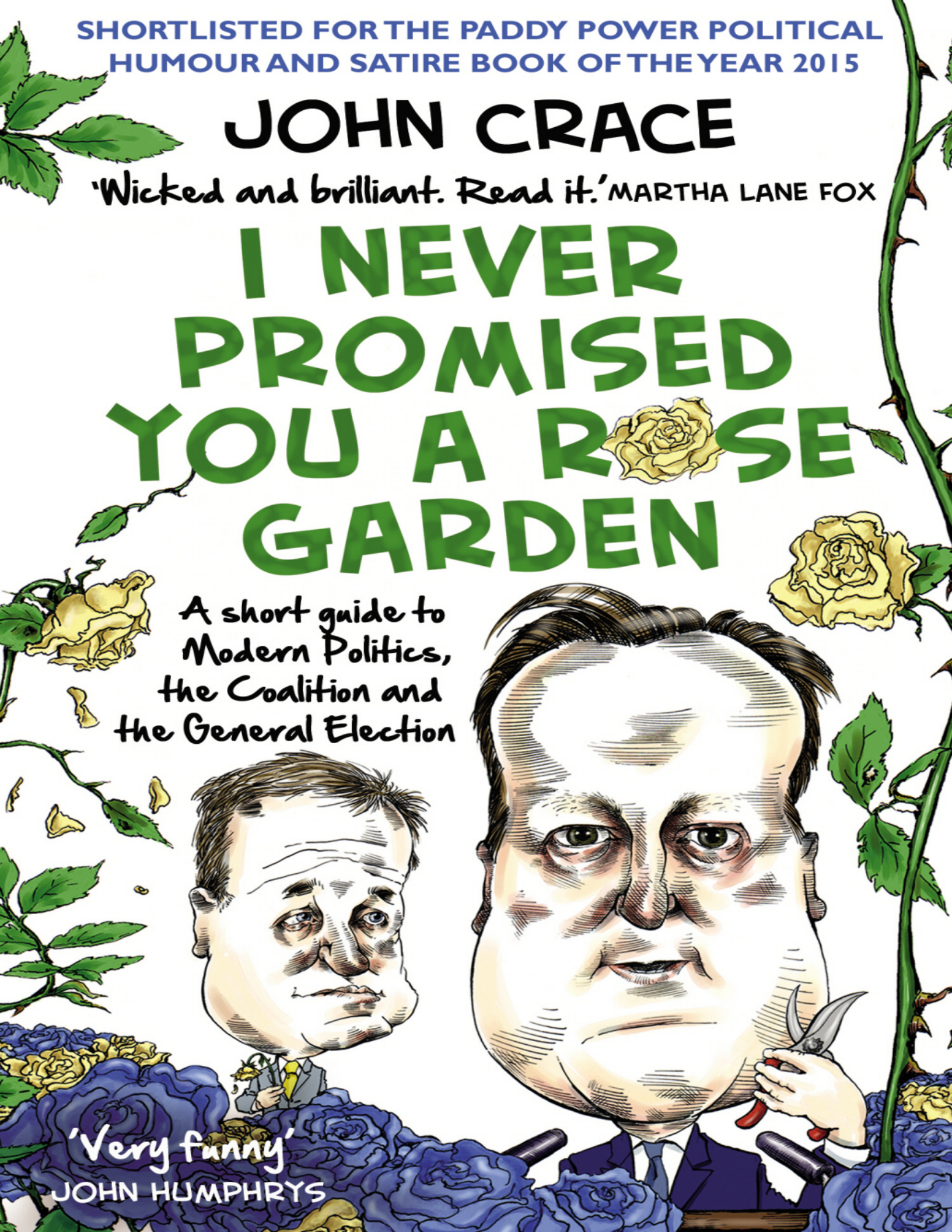
SHORTLISTED FOR THE PADDY POWER POLITICAL HUMOUR AND SATIRE BOOK OF THE YEAR 2015

JOHN CRACE

'Wicked and brilliant. Read it.' MARTHA LANE FOX

I NEVER PROMISED YOU A ROSE GARDEN

A short guide to Modern Politics, the Coalition and the General Election



'Very funny' JOHN HUMPHRYS

About the Book

Six days after the 2010 general election, two men – ‘Call me Dave’ and ‘Call me Nick’ – stood side by side in the rose garden of 10 Downing Street to give their first joint press conference as prime minister and deputy prime minister. They looked like men in love and it was a romance the country wanted to believe in. But it was also one that people couldn’t help but mistrust. Most unnerving of all, however, was the sense that Dave and Nick couldn’t quite believe in their good fortune.

