

Will the real ALP please stand up?

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I KNOW it's been rather fashionable to declare Kevin Rudd the winner of this week's charming-the-pants-off-the-nation competition but I have to confess I just feel a bit soiled by the whole experience.

After too many weeks whispering suggestive sweet nothings to anyone who'd listen, the incumbent and the aspirant finally gave us a glimpse under the sheets and it all felt a bit icky.

The incumbent just kept banging on about how good it felt and couldn't we please just let him keep on keeping on, while the aspirant just seemed a little too cocky. Like one of those guys you meet in a bar who knows he's not going home alone. Somehow watching the poor old Prime Minister struggling to keep up with his younger rival had all the hallmarks of those late night ads for male performance enhancers while Kevin07 just made me feel desperate and dateless.

Neither of them set my heart rate aflutter. There just seemed to be an inevitability of a looming arranged marriage. Not better or worse, just a sense of a ceremonial transition to a different kind of partnership that was already showing signs of being fraught.

And it felt weird. Especially when the ALP trotted out all three previous Labor prime ministers. I know it was supposed to be a moment for the true believers — and there was something very touching about these three venerable Labor men standing in solidarity, even though we all knew it had more to do with presenting a united front over wanting to see something end than the prospect of a new beginning — but, when I saw them, I winced like you do when you stumble across a photograph of a lost love.

I felt like Gough, Hawkie and PK were being manipulated. Just like the rest of us. Desperately trying to convince each other that the Labor Party is still the Labor Party.

And when I heard Kevin07 utter that classic Keating-esque line about a Labor government extending a hand down to those who needed to be raised up, I physically flinched. It was vintage Keating and all it did was make me wistful — wistful for a time I could feel genuinely lustful for what the Labor Party stood for. But now I just feel dirty and cheapened by an imitation Labor Party, which knows it'll get my vote even though it hasn't said a single word to me for some time.

The only other time my ears pricked up was the moment Rudd sounded like Hugh Grant in his marvellous prime ministerial speech in *Love Actually* by suggesting that he might stand up to his American counterpart. But that was just a movie. Yet even when the man-most-likely to speak my language dared say something that the Labor Party of old might have had the courage to own — that it would change everything once it got into office — the party machine simply performed another of its excruciating backflips, complete with half-pike and shadow jump.