



THE PORTRAIT  
By Paul Smith

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# THE PORTRAIT

A Play

By

Paul Smith

# CHARACTERS

Winston Churchill

Graham Sutherland

Charles Doughty

William Somerset Maugham

Lady Churchill

Jennie Lee

Clement Attlee (voice)

Pathé Newsreader (voice)

# THE PORTRAIT

## PROLOGUE

*A screen shows a compilation of photographic images of Winston Churchill during World War II it is underscored by patriotic music – ‘Land of Hope and Glory’. This dissolves into the following scene.*

## SCENE 1

WHITEHALL - 9 May 1945

*We hear the soundtrack to Pathé News report with the familiar voice of a news reader from the 1940s*

NEWSREADER

Just two days following the declaration of the end of the War in Europe, the people of London continue their celebrations. Crowds in Whitehall gave a rapturous reception as the Prime Minister, Mr Winston Churchill, appeared on the balcony of the Ministry of Health. He continues to inspire his people. Thank you Mr Churchill. Thank you!

*We hear the start of the speech in darkness. As the speech continues CHURCHILL is picked out in a spot. He is 70 years old. Bright-eyed, vibrant, mobile and smiling. Optimistic and heroic. His speech to the people*

***of London is being given to a gathered crowd in the open air.***

CHURCHILL

My dear friends, I hope you have had two happy days. Happy days are what we have worked for, but happy days are not easily worked for. By discipline, by morale, by industry, by good laws, by fair institutions – by those ways we have won through to happy days for millions and millions of people.

You have been attacked by a monstrous enemy – but you never flinched or wavered. Your soldiers were everywhere in the field, your airmen in the skies – and never let us forget our grand Navy. They dared and they did all those feats of adventure and audacity which have ever enabled brave men to wrest victory from obstinate and bestial circumstances.

And you people at home have taken all you had to take – which was enough, when all is said and done. You never let the men at the front down. No one ever asked for peace because London was suffering. London, like a great rhinoceros, a great hippopotamus, saying: ‘Let them do their worst. London can take it.’ London could take anything. My heart goes out to the Cockneys. Any visitors we may happen to have here today – and many great nations are represented here, by all those who have borne arms with us in the struggle – they echo what I say when I say ‘Good Old London!’

In every capital of the victorious world there are rejoicings tonight, but in none is there any lack of respect for the part which London has played. I return my hearty thanks to you for never having failed in the long, monotonous days and in the long nights black as hell.

God bless you all. May you long remain as citizens of a great and splendid City. May you long remain as the heart of the British Empire.

***Cheers as CHURCHILL waves and gives the V for Victory sign as the light fades to black***

***MUSIC fades in under the latter part of the above speech– Zadok the Priest***

## SCENE TWO

WHITEHALL – June 1954

*An office on Whitehall. Standard. Ordinary. Aloof. A desk and several chairs. Boring bookcases. Dominating the scene is a framed copy of the famous Yousuf Karsh photograph of Winston Churchill taken in 1941 – reputedly the most reproduced photograph of all time.*

*Sitting at a desk is CHARLES DOUGHTY. Member of Parliament. Also early 50s. Business-like and efficient. He doesn't fluster easily.*

*A knock at the door.*

DOUGHTY                      Come.

*JENNIE LEE enters. MP. Aged 49. Smart and neat. She speaks with a slight Scottish accent.*

DOUGHTY                      Jennie. Thank you so much. So good of you. Please... *(he indicates a chair).*

LEE                                I could tell by the end of the meeting that you were a little frazzled, if that's the right word!

DOUGHTY                      Well if it means charred like a piece of overdone bacon then it is. I just had to clear my head after the meeting and start trying to see the woods for the trees. Time is passing so fast and I fear that Indecision is beginning to win the day. After so many meetings we are still no nearer choosing the right gift.

LEE                                It's the annual dilemma of what to buy an aged Uncle for Christmas. Only just a little more significant. We are floundering.

DOUGHTY                      And it's for that very reason why I need to pick your brains and see if between us we might be able to trim the list down to a more manageable and practical level

which we could take back to the committee and save some time and effort.

LEE I agree, so long as we don't present them with a fait accompli. There are too many strong personalities around that table. Too many parties. Too many wings of parties. Of both Houses. And not exactly an equality of sexes.

DOUGHTY The very reason why I need your considerable influence within the group.

LEE Yes, that's what they all say!

DOUGHTY I apologise. I didn't mean...

LEE It's fine Charles. Honestly. I am more than happy to help. How do we take this forward then?

DOUGHTY At the last count there were 15 suggestions of which 9 have a certain level of support amongst us. I think I am right in saying that the Memorial Garden idea was rejected?

LEE It was. A little premature.

DOUGHTY Indeed. So we are left with the following.

1. A Statue
2. A Portrait
3. A Concert
4. A Symphony or Concerto
5. A Celebratory Book
6. A gold bust
7. A theatrical show about his life.
8. A Rose
9. A Scale model of Chartwell

LEE When you read them out like that, I wonder how on earth we have filled so much time discussing them.

DOUGHTY Quite. These are all time dependent.

LEE Which is why we need to get a move on. Parliament can't work quickly even when it is shopping for a birthday present.

DOUGHTY Winston will really only appreciate something which will last. Something tangible.

LEE The statue and portrait appear to be favourite.

DOUGHTY Isn't a statue usually erected after death?

LEE By convention I think. Like the memorial garden it might be a bit premature, though Winston rather likes breaking with convention. He might like it.

DOUGHTY Though he may take it as a hint that the end is nigh.

LEE Maybe. I think he might happily burn a model of Chartwell – unless he had made it himself.

DOUGHTY You may be right.

LEE I agree though that whatever is chosen needs a life beyond him. Legacy. I think I mentioned I know the artist Graham Sutherland. I think it would be worth considering him.

DOUGHTY For portrait, statue or bust?

LEE Portrait.

DOUGHTY I dislike busts.

LEE Sutherland is very sound. Likely to be easy to handle. Churchill will respect him.

DOUGHTY So, portrait we think over bust. Statue out?

LEE Leave it till another time.

DOUGHTY The grand book about his life idea seems to have some support and at least that is something that he could

keep. A large work of art would undoubtedly be destined for public consumption.

LEE A concert would be a one-off. There and gone. Maybe the symphony? Britten or Vaughan Williams maybe?

DOUGHTY Book, portrait, symphony.

LEE Same problem with a theatrical piece. It could end up being rather treacly. Winston wouldn't sit through it. The rose maybe?

DOUGHTY Book, portrait, symphony, rose.

LEE He will probably hate them all.

DOUGHTY A risk we have to take. Let's see if we can get the Committee to accept these four as a shortlist. Then take it down to two. Who was the artist you mentioned?

LEE Sutherland. Graham Sutherland. Nice man. Strong-minded and wonderfully talented.

DOUGHTY We will talk to him.

LEE Don't give him any false hopes.

DOUGHTY The portrait is my choice – we will get it passed I am sure. But I won't speak to him yet. Don't you speak to him either.

LEE My lips are sealed.

***FADE TO BLACK***

***MUSIC – BUTTERWORTH; On the Banks of Green Willow***

## SCENE THREE

WHITEHALL – July 1954

*The same office as in Scene Two*

*A door opens and GRAHAM SUTHERLAND enters. Early 50s, well dressed in a suit. Slight in build. He is nervous as he looks around the room. His eye eventually falling on and studying the photograph of Churchill.*

*The door opens again and in walks CHARLES DOUGHTY.*

DOUGHTY                      Mr Sutherland?

SUTHERLAND                Yes.

DOUGHTY                      Charles Doughty. ***(They shake hands)***. Good to meet you. Do sit. Draughty.

SUTHERLAND                I'm sorry?

DOUGHTY                      These Whitehall chambers. All draughty.

SUTHERLAND                It's fine.

DOUGHTY                      For the visitor maybe. For the virtual residents, deeply uncomfortable. Now. I won't waste your time further and I do apologise for the cloak and dagger nature of the summons, so to call it. It's good of you to come along.

SUTHERLAND                Delighted and intrigued.

DOUGHTY                      Good. Pleased. I doubt you are unused to the 'around the houses' approach.

SUTHERLAND                It has been known.

DOUGHTY                    Being the Palace of Westminster you will understand that everything has to be carried out in a swathe of bureaucracy. The simplest actions require a committee, motions, white papers – the lot. And all in triplicate. You are fortunate to work in a rather less formal world.

SUTHERLAND                Possibly.

