

AFFAIRS OF STATE

A 45 minute play

by

Peter d'Aguilar

ISBN: 9781873130506
The Playwrights Publishing Company

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The author

After studying communications at Southampton College of Art, Peter d'Aguilar worked in advertising and public relations for several years before training as a furniture restorer and life coach. A freelance copywriter and cartoonist, he wrote his first piece of fiction at the age of seven (an excuse for not handing his homework in on time) and has spent the subsequent forty four years trying to master the art. He is currently a marketing officer with the Forestry Commission.

His short story Saving Souls was selected for publication in the second issue of Libbon magazine. Peter continues to write single plays and serials for radio with great enthusiasm. He lives in Sussex with his wife and two children.

AFFAIRS OF STATE

Faced with a choice between her marriage and high political office, Sarah knows which option to choose. Or does she?

A topical political satire entwined with an offbeat love story; AFFAIRS OF STATE scores direct hits on emotive targets of today such as sleaze, celebrity, matrimonial law and cheap journalism.

Characters:

Sarah Lucas (38)

Bright, beautiful, scrupulous – can she really hope to reach the top in politics with so many handicaps?

Derek O'Herlity (43)

Charming but ne'er-do-well Irish self-made millionaire. Sarah's husband

The Prime Minister (56)

An avuncular, pragmatic, cynical statesman

Ms Smiles (49)

A hard-nosed divorce lawyer

Jez 'Sniffer' Wilkins (33)

A tenacious investigative journalist
(could equally be played as a male character)

AFFAIRS OF STATE

that sort of thing. I know a number of my cabinet do. In fact, I caught the Minister of the Interior slavering over that newspaper picture of you and the current Chancellor outside Number Eleven last week. I assume it was you he was leering at. The Chancellor may have a wonderful head for figures, but he's not by any stretch of the imagination a physically attractive man. Strictly between you and me, I'll be announcing a reshuffle quite soon. The Minister of the Interior will be spending a lot more time with his family. Poor devils. On the other hand, you Sarah will be spending rather less time with yours. Which, if I may come, somewhat unceremoniously, to the point, is why I've called you in to see me today.

SARAH

Yes, PM?

PM springs to his feet and paces the stage restlessly

PM

Indeed. In my view, and realistically mine is the view that counts, you have but one chink in your armour. One blot on your escutcheon. One blemish on your otherwise spotless countenance. And I think that, if you search your soul, Sarah, you'll have no real difficulty in identifying it.

SARAH

(sighs) Derek?

PM

Yes. Derek. Indeed Derek. How could you, Sarah? How could someone with your impeccable judgement and infallible taste have been unwise enough to marry that ... that ... jackass? That ill-bred, oafish, crooked, boorish, drunken, lascivious, Irish buffoon? That man is the most complete and utter all round bore that I've ever had the misfortune to come across. I once had to endure his company for nearly half an hour at a Buck House reception. Goodness knows what he was doing there. Gate-crashing, presumably. Not only did he criticise my policies openly and to my face, he also refused point blank to laugh at any of my witticisms and repeatedly sprayed globules of veal and ham pie all over the front of my suit and tie. And, heavens, can he talk? If I'd been a donkey, I'd have had real concerns over the welfare of my hind legs. (beat) If fate had cast me as the leader of a *third world* country, and I sometimes wish it had, I'd be seriously tempted to have my Secret Service eliminate him, in the interests of national security and general good house-keeping. (beat) I ask you, Sarah. How could you possibly have married a man like that?

SARAH I love him, PM.

PM *Love?* There's no room for love in politics. Do you really suppose *I* married for love? Good God, no. I selected my wife from a short list drawn up by my private secretary, when I was a mere shadow front bencher. Quite simply, she had the best qualifications for the job. There's no room for sentiment in these matters, Sarah. And, if your husband's general behaviour wasn't reprehensible enough, my spin doctors have just been informed by a certain Ms Wilkins, political correspondent of the Sunday Echo, that your blasted husband has enmeshed himself in some new bout of skulduggery. With, of all people, that Premier League rascalion Markovitch.

