

Big Horace Cooks A Goose

Big Horace has his sights set on Westminster. Nice number. No hassles. Big house in London. Second home somewhere in the country. Big Horace has it all sketched out. Five Year Plan. MP. Junior Minister. Minister. Prime Minister. Sits down with his long-time political ally, Wee Eck. Runs through the plan.

“How’re you going to get any votes?” says Wee Eck. Mystified. Wee Eck never had anyone voting for him.

“Buffets and feasts,” says Big Horace, tapping the side of his nose.

Wee Eck no wiser. Neither is Squiffy Hunter who turns up for a game of darts down the *Splendid Rammy* pub. Squiffy shrugs and pulls up his hoodie.

Next week, Big Horace throws a pre-election party. ‘Political Feast’ he calls it. ‘Tea in the Dark.’ Huge spread. Cooks it all himself, using the *Carefree Student’s Guide to Easy Catering*. Everyone turns up. Mayor, Councillors, some neds from the Windyside Estate. Horace’s political power-base starts small. Wee Eck, Squiffy and Harriet the Horse is all. After the feast, he has the Town Council and the Windyside Estate in his pocket.

“How’d you do that?” asks Wee Eck, patting his stomach. “That was grand!”

“Aye,” says Squiffy, “fills a gey big empty space. Tasty, too. Eck, gie’s a can of yon lager to wash it down.”

“That Quiche Lorraine was fair the business,” opines Harriet. “Can you give me the recipe?”

“Better than that, Harriet,” says Big Horace. “I’m going to teach you how to cook it and then we’re going to hit London.”

Squiffy whispers to Wee Eck that Harriet’ll never learn how to cook, not at her time of life. Harriet smacks him in the mouth. Carlsberg Special all over the place. Squiffy quite apologetic through squint teeth.

The following week a civic reception at the Town Hall. Big Horace and Harriet the Horse do all the catering. Squiffy organises the wine. Mostly in cans, but Harriet sends him off down LIDL to get some of those fancy Continental bottles. Wee Eck dressed up in cook’s outfit, smiling knowledgeably. Indian buffet. Mouth-watering bhajis. Poppadums that explode under your tongue like bliss. Creamed spinach to die for. Word spreads. Queues of folk from the outlying estates. Big Horace makes a short speech about politics. Everyone claps wildly and gets stuck into seconds.

Voting Day comes. Big Horace for the Popular Party. Half a dozen other candidates. None of them can cook. Messages of support from party bigwigs do nothing for them. Big Horace reads out message of support from Jamie Oliver. Great acclaim. All voters have heard of Jamie Oliver. Landslide victory. Swept to power on melt-in-your-mouth sausage rolls and buttery parsnip bouchons. Big Horace makes the usual victory speech pledging never to forget his constituents.

The he goes off to London and forgets them. Far higher things to think about. MP by day. Cook by night. Sometimes the other way round. Glad-handing all his fellow MPs. Intimate soirées at his Fulham flat, roasted red peppers *à l’Algérienne*. Home-made houmous and crusty bread fresh from the oven. Larger parties for a couple of dozen. Big Horace entertaining them from his open-plan kitchen. Picture of relaxation. Surrounded by bubbling pans and huge pepper-mills. Wee Eck toggled up, serving canapés while Squiffy and Harriet the Horse pass round the wines. The three of them come down special for those events. First Class tickets on Stagecoach, no less.

At the end of first year, Big Horace's name being touted about as the Man to Watch. Everyone watches.

Sure enough. Horace named Junior Minister for Food in the first reshuffle. Horace does it brilliantly. Best buddies with Hugh and Delia and Gordon. Celebrity Chef appearances week after week. Sunday brunches with Ainsley. No stopping him now. Jamie and Horace share bangers and mash on Thursday night after the debates. Dinner parties get bigger, but Horace still doing all the cooking. Specialises in *Crudités à l'Écossaise*. Secret recipe known only to Big Horace and Harriet. Road-kill simmered slowly in an Irn-Bru sauce. Flesh dissolves in your mouth. Guests ecstatic. Women fainting from gastronomic pleasure. Male politicians lost for words. Astonishing. "We need a good man like you on the front bench," says the Prime Minister. "A man who understands the refined things in life. Any more of that chestnut *en croûte*?" Big Horace nods sagely and crushes some more garlic.