DOUGHTY                    I often think that spending one's day daubing paint on canvas must be akin to the Life of Riley.

SUTHERLAND                There is maybe a little bit more to it than you think.

DOUGHTY                    Quite so.

SUTHERLAND                You ought to try it one day.

DOUGHTY                    Maybe I will. A good way to spend one's retirement

***An awkward pause***

DOUGHTY                    Yes, well now. Portraits. We have seen some of your work.

SUTHERLAND                I have only completed a few portraits up till now.

DOUGHTY                    Indeed so. Somerset Maugham, Lord Beaverbrook.....  
Very good.

SUTHERLAND                Thank you.

DOUGHTY                    Why so few?

SUTHERLAND                Wasn't something I was drawn to, if you excuse the pun. I only came to it in the last few years. I never set out to be a professional portrait painter. Landscapes mostly. I was an official war artist. Mainly on the Home Front.

DOUGHTY                    Of course.

SUTHERLAND                A number of religious commissions.

DOUGHTY                    Indeed.

SUTHERLAND Somerset Maugham was the first. I turned it down initially. It was something of an experiment. We agreed that if it didn't work there was no pressure to exhibit it and...well, it might just be left in a cupboard. Destroyed even.

DOUGHTY Heaven forbid.

SUTHERLAND Yes. The thought of that sends shivers down my spine. Luckily it turned out alright. He was very pleased.

DOUGHTY Which must have spurred you on.

SUTHERLAND I gained a certain level of confidence from it, yes.

DOUGHTY Good. Well, we are very impressed.

SUTHERLAND Pardon me. But who is the 'we'?

DOUGHTY Oh I do apologise, once again. I am merely a mouthpiece. The Secretary of a Special Committee from both the House of Lords and the House of Commons. I believe you know Jennie Lee, one of our Committee Members.

SUTHERLAND Indeed I do.

DOUGHTY Yes. Good. I know you will understand, I am sure, the sensitivity of what I am about to discuss with you.

SUTHERLAND Of course.

DOUGHTY The Committee has been given the responsibility of organising some special celebrations. On 30 November, the Prime Minister will reach his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. We have discussed, ad nauseam, the ways in which we can mark this momentous occasion. We have decided on a portrait. A portrait of Winston Churchill. We would like to offer you the commission to paint the portrait. It is to be painted in his familiar surroundings of the House of Commons. It will be his to keep for his lifetime and thereafter it will hang here at Westminster. A large

portrait. A full length portrait. To have a public unveiling, probably in Westminster Hall, in front of the members of both Houses. Possibly broadcast live on the BBC. All in front of the subject himself. A portrait of the man.

***Silence***

I sense you would like some time to give the matter some thought.

SUTHERLAND Well, yes indeed. There is much to consider. I won't need long to make the decision. Is the Prime Minister happy with the choice of myself?

DOUGHTY As yet he knows nothing of the commission. He much prefers to have such matters presented to him on a plate. He will be very happy with the whole idea I am sure.

SUTHERLAND You don't think he will object.

DOUGHTY I took the liberty of speaking to Lord Beaverbrook who knows the Prime Minister well. He said the idea was a splendid one.

SUTHERLAND Oh, well, that is encouraging. As I say, I can come to a decision fairly swiftly.

DOUGHTY Good. A week. The fee is 1,000 Guineas and represents donations from the joint Members.

SUTHERLAND May I say how very flattered I am to be called upon to take on this commission.

DOUGHTY Indeed. Though flattery is the artists' modus operandi is it not?

SUTHERLAND I paint what I see.

DOUGHTY Of course.

SUTHERLAND

My approach to a portrait is to portray as accurate a description of the sitter as I can.

DOUGHTY

Which is exactly what we are looking for. Well, I won't keep you further Mr Sutherland. **(He hands over an envelope)** The details of the commission are within. They are not too precise. We have no intention of interfering in the technical aspects of the painting. I realise that we are now in mid-July – there is an immovable deadline. Not a very wide window. So if you are happy to take the commission, we would need your agreement by next week please. If you have any further questions, you know where to find me.

SUTHERLAND

Thank you Mr Doughty.

DOUGHTY

I look forward to hearing from you Mr Sutherland. England expects!

***Fade to black***

***MUSIC – PURCELL; Rondeau from Abdelazer Suite***

## SCENE FOUR

### A LECTURE HALL

***A lectern stands in a spot. SUTHERLAND moves into the spot. Possibly display some of his war paintings.***

SUTHERLAND

At first it was difficult to decide what function I might undertake as a war artist and I couldn't properly call myself one for some time. My first job was to make drawings of camouflaged aeroplanes. I couldn't make much of them, I am afraid. After that I was sent to a gun testing site near Melton Mowbray and again I tried to find my way towards making something of the subject – this time guns, gun barrels and breach blocks. But I did nothing with any kind of heightened feeling.

Moving to Swansea, I had the first sight of the possibilities of destruction as a subject. The architecture was florid and Victorian. At first I made as complete a record of what I saw. I hadn't yet begun to feel a sense of what these remains really looked like. Later some were to become like great animals who had been hurt.

My feeling at the beginning of the war from the point of view of my work was one of being thrown down in a totally unfamiliar field. There was I who, up to then, had been concerned with the more hidden aspects of nature... But now I was a paid official – a sort of reporter – and naturally not only did I feel that I had to give value for money, but to contrive somehow to reflect in an immediate way the subjects set me.

***Fade to black***

***MUSIC – HOLST; I Vow to Thee My Country***

## SCENE FIVE

### DOWNING STREET – July 1954

*The Prime Minister's office. A warm, full room with armchairs, a desk and chairs. DOUGHTY enters and waits, uncomfortably. He looks around the office. A portrait of the Queen takes his attention: it is a 1951 photographic portrait by Yousuf Karsh. The door opens slowly. The bulky figure of SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL enters. He is 79, showing a few signs of a stroke he suffered in 1953. He walks slowly. He is not that man he was in Scene One.*

CHURCHILL                    Sit, Doughty.

DOUGHTY                    Prime Minister

CHURCHILL                    Now, what is all this nonsense that you need to see me about.

DOUGHTY                    Your forthcoming birthday Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                    What of it?

DOUGHTY                    We have been thinking about how to mark it. It being of significance.

CHURCHILL                    We? We? Who is 'We'?

DOUGHTY                    I am merely the mouthpiece for the Committee set up to organise your birthday celebrations.

CHURCHILL                    So now we set up committees to organise tea parties. Whatever next?

DOUGHTY                    But this is rather special Sir.

CHURCHILL All birthdays are special when you get to my age. They should all be celebrated!

DOUGHTY Indeed Prime Minister. I doubt many of us will still be working when we are 80.

CHURCHILL I never quit. Working keeps you going. In the face of battle, one never quits.

DOUGHTY You are an example to us all Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL Flim flam. Now get on with it man.

DOUGHTY The Commission Committee; members of both Houses, have asked me to request whether you would be willing to sit for a portrait which we would like to present you with as a birthday present.

CHURCHILL Is it not a little vain to request a picture of oneself as a gift? Fascinating to offer a gift that the giver is more or less in the dark about until it is opened by the receiver.

DOUGHTY Rather exciting I should think.

CHURCHILL I have sat for portraits before. They are not all exciting.

DOUGHTY We have suggested Graham Sutherland to undertake the commission Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL Should I know him?

DOUGHTY ***(Handing over a portfolio of pictures)*** These are examples of his work Prime Minister. I think you will agree he is a fine craftsman.

CHURCHILL One artist appraising the work of another. No guarantee of objectivity there. Like me assessing the performance of Mr Attlee. Max!

DOUGHTY Prime Minister?

CHURCHILL Max Beaverbrook. Yes, I like that. Full of the real man.

DOUGHTY                    It's a splendid likeness.

CHURCHILL                You know Max?

DOUGHTY                    Not as well as yourself Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                Then you won't be able to appreciate at least 90% of the work.

DOUGHTY                    You have painted portraits Prime Minister?

CHURCHILL                I paint portraits of the wonderful English landscape whose face is as complex and changing as any human. Thankfully she tends to be a compliant and a still sitter and doesn't turn around to you afterwards and tell you that your painting is a dud.

DOUGHTY                    Yes, that's very good Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                Painting a portrait or a landscape, the artist merely translates what he sees on to the canvas in whatever medium he cares to use. The skill is convincing the beholder that your vision works. Accuracy is only a part of the challenge and possibly the least significant.

DOUGHTY                    Alas, I am not well versed in the rules of art.

