

## 16-99 Years Prose Reading

### **The King's Speech** by Logue and Peter Conradi

Albert Frederick Arthur George, King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions and the last Emperor of India, woke up with a start. It was just after 3 a.m. The bedroom in Buckingham Palace he had occupied since becoming monarch five months earlier was normally a haven of peace and quiet in the heart of London, but on this particular morning his slumbers had been rudely interrupted by the crackle of loudspeakers being tested outside on Constitution Hill. 'One of them might have been in our room,' he wrote in his diary.<sup>1</sup> And then, just when he thought he might finally be able to go back to sleep, the marching bands and troops started up.

It was 12 May 1937, and the forty-one-year-old King was about to face one of the greatest – and most nerve-racking – days of his life: his coronation. Traditionally, the ceremony is held eighteen months after the monarch comes to the throne, leaving time not just for all the preparations but also for a decent period of mourning for the previous king or queen. This coronation was different: the date had already been chosen to crown his elder brother, who had become king on the death of their father, George V, in January 1936. Edward VIII had lasted less than a year on the throne, however, after succumbing to the charms of Wallis Simpson, an America divorcee, and it was his younger brother, Albert, Duke of York, who reluctantly succeeded him when he abdicated that December. Albert took the name George VI – as both a tribute to his late father and a sign of continuity with his reign after the upheavals of the previous year that had plunged the British monarchy into one of the greatest crises in its history.

At about the same time, in the considerably less grand setting of Sydenham Hill, in the suburbs of south-east London, a handsome man in his late fifties, with a shock of brown hair and bright blue eyes, was also stirring. He, too, had a big day ahead of him. The Australian-born son of a publican, his name was Lionel Logue and since his first meeting with the future monarch just over a decade earlier, he had occupied a curious but increasingly influential role at the heart of the royal family.