How did the UK get its first coalition government since the Second World War? What compromises were made to keep it alive? Has it changed the nature of British political life for good? And who will win the 2015 general election? This book takes you inside the corridors of Westminster to reveal the real challenges and priorities of government, along with the conversations that were likely to have been had, instead of the ones the politicians would have you believe in. *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* is a satirical, sharp and very funny take on modern British politics. It is a must-read for all those who know which way they are going to vote in 2015. And for all those who don’t.

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A short guide to modern politics, the Coalition and the general election

John Crace

For Simon and Olivia

‘No ifs, no buts. If we fail to deliver, you can vote us out.’
THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY MANIFESTO,
GENERAL ELECTION 2010

Acknowledgements

I Never Promised You a Rose Garden was commissioned well before I became the *Guardian*'s parliamentary sketch-writer. It is a job for which Simon Hoggart set the gold standard for more than twenty years until his death in January this year and one which I am honoured to have been given. I hope Simon would have enjoyed this book.

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I haven’t been easy to live with as I finished writing the book and got used to wearing a suit to work for the first time in fifty-seven years; so no thanks to Tottenham Hotspur Football Club for making my life even more stressful. On the plus side, I did have the love and support of many friends and my family; in particular, my fab wife, Jill, my two wonderful if rather too opinionated children, Anna and Robbie, and Herbert Hound. Without them, everything is just noise.

Chapter 1

2 + 2 = 5

SHORTLY AFTER THE general election of May 2010, during the talks to form a coalition government, David Cameron, the leader of the Conservative party, and the Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg, had a conversation. History will record it as an agreement to put aside the old party politics by the introduction of a Fixed-term Parliament Act that would prevent a prime minister from calling a snap general election and ensure future governments had a full five years to implement their policy programmes. The actual conversation is likely to have been a little more nuanced than that:

Clegg: I don't trust you.
Cameron: How can you say that?
Clegg: Most coalitions barely last a year. How do I know you're not just going to dump me?
Cameron: The thought had never occurred to me …
Clegg: Not even if the opinion polls suggested you would get an outright majority in a year's time?
Cameron: I give you my word …
Clegg: You do realize the country is in an economic mess and that the government is likely to be hugely unpopular for at least three or four years? If not longer …
Cameron: And?
Clegg: And if I persuaded my Lib Dem colleagues to vote against the government on a key issue we could force

another general election? And in another hung parliament we might just form a coalition with Labour?
Cameron: You wouldn't dare …
Clegg: Try me.
Cameron: No one would ever trust you again …
Clegg: They don't anyway.
Cameron: So what do you suggest?
Clegg: A fixed-term parliament. That way we're both locked in and neither of us will have one of the shortest political careers on record.

The Fixed-term Parliaments Act became law in September 2011. For the first time in Britain's history, the date of the next general election became universal knowledge. Labour, Plaid Cymru and the Scottish Nationalists tried to introduce an amendment limiting the fixed term to four years, but the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats outvoted them and five years it was. Barring either the House of Commons passing a no-confidence vote in the government – and given the Coalition's majority this would require the government effectively to admit, 'You know what? We have been a bit rubbish' – or for two-thirds of all MPs to demand an early election – about as likely as them asking for their expenses to be re-audited, just in case they had over-claimed – then the next election would be held on 7 May 2015.

Under the previous rules, the government had been free to call a general election at any time during the course of a five-year parliament. In practice, the only governments that delayed calling an election until they were statutorily obliged to do so were those who knew they were dead ducks and were just hanging on for a miracle – a spontaneous eruption of billions of tonnes of oil in the Thames estuary would be handy – and to get the most out of the ministerial limos. John Major knew the game was up long before the 1997 election: he had already resigned

once as leader of the Conservatives in 1995, after being overheard referring to several of his Cabinet colleagues as bastards following a TV interview.

