

## P R O L O G U E

I am Daniel Addison. When I escaped Ottawa the first time, I was head speech writer for the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. But after five years in the crucible of Parliament Hill, my public-service calling was battered beyond recognition. Naïve, innocent, and excited when I arrived, I was embittered, exhausted, and ineffably sad when I left.

Still, I remained liberal and a Liberal – in that order. I had come by my liberalism the hard way – by slowly and steadily shedding the expectations and assumptions inflicted by my family's five generations of leadership in the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party. I had canvassed for PC candidates when the staples in my diet had been puréed chicken and strained peaches. In those days, the candidate-kissing-the-baby shot had been de rigueur for campaign leaflets. Well, I had served as the local baby until I was old enough for it to be creepy. Check out the party's photo archives and you'll find my smiling mug over and over again, my snowsuits or sunhats festooned with Tory paraphernalia according to the season.

When I arrived at university, I decided that family tradition was one reason to be a Tory, just not a very good one. So I decided to read about ideology, liberalism, socialism, and conservatism and what they really meant in theory, in practice, and in our history. I majored in English but also pursued my personal political science minor on the side. The more I read, the more of what had been my family's bedrock cracked and crumbled. After literally a

lifetime of blind support for the Progressive Conservative Party, the family veil fell, and I realized in my heart and in my head that I was actually a Liberal. My forebears are still dizzy from subterranean spinning.

My parents seemed amused by my conversion and considered it to be a predictable manifestation of late-onset teenage rebellion. Their tolerance of what some of my relatives considered a knife in the family's back or, at least, a slap in the face was couched in the sincere belief that I would eventually come to my senses. Even then, I felt certain I'd be a Liberal for life.

In the first year of my master's program in English – after much soul-searching – I capitalized the L and joined the Liberal Party of Canada. Uncle Charlie stopped speaking to me. Had I known, I'd have taken the plunge years earlier.

I landed in the Opposition Leader's office after completing my coursework for a PhD in Canadian literature at the University of Ottawa. I started in the correspondence unit and within eighteen months, wrote my way up from letters to speeches. For most of my thirty-two years, I had lived with what I called my "completion complex." I was bound to finish what I started. I couldn't leave any food on my plate even if the meatballs were hard as golf balls. I couldn't start a book, hate the opening chapters, and discard it until suffering through all 569 pages of it. I would sit through far more very, very bad movies than someone with even average cerebral capacity would ever endure. So leaving U of O one dissertation shy of my PhD was a therapeutic breakthrough, of sorts. After all, an opening as a wordsmith for the Leader of the Liberal Party (arguably, the Prime Minister in waiting) did not beckon often. I took the job. But in twisted tribute to my completion complex, I somehow nursed along my dissertation on Canadian comedic novels at night while turning phrases by day. After enduring Liberal caucus meetings, I found that defending my dissertation two years later was as easy as the dinner conversation in *Leave it to Beaver*. However, juggling my time and the demands of both poles of my life was not easy. Some

of my colleagues thought I was very committed while others simply thought I should be. I languished somewhere in the middle. I was glad the PhD was done but was unclear about the implications. Clarity came soon enough.

On Parliament Hill, the pendulum of power swings between the cynical political operators (CPOs) and the idealist policy wonks (IPWs). It's a naturally self-regulating model that inevitably transfers power from one group to the other – and back again. It can take years, even multiple elections, for the pendulum to swing to the other side. It was just my luck that I – a member in good standing of the idealist-policy-wonk contingent – would arrive in Ottawa just as the backroom boys were starting their swing back up to the top.

To be fair, governments work best when the pendulum is somewhere near the middle – with the CPOs and IPWs sharing power. When the CPOs are dominant, as they were when I arrived in Ottawa (and when I left, for that matter), they tend to erode public confidence in the democratic process and infect the electorate with the cynicism, self-interest, and opportunism that flow in their veins. In the mind of a hardcore CPO, the ends always, always justify the means. At least, that's my balanced, impartial view.

On the other hand, when the IPWs are at the helm, however well-meaning we may be, we often lack the necessary killer instinct and political acumen to push our vaunted policies across the finish line. We can't seem to accept that selling the policy is just as important as coming up with it in the first place. We seldom get to the ends because we mess up the means.

