. Its members asked difficult questions and were not afraid to propose bold solutions. The monarchy's finances and management were overhauled, and the first-ever royal personnel department was created. Many other improvements were small in themselves but dramatic in their impact. The rule book on royal etiquette was torn up so that ordinary people were no longer made to feel they were stepping back into the medieval era when they were in the queen's presence: Dress codes were relaxed, and the spouse-only policy of bringing guests to state banquets was abolished. Bowing and curtsying became optional rather than obligatory.

The queen's diary was reconfigured so that her work became more relevant to the concerns of the people; she spent more time visiting public rather than private schools, for example. With the help of the CRU, the queen devised special "theme days" saluting particular areas of national life.

IN FULL SAIL
ABOVE, A RENDERING OF THE JUBILEE FLOTILLA. RIGHT, THE CANALETTO PAINTING THAT INSPIRED IT.

One of the first involved the financial sector. In 1998, brokers at London's Merrill Lynch headquarters suddenly looked up to see the queen on their trading floor. And she made sure she met the motorbike dispatch riders, too. Today, it is not unheard-of for the queen to visit a pub or the offices of Google.

Elizabeth's personal image also received a revamp. Out went the flouncy pastels; in came the bold colors and dramatic tailoring. Few people really took notice of the queen's makeover until she visited Milan following Fashion Week 2000. Her clothes were still unmistakably British, though now they were a sign of confidence rather than the first line of defense. The Italians adored her determination to look chic and timeless while refusing to hide the fact she was not just a living symbol but also a hands-on grandmother. "She is one of the most elegant women in the world," declared Miuccia Prada. For the first time in years, the queen was back on the front pages of the British press for herself—and not because of some family scandal.

ON TRACK
QUEEN ELIZABETH II AND HER HUSBAND, PRINCE PHILIP, ARRIVE AT ROYAL ASCOT IN 2005.

Yet no one, not least the queen, was sure whether her efforts to reconnect with the public were gaining traction. In 2002, on the eve of the Golden Jubilee, Elizabeth's fiftieth anniversary as queen, she began to doubt whether anyone would turn up to the celebrations and even considered a rollback of events. The *London Times* ran the front-page headline PALACE FEARS JUBILEE FLOP. . . . It wasn't until Brian May, guitarist of the rock band Queen, performed a heart-stopping rendition of "God Save the Queen" on the roof of Buckingham Palace before a live audience of a million on the ground and 200 million on TV that all fears were dispelled. In the words of many fans that day, the queen had found her groove. *(continued on page 218)*

FLOTILLA: JOSHUA KNOWLES; *RIVER THAMES WITH ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL ON LORD MAYOR'S DAY*, DETAIL OF ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL: BRIDGEMAN-GIRAUDON/ART RESOURCE; QUEEN ELIZABETH II: © IAN HODGSON/REUTERS/CORBIS.

CROWN HEIGHTS

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Fast-forward ten years and Elizabeth is enjoying such high approval ratings that commentators privately refer to her as a royal Betty White. "She has made a remarkable comeback since the dark days after Diana's death, when the country turned against her," says Sally Bedell Smith, author of *Elizabeth the Queen.* "Now the queen is as much loved as she is admired."

If she famously referred to 1992 as her "*annus horribilis,*" 2012 is Elizabeth's year par excellence. Her jubilee festivities will be a four-day extravaganza, followed in July by her hosting of the Olympic celebrations. Finally, in November, the queen and Prince Philip will celebrate their famously successful marriage on the occasion of their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary.

Despite her advanced age—she turned 86 in April—Elizabeth has taken to the jubilee events with gusto. At high water on Sunday, June 3, she will be at the forefront of a Canaletto-inspired flotilla for a seven-mile journey up the Thames. Thirty thousand spectators aboard 1,000 vessels of all sizes will proceed behind the royal barge. At least a million are expected to watch from the banks. The next day, she will light the last of more than 2,000 beacons streaking across the Commonwealth. Later, the windows at Buckingham Palace are expected to reverberate once again as the BBC mounts a live rock concert with performers including Paul McCartney and Elton John.