CHURCHILL                There are no rules, Don't believe the theorists. Paint with the eyes.

DOUGHTY                    I will have to try it when I have the time.

CHURCHILL                I am Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury. I have the time!

DOUGHTY                    I will look into it Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                So you wish to report back to your Committee I suppose.

DOUGHTY                    As soon as possible Prime Minister. Will you accept our present? Maybe you wish to discuss it with Lady Churchill?

CHURCHILL                   It isn't necessary. Go ahead. Instruct your artist. Arrange the sittings with my Private Secretary.

DOUGHTY                    That is very kind of you Prime Minister. Mr Sutherland is currently abroad, but hopefully will be able to arrange a meeting by mid-August.

CHURCHILL                   Get on with it then man. Better be bloody worth it!

***DOUGHTY leaves. The lights fade down and then up again on Churchill sitting in spot, writing a diary. The words are heard as a voice over.***

CHURCHILL                   This is to be the first portrait of me for some time. I find myself strangely nervous about what to expect. The man Sutherland is a talent that is certain and Max was full of praise when I brought him up in conversation.

But still I have doubts. I shouldn't. What an honour to be lauded in this way. What a chance to show everyone I am here and here to stay. I have that vigour that my detractors feel I have lost, sapped by years on the treadmill of life and fighting the foe. They can see me anew. Caught forever as the leader they know me to be and the complex and humble man I know I am.

Banish those doubts Winston and enjoy the affection of those who wish to proffer gifts in celebration. I will not fade away.

***Lights fade to Black***

***MUSIC – VAUGHAN WILLIAMS – He Who Would Valiant Be***

## SCENE SIX

CHARTWELL – August 1954

*Churchill's studio at his home in Kent. A chair has been set on a raised platform, in readiness for the sitter. SUTHERLAND enters with his sketching materials and spends time looking around the room. Fascinated. He spends some time looking out of the window. As he does so he hears the voice of DOUGHTY who offers him some final words of advice – these come as a Voice Over.*

DOUGHTY

*(Voice Over)* Patience will be your key. The Prime Minister is prone to mood swings as you may know. He may not always be the perfect sitter. His mind runs along so many tracks at the same time, so he may sometimes appear a little preoccupied. Distant. Please do not let this worry you. Plough on regardless. You may have heard this quote from his friend Lord Beaverbrook; "What a creature of strange moods he is - always at the top of the wheel of confidence or at the bottom of an intense depression." Rather sums him up I think. So, you will have something to cope with apart from the painting itself. I am, though, sure you will get on, and find him as fascinating and engaging a sitter that you could ever wish for. I would ask you to also bear in mind that the Prime Minister had a stroke last year. This is not widely known so I would appreciate your discretion in this matter. He has made a remarkable recovery, but it has taken a certain toll on him. Under no circumstances let him know you are aware of this. Thank you. Please arrive on 26<sup>th</sup> at 12

noon and ask to be taken straight to his studio. Good Luck.

***The door opens and in walks CHURCHILL in casual attire. He is bright, chirpy and enthusiastic.***

- CHURCHILL I hope I have not kept you long Mr Sutherland, I was attending to my goldfish! Welcome to Chartwell Mr Sutherland. This is my studio. What do you think of it?
- SUTHERLAND It's a wonderful space Prime Minister.
- CHURCHILL Isn't it. I have a feeling we will get to know each other rather well on this little adventure. This is my world. My creative enclosure. I thought you would like to use this room for your work. It will give you a leg up for what you are about to undertake. I hope it will serve the purpose.
- SUTHERLAND That's very considerate of you Prime Minister, but I would have been happy with anywhere in your house.
- CHURCHILL Stuff. You will be able feed off the intense artistry that sometimes takes place in here. An artist must be comfortable in their surroundings. I am always comfortable here. You too will be at your ease I am sure. Drink?
- SUTHERLAND No thank you Sir.
- CHURCHILL Tea total?
- SUTHERLAND No, it's just a little early for me.
- CHURCHILL Never too early for a brandy. ***(He pours himself one and takes a gulp)*** So, you're going to paint me my birthday present.
- SUTHERLAND Indeed Sir.
- CHURCHILL Well, it's a brave man and all that! An undertaking.

SUTHERLAND It is Sir, but I am looking forward to it.

CHURCHILL Good.

***A silence***

CHURCHILL Come and have a look out of the window. Look at that. Is that not the most beautiful sight? I built that wall. All of it, bare hands. You have to graft Mr Sutherland, whether you are Prime Minister or an apprentice gardener. You have to graft. Rewards will come in all forms.

SUTHERLAND You have certainly worked hard to create such beauty. It's no wonder you love it here.

CHURCHILL I do. Oh I do. It is perfection Mr Sutherland. I could never leave. Never.

***CHURCHILL takes a handkerchief and wipes away a tear. A silence.***

CHURCHILL Will this wonderful room suffice?

SUTHERLAND I may have to make a few re-arrangements for the light.

CHURCHILL No need. Light is perfect. Held me in good stead for many years.

SUTHERLAND I am sure it will be ideal.

CHURCHILL Good. Start now. Get on with it. The sooner the better. You need to make the most of me, I spread myself thinly. You may not get another chance.

SUTHERLAND I was going to just make some initial sketches today.

CHURCHILL Good. Isn't Chartwell perfect?

SUTHERLAND Beautiful Sir.

CHURCHILL I would rather not be anywhere else on Earth. It's the perfect subject for an artist. You should paint her.

SUTHERLAND                    One commission at a time.

CHURCHILL                    It isn't a commission Mr Sutherland.

***Silence***

SUTHERLAND                    Well, I don't want to use up too much of your precious time Prime Minister. I just thought it was worth having an initial discussion about the nature of the portrait and make some initial sketches.

CHURCHILL                    Paint what you see and it will be fine.

SUTHERLAND                    Oh, I will paint what I see.

CHURCHILL                    What would you like to see? The bulldog or the cherub?

SUTHERLAND                    It entirely depends on what you show me Sir.

CHURCHILL                    ***(grunts)*** Mmmm. Well when you need to I will have my Garter robes ready. They will give you something interesting to get your brush around. Everyone knows what I look like, but the garments are more mysterious. Or maybe it is what they enclose that is the mystery.

SUTHERLAND                    I beg your pardon Prime Minister, but I was given to believe that the commission was to portray you in a suit.

CHURCHILL                    Pah! They should let the artists make their own decisions. A suit is dull. Do they want a dull painting? The philistines who make up that committee have not one atom of artistic sensibility between them. They should be pleased with whatever you come up with. Should be your decision.

SUTHERLAND                    I do think I should stay with the brief of the commission. I am sure it won't be a dull painting.

CHURCHILL                    Oh my apologies Mr Sutherland. I didn't mean to impugn your abilities. I am sure it will be a vibrant and splendid piece of work. I like colour. The robes would

give you colour. I rejoice with the brilliant colours. I am genuinely sorry for the poor browns Mr Sutherland. What do they understand about artists? I just get so frustrated with people who believe they know better than others. We artists must make a stand!

SUTHERLAND

Indeed Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL

I like you Mr Sutherland. We will get along just fine. My friend Max Beaverbrook spoke very highly of you. What's good enough for Max.... What say we go out on a limb? Do your own thing!

SUTHERLAND

I know the Houses of Parliament would rather have what they wanted.

CHURCHILL

Since when have Parliamentarians got what they wanted? The history of the democratic process in this country is littered with the corpses of the disappointed, unattained wishlists and the failures of everyone from Prime Ministers to Secretaries of State for Wales.

SUTHERLAND

I still think I had better double check with Mr Doughty.

CHURCHILL

Doughty?

SUTHERLAND

From the Commissioning Committee

CHURCHILL

Don't bother yourself. Stick with your briefing. Keep the puppy quiet. Forget about all that.

So, you wish to start your sketching?

SUTHERLAND

If I could just change the chair for the one in the window.

CHURCHILL

As you wish.

***SUTHERLAND makes some alterations to the layout as CHURCHILL looks on, occasionally tutting.***

***SUTHERLAND gets out his sketch pad and pencils.***

CHURCHILL                      Ready?

SUTHERLAND                    Yes, Prime Minister. If you could just relax in the chair maybe with your hands on the arms

***CHURCHILL sits and does as asked***

SUTHERLAND                    Thank you Prime Minister. I tend to sketch detail in fairly close proximity to my sitter. I hope that isn't a concern to you.

CHURCHILL                      You must be wherever you get the best view.