But even the staunchest policy wonk cannot work in a CPO-controlled environment without absorbing and assimilating the overtly political approach we wonks philosophically abhor. It's insidious and inexorable. One day, you wake up and find you're instinctively reviewing polling data in a different way; you find yourself thinking about the election cycle and how to isolate the weak Cabinet Minister from the rest of the herd in order to move in for the kill. I felt sick when I realized how my perspective had

changed. I was as if I had inadvertently crossed to the dark side and that all the backroom boys were waiting just across the threshold to present me with monogrammed suspenders, shove a cigar in my yap, and welcome me into the fold. It really was time to go.

But in the interest of full disclosure and transparency – concepts sadly absent in government these days – I confess there was more to my hasty retreat from Ottawa than a near-fatal case of political disillusionment. Something else also played a role. Around the time of my crisis of conscience, my two-year relationship with Rachel Bronwin flamed out in much the same way as the space shuttle Challenger exploded over the Atlantic Ocean. When I replay our last encounter in my mind, I always accompany the scene with the public-address voice of NASA Mission Control, uttering that now classic understatement, “obviously a major malfunction,” as burning wreckage fell into the sea.

Rachel was serving as senior political adviser to Dick Warrington, the youngish and, some would say, handsome Opposition House Leader. I had met Rachel at a political-assistants’ meeting, and we had clicked in a way that had left me somewhat unnerved. She was wonderful in every way. It was as simple and rare as that. She was intelligent, thoughtful, committed, ambitious, and beautiful – so beautiful that our relationship violated the accepted order of the universe. The match just wasn’t credible. Someone like me was not supposed to be dating, let alone sleeping with, someone like her. But I was. I wore the perpetual, loopy grin of a lottery-ticket holder who wins big his first time out.

When we would walk hand in hand down Sparks Street on a Saturday afternoon, I could almost feel the skeptical glances of passers-by. Modesty aside, I’m a far cry from ugly. But I was not exactly in Rachel’s class. Pierce Brosnan would have just barely made the cut.

For those two years, I’d never been happier. By the end of month six, I had a toothbrush at her apartment in the Glebe. On our first anniversary, she gave me the bottom drawer in her dresser. After

two years, I was frequently noting the folly of paying rent for two apartments when only one was really being used. I really thought the big search might be over. I'd also finally stopped looking over my shoulder, waiting for some uniformed relationship bureaucrat to tell me that there'd been some mix up with my paperwork and that I couldn't see Rachel any more. He never showed up, but someone else did.

Nothing really seemed amiss at the time. I thought she seemed a little distracted, even distant, but I blamed that on a spike in her workload. Looking back now, I realize she was pulling a few more all-nighters at the office than might be reasonably expected of the senior adviser to the Opposition House Leader. It was mid-July, so Parliament wasn't even sitting at the time. Hindsight is a cruel companion.

One night, after Rachel told me she'd be working late again, I unexpectedly found myself back in Centre Block, picking up the car keys I'd managed to leave on a table in the Library of Parliament earlier in the day. No wonder I left my keys there. I usually became misty-eyed and foggy-headed in the Library of Parliament, so I often forgot things there. I thought of the library as one of my favourite places in the world. In one of Canadian history's few spasms of generosity, the fire of 1916 spared the library and its immaculate woodwork while razing the rest of the original Parliament building. A new and equally majestic Centre Block was erected to house the two chambers of our democracy, grafted onto the original library in all its august glory.

I like to think that the best speeches I wrote for the Liberal Leader were penned and polished in the Library of Parliament. My preferred spot was a varnished, wooden table under the watchful gaze of a white plaster bust of Sir Wilfrid Laurier. When words would abandon me, I'd stare at Laurier or read his speeches from Hansard, which lined the shelves behind me. Canada has spawned precious few orators and even fewer leaders of Laurier's calibre. I fear he'd be disgusted and depressed were he to return to the House of Commons today for the tabloid TV of question period.

After leaving the library's security desk, keys in hand, I thought I'd surprise Rachel and, given the hour, perhaps even drive her home. I strolled through Centre Block, feeling the history, as always, seeping out of the walls. I pushed open the door to the House Leader's office and found the reception area empty and dark. I could look right down the hallway to Rachel's office, which was bathed in light from her black, halogen desk lamp. I was surprised to see the House Leader himself sprawled in Rachel's chair with his hands on his head like he was about to be handcuffed. He had a rapt expression on his face, which left me somewhat perplexed – for another two breaths. That's when I caught sight of Rachel.

