

the men in grey suits

A

# TRAGEDY



8993

THE PLAYERS

GORDON BROWN The king

ED BALLS Minister and longtime servant of the king
DAMIAN MCBRIDE The king's doctor of spin
CHARLES CLARKE A disgruntled former minister
PETER MANDELSON Kingmaker and Gordon's former enemy
JAMES PURNELL An impetuous young minister
And the ghost of TONY BLAIR

A CHORUS OF LABOUR MPS MESSENGERS AND A HERALD

**2993** 

Gordon Brown's premiership, which began in June 2007 when he took over from Tony Blair, and is likely to end at the general election of 2010, is routinely described as a "tragedy", often with the prefix "Greek" or "Shakespearean". Well, here it is

# & ACT I S

## Parliament Square. Dawn. A miasma hangs over the land.

Enter a CHORUS of Labour MPs

CHORUS: More than ten years ago the mighty Blair Seized our tribe and nation's helm. Under him Labour seemed invincible. But there's Something about the cut of his jib that's Always rankled. From Clause Four to Iraq Has been unending woe. Look at us now: The crumbled relic of a once-glorious party. Oh woe! But see, here comes a messenger...

#### Enter a MESSENGER

MESSENGER: Why all so bleak my fellow Labourites?
Have you not heard the blissful news? As day
Behind Canary Wharf now breaks, so comes
New dawn for us and for our stricken land.

CHORUS: You don't mean...

MESSENGER: The men of Blair are routed; and at last Our Gordon rules Britannia! See where he comes! Give him the hero's welcome he deserves, The famous, fearless scourge of tyrant Blair!

Enter GORDON, crowned. With him are BALLS and MCBRIDE, two Brownite liegemen. CLARKE, a malcontent, follows

GORDON: O my children! I know our nation reeks
Of spin and missing WMD.
But be assured: the ship of state is safe.
You know that I abolished boom and bust.
The NHS was rescued thanks to me.
My humble origins in lowly manse
Go down a treat. This is my destiny!
Come, now to work.

Exeunt all besides CLARKE and CHORUS

CLARKE: O how my heart misgives! My inner eye
Sees great New Labour dead, our proud poll numbers
Dashed. So mark me, friends. Be it from hubris,
Indecision, choose what fault you will:
I say that Gordon's reign can never come
To good. And worse, for him, I seem to see...

**CHORUS: The Furies?** 

CLARKE: No, the Men in Grey Suits! CHORUS: Shut up Clarke, you bitter fatso.

# X ACT II S

### A coastal redoubt.

Enter BALLS and MCBRIDE, followed by CLARKE and the CHORUS

BALLS: All is as was foretold. Our ratings rise, Our former foes among the editors Applaud. None speaks of the despised Blair.

MCBRIDE baring his teeth: And while McBride doth breathe, so shall it be!

Enter a MESSENGER (to be followed by three others)

FIRST MESSENGER: In haste I come to tell our king the news: Rebels have tried to strike his homeland o'er Hadrian's Wall. Quickly: where's Gordon?

**Enter GORDON** 

GORDON: Here. I have heard. Gather my generals.

SECOND MESSENGER: The beasts are sick from plague of foot and mouth!

GORDON: Gather my veterinarians. And shoot the cows.

THIRD MESSENGER: The rains fall hard upon the western towns!

GORDON: Gather my meteorologists. And bring my wellies. FOURTH MESSENGER: The people run upon a northern bank!

GORDON: Nationalise the sucker–eventually.

**Exeunt MESSENGERS** 

CHORUS: Such calm. Such fortitude. So different from The headline-chasing grandstanding of yore. This king will surely keep our dynasty In Downing Street until the end of time.

CLARKE: What a load of crap.

GORDON from his dais: My people! The evil ones are routed!
The waters have receded! Now pledge I British
Jobs for British workers, a new
Chapter in our island story. Some there are
Think me too serious, my face too dour.
But it at least is honest, unlike one
Too busy grinning wide in foreign lands
To grace our shores. I am the man I seem!

BALLS: Now should you ask the people for their vote.
The time is right to call a snap election.
Now, liege. Our enemies are green. We'll grind
Their faces in the dust of history.

MCBRIDE: Do it, my king!

GORDON to audience: They speak the truth. Now am I at the zenith
Of my powers. I've proved that I was born
To be a king. Now could I do it, pat,
And show the doubting world, and Clarke, and Blair,

What Gordon Brown is made of. But do I dare? Removes crown, stares lovingly at it

Dare I now risk the crown I so desired?

# X ACT III S

## The ramparts of Westminster.

Enter the CHORUS and CLARKE

CHORUS: All here too well recall what then ensued.
Gordon would not decide. Gordon could not
Decide. And in the end, what did he do?
Nothing—and instantly regretted his mistake.
He slammed the doors, threw royal staplers,
Berated his advisers and his stars.
He raged at all except the one at fault.
And since that time it's gone from bad to worse.

#### Enter a HERALD

HERALD: When Gordon bottled it, almost at once
His power vanished like a hologram.
The love the people owed him turned at first
To loathing, then to ridicule. You know
Of his untimely squeeze upon the poor;
Of how our nation's records then were lost.
And now the wild-haired seer, old Vincent Cable,
New insults adds to Gordon's injuries.
Observe, he quips, how Gordon has transformed
From Stalin into Mr Bean. Tee-hee.

CHORUS: The bastard!