The power to call an early election at any time was a huge advantage for a government, allowing the prime minister to select the date that opinion polls suggested would be most advantageous. Even now, Gordon Brown must be kicking himself for not calling an election in October 2007. He had finally taken over from Tony Blair in June of that year. All the opinion polls suggested Labour would win an election with a reduced majority. But Brown bottled it.

You can understand why. Becoming prime minister had been Gordon Brown's driving obsession for years and he believed that Blair had reneged on several earlier deals to step down and let him take over. Having finally got his hands on the job he had always wanted, was he really prepared to risk everything on a snap election? What if the polls were wrong – they had been in the past – and he were to lose? Then he'd be no more than a footnote in history. The laughing stock of his nemesis, Blair. The man who was handed the keys to Number 10 without the need to win an election and was then rejected by the public when he did call one. Better to wait until the opinion polls picked up just a little … Except they never did. The financial collapse followed soon after, the economy went into recession and Brown's days were numbered.

It's possible that David Cameron might have given up the massive benefit of being able to call a general election at a time that suited him as an act of fair-minded altruism. If so, then he would be the first prime minister in history to decide to level the political playing field in order to give his opponents a better chance. It's unlikely that Cameron sat in his office at Number 10 feeling overwhelmed by the existential crisis of his good fortune: 'I've had too many

advantages already in life. It's just not right I should have any more. It's time to give that nice Ed Miliband a break.'

Cameron agreed to a fixed-term parliament because the Lib Dems demanded it as part of a coalition agreement and at the time it wasn't a deal-breaker for the Conservatives. Better to get the chance of power on a fixed-term contract than to risk missing out completely. That's how the political process rolls. Sometimes laws get passed for the good of the whole country, sometimes they get made mainly for the benefit of the people inside Westminster. Some of the knock-on effects of this constitutional reform could be predicted, if not quantified. Each parliament has lasted just under four years on average since the end of the Second World War: a five-year term gives voters fewer opportunities to re-elect or change a government. Whether the loss of some democratic accountability is compensated for by the stability of the new system is still anyone's guess.

There have also been a number of less expected consequences from the Fixed-term Parliaments Act. When the opposition faced the possibility of an election at any time, it needed to be able to present credible and coherent policies of its own. Labour has been under no pressure to do that: why go through all the effort of creating detailed proposals – which the government will pick holes in – for situations that will almost certainly have changed a few years down the line when the general election comes round? Far better to argue your own position in vague generalities while putting the government under the microscope. Which is mostly the game Labour has played in opposition. Even the party's own insiders still aren't entirely sure what the One Nation slogan, launched at Labour's 2012 party conference, really meant. Luckily, it doesn't matter that much, since it seems to have been reduced to ever fainter echoes.

One of the arguments used in favour of a fixed-term parliament was that it would allow the government to plan

a full five-year legislative programme without worrying that important Bills would have to be dropped because of an early election. It hasn't quite turned out like that. All the Coalition's big – and difficult – legislation on deficit reduction and reform of schools and the NHS took place in the first three and a half years of the parliament. Thereafter things have gone rather quiet, because the Coalition doesn't want to upset the punters before an election. The general rule of government is to get the pain in early and be Mr Nice Guy – aka do not very much apart from the odd budget giveaway – before an election. The only moderately tricky piece of legislation to be negotiated in the final year was the HS2 Bill for the construction of a high-speed rail link between London and Birmingham. Even then its third reading was scheduled for a time comfortably after the May 2015 election. This year, next year, sometime, never …

The feeling that backbench MPs were left twiddling their thumbs was not lost on the opposition. MPs are known for being generous in awarding themselves long holidays – recess, they call it – but in 2014 they gave themselves even more holidays than usual. For once, though, accusations of wholesale slacking-off were wide of the mark. Most opposition MPs would have welcomed more activity. There was just nothing for them to do. If the government hadn't run out of ideas, it had certainly run out of legislation to put before parliament.

There's a little-known exchange that takes place in the House of Commons at about 10.30 every Thursday morning in which the leader of the House is asked by the shadow leader of the House what business the government has timetabled in the coming months. Normally it's a fairly anodyne session, but for a while in early 2014 it became one of the highlights of the week. The Conservative leader of the House was Andrew Lansley, whose sacking as health minister was almost a mercy act. Lansley is a tortured soul

who moves so slowly it's as if he is hoping time will overtake him and transport him back to a more congenial era. The late nineteenth century. His opposite number was Angela Eagle, an altogether sharper politician.