For me, Centre Block is hallowed ground. I'm reluctant to defile its image with tawdry descriptions of infidelity. On the other hand, what happened that night gave me the strength to reject the path of least resistance and get the hell out of that netherworld. So I'll recount the story, but out of respect, I'll take care to honour the strictures of parliamentary language.

Rachel, my Rachel, was on her knees in front of the Opposition House Leader. Let's just say she was rather enthusiastically lobbying his caucus. Stunned and devastated, I turned away – to get a better view in the lee of a well-endowed rubber plant. Rachel jumped into her advance work with both hands before moving to what seemed to be his favourite part of the proceedings – Oral Questions. Eventually, he pulled her up off the floor and onto the desk where he begged leave to introduce his private Member's bill. Clearly, there was unanimous consent as the cut and thrust of debate started immediately – well, mostly thrust. By the look on her face, second reading was proceeding satisfactorily with just a few indecipherable heckles thrown in for good measure. The House Leader occasionally shouted "hear, hear" and slapped her backbench in support. At one point, she amended her position on his bill, and the debate continued.

They were hurtling towards royal assent when I regained my faculties. I considered rising on a point of personal privilege, but,

abhorring confrontation of any kind, I simply threw up on the rubber plant and stumbled back out into Centre Block's arched and awe-inspiring main corridor. Portraits of former prime ministers mocked me as I hurried by, searching for answers and some industrial-strength breath mints. At that moment, I was sure that Rachel and the Honourable "Dickhead" had no idea I was their vomiting vestibule voyeur. Damn my weakness for alliteration.

By the time Rachel arrived home in the wee hours, I'd already cleaned out my drawer and repatriated my toothbrush. I left her a crumpled leaf from the rubber plant, which I was surprised to find still clenched in my hand, along with a terse note, breaking it off and suggesting that she invest in a deadbolt and a DO NOT DISTURB sign for the office. I resigned the next day.

Before meeting with the Leader and his chief of staff to consummate my escape from federal politics, I made a phone call to the head of the English department at the University of Ottawa, who was also my dissertation supervisor. I couldn't just throw in the towel and live off my savings and investments until I found gainful employment. Given the state of my finances, that would mean finding another job by the following Tuesday afternoon. So I decided to advance the plans I'd already intended to pursue – just not so soon.

Professor Phillip Gannon not only ran the English department but also chaired the faculty-appointments' committee. They'd recently had a transfer appointment fall through and weren't happy. The committee was short one junior professor for the fall term, and they were scrambling to find a replacement. He'd already called me some weeks before to gauge my interest. At the time, I was still planning on staying with the Leader through the election expected in early October and perhaps becoming speech writer to the Prime Minister should the campaign unexpectedly go our way. But much had changed in two weeks, and I prayed that in the dead of summer, the committee members would be more interested in their Gatineau cottages than in searching for a newly minted

PhD to teach Canadian literature for. After the way my life seemed to be unraveling, I fully expected this opportunity to have been shut down already. I was wrong.

Professor Gannon was thrilled to hear of my interest in the position. Apparently, I was saving his bacon, not to mention his summer. He did a quick call around to his vacationing committee members, and by noon, I had paperwork on my home e-mail. In the minds of the dock-lounging committee members, I was more than qualified to teach undergraduate English. After all, I knew my ABCs and had never been in prison. As for the approval of the Senate Committee on Appointments, my years on Parliament Hill and assumed proximity to power at a time when the university was seeking federal funding for a new economics building seemed to grease the wheels.

The university usually operated in geological time but not that day. By three-thirty, it was official. I was the English department's newest faculty member. Thanks to a practice common in many universities when easing in a new and untested faculty member, I wouldn't actually be teaching until the second term, freeing up some time in the fall to orient myself to the rigours of life in academe.

Despite appearances, joining the faculty wasn't a precipitous decision on my part. I'd already decided to pursue teaching after completing my PhD. I just didn't think it would happen for another few years. In politics, leaving your options open is standard operating procedure.

