



Source: Martin Chulov, 'Sharon redraws political landscape', *The Australian online*, 22/11/05.

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"In what seemed like the riskiest move he has made to date, John Howard resigned from his position as Prime Minister of Australia today in order to start a new party that he intends to lead into the next election.

'Mr Howard was quoted as saying, that he intends to form a new party that will be using social reform as its main platform for election. Mr Howard says that he has had a complete change of heart from his previous politics and can see no positive way in which to serve his countrymen currently as a member of the Liberal party. He hopes that his new party will appeal to a lot of disenchanted and isolated people, from all walks of life. His first reforms, should he be elected, will be allocating funds for interfaith places of worship to be built and to encourage all spiritual leaders, including Muslims, Buddhists, Jews and Christians to assist the government in forming communities of relevance to citizens who wish to go beyond the barriers of separation and fear.'

Trish dropped the plates she was carrying from the dining table to the kitchen when she heard this last bit of 'breaking news' from the television. She quickly grabbed the remote to turn up the volume and listened for another 45 seconds to the newsreader before the phone rang.

'My god, are you watching the news?' Juliette, a girlfriend from work spoke to Trish in a hurried and excited tone. 'I can't believe it, it just isn't meant to happen like this, why weren't we told? He is such an arrogant dickhead, what in the hell possessed him to make a move like this? I'm suspicious. Who has got to him? Can a leopard change its spots overnight? Oh my god, would it work? He's mad. Completely mad. He must have swallowed a bottle of ecstasy.'

There was a pause on the line.

'Trish, are you there?'

'Yes, I'm here. I can't answer any of your questions. I have no idea what has happened to him. Quite frankly, at the moment I can't imagine who could possibly have so much influence over him. It must have come from himself. It's not like him though, this is really risky. He never does risky. But if he is for real and he can pull this one off, then God go with him cause he'll need all the help he can get.'

'But, what about us, what about us?'

The mobile phone started ringing.

'Look Juliette, I have to go, the other phone. See you tomorrow, early, we'll talk then.'

'Hello, Trish speaking.'

'Fuck, have you been watching the news?' Trish's husband was on the phone.

'Mum, Mum have you seen the news, Simone just rang me'. Trish's daughter was coming down the steps, two at a time, bellowing for everyone to hear.

'Hello, darling? Yes, I've heard, it's madness. I'll call you back.'

Trish flopped onto the couch with her face in her hands and started crying. She wasn't sure why she was crying. Was it her job that she was crying for? Was she crying with embarrassment? Was she crying with relief? Excitement? Disbelief?

'Mum? Mum? What's wrong?'

Rosie sat beside her mother and put her arms around her back. She didn't know what to say, so she sat silently watching the TV as more unbelievable information poured from the newsreader's mouth.

Both phones kept ringing constantly but neither Trish nor Rosie picked them up. Trish knew it would be all her staff. All worrying about their jobs and what this will mean to their employment tomorrow. She didn't know and couldn't think about that right now. All she could think about was this conversation she had had with John Howard only yesterday in his office.

He had called her in, which was not unusual for a Wednesday afternoon: they often went over his diary and upcoming events, discussing speeches, logistics of transport, family movements etc for the forthcoming week. This day, however, he didn't want to discuss any upcoming events. He asked her if she was religious or spiritual or held any belief whatsoever. She gave a perfunctory answer. He probed her for more information. He was genuinely interested. Through the course of this conversation he alluded to a series of 'visitations' he had had over the previous few months. He was unsure what to make of them and was obviously looking to someone, anyone, for guidance on the matter. Trish didn't have much to say to him. 'Being a lapsed Catholic I rarely think about spiritual matters these days', she said as she excused herself from his office.

So, here she sat, a day later, crying on the couch wondering what in the hell was going to happen to the country tomorrow. Wondering how something like this can happen to such a man. Envy him the guts to change so dramatically in such a short space of time and to actually TELL the nation. To resign!! To start again, to change everything you believe in. Would she follow him? Does she believe in what he is saying? Did she believe in him up till now? How does she feel about social reform? Did she ever like him? All these thoughts came flooding through her mind in quick succession. And she had no answers, none at all. Was she really that out of touch with herself? Had sublimating her own thoughts to hold down such a highly regarded position in the press secretary's office actually left her with no political integrity of her own? Was she really so vacuous? All those times she had spouted party policy, whose thoughts were those? Who am I, she thought? Am I such a robot to routine that I have forgotten any original thought I may have once had?

The questions went on and on through her mind, but all the time, all she could think was, no answers, no answers, no answers.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Deb McBride.