

## Tekst 7

*The following text is taken from the novel The Party, written by Elizabeth Day and first published in 2017.*

He paused briefly, glancing around the marquee, taking its measure, and then I could see him fix his features accordingly and he unbuttoned his jacket and became jovial, shaking the proffered hands with ease, one palm resting on the other person's upper arm as he did so. 'Good to see you,' I heard him say as he approached. 'Great party. Great to be here.'

Edward Buller got closer and closer to us and I felt a surge of energy, all at once worried that he wouldn't remember me and that I would have to pretend to be a perfect stranger, even though I'd spoken to Gilly plenty of times in the past about how well I knew him. I saw her watching me now with her beady stare as the Prime Minister continued his triumphal procession and I knew that if Edward Buller blanked me, Gilly would note this down and it would become part of her spewing anecdote at other parties like this one and I would never live it down.

'All he needs now is someone to give him a baby to hold,' Lucy said. 'Wonder if Ben's arranged that.'

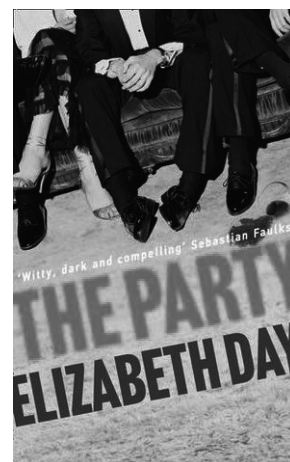
I laughed.

'Hi, Eric!' The Prime Minister was saying now, just two feet away from us. 'So glad you could make it.'

He was trailed by his meek wife, Fiona, a slender brunette wearing a mid-calf dress in an ugly geometric print. The Daily Mail was forever pillorying Fiona Buller for 28 and her habit of recycling old outfits. A few weeks before, she had been pictured at a women's mentoring event wearing a jumper knitted with the design of a poodle across her chest. The Mail had run a double-page spread asking fashion experts to give their assessment under the headline 'Paw Show'. One of the stylists had given her 'Canine out of ten for dowdiness'.

'Great to see you', Buller said to a man with ginger hair. 'You remember my wife, Fiona?' Behind him, Fiona gave a wordless shrug.

The Prime Minister was now close enough for me to smell the metallic edge of his aftershave. I rehearsed what I would say. I thought it best to take the initiative so that, before he had the chance to humiliate me by not remembering who I was, I would say, 'Nice to see you again, Edward,' and then maybe I would follow up with 'Must have been at Ben's' in order to give him the appropriate context. My hand was sweating. I removed it from Lucy's clasp. The Prime Minister had just embraced a woman in a tight brocade dress and was moving towards me, his progress inexorable. He looked up and our eyes met briefly and his gaze was one of complete



blankness and I felt my heart rate soar as he came closer and the inevitable moment was upon me....

'Maaaaate!' Ben had surged out from the crowd and was grappling the  
45 Prime Minister into a showy bear hug. All I was left with was a broad  
sweep of Buller's shoulders and Ben's arms around him. Ben drew back.  
'So good of you to come.' His eyes were glistening. Was he — no, he  
couldn't be — but was he actually on the verge of tears?

'Wouldn't have missed it,' Buller was saying.

50 Then Serena shimmied into the picture, cheekbones pearlescent, and  
kissed Fiona lightly on each cheek and said loudly: 'You two never let us  
down!' So everyone could see what good friends they were. Fiona took a  
startled step back.