SUTHERLAND                    Thank you Prime Minister. I will start now. (***He does so***)

***SUTHERLAND starts sketching. After a short while....***

CHURCHILL                      Do you like to talk to your sitter or must we be here in stony silence Mr Sutherland?

SUTHERLAND                    I am very happy to talk. I think it's important to get to know the sitter that bit better. It helps with the finished work.

CHURCHILL                      I agree. But tell me off if I become too chatty. I don't like the verbose. People accuse me of over-speaking; but at least those who hear my words know what I mean when I am speaking them. Plain speaking. The art world is full of the over-speaking I would presume.

SUTHERLAND                    It certainly has its share.

CHURCHILL                      Of course the Americans are very good about not saying what they mean, or at least saying it in a very circuitous way. I have had many dealings with our friends across the Atlantic – a more frustrating English- speaking race there never was!

SUTHERLAND                    I am sure that during the War that must have made for some interesting encounters.

CHURCHILL                    You might say that. I was once asked by a US General to comment on a briefing paper he was going to present. I told him it had too many passives and too many zeds. I deplore the American use of the zed. And it is zed, not zee. The general asked me to clarify what I meant. I pointed to the zeds in the words systematize, finalize, prioritize. As far as the passive was concerned, I asked him which sounded better – ‘We shall fight them on the beaches’ or ‘Hostilities will be engaged with our adversary on the coastal perimeter.’ *(He laughs)*

SUTHERLAND                *(laughing too)* And what was the response?

CHURCHILL                    I don’t believe there was one.

SUTHERLAND                Stunned silence.

CHURCHILL                    The English Language is so beautiful. There is no need for its corruption or ill use.

SUTHERLAND                I agree Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                    I hope you will not corrupt or ill use your talent Mr Sutherland.

*(CHURCHILL lights up a cigar)*

SUTHERLAND                I certainly have no intention to Sir.

CHURCHILL                    It is never a craft which one can conquer. Not unlike leading a country. I am still a beginner as far as painting is concerned. But I love it so. Just to paint is such fun. All those colours. The feeling as you squeeze those tubes of vibrancy. Matching them, however crudely, with what you see. It is fascinating and absolutely absorbing.

SUTHERLAND                I do agree Sir.

CHURCHILL                    But practice.....

SUTHERLAND One has to invest so much time in it to continually see a development or improvement. I am a beginner too in some respects.

CHURCHILL Time. Indeed. When I get to heaven I mean to spend a considerable portion of my first million years in painting and so get to the bottom of the subject.

SUTHERLAND That would be a very positive use of the afterlife Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL Well if one approaches the afterlife with a positive view then death ceases to be something to be afraid of.

SUTHERLAND Again, a positive outlook.

CHURCHILL I can never be less than positive when I am at Chartwell. Will you be featuring my cigar?

SUTHERLAND I believe the Committee would rather not Sir.

CHURCHILL Mmmm. Better leave it out then. Paint it in and then paint it out if they insist.

SUTHERLAND I think they will Sir.

CHURCHILL Pah! *(pause)* I wonder if you might show me some samples of the sketches you do. It will encourage me that you're making progress and enhance my anticipation of the end result.

SUTHERLAND I am sure that would be fine Prime Minister. You will understand that sketches is all they are and only limited to certain features.

CHURCHILL Yes of course. Of course. I understand. It will keep my mind at rest. I can report back to my wife with confidence.

***SUTHERLAND continues to sketch in silence***

CHURCHILL Let me have a preview now.

***SUTHERLAND is wrong footed, but takes a sketch to CHURCHILL. It is studied.***

CHURCHILL                    This is very encouraging Mr Sutherland. Yes, very much so. You have some considerable talent sir. A good eye. I might say that I think this has the makings of by far the best portrait I have ever had done. This is good.

SUTHERLAND                Well, thank you Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                    Maybe I can see more next time. We should sketch together some time. South of France. Perfect place. Beautiful countryside. Perfect climate. Relax and create.

SUTHERLAND                That would be delightful Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                    We will do so sometime. When we have seen off this challenge.

***The sketching continues in silence as the lights fade***

***MUSIC – ARNE; Rule Britannia***

## SCENE SEVEN

WHITEHALL – September 1954

*DOUGHTY and SUTHERLAND enter.*

SUTHERLAND                    He wanted to be seen in his garter robes.

DOUGHTY                        So I understand. I persuaded him otherwise. Or rather I got someone else to. I don't hold the level of sway needed to cope with all the Prime Minister's fancies. He will be in his suit. Striped trousers, bow tie etcetera.

SUTHERLAND                    Just for one sitting and the photographs.

DOUGHTY                        You may find that more often than not he is in his pyjamas. Or in the bath.

SUTHERLAND                    Well, we have one sitting completed. Over three days. He is challenging me.

DOUGHTY                        As a sitter and as a man I should think.

SUTHERLAND                    Yes

DOUGHTY                        And he will continue to do so. As I said, patience will need to be your best friend. The challenge will continue to the end.

SUTHERLAND                    You are planting doubts?

DOUGHTY                        I am?

SUTHERLAND                    You are.

DOUGHTY                        Well if you have, we would need to know as soon as possible if you had any intention to withdraw from the commission.

SUTHERLAND                    I have no intention of withdrawing. He is very engaging. Trying to be as helpful as possible. He was in a good



## SCENE EIGHT

CHARTWELL – September 1954

*The artist and sitter are in mid-session. SUTHERLAND is creating an oil study of CHURCHILL. The Prime Minister is in his suit. Seated in a larger chair with arms. Posing rather like the finished portrait. There is silence while he works.*

CHURCHILL                      Your portrait work is confined to the famous and infamous Mr Sutherland?

SUTHERLAND                    Not at all Prime Minister. During the War I made a number of studies of tin miners. Their faces told many stories yet they would never be famous.

CHURCHILL                    The meek are the worthiest of all God's creatures. Greatness is fleeting.

SUTHERLAND                    But can last forever in some cases.

CHURCHILL                    Greatness, of course, does not necessarily determine goodness. I have met many great people, but they have not all been good. Herr Hitler was great, but a more wicked man never stepped on God's Earth. Mr Stalin..... Many others I could mention. How you condense this into a face must be your greatest challenge.

SUTHERLAND                    It is Sir. But one has to have confidence in your own ability. It is certainly easier if the subject is in front of you.

CHURCHILL                    Meaning?

SUTHERLAND                    As opposed to painting a representation of someone you have never met, but everyone knows. Then it is a purely subjective piece of work. Jesus Christ for

example. But I may have taken the easy way out by the creation of a somewhat stylised figure. I am currently working on a tapestry design which may require a somewhat more literal interpretation.

CHURCHILL

Good luck with that Mr Sutherland. How one portrays Christ is an almost impossible task it would seem to me. Reminds me when I was in the United States before the last War. I met with Mr Charlie Chaplin when visiting Hollywood. Short man. Shorter than myself. I asked him what role he desired to portray on film. 'Jesus Christ' he said. I replied 'Do you have the rights?'

***CHURCHILL bursts into laughter. SUTHERLAND joins in***

SUTHERLAND

Maybe no one has the rights to portray him.

CHURCHILL

Well, I am not Christ-like. I have the failings and frailties of every man. I stand in the shadow of his humanity, his gentleness, his overwhelming goodness. Am I a good man? What is it that you will capture of me? What will you create as a permanent legacy for many generations to come. Till time immemorial?

***A silence***

SUTHERLAND

I appreciate the responsibility.

CHURCHILL

We both do. Joined as we are by the bristles of a paintbrush. A monument in oil and canvas.

***A further silence as SUTHERLAND continues working***

CHURCHILL

You are continuing with your sketching? Did you not promise to show me some more of your sketches from the other week?

SUTHERLAND

Of course Sir.

***SUTHERLAND takes a few sketches and shows them to CHURCHILL. CHURCHILL studies them in detail.***

***SUTHERLAND stands nearby nervously. Eventually CHURCHILL grunts.***

CHURCHILL No, no. This won't do at all. I haven't got a neck like that. You need to take off an inch. No an inch and a half. And I have do not have a double chin. You are missing the mark by a considerable distance Mr Sutherland. There is no nobility in that face. I should look noble do you not think?

SUTHERLAND Well, errr, as I have said Prime Minister, this is not the finished work.

CHURCHILL When will you actually start the painting itself?

SUTHERLAND When I feel I have the images I need.

CHURCHILL I note you use a stubby little pencil to sketch. Are you happy with the equipment you use? Do you have the correct materials?

SUTHERLAND They serve me well.