Next week, Big Horace named Minister for Culture. European trips, new recipes picked up here, there, everywhere. Photo opportunities in elite Parisian kitchens and idyllic Greek tavernas. Hobnobbing with Belgian chocolate aristocrats and Italian Mafiosi. Back in London, moves into bigger pad. House in Chelsea. Huge kitchen. Sunday lunches with Nigella. Wee Eck and Harriet move in to servants' quarters to provide round-the-clock expertise and advice. Wee Eck officially his Political Adviser. Harriet his PA. Both ace at handing round the vol-au-vents and wine. 'Heavy' Tam Smith contracted to supply all beverages, he and Squiffy might as well be living in the cellars.

New elections called. Big Horace and team back up north for a month. Fame and celebrity precede him. Hairy Bikers whistlestop to encourage the voters. None of the other candidates have a look-in. Big Horace sets up open house with 24-hour buffet laid on, all free. Even his rivals drop by for a snack. Increased majority, largest in the country. Triumph. Back to London. PM calls him into No. 10.

"What say the Foreign Office, Big H?"

"Suits me fine," says Big Horace.

"Start right away then," says the PM.

Big Horace travels the world in style, portable kitchen and big book of recipes. Tempts the Taleban with his Crispy Peking Duck. Captivates the North Koreans with his Sauerkraut. Grabs the taste-buds of the G12 with his greengages in quince syrup. Israelis and Palestinians sit round the table just to get a spoonful of his lemon and mango sorbet. Brazil stops chopping the rainforest so that Big Horace can harvest nuts and exotic herbs for a slap-up meal in Rio.

Back home, Wee Eck and Heavy Tam campaigning. Big Horace for PM. PM looks askance. But nothing can stop the juggernaut of popularity. Big Horace's Best Book of Cooking tops the charts week after week. His i-Pod app download of easy meals reaches eight-figures.

Big Horace arrives at the UN. British delegation to host a dinner for the Secretary General and all the members of the Security Council. Highpoint of the season in New York. Moscow, Beijing, Berlin, Washington all looking forward to a legendary three-course Horatian meal. Big Horace goes for goose. Wee Eck and Harriet flown in from London, Squiffy comes along too. Kitchen helps. Big Horace shows them what to do. Pluck goose. Stuff goose. Rub goose with secret sauce. Eight parts butter, one part chilli, one part Buckfast. Harriet does the dessert, Wee Eck does the starters, Squiffy does the sauce.

Big Horace leaves them to it while he goes off to make his speech. Big mistake.

Squiffy samples the Buckfast. Good stuff. Opens another couple of bottles. Gets the ratios all mixed up. One goose eight parts chilli. Next goose eight parts Buckfast. Squiffy gets more inventive. Goose after that equal parts meths and coriander. Squiffy licks his fingers. A blast. Then one with *crème de menthe* and curry-powder. Squiffy reckons he can write his own cook-book when he gets back home. "Dead easy, like," he says to Harriet. Harriet too busy to notice. Squiffy sticks geese in oven.

Eight o'clock. Twenty guests at Horace's table. The most powerful men and women in the world. Wee Eck's starters demolished in no time. Sparkling conversation. Big Horace the focus of attention. Then come the geese. Look great. Flashlights explode. Premier of China slaps Horace on back. "You come China. You do next Party Congress Feast!"

Eight geese between them. They dig in. Three mouthfuls. Only the US and Germany don't run for the rest-rooms. Some never make it.

Great scandal. Big Horace recalled to London on next flight. China and France accuse Britain of imperialist conspiracy. Russia too weak to make a statement from sick-bed. But only a matter of time.

Big Horace back in Windyside Estate. Running the hamburger-van parked next to the *Splendid Rammy*. Experimenting with new sauces. Squiffy the toast of the smart set in London.