

## THE BOMBSHELL

A nearby clock struck ten as John Blount wandered aimlessly down George Street, and he was at odds with himself. An hour earlier he had dashed off a letter of resignation and handed it to the editor of the Daily Times who, glancing at it briefly, tossed it on his desk without comment.

And now John Blount found himself on the street without a job. Why had he made such a sudden decision? It had always been Blount's pride that he contain his pride no matter what crisis confronted him, but this time Peel's ranting had caused him to do the decisive thing but, at the moment of its accomplishment, his perturbed mind began to doubt the wisdom of the plunge. The cool night air was whispering commonsense to him now that it was too late to take advantage of it.

"If it wasn't for the wife", he muttered, "I wouldn't mind, but the thought of her takes all the nerve out of me. I should have thought of her before I dropped my letter into Peel. If it were not for that letter they would be compelled to pay me three months salary, and then I should have had time to turn around. Oh! if I had another chance", and he raised both hands to the dark heaven above him.

In his self-absorption he had not noticed the approach of a large man, who stopped abruptly as the young man's hands fell to his side, and then came forward quickly with hand outstretched.

"Hello, John", he cried. "What's wrong. Are you practising for the stage or just plain drunk?"

"Hello, Bill", said the young man cordially <sup>offering</sup> his hand. "What are you doing in George Street instead of in the House? It's sitting tonight, isn't it?"

"Oh", cried the other with a laugh, "I'm afraid I've not heard the debate tonight for I was working hard in a special committee. We have just finished

and I have come out to enjoy some of Sydney's lovely night air, although the warm rooms are not so hot as the coal-pit was before you were instrumental in electing me."

"You were elected <sup>at</sup> primarily through your own merits and eloquence, and you got the preferences of an Independent", John replied.

"I was elected because of the hard-hitting articles you wrote for the Northern Herald and because your wife and mine canvassed every vote in the electorate. There's no one in Sydney can write a shoulder-hitting article like you can and quick the Daily Times was to see it, and well you deserved your promotion."

"Promotion!" groaned the young man.

Bill Matthews grabbed John by the arm. "Hold up, lad. Are you ill? You look as if you have just arisen from a sick bed".

"I feel rather that way", said the young man. "The truth is ~~that~~ I've finished with the Daily Times. They say I'm a failure, I can't write and I don't bring in any news. ~~It~~ I have undergone every humiliation they could put upon me and, in desperation, tonight I resigned."

His companion's face showed anger at his humiliation, and yet a trace of bewilderment which denoted a lack of John's sensitiveness, for Bill Matthews had experienced harder conditions than these.

"How on earth did you come to such a foolish thing like --"

"I know! I know", interrupted John impatiently. "I've censured myself more severely than you can blame me. I was busy at that when I met you. I'm out of a job and everything fades into insignificance before that fact".

"Why not go back to the Northern Herald, John. They'd take you on again like a shot".

"I couldn't do it, Bill. I'd sweep these streets first".

"Why in Heaven's name", cried the other. "Think of the send-off they

gave you -- the dinner at which I presided. They'd extend to you a hearty northern welcome, my boy. Pocket your pride, John, and go back north".

"Quite impossible. It would be a confession of failure", said John. "I couldn't face it. Lord, if I only had another chance on a decent paper, I'd give them value for their money if hard work would do it".

The mind of the ex-miner, less subtle than that of the writer, nevertheless understood by the determined tone of his friend that any advice urging a return to the north would be counsel thrown away. He remembered with a glow of gratitude the strenuous fight John had made during the election; the stirring appeals he had written day by day which had done so much to assure the success of him and his party. It was these articles which had much to do with the transfer of the country newspaper man to the staff of the Daily Times and Matthews felt that in some measure he was responsible for his young friend's present predicament. He had been silent for some time as they walked along, but knowing well that it was useless to ponder further for he already made up his mind what he was going to do, he stopped suddenly at the Harbour Inn entrance.

"John ", he said, "I have something to tell you, and it will best be said over a cold glass", and he held the door open for his companion. He bought two glasses and they sat down at a quiet table in the corner.

"John, we're a couple of men from the mining regions, and although you handle the pen and I used to handle the pick, we're brother<sup>s</sup> in thought. I owe my seat to you and, tomorrow if you handle your cards right, you'll owe one of the best newspaper situations in Sydney to me. I'll give you a piece of news which will open any editorial door in the city to you. Tonight it is of the utmost importance; in twelve hours it will not be worth ten cents. Get your pen and notebook ready."