CHURCHILL Mine come from Switzerland. Top notch. They serve me well too. I will have some sent to you. They will help your progression.

***A silence***

CHURCHILL It is a battle isn't it?

SUTHERLAND I'm sorry, Prime Minister, what is?

CHURCHILL Painting a picture.

SUTHERLAND Somewhat yes.

CHURCHILL Maybe we should have entered into a mutual battle. We could have painted each other at the same time.

SUTHERLAND That would have been an interesting experiment, but I don't think I would make a particularly interesting subject.

CHURCHILL Nonsense. Every human face has merit. Do you always make so many sketches first?

SUTHERLAND I like to build up my collection of source material which I will use to produce the end work.

CHURCHILL A collage then? A compilation? A jigsaw?

SUTHERLAND An amalgamation. A distillation. I will use the photographs which we will be taking as further reference.

CHURCHILL I use my eyes. Only my eyes. Even though their powers are on the wane. At some point the real eyes will fade and the minds' eye will take over. At that point I will begin to paint what I think, rather than what I see. Francesco Goya became blind. He continued to paint. Remarkable work. Remarkable. Such determination to continue as his powers slipped away. Age having its wicked way with the organs which were so vital to him. Beethoven..... Extraordinary. Never any doubt in their ability.

SUTHERLAND Did you doubt yourself during the last War?

CHURCHILL Always, but you never admit it.

SUTHERLAND To no one?

CHURCHILL To oneself. To one's diary. To one's god. Whoever that god might be. Never the same from one person to another. We do not know who god is. My god is different to yours. Every portrait I have sat for has produced a different person. Some I recognise and some I don't. Some I don't mind seeing, some I never want to clap eyes on ever again.

The Christian God is rarely portrayed in art. Michelangelo I suppose.....

It is extraordinary how perceptions change over time. Even over a short time. How differently have I been seen since the end of the last war. Since 1945. How opinions and impressions alter, are corrupted. One minute a hero. The next a figure of fun and ridicule. How fickle are those who portray you.

SUTHERLAND

Including artists?

CHURCHILL

**(becoming irritable)** Including everyone. And anyone. Triumph was followed so quickly by humiliation and now I lead a government continually fighting for survival.

**A silence**

CHURCHILL

How much more Mr Sutherland? I have matters to attend to.

SUTHERLAND

Would you like to take a break Prime Minister?

CHURCHILL

**(rising)** Yes, I need to go the bathroom. Have you seen enough?

SUTHERLAND

I was hoping for a slightly longer session Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL

Then we will organise some refreshment and we will convene again this afternoon. The light in here is all wrong. How can you possibly see what you need to?

SUTHERLAND

It's perfect for what I need Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL

We will re-arrange it this afternoon. We don't want a dark and gloomy portrait do we?

We will continue the battle later.

**CHURCHILL leaves. SUTHERLAND sinks down into his chair and puts his head in his hands. The lights fade.**

**MUSIC; ELGAR – Imperial March**

## SCENE NINE

WHITEHALL OFFICE – October 1954

***DOUGHTY enters opening a letter and we hear the words as a voice over.***

SUTHERLAND

***(Voice over)*** Dear Charles

I thought it would be appropriate to offer you a progress report on the portrait .

Our two sittings so far have been useful and productive. I am planning one more before I start on the full portrait proper. I have decided I will do this at my studio as I think I will have enough useful material, including the photographs which I have arranged to be taken. The Prime Minister seems content with this.

I have previously told you of my reservations about the commission, but I am determined to take it through to the conclusion and hope that the end result will meet with the satisfaction of Parliament. As to what the Prime Minister will conclude I do not know. We are cut of very different cloth – but we are both landscape artists at heart. This in itself presents an issue as I feel he lacks confidence in my portraiture capabilities.

The main cause of my worry is how the Prime Minister has a vision of himself which I cannot produce. I believe he wishes for a portrayal as a war hero – at his most triumphant. This will be implicit in my work, but I will not ignore the man as he is now. It will not be a retrospective portrait, but then I am not planning a warts and all image.

The deadline is approaching fast, but, of course, it will not be missed. I will value your opinion before the day and will arrange for you to visit my studio.

Charles, I am nervous and concerned, and although I am not quite having sleepless nights, the painting is consuming all my waking hours.

I trust it will be worth it in the end.

Yours

Graham

***MUSIC; VAUGHAN WILLIAMS – Fantasia on a Theme  
by Thomas Tallis***

## SCENE TEN

CHARTWELL – October 1954

*SUTHERLAND is working on something, but CHURCHILL is not there. SUTHERLAND is impatient. His frustration is obvious.*

*Eventually CHURCHILL enters – in a boiler suit. He has a lit and half smoked cigar in one hand and a glass of brandy in the other. He is suffering post lunch. His speech during the scene varies from almost inaudible to strong.*

CHURCHILL                    Sutherland.

SUTHERLAND                Good afternoon Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                You find me thoroughly unprepared for our sitting. Haven't much time so get on with it.

SUTHERLAND                Of course Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                You won't need another sitting after this?

SUTHERLAND                I don't think so Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                Done the best you can with this tired frame have you?

SUTHERLAND                I will have done by the time I am finished.

CHURCHILL                And you're convinced I will like the result?

SUTHERLAND                Well, I have no intention of aiming for your disapproval Prime Minister. I want to concentrate on your face and hands today Sir.

CHURCHILL                You can tell a lot from someone's hands. And their handshake.

SUTHERLAND                    Often the most difficult part of the body to paint. That's why I spend a lot of time working on them.

CHURCHILL                    You need more light.

SUTHERLAND                    No thank you, this is fine at the moment. But I will have to work to beat the dusk.

CHURCHILL                    Still sketching then?

SUTHERLAND                    Yes Sir. If I could just pose your hands and fingers Sir.

***CHURCHILL waves SUTHERLAND to him. SUTHERLAND carefully arranges the fingers on the arms of the chair and starts sketching them.***

CHURCHILL                    Time is pressing. I will want to see the finished painting before the day. You will grant me a private viewing?

SUTHERLAND                    Well, if I am honest, Sir, I wasn't planning one. But if that's something you would like.....

CHURCHILL                    Well of course. I have to see it. I can't wait in suspense in the unknown and get the same shock as the rest of the onlookers.

SUTHERLAND                    I hope it will be a nice surprise, rather than a shock Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                    Well, you know what I mean. I don't want an Anne of Cleves scandal. Henry VIII marrying her on the strength of Holbein's inaccurate portrayal.

SUTHERLAND                    The Flanders Mare.

CHURCHILL                    Indeed. Still I am not going to use the portrait to attract a new wife. What would Clemmie think?

***Some laughter to break the tension***

I am sure that the result of your labours will be lauded across the land and generations to come will look upon

it in the great palace and appreciate your art in all its glory.

***CHURCHILL is sleepy***

SUTHERLAND

That's very kind of you Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL

Just make sure you don't make a bloody mess of it.

SUTHERLAND

I certainly won't do that. I know the result will be something you will be proud of. I will be proud of it too. I trust the nation and the future will agree.

***CHURCHILL is asleep. The hands slip from their position on the arms of the chair. They hand limply – cigar still between fingers. SUTHERLAND stares at him for a while***

SUTHERLAND

A bit more of the lion please Sir.

***CHURCHILL starts***

CHURCHILL

Still making progress Mr Sutherland?

SUTHERLAND

Steadily Prime Minister.

***CHURCHILL relights his cigar***

CHURCHILL

I wonder whether you and your charming wife would join us for a small luncheon at Chequers on 14 November.

SUTHERLAND

I am sure we would be delighted Sir.

CHURCHILL

Will it be ready then?

SUTHERLAND

I plan it to be.

CHURCHILL

Good. Don't play with it Mr Sutherland. When you get a thing the way you want it. Leave it alone. Bring it with you. We can have an informal unveiling. My other guests would love to see it.

SUTHERLAND

Well...

CHURCHILL                    Come on. I have to see it sooner or later. Your creation. It will be a more relaxed surroundings than Westminster Hall.

SUTHERLAND                I am sure that would be fine.

CHURCHILL                Come on man. Be proud. You're not doubting yourself I hope.

SUTHERLAND                Of course not Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                Drink?

SUTHERLAND                No thank you Sir.

CHURCHILL                I need one. Was a good lunch. A week of sniping and back stabbing is enough to turn a man to drink. They are buying for blood Mr Sutherland. Let them buy I say. I won't be turning over so they can trample me underfoot. Do I deserve that? I don't think so. Eden is snapping at my heels. It would be fine if I had an immense majority like Attlee had. But I don't. You'll all have to put up with it.

