

A woman, likely Elizabeth II, is shown in profile, wearing a crown and a necklace. She is looking to the right. The background is dark and out of focus, with some lights visible on the left.

# Christmas Preview

# Married to the job

## BURDEN OF RESPONSIBILITY

*The Crown* will show the moment Elizabeth (Claire Foy) made Philip (Matt Smith) a British prince





**‘This is the reason they’ve endured: they’ve never allowed us behind the palace walls’**

MATT SMITH

As *The Crown* returns, stars **Claire Foy and Matt Smith** reveal their new-found respect for the royals

INTERVIEW BY  
ZOE WILLIAMS

**The Crown: Series Two** From Friday Netflix

**M**ATT SMITH IS on a one-man mission to rehabilitate the Duke of Edinburgh. Prior to the first series of *The Crown*, the Queen’s husband was primarily known for making unfortunate remarks on state visits. “There’s a common misconception about him,” Smith says patiently. “When I told my grandad about the role he said, ‘Bloody hell, you’re not playing that berk, are you?’ But if you read up on him, he’s quite the opposite – he’s very intelligent, he’s quite precise, he’s got great wit.”

Watching Smith look effortlessly majestic in Prince Philip’s scarlet Grenadier Guards uniform during filming at Clarence House, you’re also reminded that he was incredibly dashing.

“The facts of the situation are that she was completely infatuated with him. He was a dreamboat,” says Claire Foy, who has wowed audiences with her portrayal of the Queen. “But they also had a lot in common and they seemed to understand each other in a way that was really special. They had a common sense of humour, and a common way of communicating.”

*The Crown*’s smash-hit first season for Netflix sprang a few surprises on the Windsors’ loyal subjects, not least of

LIVERY: FREEPIK; HAND-DRAWN TYPE: JITESH PATEL



◁ which was how much of a wildcard match Philip was for Elizabeth and how far he would have been from the first choice of a royal-marriage-arranger. It was a love-match island in a sea of duty.

By the start of season two, however, their marriage is miserable. The year is 1956 and the Duke of Edinburgh is restless in his helpmeet role and missing his naval career. More importantly, he has fallen in with a bad crowd, and has a "thing" going on with a ballet dancer. Alienated from the Queen, he goes off on a tour of the Commonwealth and, free from the scrutiny of the

## 'Prince Philip is my barometer on everything'

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press, controversially grows a beard.

"There's an interesting balance to be struck," Smith explains, "between trying to be truthful and authoritative and not being too syrupy. You only need to go a little bit in this direction and it's too reverent; and in that direction, and it's too liberal and sneery and anti-them."

**T**HE WHOLE PROJECT, written by Peter Morgan (the man who also brought us Helen Mirren in the 2006 film *The Queen*), is a tightrope between staying true to the facts and telling a story that gets to the root of a relationship about which so little is known. As Claire Foy says, "What everybody doesn't know about the royal family is that there are no facts. It's all conjecture. That's what Peter does so well. He doesn't place the truth anywhere. He leaves it for people to figure out for themselves." Matt Smith adds, "This is the reason that they've endured – they've never allowed us behind the palace walls. They've kept the illusion, that mystique."

Into that lacuna of discretion where decades of gossip should be, *The Crown* has poured a universal story of marital disappointment and disillusionment, laced with the very specific circumstance of this family, at that time: they could never divorce; they could only endure. "There is a fracture in their marriage that neither of them is quite willing or able to address. Their problems are universal. The things that touch them are the things that would touch anybody," Foy says. "But that feeling that there is no way out... it's easier to understand when you realise their marriage is the symbol of Christianity in the United Kingdom."

For all the sparse and elegant tenderness of the script, the great wells of sorrow in Foy's eyes

**CALM IN A CRISIS**  
The Queen discusses Suez with her prime minister, Anthony Eden (Jeremy Northam); below, Philip sports a beard during a rocky time in his marriage



when she's playing the Queen and the stubborn, battered-down anguish in Smith's Duke speak volumes on their own. It helps that they've both fallen, totally, for their characters.

"He was essentially orphaned," Smith explains. "His mother was committed, his father went off to Monaco and he was sent off to live with his uncle." Add in an education at Gordonstoun boarding school in the Highlands, which became known as Colditz in kilts, and Prince Philip becomes a much more human character.

**T**HE QUEEN, THOUGH, probably comes off as the most beset this season, battling the Suez Crisis brought on by a flapping Conservative government led by Anthony Eden (brilliantly played by a thin-lipped Jeremy Northam). "Looking back at the decisions people made [during Suez], you can see them in a context and maybe that reminds us all to just pause for a moment before making choices. Because you've got to accept the consequences," says Foy. It seems that, like the

royal character she plays on screen, Foy has developed a delicate diplomacy, never sounding thoughtless or Pollyanna-ish, always treading carefully. But you can't help thinking that despite talking about Suez she is drawing a parallel with Brexit.

"*The Crown* shows that a lot of people who were in charge didn't take those consequences into consideration. They were only concerned with their moment in history, as opposed to thinking of generations to come, who would live with what they decided to do."