Each week Eagle would taunt Lansley that the government had nothing to do and he would reply that the reason there was so little to do was because the Coalition had been extraordinarily efficient in expediting its legislation. Not even Lansley could look convinced by that. His nadir came in the final head-to-head before the Easter break.

'Perhaps he can now confirm that prorogation [the ending of the parliamentary session] will be at least a week, or even two weeks, early due to the government's chronic lack of business?' Eagle asked.

Lansley rose wearily. 'I am surprised at the honourable lady's argument that we are not busy. We are busy,' he replied. 'As it happens, when we return from recess, we have a busy two days.'

Lansley's own state of profound futility was so visible even his own party regarded him as fair game. 'Why are the government so frightened of giving Members of Parliament a decent time to debate the HS2 Bill?' enquired Tory back-bencher Cheryl Gillan. Lansley insisted he had given it a lot of thought and had allocated more than enough extra time. 'An hour,' said Gillan.

Lansley's expression made it clear he felt this was a huge concession to his social schedule. The speaker couldn't resist going in for the kill. 'I say gently to the leader of the House that, in extending the Monday sitting by an hour, I feel sure that he was taking pity on the chair and did not want the chair to be occupied beyond eleven o'clock. For my part, I would be quite happy to sit in the chair until at least three or four in the morning.' Lansley looked horrified.

Lansley was just the fall guy, though, the politician who shouldered the burden of government inertia. It wasn’t his fault. That the government had so little to do was a direct consequence of the five-year Fixed-term Parliaments Act. Election campaigns used to last only a matter of weeks; a couple of months at most. Now they last more than a year.

Chapter 2

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

THERE'S OFTEN A point in the lifespan of a parliament when the government knows the game is up: that no matter what it does it has no chance of winning the next election. Sometimes it comes after two or three years; on a few, rare, occasions it's reached on the very day after they've just won the previous election.

John Major's Conservatives experienced that moment of revelation in 1992. Their surprise election win that year had been more of a vote against Labour than an endorsement of the Tories: indeed, up until the moment Neil Kinnock, the Labour leader, yelled, 'We're all right! We're all right!' on stage at a political rally in Sheffield, many Conservatives had already resigned themselves to the inevitable. Kinnock's Bono impressions – 'Every time I clap my hands, I lose another vote' – were a wake-up call. The electorate might have been all right, but the Labour leader wasn't. Kinnock's efforts to appear as the new, engaged, populist face of Labour had backfired embarrassingly.

Lightning wasn't going to strike twice. The Tories' narrow 21-seat majority couldn't survive another five years: they had been in power since 1979 and the public were bored with them. Sitting in Number 10 on the day after the 1992 general election, Major knew he was on borrowed time. The country's apathy and disillusionment with the Tories was only ever going to increase over the next five years and all he could do was try to limit the worst of the damage. It was a thankless task as his government lurched

from one crisis to another: first Black Wednesday, in which the Treasury lost £3 billion in a day trying to keep the pound in the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, then a succession of sex and money sleaze stories involving Tory politicians, along with ongoing rows within the party over Britain's membership of the European Union. Come the 1997 election, it's possible that not even John Major voted for the Conservatives.

Labour might have had much the same feeling in 2005. Most of the goodwill that the party had accumulated going into their 1997 landslide victory had long since dissipated. Their majority had been cut from 160 to 66: even though the economy appeared still to be OK, disenchantment had set in. Core Labour supporters believed the party had failed to deliver on many of its promises and – more importantly – that they had been misled over the government's decision to go to war with Iraq in 2003. The less committed Labour voters were just becoming apathetic. Close up, many Labour politicians had begun to look just as self-serving and back-biting as their Tory counterparts had done. Another five years of this and Labour would be done for.