My final meeting with the Leader and Bradley Stanton, his chief of staff, went as expected – at least until the end. In other words, they were mad as hell. How could I abandon them on the eve of an election? After all they'd done for me, how could I leave just as the battle beckoned? I calmly explained that I'd already produced the election kickoff speech, two stump speeches (one of them down and dirty, which hammered the Government, and the other one high-road, which sounded more Prime Ministerial), opening and closing debate remarks along with witty and thought-



ful repartee in all policy areas, a victory speech, and a concession speech. Stanton had been so busy planning diabolical campaign gambits that he knew nothing of my election prep work.

I apologized for the short notice and pledged my support during the campaign, provided it didn't interfere with my new faculty responsibilities. I also offered to participate in debate prep when the networks and the party leaders had decided on timing and format. As the meeting wound down, the Leader seemed to soften and asked me if I was moving out of Ottawa. I replied that I really wanted to get out of the city as part of my reintegration into normal Canadian society. Escaping Ottawa's gravitational pull was a big part of my plan, I explained, as I relayed my intention to find a place on the water in Cumberland, about a 30-minute drive east of the capital on the Ottawa River. Several U of O faculty members lived there and made the short, sedate commute to campus every day. The Chief of Staff's left eyebrow lifted in a Spockian arch, and a wave of unease washed over me.

I had made a big mistake mentioning Cumberland. Since birth, I had had great difficulty saying no. Though I was already guilt-ridden for bailing on the imminent campaign, I was determined to make a clean break. But like a thin crust on new-fallen snow, my resistance looked solid enough only to give way at the slightest touch. The Leader gave me his sad-eyes routine, and I swayed, vibrated, and collapsed like the Tacoma Bridge. One last favour; then, I was out.

I left the Leader's office and Parliament Hill, not quite free of politics. My parting gift to the Leader? I promised to find a Liberal candidate for the riding of Cumberland-Prescott and then manage the local campaign. I'd be free and clear by mid-October.

No problem. Piece of cake. How hard could it be?

Cumberland-Prescott – a Tory stronghold since before confederation and currently held by the Honourable Eric Cameron, the most popular Finance Minister in Canadian history. He was young, good-looking, widowed, and blessed with an eloquence that, while honed and rehearsed, sounded as if he were talking off

the cuff – a wonderful gift in politics. In other words, Cameron was as close as any politician came to the elusive “complete package.”

People actually believed he was honest and a straight shooter. I saw through him. I loathed him in a partisan way. But I may have been the only person in Canada who did. I had watched him at close range for five years and was convinced he was not what he seemed. He couldn't possibly be. Nobody could be. He'd won the last election by over 36,000 votes, up from a 31,000 plurality in the previous campaign. His most recent budget, introduced in February, gave Canadians a 10 per cent cut in personal income tax, a one-point cut in the goods and services tax, and higher RRSP limits, while still paying off \$10 billion of the nation's debt. Masterful.

Skyrocketing favourability ratings for the budget, the Tory government, and the Finance Minister himself had the pollsters checking and rechecking their field and tab operations. No one had ever seen anything like it. The unprecedented numbers cemented an autumn election call. And we weren't ready. Cumberland-Prescott was the only constituency in Canada still without a nominated Liberal candidate. Only seven weeks remained before the Prime Minister's quadrennial drop-in at the Governor General's to dissolve Parliament and call an election.

Despite an unprecedented Tory lead in the polls, we had many, many hard-fought Liberal nomination battles across the country. We were optimistic, had attracted some star candidates, and had put little stock in the pre-election numbers. Inexplicably, most Liberals across the country were feeling good. Why? Well, during an election period, seemingly rational people commonly take leave of their senses and replace reason with hope. Political parties have practiced the mass delusion of their members long before the Reverend Jim Jones took it to the next level. Despite this ill-conceived Liberal optimism in many parts of the country, Eric Cameron's utter invincibility cast a pall over the handful of Liberals living in Cumberland. The Liberal riding association was not just moribund, it was very nearly extinct.

So I packed up and moved to Cumberland, choosing a clean but inexpensive local motel as my home base until I could find permanent accommodations. But that wasn't my first priority. I had seven weeks to secure a Liberal candidate for Cumberland-Prescott, no doubt to be led once more to the electoral slaughter. Otherwise, I'd be struck from the Leader's Christmas-card list – a sure sign of political excommunication.