SARAH Bosco Markovitch?

PM The same. The dodgiest man in Europe. Every time I'm forced to shake hands with him, I count my fingers afterwards to check they're still all there. And then I count his. For someone with fingers in so many distasteful pies, it's a wonder he only has the customary ten. Surely even a mountebank of your husband's stature can see that Markovitch is poison?

SARAH He *is* the elected President of quite an important EU country, PM.

PM Since when has that been any kind of endorsement? No, Sarah; I'm afraid I have no choice but to deliver an ultimatum. If you want to continue on your meteoric rise through the political starscape, you will need to sort out the Irish Problem once and for all. I must urge you in the strongest possible terms to give some serious thought to your ongoing domestic arrangements.

Scene Two

Door opens. SARAH enters her house, wearing a coat and carrying a briefcase. Noise from upstairs

SARAH (calls) Derek? Is that you?

DEREK (upstairs, unseen) No, it's a cat burglar. And I'm rather busy. Could you possibly come back later?

SARAH Stop fooling about. I need to talk to you.

SARAH Don't play the idiot with me, Derek. You know perfectly well that Wilkins doesn't come up with *nice* things. It's not her field. She's come up with something nasty.

DEREK Something nasty about me? Surely not.

SARAH About you and Bosco Markovitch.

DEREK Bosco? What about me and Bosco?

SARAH Have you had any dealings with Bosco recently?

DEREK With Bosco? Me? Good lord, no. Not with that old rogue Bosco. Perish the thought.

SARAH Derek!

DEREK Well, yes. I suppose I have.

SARAH What?

DEREK Oh, just a little bit of this. A little bit of that –

SARAH Stop procrastinating, Derek. *You're* not a politician. This is serious.

DEREK Please don't keep using that word. I don't like it. It makes me feel all cold inside.

SARAH You gave me your solemn oath that you wouldn't have anything more to do with Bosco ever again.

DEREK Did I?

SARAH Yes, you did.

DEREK I may have had my fingers crossed.

SARAH Grow up, Derek. You're boyish charm may still work on impressionable secretaries, but not with me. Just tell me exactly what's been going on. NOW!

DEREK With Bosco?

SARAH Yes, with Bosco.

DEREK Well, the thing is; he had this, like, brilliant investment idea, and I've put a little bit of money into it that was burning a hole in my pocket. And then, to return the compliment, he put a bit of money into one of my little

schemes. Quid pro quo, so to speak. Except it was Euros, rather than quids. If you get my drift.

SARAH Are you a total imbecile, Derek? How can a self-made millionaire, albeit one from the scrag end of Dublin, be so criminally naïve as to trust a man like Bosco Markovitch?

DEREK Have a heart, Sarah. I'm not the only person to fall for his easy charm and plausible banter. He *is* President of a largish European nation, for heaven's sake. People must have voted for him in their millions. It's unfair of you to single me out as extra specially gullible. You don't get where he has without a certain amount of credibility.

SARAH You don't get where he has without a certain amount of double-dealing, duplicity and downright dishonesty.

DEREK Anyway, there's no cause for alarm. The market has gone up, as predicted. Happily, there are plenty of pickings for all.

SARAH That's not the point, Derek, and you know it. I simply cannot afford to have my husband implicated in improprieties.

DEREK Sarah –

SARAH I'm Chief Secretary to the Treasury, for Christ's sake. If I play my cards right, I may well become the first ever woman Chancellor.

DEREK So? There's no real money in that game. And people will end up despising you for raising taxes and persecuting the poor unfortunate drinkers and smokers. If you want my advice, you should quit politics while you're ahead. Get yourself a few juicy board directorships. The private sector is crying out for your sort of talents. Brains, looks, unblemished integrity, etcetera, etcetera.

SARAH I happen to value my career, even if you don't. I want to put something back. To make a difference. To give people a voice.

DEREK Now don't be going on like that, my love. You'll have me in floods.

SARAH All I'm saying is, stay well away from Markovitch and keep your nose clean, or ... or -

DEREK

Or what?