Mr Sutherland I have served this country with all my heart for over half a century. Do they ditch me now? Do they put me out to grass? Never. Show them I still have the mind, the strength, the vigour and determination. Show them those qualities Mr Sutherland. Put an end to the Doubting Thomas's!

***Fade to black***

***MUSIC – HERBERT PARRY; Jerusalem***

## SCENE ELEVEN

### SUTHERLAND'S STUDIO – November 1954

*The painting has its back to us on a substantial easel. It is covered in a cloth.*

*SUTHERLAND enters with DOUGHTY who is business-like as usual. They are mid conversation.*

DOUGHTY ...and I would have been on time. Three-line whip!

SUTHERLAND It's not a problem. Really.

DOUGHTY Honestly I was on the verge of missing the vote altogether. But it would have been more than my job was worth. I wasn't going to miss this though.

SUTHERLAND Well, it wasn't going anywhere. It is done. Here to stay. I don't mind telling you. It has been the toughest assignment.

DOUGHTY I do not doubt it. I think there are no more challenging commissions. All I need to do today is to get my own first impression and be able to report back to the Committee that all is well.

SUTHERLAND I understand that of course.

DOUGHTY So, are you happy with it?

SUTHERLAND I believe I have fulfilled the brief. I have been true to myself. From the word go, as I told you, I wished to produce an accurate portrayal of the sitter. I believe I have achieved this.

DOUGHTY You think Sir Winston will be happy?

SUTHERLAND I cannot tell. I hope he will. I cannot tell. I have done what I think is right. I cannot tell.

DOUGHTY                                But time will, I suppose.

SUTHERLAND                            Time is always the final arbiter. We will see.

DOUGHTY                                Well, are you going to put me out of my misery, so to speak?

SUTHERLAND                            Of course.

DOUGHTY                                Would I be presumptuous to suggest I might be the first person to see it?

SUTHERLAND                            With all due respect, yes you would!

DOUGHTY                                Ah!

SUTHERLAND                            My wife has had a peek. And a few others.

DOUGHTY                                Of course.

SUTHERLAND                            Well. Here we are.

***SUTHERLAND unveils the painting. An intake of breath from DOUGHTY. He stands in stunned silence. He turns and looks at SUTHERLAND. Face giving nothing away. He turns back to the painting. Moves nearer and then turns back to SUTHERLAND a smile starts to play on his face.***

DOUGHTY                                Goodness. Extraordinary.

SUTHERLAND                            In a good way?

DOUGHTY                                Oh yes of course. Really it is..... well.... Quite something.

SUTHERLAND                            You think you can report back favourably?

DOUGHTY                                Oh indeed. Very favourably.

SUTHERLAND                            You don't know how good that sounds. Thank you Charles. Your support and enthusiasm has been of enormous value to me. On my own I may not have reached this point.

DOUGHTY                    Now, I may not be a top art critic, but I am sure you have nothing to worry about.

SUTHERLAND                That's very comforting.

DOUGHTY                    What was the toughest part to paint?

SUTHERLAND                Probably the head. There seem to be so many Churchills. I had to look hard to find the real one. I really thought I had got it. Kathleen agreed. But something told me that it needed something else. So I started it again. Sometimes you have to destroy something you are pleased with in order to get something better.

DOUGHTY                    Well, Winston is always acting. Trying to discover what is beneath the greasepaint is an art in itself. I think you have managed that.

SUTHERLAND                Thank you again Charles.

DOUGHTY                    Good. Well I have some news for you. We have had some communication from Lady Churchill.

SUTHERLAND                Oh?

DOUGHTY                    Yes, she has requested permission to view the portrait before the official unveiling.

SUTHERLAND                I see.

DOUGHTY                    I said I would sound you out. Do you have any objections?

SUTHERLAND                Well.... There isn't much time.

DOUGHTY                    I know, but I really think she will be delighted. I think she just wants to put the Prime Minister's mind at rest.

SUTHERLAND                He had wanted me to take it to Chequers recently. I decided not to.

DOUGHTY                    Yes I know. He wasn't too happy.

SUTHERLAND

Oh. No, no, I have no objections. I think I would rather not be here when she first sees it.

DOUGHTY

I am sure you can think of some way of achieving that. Good. Well I hoped you would agree. If it is convenient, we have arranged the viewing on 20<sup>th</sup> November. It isn't far for Lady Churchill to visit here. Would that be ok for you?

SUTHERLAND

I will speak to Kathleen, but I can't see a problem.

DOUGHTY

Excellent. Well, I think we are almost ready. I will see you on 30<sup>th</sup> Graham. Exciting. I had better get back to London. Do not worry. I can see myself out.

***DOUGHTY leaves. SUTHERLAND paces. Suddenly he sits down at his desk. Takes out an address book. Looks up a number and dials it.***

SUTHERLAND

Mr Somerset Maugham please.

***LIGHT FADES***

***MUSIC – HOLST; St Paul's Suite - Jig***

## SCENE TWELVE

A lounge area in a club – NOVEMBER 1954

*SUTHERLAND is drinking coffee with WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM – he is 80. Smartly dressed in double-breasted pin-striped suit. Well spoken. He smokes a cigarette.*

MAUGHAM                    So are you involved in some kind of espionage assignment? Going behind enemy lines? Smoke and mirrors?

SUTHERLAND                Not quite Willie. But it is something of a delicate matter.

MAUGHAM                    And what better place to discuss the sensitive and the secret than in a smoke-filled gentleman's club.

SUTHERLAND                Well I didn't want to drag you down to Kent.

MAUGHAM                    Well come on then. Spill the beans. Have you been recruited by the Russians? Off to join Burgess and Maclean?

SUTHERLAND                Goodness me nothing like that. No. Look, over the last few months I have been undertaking a commission.

MAUGHAM                    A portrait to match your masterpiece of me?

SUTHERLAND                I don't compare Willie – well I try not to. This is just different. The subject is as erudite as yourself. The Prime Minister.

MAUGHAM                    *(loudly)* Winston?

SUTHERLAND                Shhhhhh.

MAUGHAM                    Yes, sorry. Well. That is some commission.

SUTHERLAND                I was requested by this special committee of the House of Parliament. It's for his 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday. A present.

MAUGHAM                                 Sounds like you are feeling the tension somewhat.

SUTHERLAND                                Just a little! I have multiple concerns about it.

MAUGHAM                                 His birthday is soon isn't it?

SUTHERLAND                                End of the month and the portrait is being unveiled at a ceremony. Live on television.

MAUGHAM                                 On television.

SUTHERLAND                                Yes.

MAUGHAM                                 Grand. Significant. Celebratory. My 80<sup>th</sup> in January was a rather more modest affair without the national celebrations.

SUTHERLAND                                Well, I hope it will be all that.

MAUGHAM                                 Has the subject witnessed your finished work?

SUTHERLAND                                No, but this is where I rather hoped you might be able to help.

MAUGHAM                                 Break it to him gently that it's an absolute stinker, is that it?

SUTHERLAND                                No, please.

MAUGHAM                                 Sorry, I was joking Graham. I can see it's a rather touchy issue. I am sure it is very fine.

SUTHERLAND                                I think you had mentioned that you were acquainted with Lady Churchill.

MAUGHAM                                 Clementine? Yes, indeed.

SUTHERLAND                                Well, I have not met her, but she has requested a preview.

MAUGHAM                                 No doubt to reassure Winston that it is a magnificent likeness from the brush of an inordinately talented young man.

SUTHERLAND If it were only that easy.

MAUGHAM So, what do you want me to do?

SUTHERLAND I am afraid I just don't think I can face witnessing Lady Churchill's reaction when she sees it. I wouldn't know what to say or do if she hates it. You are masterly in the art of pouring oil on troubled waters. I know you would be far more at ease accompanying her to the viewing that I would be myself.

MAUGHAM Flattery will get you everywhere.

SUTHERLAND Oh I do hope so!

MAUGHAM Of course. It's not a problem at all. Where and when?

SUTHERLAND At my studio on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

MAUGHAM Will you be there?

SUTHERLAND Certainly I will be. Downstairs. I just need some kind of signal to let me know all is well. Maybe you can whistle down the stairs or something if she is happy.

MAUGHAM More subterfuge.

SUTHERLAND Only if she likes it. If she doesn't, just come downstairs and see her out. I will hide. Tell her I had to go out or something....whatever.

