

Extract from **This House**
By James Graham

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Characters

Clerk
Harper
Harrison
Mellish
Cocks
Speaker
Esher
Stkins
Silverster
Weatherill

Clerk: Your ministerial box.

Harper: It's black, not red.

Clerk: The Chief Whip's is black.

Harrison: 'The forces of darkness, and evil' ...

Mellish: Do pack it in.

Clerk: Key. Opens from the bottom not the top. It's heavy, you'll get used to the weight.

Mellish: I know, I know, I've done this before you know. (*Taking it*) Struth.

Clerk: Lead surround. Protect the contents from bomb blasts.

Mellish: What about *my* contents?

Clerk: They aren't Parliament's concern. (*Handing the case over and leaving*).

Mellish: Oy, And can I get some art? And nothing with a yacht on it.

Cocks: (*sitting, playing*). Walter, look. Adjustable chairs.

Harrison: Never! (*Sitting*). Ha! All this time, them bastards! Bloody ell, I knew their poll ratings had been up and down all year but I didn't know their arses had as well.

Mellish: Ey, should see how comfy it is in the back seat of my car – oh wait, didn't I mention I get back my ministerial car?

Harrison: Oh you smug little tart, Chief.

Mellish: Right, let's stop mucking about, shall we.

Mellish turns a blackboard over – during this, and for the rest of the play, the Whips should light up fags and smoke as and whenever fits. Most should probably spark up now ...

Mellish: Now. I don't know if any of you have read a newspaper this week but apparently we, the Labour Party, are now in power.

All: Whey-hey.

Mellish: With one big problem.

Harper: Awwh.

Mellish: It's a mathematical problem, and one we definitely have to balance.

301, us. The Tories 297. And then we have the Odds & sods. Liberals 14, the Scots 7, Irish 11, Welsh 2, others 3, meaning an Opposition total of 334. (*Writes 'Total 301 v. 334'.*)

(The table created could look something like this:

			TORIES: 297
			LIBS: 14
			7
			11
			2
			3
LAB: <u>301</u>	v.		<u>334</u>

Mellish: In other words we're all up shit creek, we've got the biggest boat, but they've got more paddles. Or to put it a simpler way ... combined, there are more of them than us.

(this sinks in). So how do we survive? Answer: haven't a clue. None us has any experience of a hung parliament, so it's a learn-on-the-job type thing. But we are going to war, Gentlemen, so make no bones, on the other side of the lobby are a bunch of vindictive fucking bastards – sorry, Ann – already plotting our demise...

Speaker: The member for Esher!

The Opposition Whips Office.

Atkins unpacking at his new desk. **Esher** (veteran Tory know as 'Colonel') drinks a whisky.

Esher: It stinks over here.

Atkins: No it doesn't.

Esher: Always has, this side. Nasty ruddy odour. And it's colder.

Atkins: Was there anything I can help you with, Colonel?

Esher: My new office, don't like it. It's cramped and there's this ugly painted thing in there.

Atkins: That's the Member for Gloucester, Colonel, she's sharing your room.

Fred Silvester *knocks and enters.*

Silvester: Mr Atkins? How do you do, I'm / Fred Silvester –

Atkins: Fred Silvester; new member for Manchester Withington, formerly of Walthamstow West. Welcome back. Nice to know we picked up a few seats while haemorrhaging others. You've been assigned to the Whips? (*Taking his letter.*)

Esher: Manchester you say? God awful place, can't be doing with it. Either needs a good clean or a good fire, I don't mind which.

Atkins: Colonel, Mr Silvester here will relocate you to a new office this afternoon.

Silvester: Oh, right. Yes of course.

Esher: Posture, man. People aren't afraid of a man who slouches. I'll be in the Smoking Room, let me know when that banshee is exorcised from my office. (*Exits.*)

Atkins: (*Reading Silvester's file.*) You were in advertising.

Silvester: Yes. Well, sort of.

Atkins: You either were or you weren't.

Silvester: I was.

Atkins: Called to the bar, I see.

Silvester: Grays Inn.

Atkins: He's right about your posture, you know.

Silvester: I'll work on it.

Atkins: Do you prefer Fred or Frederick?

Silvester: Fred's fine.

Weatherill enters, clutching his folder. Sharply dressed, as ever.

Weatherill: Oh Chief. How boring, this whole thing.

Atkins: So I'm starting to realise. Jack Weatherill, Governm- ... *Opposition* Deputy Whip; Fred Silvester of /
Manchester Withington –

Weatherill: Oh, Manchester Withington, formerly Walthamstow West, yes, hello.

Silvester: How do you do. Gosh, what a fine suit, I must say.

Weatherill: Oh, thank you.

Atkins: Yes, Jack has many a fine suit.

Weatherill: (*handing Silvester a card*). Family are tailors by trade, place up on Saville Row. You should
pop along. I don't mean – not to imply that you need to.

Silvester: No, of course.

Weatherill: But, you know.

Atkins: Fred was about to begin the annual game of musical chairs, weren't you Fred.

Silvester: Yes – oh, right, yes. (*Exits*).

Weatherill: (*calling after*). Have fun. (*To Atkins*). Seems a good sort, bit wet behind the ears.

Atkins: So were we all once. They dry out.

(*Goes to adjust his chair, and realises it isn't adjustable. Tutting*). Oh. The chairs, for God's ...

(*sighs*). I swear, Jack. This is but a temporary situation. It'll be over by Christmas.

Weatherill: Hmm, over by Christmas, where have I heard that before?

Government:

Mellish: Obviously the Tories are gonna vote against us every time, all the time, so what then?

(*looks around. A sense of him 'grooming' the quiet one, here ...*). Michael?

Walter, he's built up the contacts, made the relationships –

Mellish: We all have to have those relationships now, can't just rely on Walter. And Michael's right. A 'rainbow' coalition. And as you know, at the end of the rainbow is a pot of gold.

Harrison: Oh, lovely chief, beautiful.

Mellish: That said, the world and his wife gives us about as much chance of lasting the spring as an Austin Allegro climbing a hill –

Harper: I've sold it! So fuck off.

Mellish: In fact we might even be the shortest government that 'ere bloody lived –

Cocks: But we can still lose votes in the House and survive, can't we? Only way we can be booted out is losing a Vote of No Confidence.

Mellish: Bingo, we lose a Confidence Vote, our PM is *forced* go to the Queen. Historically rare, obviously, because governments normally have a majority, well we don't.