Bill Matthews finished off his glass of beer and sat back.

"Did you read what the Chief Secretary said about the Labor Bill in the House on Tuesday?"

"Yes, very outspoken about it he was", replied John. "The Opposition was very pleased with the length of time he took over it, but apparently the Government had some reservations. All the Government papers have praised him, but the independent Dome thinks the Government is hedging and waiting to see which way the cat jumps apparently".

"Quite so. Well the cat has jumped and the account of that jump constitutes your item of news. We learned that this Bill had caused a split in Cabinet, and then I approached the three Independent members who have been keen on putting through a measure to prevent logging in the forests up north. I made an offer of support for their Bill if they would support the Labor Bill. United we could defeat the Government by two votes, sufficient to bring it down".

"Why didn't you bring it down at once?" asked John.

"We would be satisfied to get the Labor Bill through. Besides, we couldn't rely on the Independents on other business after their ~~anti~~ anti-logging bill became law. Anyway, back to our muttons. We sent an ultimatum to the Government -- make the Labor Bill a Government measure, or face a no-confidence motion. They went to water and this morning the Chief Secretary asked for a conference which was held tonight. He was eloquent, persuasive, threatening and cajoling, but we stood silent and solid as this table. At one stage he was nearly reduced to tears but he melted not one".

"And the result -- the result?" cried the reporter, all aglow with excitement, and appreciating the value of this information.

"The result was a complete surrender. The only concession we made was that we would not attack the Government tomorrow as we intended, but

would remain silent as we did tonight at our meeting with the Chief Secretary. He will need all his nerve to admit that he has <sup>had</sup> second thoughts about the Bill. Our leader will make a formal little speech of thanks for this sudden change of front, although he will not call it that. And now if you are ready to write I shall give you the Home Secretary's words tonight as nearly as I can remember them".

When the dictation was finished Bill Matthews pushed his chair back. "I'll leave it to you to get to the Dome quickly to catch the first edition. Good night", and he made for the door.

John Blount recognised to the full the far-reaching importance of the information which he had received and he also knew its transient nature. Time was of the essence, so he walked briskly on his way to the Dome office, where he expected to be welcomed with open arms. Suddenly, in mid-stride a staggering thought struck him like an unseen blow between the eyes to experience one of those mental processes which had largely nullified his success on the Daily Times. What he called his professional conscience intervened. Until his resignation had been accepted, he thought, the fateful story of the Chief Secretary was the property of the Daily Times. He did not argue with himself about it, but indulged in one deep sigh, for that was his character.

Perhaps, he thought, Peel might take him back after hearing his story, so he turned down Martin Place, and headed for the fearsome editor.

"So you've come back hoping that I would take you to my bosom again, eh?"

"Yes, I should like to ~~ask~~ withdraw my resignation which was written on spur of the moment. And I've got a bombshell of a story for you", said John.

Peel handed him his opened letter. "Here's your letter of resignation at the foot of which I have written 'Resignation accepted - Alan Peel', so that takes care of that. As for your story, send it in and we'll pay you space rates

if it is any good, though judging on your past efforts that is unlikely".

"Then I'm no longer a member of the staff of the Daily Times?"

"The answer is a very definite 'no'. Good night".

Once more John sighed, but this time it was one of deep relief, for he was very happy. "Good night, Mr Peel. What a sight your face will be in the morning", and he lightly skipped out the editorial door and disappeared for ever from the newspaper building.

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The next day in the Daily Times office there was the devil to pay and nothing on hand to liquidate the debt. In Peel's room the proprietor raved at the editor as he waved a crushed telegram in his face. "Listen to this. I quote ' The astounding political news in the Dome this morning is not only true, but had been offered and refused in the Daily Times office by the editor. John Blount, of your staff had got the news story, and will hereafter work for the Dome. Signed Parliamentarian.' "

" Good Heavens, Peel ", roared the enraged proprietor, " this bombshell of exclusive news comes from that old grandmother the Dome . The astounding political event of the year which could smash the Government, and we missed it! "

"So have all the other papers except the Dome ", pleaded Peel; "and, besides, you told me to discharge Blount ---"

But the language of the ~~the~~ proprietor here passes the bounds which print permits even in today's society.

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