

# SYBIL / VENABLES / CRAMOND

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Pardon Me, Prime Minister

Cramond That's not, by a long chalk, all. I've had second thoughts about pitching this new Casino and Betting Shop Tax at eighty per cent of the profits.

Venables Yes, eighty per cent struck me as a little excessive.

Cramond Excessive? It's not enough! The way some of these bookmakers operate—leave 'em with a fifth of their profits and they'll still have enough to keep going! Most of 'em'll make a packet this week for a start. They're laying six to four on a new Casino and Betting Shop Tax! Our object is to put them out of business, yes?

Venables Yes.

Cramond Make it ninety-five per cent of profits, and we'll really finish 'em off!

Venables We mustn't appear totally ruthless.

Cramond We mustn't appear namby-pamby! *(He produces another paper from his file)* Now then, we've already agreed to ninety-five per cent tax on strip clubs.

Venables Did you check your terms with the Attorney-General?

Cramond I did. The relevant clause will read: "A special tax at ninety-five per cent of profits will apply to any places of entertainment which offer lewd or suggestive performances, or exhibit members of the cast less than fully dressed at any time." Every strip club should be closed by the end of the week, and half your West End theatres as well.

Venables That should please the Purity League.

Cramond They'll be even more pleased when we finish off the casinos! Think of it! Ninety-five per cent tax on profits, plus a ninety-five per cent tax on winnings. And I mean all gambling. Pools, church raffles, not to mention those temples of sin in the High Street.

Venables Temples of sin in . . . ?

Cramond Bingo halls! We must rid this country of the urge to get something for nothing! Shutting the casinos isn't enough, we've got to purge the urge!

Venables We don't want to go too far at first.

Cramond Are you backing down from our crusade? If you've lost your stomach for the fight, there are others, Prime Minister. *(With quiet menace)* Others in the Cabinet all too ready to take over.

*The main door to the hall opens and the Prime Minister's wife enters. Sybil Venables is a sweet, rather vague lady, in her early fifties, quite impervious to the tense atmosphere into which she has walked: and is the only person in the country who is not afraid of the Chancellor. She is gracious, jolly, and a keen supporter of all things bright and beautiful. She carries a vase of flowers*

Sybil Now then, what are you boys up to? I thought you'd like some flowers, George, as it's Monday. *(She puts the vase on the Prime Minister's desk)*

Venables Thank you, Sybil. The Chancellor and I are in conference. We're busy, my dear.

Sybil *(arranging the flowers)* I hope you're not bullying poor Hector. *(To*

*the Chancellor*) You must forgive him, he's so domineering sometimes.  
**Cramond** We're resolving some vital points on the Budget, Mrs Venables.  
**Sybil** How nice. (*Looking at the flowers*) No, they're not *quite* right on the desk, dear. Perhaps on the . . . (*She lifts the vase and looks around the room*)

**Cramond** This Budget will be the cornerstone on which we'll rebuild the nation.

**Sybil** (*moving to a cabinet with the flowers*) Still got a hole in your sock, Hector. You bachelors are all the same. You need a good woman to look after you.

**Cramond** (*looking at his sock*) You know I'm married to my job, Mrs Venables.

**Sybil** (*rearranging the flowers*) Such a pity. You must have met lots of pretty girls in the past. I remember reading an article about you, years ago, in a magazine.

**Venables** Sybil dear . . .

**Cramond** Giving that interview was one of my rare lapses of judgement.

**Sybil** It was called, "Hector, A Man light on his Feet, with fire in his Heart". Or was it, "a light in his Heart, with fire in his Feet"? There *was* a girl once—you glimpsed her briefly, then lost track of her for ever.

**Cramond** Tch! They embroidered everything I said.

**Sybil** Awfully romantic.

**Venables** Sybil dear, the matters I'm discussing with Hector are very urgent. The Budget's tomorrow, remember?

**Sybil** Tomorrow will be a busy day for us all. And it's my birthday. I hope you hadn't forgotten, George.

**Venables** (*with a start*) Indeed not, my dear. (*He makes a surreptitious note on his desk pad*)

**Sybil** Not that I'll have much time for budgets or birthdays. This "National Blood Donor Week" is taking up so much of my time. Did you know they've made me Honorary Commandant, Hector?

**Cramond** (*amazed*) Good heavens! Er—good heavens, how splendid.

**Sybil** Such a good cause isn't it? Which reminds me, George, you haven't pledged a donation of a pint of blood.

**Venables** But I *gave* my donation yesterday when we went to the Mobile Unit parked out there in the street. The TV cameras were there, I had to.

**Sybil** That wasn't a donation, George, that was just a drop of blood from your thumb so that we could register your blood group.

**Venables** Oh.

**Sybil** You've had your blood grouped, haven't you, Hector? And all your staff?

**Cramond** Yes, I was done this morning. I went out to the van first thing and pledged my pint, if mine is a group they want.

**Sybil** (*going to the main door*) I'll find Mr Campbell and ask him to send everyone who comes to Number Ten out to the Mobile Unit to be grouped.

**Venables** Well, when you see Campbell, my dear, ask him to bring in the journalist as soon as she arrives. It's Lord Rotherbrook's daughter.



Sybil Very well, dear. I mustn't waste time with you chatterboxes. I've lots to do.

*She exits by the main door*

Cramond Now then, Prime Minister, I take it I have your support on these tax levels?

Venables I'm still a little concerned about doing too much too quickly.

Cramond Are you, or are you not, still in favour of our campaign to clean up Britain?

Venables Of course I'm in favour of it. I was the first to propose it as party policy, in my address to the Conference. "Make Morality Matter!"

Cramond That was *my* slogan, I thought of that! Now you choose to obstruct me.

Venables I'm simply inviting you to have second thoughts on the tax figures.

Cramond I've *had* second thoughts and I'm ready to stick with them. And if you don't do the same, the Cabinet will want to know why. *(He leans across the desk, and glares at Venables)*

Venables *(hesitating a moment, and then capitulating)* If you're convinced they're essential, Hector, you'd better go ahead.

Cramond *(thumping the desk)* Right! That's settled then.

Venables Good. *(He rises and moves towards the main door)* Before this journalist comes, I want to have a look at the teleprinters. If the pound's crept up a bit, I can drop a few hints about an economic break-through.

Cramond *(moving to exit with the Prime Minister)* I'll come with you. We might have some good news. There's nothing these foreigners like more than a tough Budget. For us, of course.

*Venables and Cramond go, closing the door behind them. The room is empty for a moment, then the door to the Chancellor's passage is gently opened. Shirley puts her head round the door and peers cautiously into the room before entering. She is an attractive blonde—scatty but not dumb—in her early twenties—cheerful, direct, and with an oddly naïve manner. She wears a light outer coat over a red dress. It is obvious from her behaviour that she is an intruder: she moves on tiptoe, and listens at each door in turn. Satisfied, she relaxes a little and starts to look round the room. Then she gives a start, as the main door opens. Campbell enters. He is surprised to find her there, and clearly has never seen her before*

Campbell Oh! Er—can I help you?

Shirley No, thanks, I was just—er—looking round.

Campbell *(an explanation dawning on him)* Oh, you must be the lady from Fleet Street.

Shirley Er—from Fleet Street?

Campbell I expect Miller let you in, did he? He ought to have told me you were here. I'm Campbell. Rodney Campbell, the P.M.'s P.P.S.

Shirley OK. How do you do?

Campbell Perhaps you wouldn't mind waiting in the ante-room? *(He opens*