MAUGHAM *(laughing)* Oh what a web you weave. It will be perfectly alright I am sure Graham. Despite the histrionics I will play along with you. Clemmie will be thrilled. I have no doubt!

SUTHERLAND Thank you Willie. Thank you.

**LIGHTS FADE**

**MUSIC – WARLOCK; Capriol Suite – Basse Dance**

## SCENE THIRTEEN

The living room of SUTHERLAND's home in KENT – 20  
NOVEMBER 1954

*LADY CLEMENTINE CHURCHILL is seated drinking a cup of tea. She is 69 years old. Elegant. A tray with teapot and cups is on a small table.*

*After a moment SUTHERLAND enters with MAUGHAM*

SUTHERLAND            Lady Churchill. You know William Somerset Maugham.

LADY C                    Yes of course. Hello Willie. Lovely to see you.

MAUGHAM                Lady Churchill. A pleasure as always.

LADY C                    Let's be done with the formalities. It will make for a more relaxed atmosphere. As it is, we have a very anxious artist here!

MAUGHAM                Anxious to please I am sure.

LADY C                    Indeed. But you have no need to worry Mr Sutherland. Winston speaks very highly of you. He enjoyed your meetings together. Have you seen the finished work Willie?

MAUGHAM                Good heavens no. It would hardly be fitting for me to have a viewing ahead of yourself.

LADY C                    Well someone has to be first.

SUTHERLAND            My wife was.

LADY C                    Good. The spouse is so often the sternest critic. Winston dreads showing me something he is

particularly proud of. He takes criticism very badly. He thinks if I don't like something then it should be condemned to the bonfire! Do not be concerned Mr Sutherland. I am no art critic. I like to think I am rather fair.

SUTHERLAND

Thank you Lady Churchill.

LADY C

Tea Willie?

MAUGHAM

Not just now thank you. Later maybe.

LADY C

In that case maybe it is time to put this young man out of his misery!

SUTHERLAND

It's really not that bad.

MAUGHAM

Of course not. Naked agony is probably better! (*he laughs*)

LADY C

Really, my opinion counts for nought. I cannot and would never speak for Winston. He's his own man. Always has been. Always will.

SUTHERLAND

Well the studio is just up the stairs and along the passage.

LADY C

Then I will powder my nose first. I need to look my best for Winston even in oil!

SUTHERLAND

Just up the stairs on the left.

LADY C

I will see you at the top of the stairs Willie.

***LADY CHURCHILL leaves***

MAUGHAM

Keep calm. It will be fine.

SUTHERLAND

So you come back to the top of the stairs and whistle if all is well and then come down. If I hear you coming down without whistling I will know it's a disaster. Please give her my apologies and see her out of the front door.

MAUGHAM

I have my instructions. It will be carried out as planned. Quite looking forward to seeing it myself actually. But I will keep my opinions to myself. For now anyway! Better not keep the Lady waiting. Wish us luck!

**MAUGHAM exits. SUTHERLAND starts to pace. Eventually the lights fade to blackout to show a passage of time.**

**When the lights rise again, SUTHERLAND is sitting uncomfortably on an armchair. Suddenly there is the sound of a low whistle. SUTHERLAND throws himself back in the chair, then suddenly rise as we hear footsteps and voices.**

**The door opens and MAUGHAM enters and holds the door open for LADY CHURCHILL – she is replacing a handkerchief in her handbag.**

MAUGHAM

All back safe and sound. Good show Graham. Don't you think so Clemmie?

LADY C

Mr Sutherland. I can't thank you enough. You will realise it is difficult not to become emotional.

SUTHERLAND

Please sit down Lady Churchill.

LADY C

No thank you. We all need to get a move on I am sure, so I won't keep you. But I have witnessed a fairly amazing piece of work which I fear I cannot praise enough. I believe you have created something very special and I am sure the Houses of Parliament will be only too relieved with the result of their endeavours.

Obviously as I said before, I cannot speak for my husband, but such is my enthusiasm that I would really value it if you have a photograph of the finished work which I would ask you to permit me to show him.

SUTHERLAND

Yes, of course **(he moves away to a table with some books and papers and finds a photograph which he**

***places in an envelope while the following dialogue takes place)***

LADY C I am sure it's not something you do for all your subjects, but I think Winston would really appreciate a preview himself. In private, so at least he is not overawed on live television. He is not keen on being taken by surprise.

SUTHERLAND It is not a problem. A pleasure in fact. ***(He hands over the envelope to LADY CHURCHILL)***

LADY C Thank you. We will keep it away from prying eyes.

SUTHERLAND I am grateful.

LADY C I know you will receive a special reception at Westminster. It will be what is deserved.

SUTHERLAND Thank you Lady Churchill.

LADY C Thank *you* Mr Sutherland. Now, Willie, if you would like to escort me to my car. Goodbye Mr Sutherland.

SUTHERLAND Goodbye Lady Churchill. My best wishes to the Prime Minister.

***MAUGHAM opens the door and LADY CHURCHILL exits***

MAUGHAM Goodbye Graham. Keep faith. "Modest doubt is the beacon of the wise".

SUTHERLAND Willie, thank you. Thank you.

***MAUGHAM closes the door behind him as the lights fade***

***MUSIC – SULLIVAN – Henry VIII Suite March***

## SCENE FOURTEEN

WHITEHALL – November 1954

***SUTHERLAND is talking with DOUGHTY. SUTHERLAND is upbeat and happy.***

SUTHERLAND Charles it's a tremendous relief. Yes, I got a signal. A whistle down the stairs from Willie Somerset Maugham. Lady Churchill was so pleased. She had tears in her eyes. She asked for a photograph to show to the Prime Minister, which I gave her. It has put my mind at rest.

DOUGHTY *(off)* I am delighted. You must feel more settled.

SUTHERLAND I am. So, the details of the unveiling.

DOUGHTY *(off)* It's a big affair of course. What with it being the same day as the State Opening of Parliament.

***DOUGHTY gradually walks in with some papers for SUTHERLAND. SUTHERLAND walks out of his studio to meet him.***

DOUGHTY The presentation of the portrait will be made by Clement Attlee. Not sure why they chose the Leader of the Opposition. Churchill's wartime deputy I suppose. 'A sheep in sheep's clothing' as the Prime Minister once described him! Not a huge amount of love lost between them. Anyway, once he has spoken the curtains will be pulled and the Prime Minister will make his acceptance speech.

SUTHERLAND I see.

DOUGHTY Good. So, here are the details of the presentation. The Prime Minister's Secretary passed me this.

***DOUGHTY hands over a large white envelope.  
SUTHERLAND opens it and reads it.***

DOUGHTY Everything ok?

SUTHERLAND I think you had better read this.

***SUTHERLAND hands the letter to DOUGHTY who starts to read it out loud and the voice changes into that of CHURCHILL after a sentence.***

DOUGHTY/CHURCHILL My dear Graham Sutherland

Thank you for sending me the photograph.

Personally I am quite content that any impression of me by you should be on record. I feel however that there will be an acute difference of opinion about this portrait and that it will bring an element of controversy into a function that was intended to be a matter of general agreement between the Members of the House of Commons, where I have lived my life. Therefore, I am of opinion that the painting, however masterly in execution, is not suitable as a Presentation from both Houses of Parliament. I hope therefore that a statement can be agreed between us which will be accepted by the Commons.

About the ceremony in Westminster Hall. This can go forward although it is sad there will be no portrait. They have a beautiful book which they have nearly all signed, to present to me, so that the ceremony will be complete in itself.

It has been a great pleasure to me to make your acquaintance and to meet your wife. When the present pressure has abated I should like to talk over the portrait with you as I have some suggestions to make if you invited them.

Yours very sincerely, Winston S Churchill.

DOUGHTY

Would it be an understatement to say we have a problem?