No one understood this better than the Labour prime minister, Tony Blair. Following the death of the party's leader John Smith in 1994, Blair and Gordon Brown had had dinner together in Granita, a restaurant in Islington, during which many insiders believe a deal was reached to stitch up the leadership of the Labour party for the foreseeable future. If Brown didn't challenge Blair's candidacy, then Blair would step aside some years down the line and let Brown have a go. The exact details of the conversation have long been a matter of contention. Until now:

Blair: Very good of you to join me, Gordon.
Brown: I thought it was you that was joining me …

Blair: Would you like a glass of wine? No? The angostura bitters? A splendid choice. Anything on the menu that you would especially like?
Brown: I think I'll have the leadership of the Labour party …
Blair: It's off.
Brown: That's not fair …
Blair: New Labour has to move with the times. A certain amount of greed is good. Thing is, Gordon, ya know, the voters find you a bit scary. So we don't want to put them off, do we?
Brown: What are you saying exactly?
Blair: The guys think Labour stands the best chance with me as leader. And I have to say, I agree. But you will get your opportunity …
Brown: When?
Blair: Oh, I don't know, Gordon. Do stop going on so. Just try and enjoy being chancellor for a bit. You will get your turn as prime minister one day, I promise.
Brown: When?
Blair: Oh look! There's the waiter. So what will you have? I can recommend the sea bass …
Brown: I will give you two elections, Tony. Just two. After that, you bugger off and make your fortune somewhere else. Do you hear?
Blair: This stuffed squid is heavenly. To die for …
Brown: Two terms. No more. I want your word on that.
Blair: Alastair! Fancy you turning up …

Whether a deal had really been done and whether the Labour party would automatically have accepted Brown as its leader once Blair stepped down is conjecture; what isn't is that Brown felt a deal had been made and that the leadership would be his by right. Wind forward nine years to 2003. Gordon Brown was still chancellor; Blair had won two elections and was in his second term of office as prime

minister, showing no sign of going anywhere. In his 2010 autobiography, *The Third Man*, Peter Mandelson, one of New Labour's more slippery architects, recorded that Brown and Blair were virtually on non-speaking terms by 2003 – primarily over Blair's refusal to step down: non-speaking, that is, apart from a series of volcanic rows late in the year. Mandelson has never been the most reliable of witnesses, so the conversation could have gone like this:

Brown: You promised you would go …
Blair: Didn't. I had my fingers crossed. So there.
Brown: I've always thought you were untrustworthy. And now the public think you are too. Just go.
Blair: Sometimes one must travel the road less travelled, Gordon. Nothing could be simpler than for me to walk away and let you be prime minister. Indeed, in my weaker moments there's nothing I would like more than to just put my feet up. But that's not what God wants and it's not what the country wants. I am here to serve. So you must stand and wait …
Brown: I've had enough of this …
Blair: Well, I haven't. What bit of 'I'm Not Going Anywhere' don't you get? I love it at Number 10. Cherie loves it at Number 10. Did you ever really think I'd chuck all this in for you? I've got my legacy to think of. Another election win and I become the first Labour leader to win three successive elections.

History was duly made, with Blair securing a third victory in 2005 with a further reduced majority, largely because the voters thought the Conservatives were still a shambles, with a leader, Michael Howard, who had been no more popular than the previous incumbents, William Hague and Iain Duncan Smith. But even as the last votes were counted, Blair knew his time was up. The public disliked and mistrusted him and no one believed in the New Labour

project any more. Labour had run out of ideas, big or small. Government had been reduced to getting through day-to-day crises with as little damage as possible – something that was becoming increasingly difficult as the Labour back benches were filling up with discontented MPs who had either been overlooked or shafted by their leader. Blair had almost as many enemies in his own ranks as he had among the Tories.

In 2006, Tom Watson, a junior defence minister, met with several other Labour MPs at a curry house in Wolverhampton to plan a move to depose Blair as leader. Days later Watson resigned as minister and delivered a letter, also signed by ten other rebel MPs, to Downing Street calling on Blair to resign. Gordon Brown claimed he had nothing to do with the attempted coup and said the letter was 'ill-advised', though it was later revealed that Watson had visited Brown at his Aberdeenshire home the day before he delivered the letter. Watson claimed he had just happened to be passing by and wanted to pay his respects to Brown's baby son and that the letter was never mentioned. Even he didn't sound as if he believed that story. As with all other challenges to his leadership, Blair faced this one down, but he must have known his days were numbered. The main thing now was for him to consider the timing of his exit. Too soon and it would look as if he had merely been hanging on to win a third term; too late and he would just appear self-interested and spiteful. So he hung on for another year before calling Brown in 2007:

Blair: You win. I'm off.
Brown: What?
Blair: I'm out of here. Finito.
Brown: Just like that …?
Blair: I've outgrown this job, Gordon. There's nothing left to do here. Everything's fucking up and the country hates us. Where's the gratitude, I ask you. After all I've done.

