

## **Characters**

<b>Narrator (M/F)</b>	-	The Story Teller
<b>Lady-in-Waiting (F)</b>	-	Queen Elizabeth's Lady-in-waiting
<b>William (M)</b>	-	Henrietta's Fiancé
<b>Henrietta (F)</b>	-	William's Fiancé
<b>Grandfather (M)</b>	-	Henrietta's Grandfather

It is intended that this script is performed as a monologue; one actor performing all characters. It could alternatively be played by more than one actor with an onstage or offstage narrator.

**Narrator:**

Somewhere, there is a pub; it might be called the Wagon and Horses, the Queen's Head, the Carpenters Arms or even the Toad and Turnip. Outside the walls may be half timbered, of white pebbledash, hard blue brick or shiny tile. The name of the pub may have been changed, the insides knocked about, landlords come and gone. What is certain, is that inside this pub, there is a snug or failing that, a corner where friends keep up with the latest gossip, acquaintances exchange views and strangers confide. You may think when the heavy doors are bolted at the end of the day, the stories depart with their speakers into the night air; that nothing remains; this is not so. Once spoken or even thought, they enter the patina that builds up with the heat and light and smoke on the horse brasses, the old photographs, the oak beams, the mirroring behind the bar. Some stories are from the present, some have been around for aeons.

**Narrator:**

On a windy day the sign for The Queen's Head swings and squeaks. There is something about the expression on the face of Queen Elizabeth I that is unusual, but it is difficult to pinpoint. The pub is not Elizabethan but stands on old foundations, like a younger body on old legs. Not so very long ago this area of the suburbs was a self-contained village. You might wonder why after so many centuries of ale quaffing, the name of the pub has not been updated to the Computer Programmers Arms or at least the present Queen's Head, but there is a reason for this. If you settle yourself comfortably, I'll tell you.

It was Maundy Thursday 1582. In the village great excitement, because not only was Elizabeth I due to pass through in her golden carriage, but she was going to stop. Stop yes, the great Queen, along with her courtiers and ladies in waiting. Inside The Queen's Head, known until lately as Young Old John's, but changed especially for the occasion, there was even greater excitement. Excitement and last-minute practising of curtsies and bows; on the range, black kettles snorting steam. Soon in the snug, the Queen would perform the feet washing ceremony.

At this time in the ecclesiastical calendar an official visited the parishes and washed several pairs of feet belonging to the clean and deserving poor. After humbling themselves in the manner of Christ, small purses of Maundy Money were distributed. Once they'd had a bishop, but the Queen!

Inside the snug, the chosen villagers sat on stools with their feet ready in pot bowls. One pair of these feet belonged to Old John the barber. Watching Old John was his grand-daughter Henrietta. Henrietta was not pretty, but she was healthy with bright eyes and good teeth. Good teeth were a rarity. Before the dazzling grin of innovation appeared on the horizon with toothbrushes, toothpaste, floss and fluoride, teeth could be an absolute misery.

Old John knew that. He'd pulled plenty; teeth pulling was an offshoot of barbering. Henrietta knew it too; many was the time she'd been called away from her bobbins to help secure a squirming patient. But she had hopes for her own teeth. Her mother had had good teeth, and her grandmother Old John's late wife, had chewed meat when she could get it, well into old age. If some girls' faces were their fortune, then her teeth were hers, but how it could ever be was a mystery. Poverty was master in those parts and she and her young man could not wed until he had saved

enough from his pay as agricultural labourer. Her only dowry, her skills as a lace maker and her fine strong teeth.

Suddenly a flurry of activity and a fanfare announced the Queen; beside her, towel over arm, a lady-in-waiting. Removing her gloves, the Queen was briefly introduced to each head, before washing the opposite end. Running late, the Dean summoned Henrietta forwards to finish drying Old John's feet. Henrietta curtsied and smiled nervously at the Queen who was onto the next pair of feet. About to assist her grandfather on with his socks, Henrietta noticed the Queen suddenly address the lady-in-waiting who addressed Henrietta charmingly.