***Fade to black***

***MUSIC – VAUGHAN WILLIAMS ; Sinfonia Antarctica***

## SCENE FIFTEEN

### CHURCHILL'S OFFICE – November 1954

*CHURCHILL is in a fury.*

- CHURCHILL                    It will be like a public execution. Yes, and why not. Broadcast it on the BBC and see your Prime Minister made a laughing stock as the Leader of the Opposition unveils a portrait of Toad of Toad Hall. Look, look here. ***(He holds up a small portrait of Napoleon on his desk)*** Napoleon. Noble. That's what I call art. But this! ***(He thrusts the photograph at DOUGHTY)*** This thing. How do artists paint you now? On the lavatory!
- DOUGHTY                    I think that's a little harsh Prime Minister.
- CHURCHILL                    It makes me look half-witted, an imbecile. Which I ain't. Is that what you think should be exhibited in the Palace of Westminster after my death? Is that my legacy to this Mother of Parliaments? No Doughty. I will not go through with this ritual humiliation.
- DOUGHTY                    But Prime Minister there are many merits to the work. I think you will be surprised by the public reaction.
- CHURCHILL                    I am sure I will be. It will be met with horror and disgust. A cacophony of silence. It brought my wife to tears.
- DOUGHTY                    I had thought she rather cared for it.
- CHURCHILL                    We are of one voice. She dislikes it with an intensity only a shade less than myself. So, there you have it. I cannot accept it.
- DOUGHTY                    But Prime Minister, the unveiling is but a few days away.

CHURCHILL                      Cancel it.

DOUGHTY                        I think that is no longer possible. Mr Attlee has probably started writing his speech.

CHURCHILL                      Then tell him to tear it up. Look at it! It's all brown! I hate brown!

DOUGHTY                        I must implore you Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL                      I thought this would be a pleasure, something to look forward to. It has turned into a conspiracy, exactly as I feared. I would wager that Eden has a hand in it somewhere. Is he in league with Sutherland? Or is it Attlee? Sutherland's a Socialist isn't he? No one who looks at this dire piece of art would see a strong dynamic leader? A has-been. On the way out. Well I won't be brought down by a painting. Let the people speak. I will only cede power via the ballot box.

DOUGHTY                        Prime Minister...

CHURCHILL                      Have you not done Doughty?

DOUGHTY                        No Prime Minister. I do understand you have some concerns about the portrait. But it is the joint members of the Houses who have paid for it out of their own pockets – I might say, some not particularly willingly. You risk upsetting every one of them. None of the Members wish you ill will over this. This celebration and the presentation of the painting is without precedent as far as we know. We want this to be an honour Sir. Not an humiliation. Mr Sutherland has carried out the remit of the Committee.

CHURCHILL                      You instructed him to paint me as an idiot?

DOUGHTY                        Certainly not Prime Minister

CHURCHILL I feel deeply wounded that this excellent artist who I have grown to like and respect should see me as a gross and cruel monster.

DOUGHTY I can assure he doesn't Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL You should have spoken to him when it all started going wrong. I should have insisted he finished it at Chartwell so I could have kept an eye on it.

DOUGHTY I am sure you would be one of the first to admit that artists work to their own skills, style and agenda. They don't take kindly to interference.

CHURCHILL So an intervention to prevent this so-called likeness from seeing the light of day, offending its subject and that subjects' family, let alone the wider community was something considered impermissible? Just so as to preserve an artists sensibilities?

DOUGHTY Mr Sutherland is very distraught Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL He is a good man and I have appreciated some of his work, but one can hardly believe that these savage and cruel designs come from his brush. Every artist creates a dud from time to time. I am that dud.

DOUGHTY In the mean time we have this ceremony in front of 2,500 in just a week's time. They are expecting to see something. Prime Minister, the portrait is but part of your celebration. But an important part. We are there to honour you, not to honour the portrait as such. Everyone is full of support for you. You know you are much loved.

***CHURCHILL grunts***

Prime Minister. I appeal to you to look at the implications of not accepting the portrait. The people who you will upset and offend. You say you are concerned about your popularity; the celebration and

gracious acceptance of gifts in public can only enhance your standing. The television broadcast will reach an extremely large and widespread audience, which would never normally see an event like this. The public are not art critics. They are only interested in you. The war hero. Celebrate with you. Not the painting. I'm sorry to sound so hard Prime Minister, but I really think it is your duty.

CHURCHILL ***(after a pause)*** Well Doughty. You obviously aren't looking for advancement in the government.

DOUGHTY You are correct Prime Minister.

CHURCHILL Your words have a certain resonance Doughty. I am bitter. My family is bitter. The outcome of this process is yet to be decided upon. This is not the birthday I thought it would be.

DOUGHTY You will accept the portrait Prime Minister?

CHURCHILL Tell Mr Attlee to write his speech.

DOUGHTY Thank you Prime Minister.

***Fade to black***

***MUSIC – VAUGHAN WILLIAMS – All People That on Earth Do Dwell***

## SCENE SIXTEEN

WESTMINSTER HALL – 30 NOVEMBER 1954

*The portrait hangs high over the stage – curtained. A single chair is on the side of the stage. SUTHERLAND is pacing. He can hardly bear to look in the direction of the painting. DOUGHTY enters at speed. Business as usual.*

DOUGHTY                      Graham

SUTHERLAND                Good morning Charles.

DOUGHTY                      How are you holding up?

SUTHERLAND                It's unbearable. I can't wait for it to all be over.

DOUGHTY                      I know this wasn't quite how we envisaged things, but you will be ok. The Prime Minister will thaw when he hears people's reaction.

SUTHERLAND                I hope you're right.

DOUGHTY                      Of course I am. When I left him after exercising my powers of persuasion he seemed much more amenable. As I say, in time he will understand the portrait and grow to appreciate it. It is remarkable.

SUTHERLAND                But it isn't the portrait of the man he thinks he is. I fear I may have lost the battle.

DOUGHTY                      We don't all see our true selves even when we look in the mirror do we?

SUTHERLAND                Probably not.

DOUGHTY                      Well, I must go and continue with my duties. I will see you after the ceremony. Enjoy it.

***DOUGHTY leaves. SUTHERLAND finally looks up at the portrait. Music plays – Walton’s ‘Crown Imperial’ - and SUTHERLAND moves to the seat. A spot is on him and on the painting. As the music fades, he sits***

VOICE

My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen. The Leader of the Opposition Mr Clement Attlee will now present the portrait.

ATLEE

***(Voice over)*** Prime Minister. I have been charged by my colleagues on this your 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday, with the pleasant duty of offering you on behalf of both Houses of Parliament, congratulations and good wishes for many happy returns of the day and further, to present to you your portrait painted by Mr Graham Sutherland.

You will, I know, be having on this happy occasion, a family gathering, but this too is, in a sense, a domestic event, for the House of Commons is a family. And we're paying a tribute of esteem and affection to a most distinguished member of our Parliamentary family.

This is a unique occasion, when, in an interval to Parliamentary battles, friends and foes lay down their weapons and unite in honouring one of their number.

On behalf of both Houses of Parliament, Prime Minister, I ask you to accept this portrait.

***The portrait is gradually unveiled. We hear some gasps and intakes of breath amidst the applause.***

***SUTHERLAND is in quiet turmoil throughout. As the applause subsides we hear CHURCHILL***

CHURCHILL

***(Voice Over)*** This is to me, the most memorable public occasion of my life. No one has ever received a similar mark of honour before.

I am most grateful to Mr Attlee for the agreeable words he has used about me this morning.

I am sure this is the finest greeting any Member of the House of Commons has yet received and I express my heartfelt thanks to the representatives of both Houses for the gifts which you have bestowed in their name.

The portrait is a remarkable example of modern art

***Laughter rattles through the audience. The pain on SUTHERLAND's face is tangible.***

It certainly combines force and candour. These are qualities which no Member of either House can do without or should fear to meet.

I am now nearing the end of my journey. I hope I still have some services to render. However that may be and whatever may befall I am sure I will never forget the emotions of this day or be able to express my gratitude to those colleagues and companions with whom I have lived my life for this superb honour they have done me.

***Very loud applause bursts out – but SUTHERLAND once again hears the laughter of before - the light fades on SUTHERLAND.***

***Music – Elgar's Nimrod starts playing as the laughter and applause fade.***

VOICE

Over 60 years after Sir Winston Churchill's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday in 1954, the true fate of the portrait painted for the occasion by Graham Sutherland has come to light. Much hated by the Churchill family its disappearance has never been completely explained. Languishing in the cellar of Churchill's home in Kent, Chartwell, it was presumed destroyed. Recently found tapes have revealed that Lady Churchill conspired to dispose of the portrait with her private secretary, Grace Hamblin. Some years after it was presented to Churchill it was taken from Chartwell to a field nearby and burned on a bonfire.

Mr Sutherland, with sadness, described the original disappearance and presumed destruction as an act of vandalism.

Sutherland continued his work. Notably designing the tapestry of Christ in Glory at Coventry Cathedral. He died in 1980.

Sir Winston Churchill stepped down as Prime Minister less than six months after the presentation. He died in 1965.

***The portrait starts to burn. The flames dance around it and turns to black. The lights go out. The volume of the music increases.***