Still, one has to be humble in these situations, so I'm moving on to bigger and better things. I've got peace to bring to the Middle East and my Blair Foundation to run.
Brown: Let me get this straight. Having taken all the credit as prime minister for ten years, you're going to bugger off when the party is at its least popular and leave me to sort out the mess?
Blair: Don't be so negative, Gordon. You've always wanted to be prime minister and now you've got your chance. Never say I don't keep my promises.

Not for the first time, Blair's self-preservation instincts were spot on. Whether by luck or judgement, he got out just in time. Within months, the global banking system was in crisis and the economy was heading for recession. And Brown, the chancellor who in 1999 had promised the country 'an end to boom-and-bust economics', was left to cope as prime minister with the fallout from the worst economic meltdown for over a century. It didn't help that voters perceived his manner to be awkward and defensive. But even if he had been as smooth and slick as Blair in the New Labour heyday, the situation would have been unsalvageable. Come the 2010 election, Labour would have to go. A Conservative victory should have been a mere formality.

During his time as prime minister, Tony Blair saw four Tory party leaders come and go. John Major stepped down straight after the 1997 election, William Hague went after the 2001 election, while Iain Duncan Smith didn't even make it through a parliament to contest the 2005 election. The honour fell instead to Michael Howard, who immediately announced he would step down after the Conservatives lost that election.

Of the four, only Hague could count himself as unfortunate. At another time in his party's history, when

the Tories weren't so universally disliked, he might have been a good leader. Hague has a sharp political brain and something almost approaching charisma. His mistake was to allow himself to be put forward as leader when his party had no chance of winning an election. He was only thirty-six in 1997, and had he been prepared to bide his time for another ten years he could have been leader as the party's fortunes began to recover. But few politicians ever pass up the opportunity to take a top job when it's offered: most know that careers in Westminster can be all too short and the chance may not come around again; the rest have such big egos they believe they can be the ones who achieve the impossible.

Duncan Smith and Howard were more like sacrificial lambs. Neither had the personality or sharpness to convince either their MPs or the country that the Conservatives were a credible opposition, and their appointment had more than a hint of a *Beyond the Fringe* sketch:

Tories: We're looking for someone to make a futile gesture.
Duncan Smith: I will, sir.
Tories: Sorry? Who are you?
Duncan Smith: Iain Duncan Smith, sir.
Tories: Are you one person or two?
Duncan Smith: Just the one, sir.
Tories: Jolly good. Now look here, Duncan. The enemy are dug in over there and we need someone who is prepared to attack them on foot in broad daylight. I won't beat about the bush. It's going to be bloody. Bloody bloody. But someone has to do it and that person is you. Your country will remember you.
Duncan Smith: Thank you, sir.
Prolonged machine-gun fire.
Tories: We're looking for someone to make a futile gesture.
Howard: I will, sir.

If Labour party members had been allowed to vote in the Tory leadership contest, Duncan Smith and Howard would have romped home in a landslide. Whatever else Labour had to worry about between 2001 and 2005 – principally an unpopular war in Iraq and splits in its own ranks – the Tories weren't an issue. The choice of Duncan Smith and Howard suggested a degree of pragmatic resignation among the Conservatives. As long as the Tories couldn't win an election there was no point wasting their best ammunition. Better to keep the quality players fresh on the subs' bench and let two of the older, reasonably competent squad members have their futile swan song on the front bench.

The contest for the 2005 Conservative leadership election eventually came down to a two-horse race between David Davis, an experienced politician from the right of the party, and David Cameron, a relative newcomer from the left of the party, who had only been elected to parliament in 2001. For a while Davis was the front-runner, but a poor speech at the autumn party conference saw him slip in the ratings and Cameron got the job. His attractions were clear. He had no past and was therefore untainted by the failures and embarrassments of the Tories throughout much of the 1990s. His more liberal conservatism was in vogue: old-style, hard-line Thatcherism was popular only in remote outposts of the Rotary Club. Tories in 2005 had to look as if they cared. Cameron ticked all these boxes. What's more, he had an attractive wife, a young family, he had listened to pop songs on the radio – well, he said he had – and could sometimes be seen relaxing without a tie. This was about as common touch as any Tory politician had ever got.