HERALD: Alas, poor king, he roams the emptying Rooms of Downing Street, wailing that traitors Plot to seize his now unsteady throne.

CHORUS: To seize King Gordon's throne? Is't possible?
Er, yes, it is. And come to think of it,
Why did he get the job? Isn't he just
A bit too Scottish? And why does he do
That odd thing with his mouth?

CLARKE: Told you so.

Exit CLARKE, Enter GORDON, BALLS and MCBRIDE

GORDON: That damnèd Cable and that devious Clarke! Yet now I seem to see a still more awful Nemesis approaching Number 10,

To do me in, and with me, comrades, you.

BALLS: Who is it Gordon? Blairites?

MCBRIDE: I will quell them straight.

GORDON: Much worse and much more horrible. I see
The Men in Grey Suits: mythic shades of
Ministers—a foreign secretary,
Perchance a chancellor—who come en masse
To tell me they will serve no more, and I
Must go. They did for Empress Thatcher, and
I hear it said that they will get me too.
Begone, you fiends. Turn them away, my friends!
If friends you be...

CHORUS: The Men in Grey Suits! Let them force him out! For, sure as hell, we are too tame to try.

GORDON: There is but one thing for it. I must seek Salvation from my bitterest friend, my Dearest enemy. For love of God, go, Get me Mandelson!

Enter MANDELSON, a manipulator, by yacht

MANDELSON: I come. Forgive the occasional snigger.

GORDON: O Mandelson I know that you can do it.
You made the once-great Blair, and stabbed me in
The back. No more of that. O save me, Mandy!
Wash the blood of the deposed Blair
From these my tainted hands. And if you save me
You shall no longer Prince of Darkness be
But Lord President, First Secretary,
And whatever title takes your fancy.
Just save me, Mandy!

MANDELSON to audience: I never dared to dream I'd have A chance to own the thing that once revilèd me!

To GORDON: Old foe and friend, for both our ancient loves
The duty that I owe our clan, and for
Other and darker reasons even I
May not completely understand, I'll do it!

# R ACT IV

#### **Downing Street. Night.**

Enter the HERALD and the CHORUS

HERALD: Mandy deterred the plotters. In the time His fealty bought, a strange and wondrous thing: Like dominoes the world's big banks collapsed. Of all the monarchs Gordon held most firm.

Enter GORDON

GORDON: I have been training for this moment all My life! I've saved the world! Alone I did it!

**Exit GORDON** 

HERALD: That wasn't quite the way that others saw it.

They blamed him for the empty coffers; for
The bust he boasted of abolishing; for
The liegemen whose foul tricks brought him disgrace.

MCBRIDE is thrown from the Downing Street battlements

Though Gordon's reign was short it felt too long. And when he tried to win the people's hearts His smile was strange, some churls said even mad.

A bizarre giant smile is projected onto the walls.

Some of his councillors were lately caught Trousering the tributes of the poor.

I need not now relate how Gordon spurned

The Asiatic warriors and was Embarrassed by an actress. Taxes rose. He sold the nation's honour to the Libyans For a barrelful of oil. At last, one acted.

Enter PURNELL, a young man with extravagant sideburns

PURNELL: With Gordon, we are lost! The king must go!

CHORUS: Purnell is right! We cry for justice, Britons!
Justice for the poor, and for us too!
Unless we act we lose our places and
Our perks! The case is plain: the king must die!

**Enter GORDON** 

GORDON: Old friends, do I see murder in your eyes?
Do you forget the service that I did?
Did I not save the world? And with the last,
Lost king, engender this our dynasty?
O foulest treachery! But think on this:
O'erthrow me, and we all will be undone!

Exit GORDON

CHORUS: I suppose so. Fair enough.

PURNELL: You sods.

MANDELSON throws PURNELL from the battlements.

HERALD to audience: So Gordon reigned, uneasy and unloved— Too weak to govern, yet too tough to oust. But not for ever.

## X ACT V S

## A Scottish manse. Night. GORDON is in his study.

GORDON: I bite my nails. I send my e-mails. Yet I see them still. The Men in Grey Suits come! They follow me, invade my sleep, scoff at The dream that turned to ashes in my hands! Too much I wanted and too little thought. See where they come!

Enter the ghost of BLAIR, with a tan.

Oh, it's you, Tony. Hi.

BLAIR: Look, I do not come to mock thee, Gordon.

No man escapes his fate: my number
Was up. T'was best I left for Palestine,
To make a lot of money and world peace,
Bequeathing you an economic mess
And this expenses malarkey. Yikes!
Just one more thing, and then I'm off to Yale:
It's harder than it looks, don't you agree?

Exit the ghost. Enter BALLS

GORDON: Most loyal Balls, now only you remain Of all the thousands who once flattered me. (And by the way, have you seen Mandelson?) But why do you turn pale, eyes madly blinking? What do you see? It cannot be—not here...

BALLS: No, king. Worse even than those awful shades. It is the Etonians.

Figures in frock coats wielding silver spoons appear on the horizon They seek a duel where three parties meet.

**GORDON: Outside Thebes?** 

BALLS: No, at the polling station.

GORDON totters, then rights himself: Well, 'tis time. My heart is tired of running.

Let us give battle. If we lose, we leave Them such a mess as will undo them quite. Lead on, good Balls. I follow.

Exeunt BALLS and GORDON, head bowed, to a visiting professorship at MIT

THE END