**A**SKED WHETHER THE series has made her more of a monarchist, Foy says, "As far as I'm concerned, I live in a country that has a monarchy and I appreciate everything they do. I have huge respect for Elizabeth and her family and the things they've done as people. The monarchy as an institution is a very complex thing, and it's not necessarily something I identify with."

Claire Foy was born to play British royals – her performance as Anne Boleyn in the BBC adapta-

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tion of Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* was magnetic. "Well, I've always been fascinated by Anne Boleyn, but we all have, haven't we? Come on. She had six fingers! She's always been an exotic bird."

This is *The Crown*'s final season for the current protagonists in their young incarnations: season three will be recast, though we've no more details as yet, other than that Olivia Colman will play the Queen in her middle years. It's clear ▷





**DEVOTED COUPLE**  
Happier times for the Queen and consort

◁ how much the current leads have been drawn into the Windsors. "Prince Philip's my barometer on everything," Smith says stoutly, "even on whether or not to have an Instagram account [neither of them does]. I have been inhabiting him for the last two years." And yet both Smith and Foy have made their peace with the recast.

**F**OY IS A free spirit and couldn't imagine being pinned down by anything. "This idea that, when you get to be a grown up, you've got to have sorted everything out and live the same life... I think the expectation that anyone is ever going to do that is slightly ridiculous." Plus, she says, the pressure of the second series is already a burden: "It's more difficult because you can't try to re-create what made it successful the first time around. You have to just approach it as if you've never done it before, and you have to be attentive, and not let things slide, and not be complacent."

Smith, meanwhile, has experience of walking

## 'Doctor Who and Philip are both aliens, both outcasts'

MATT SMITH

out of a part at the peak of his performance – his Doctor Who regenerated into Peter Capaldi. "Oh yeah, I've been through it, I always knew it was going to happen. It's absolutely not a problem; it's one of the things that gives the show a real chance of having a life cycle." *Doctor Who*, in one way, was a different beast altogether.

"From the moment I was cast, I'd walk down the street, and people would come up to me and go, 'You can't break the Doctor.'"

Yet, while the difference in popularity of these two parts is stark, they're ultimately not so different, Smith points out. "They're more similar than you'd think: they're both sort of aliens, both outcasts. Now that would be a great episode – Doctor Who with a young Prince Philip."

## 'I CAME AT IT AS ANTI-MONARCHIST AND I'VE TURNED AROUND UTTERLY'

The Crown creator Peter Morgan on his royal conversion

**T**he one downside of *The Crown's* popularity, says its creator Peter Morgan, is all the awards it keeps winning. "I'm happy for the show but I loathe awards. All you want to do is celebrate with the people you've made the show with, and in LA [*The Crown* won two Golden Globes in January], there's a lot of stuff that gets in between that. Twenty different parties, agencies and networks, it's like the Fall of Saigon trying to get out of the Beverly Hills Hotel. That cigar moment of happiness and contentment can be quite elusive. If you take the intimacy away, there's nothing to enjoy."

Morgan is a curious character. While seeming to have a glass-half-empty outlook, he's also possessed by vivid energy and is very grateful. Although not to the Queen, necessarily. "If you were going to choose a character, you wouldn't choose a private, shy, middle-aged woman of limited intelligence," he says.

Is her intelligence limited? "I don't mean intelligence, I just mean, she's not an intellectual. And yet, I find her... Well, I came at it as completely anti-monarchist and I've turned around utterly. I'm a royalist, now."

To explain this sea-change, Morgan says, "There's something about the soul of a country that is somehow connected to the head of state. People believe in the Queen, now, at a time when it's so hard to find people that you really believe in. I think her achievement is undeniable, particularly

when you think about what effect exposure and visibility has on people. It's breathtaking, really."

Morgan's confident insights that breathe life into Philip and Elizabeth's marital strife through the 50s in the new series of *The Crown* also imbue his take on the Queen's political position, which is a complete mystery, considering nobody has ever known anything about her politics, except that she really liked John Major.

"Given the generation that she is, and in particular who her father was, the King Emperor, I think his commitment to the Commonwealth

## 'When the marriages fell apart they were all behaving in a crazy way'

was so undiluted that I'm sure she's very much her father's daughter. If Europe and the Commonwealth were drowning, she would pick out the Commonwealth.

"That doesn't necessarily mean she's anti-European, but I think both unions – the Commonwealth and the United Kingdom – are more important to her than the European Union. But if she thought leaving Europe would weaken those unions, she would be a Remainer."

**D**espite our fascination with the royal family and what goes on behind the gates of Buckingham Palace, Morgan insists that the monarchy has had an "astonishing turnaround. In the early 1990s, all the marriages fell apart and they were all behaving in a crazy way," he explains. But as the elder royals weathered it and gained stature by so doing, their lives began to be understood on a human level, as people of whom extraordinary demands were and are still made.

"It's quite clear, now, that they have no power at all. In fact their powerlessness is the torch. We torment these people. But we're the villains, because we don't know what we want from them." **ZW**



**BOSSING IT**  
Creator/writer Peter Morgan with *The Crown's* young rulers