**Lady-in-Waiting:** Stand up; the Queen wishes to meet you.

**Narrator:** Straightening, and blushing at the unexpected honour, she became aware that the Queen was staring at her teeth. When that evening, she told her young man what had transpired, he stared at Henrietta for a long time, at her mouth, before bursting out

**William:** You mean - the Queen wants your teeth!

**Henrietta:** Henrietta answered, 'I knew you'd be upset William dear, for they are my best asset. That's why she wants them, for hers are dreadful. When she spoke, her teeth were like rusty railings guarding her tongue. She said she would pay handsomely.

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**Narrator:** Looking dazed William uttered 'Oh', and fell silent. Henrietta said,

**Henrietta:** That's just how I feel. And if it weren't for the money, you know I'd dearly like to hold on to them, for they mean as much to me, as assets other girls hold precious.

**Narrator:** As William remained mute, Henrietta asked,

**Henrietta:** What do you think dear? It would give us enough to marry on – but –

**Narrator:** Because he was silent so long, she thought he was sad, and become sad herself with the thought of her loss. Tears flooding her small eyes, and cascading down her blunt nose, she burst out,

**Henrietta:** 'Tis a pity that my best feature can't find its fortune any other way. I mean, those girls that prize their doe like eyes, or their rosebud lips aren't asked to part with them forever!

**Narrator:** As if waking from a trance William said,

**William:** I can scarce believe it. Your teeth - in the mouth of the Queen of England!

**Narrator:** Henrietta, upset by his indifference to her tears answered,

**Henrietta:** Yes, but it works the other way too.

**William:** What other way?

**Henrietta:** Her mouth round my teeth

**William:** But think how your teeth would smile at visiting nobles; how they would chew on nothing but the best. People might write about them - as pearls - paint them – as – **(interrupted)**

**Henrietta:** I thought you would mind? That's why I said I'd let her know.

**Narrator:** William spluttered as if in apoplexy,

**William:** Let her know? You said you'd let her know! Queen Elizabeth of England know! You've let your teeth go to your head! Nobody keeps their teeth above thirty in these parts anyhow.

**Narrator:** Henrietta felt the urge to laugh, but then went red with rage. What William said was too sensible. She shouted,

**Henrietta:** I thought you said you loved me. If you loved me, you'd love my teeth and not want me to part with them!

**Narrator:** William taken aback, rebuked her,

**William:** You should be honoured. Me, I'd give my right arm for my sovereign, never mind my teeth.

**Henrietta:** That is because you've hardly got any teeth!

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**Narrator:** That night she wept salty tears over her pillow. At breakfast seeing her so pale and wan, taking tiny spoonfuls of gruel, her grandfather said,

**Grandfather:** You'd not think him much of the man if he set your teeth above the Queen would you? It would be like worshipping a graven image. It shows he loves you.

**Henrietta:** Henrietta put down her spoon 'If he loved me he'd want me to keep them!

**Grandfather:** No. You've said yourself they're your best piece. If he wanted 'ee to keep them, it would show his love up as skin deep.

**Narrator:** Henrietta sighed, felt slightly better and took a larger spoonful of gruel. A girl certainly couldn't live off compliments around here. That evening William came calling, pale and contrite; a rabbit under one arm, a fine cabbage under the other. He told her,

**William:**

If the Queen has my arm, my heart belongs to you. – Dearest, even if the Queen has your teeth, she will never look as well to me, as you without them.

**Narrator:**

Henrietta sniffed and stood her ground for several such pretty compliments for they were as uncommon as white hares, but then she forgave him. After harvest home, with the money the Queen paid for her teeth, Henrietta and William wed and settled in the village. You might wonder how she managed to chew meat herself when she could get it, but that part was handled by Old John who made her the finest pair of teeth around those parts. And if you should ever happen to pass the sign for this particular Queen's Head, the thing to notice about the Queen's expression, is that she is displaying her teeth; a highly unusual thing in old portraits. And if you should pass when the wind is blowing the sign to and fro, then look up, for she is laughing, laughing.