The problem was that as the 2010 election grew ever nearer and the economic situation became bleaker by the day, it became more and more obvious that Cameron wasn't particularly in touch. Nor was he the Conservative's Tony Blair, as many had hoped. Cameron was a posh boy who

had gone to Eton, moved seamlessly on to Oxford University, where he had been a member of the all-male, public-school Bullingdon Club – in which getting drunk, making sexist jokes, trashing restaurants and making fun of foreigners was a tradition – before joining the Tory party as a researcher. Apart from a five-year stint in PR for London-based Carlton Television, he had never had a job outside politics. No one could be entirely sure if he had ever left the Home Counties.

Nor did it help that Cameron had chosen the godfather to one of his children, a man with an almost identical background, to be his shadow chancellor. George Osborne had gone to St Paul's rather than Eton and had never had a proper job outside Westminster, but otherwise his CV also read Oxford, the Bullingdon Club and the Tory party. As a team, it wasn't so much that they lacked gravitas as that they had little to offer. They were two men who seemed to have grown up immune to the demands and complications of everyday life and had effortlessly moved into positions they considered their birthright. That judgement might have been harsh, but it was the way it looked to a lot of people, especially the ones who were losing their jobs and having their standards of living squeezed as the country slipped into recession.

As Labour ummed and ah-ed about how best to prop up the failing banks and scrambled for a viable economic policy for dealing with record levels of government debt, Cameron and Osborne didn't have any practical solutions of their own bar blaming the government for having got the country into this mess – overlooking the fact that the Tories had failed to spot the impending financial crash every bit as much as Labour had. Indeed, prior to the crash Tory economic policy was in many ways identical to Labour's. Though with a few small extra tax-break promises thrown in.

The remedies that both Labour and the Tories proposed after the crash were equally quite similar: cut government spending to reduce the level of debt. Both sides promised nothing but pain for the country for the foreseeable future; the only point of difference was how much government spending should be cut and how much pain inflicted.

Here Cameron and Osborne found themselves with an image problem. Whether their policies of bigger cuts and greater pain were more economically sensible became a secondary issue as people in many parts of the country suspected that whatever pain was inflicted would have less personal effect on the Tory leaders than Labour's policies would have on its Cabinet:

Cameron: We're all going to have to tighten our belts.
Osborne: Tell me about it. I've already cut back the cleaner's hours.
Cameron: Good man. I've axed one of my foreign holidays. We're going to go to Cornwall for a week in the summer instead. Could you do the same?
Osborne: I can't cancel the skiing trip, Dave. It's all paid for and the family would go mad.
Cameron: Fair enough, then. Just try not to get photographed on the slopes and do make sure you travel EasyJet.
Osborne: If only more people were prepared to make these sorts of sacrifices in their everyday lives, then the country would soon pull through.

Unfair, maybe. But the idea of a growing disconnection between politicians in Westminster and the people they represented was taking a stronger hold. And as the election approached, with both Labour and Tories looking equally toxic, many voters began – for almost the first time – to wonder if either of the main parties had the answers to the country's problems.

Chapter 3

Hallelujah

BRITISH GENERAL ELECTIONS have traditionally been a story of two-party politics. Initially, the battleground was between the Liberals and the Conservatives, but with the growth of the Labour party after the First World War, the Liberals fell into a rapid decline and every general election since the 1930s has, to all intents and purposes, been a contest to decide whether the Conservatives or Labour would form a government.

Not that the electorate had no other choices. A Liberal or – since the Liberal party merged with the Social Democrats in 1988 – Liberal Democrat candidate still remained on the ballot sheet in most constituencies and a few were even elected to parliament. Scotland and Ireland had their own nationalist parties – the SNP and Plaid Cymru – who won a handful of seats in their own countries. The Green party returned its first MP in 2010 when Caroline Lucas won the election in her Brighton constituency. The UK Independence Party (of which more, much more, later) put up plenty of candidates in recent years with nothing to show for it, while the far right – the British National Party – and far left – the Socialist Workers Party – had the same success (none) with fewer candidates. In the two Bootle by-elections of 1990, the Monster Raving Loony party attracted more votes than the Social Democrats in the first one and more than the rump of the old Liberal party in the second, but still no seat in Westminster. Some might call that a shame.