In an era of cheap celebrity and endless fakery, the queen has become an unlikely champion of authenticity. "She has learned to move with the times, all the while remaining true to herself and setting an example of discipline and dedication," says Bedell Smith. Perhaps the lesson to be taken from Elizabeth's extraordinary return to favor is the adage first made popular by the Victorian novelist George Eliot: "It is never too late to be what you might have been." □

PRIME TIME

(continued from page 196)

husband is the only prime minister I have met who has any idea at all of what fashion is (a job-creating industry) and why Britain is good at it (it's complicated). She does those photo ops where she accompanies her prime-minister husband really well. She stands tall, perfectly composed, and hears him do his talking thing with an unembarrassing amount of interest. (English people don't like wives to look rapt or worshipful à la Callista Gingrich.) When he's done, she smiles warmly at him.

She has not given an interview for years, and has rarely spoken publicly since her husband became prime minister in 2010—after the very weird election on May 6, which took five days to resolve and had every political commentator reaching for hanging-chads metaphors. (It was worse than hanging chads, believe me: There were lockouts at polling stations in some quite tony areas.) Elections in the U.K. are traditionally on a Thursday; the new P.M. gets to Number 10 around dawn on Friday morning, as the old P.M.'s removal van drives away. Otherwise the natural order is disturbed and the nation becomes cranky. It was Tuesday night when the new prime minister finally got to the Downing Street steps. Throughout his arrival speech, Samantha stood not alongside her husband but a yard behind him, in a sapphire-blue crepe dress (the Conservatives' color in the U.K.), with her hands lightly clasped under her baby bump. Their eldest child, Ivan, born with cerebral palsy compounded with severe epilepsy, had died the previous year, aged only six, and she was expecting her fourth child. When he finished speaking, the newly minted prime minister whispered something in her ear and they went inside.

In the flesh, David Cameron is as surprising as most other celebs: taller than you think, less chubby than you think. (He has on a nicely tailored blue suit; seriously dull tie, though). He is less shiny than the cruel English cartoonists make him—Steve Bell of the *Guardian* always draws him with a condom stretched very tightly over his entire head. At 45, he looks even younger than he does on TV, and is also infinitely, caressingly nice. Everyone at Number 10 is nice. (Does the incumbent make a difference? I wonder. Or was it ever thus?) The whole place heaves with art: both heritage (Lord Byron in his Albanian dress, by Thomas Phillips; the white-frocked Queen Elizabeth I, by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger) and modern (parked briefly in a waiting room lined with pictures by Charlotte Hodes, I find a wastepaper bin that's actually a sculpture by Ron Arad). Upstairs, the famous Tracey Emin neon—a pink scribble—hangs over the door to the Terracotta Room, where a bunch of people are having a meeting or a briefing. The scribble says, "More PAssion," underscored twice. I don't like the capital *A* much, but the minder assigned to me for the morning likes the work a lot, saying: "The P.M. thought more passion in Downing Street would be a very good idea." (I don't like that thought much, either.)

When the people exit the meeting, I catch a strong aroma of coffee. "I'll make you some if you like," says the P.M. as we enter PMO (prime minister's office). "I've got this brilliant new machine, look. It's made by Krups." He takes off his jacket and bounces around settling things and straightening things (the coffee machine, his press aide's voice recorder, my voice recorder). He pushes two armchairs a half-inch closer together. "You can have the chancellor's chair; that's where he sits, and I usually sit here." The Chancellor of the Exchequer (the medieval British title for "treasury secretary") traditionally lived next door when Numbers 10 and 11 Downing Street were separate houses. These days it's all one building, and since the Camerons have a bigger family, they live in the bigger apartment at Number 11. "What's great about living above the shop is you do get to see more of your children," the P.M. says. "I had lunch with my daughter [Florence] today—I loved it. We didn't eat the same thing, because I don't really do mashed banana and yogurt for lunch. . . . But they keep me sane, I think."

Whether or not he means to, David Cameron sounds totally engaged, brilliantly enthusiastic, fantastically cheered to be in your dazzling company. His manners and modes of speech (posh, Etonian, superpolite, charming) are as instantly recognizable to his fellow-countrymen as the purring tones of a Southern grande dame are to a New Yorker. They are therefore as instantly seductive, or as instantly annoying, depending on your preference. Me, I'm seducible. Many Brits are not.

Curiously, SamCam doesn't speak like her husband at all. The one time she made the clear choice to talk about him was during his prime ministerial-election campaign. We learned to call him Dave when, in a television interview, she said, "Ever since the day I met Dave, he has, you know, obviously taken his job very seriously,