

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The People who Stamp Papers all Day

by Chris Howlett

EXTRACT

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THE PEOPLE WHO STAMP PAPERS ALL DAY

CHARACTERS

Boris, a worker
Geoffrey, a worker from the Stationery Department
Mr. Lawrence, the boss
Maxine, Boris' co-worker

SETTING

A corporation

TIME

The present

THE PEOPLE WHO STAMP PAPERS ALL DAY 1.

The sound of the company - a low, dark HUM. It fades down to become a constant undercurrent beneath the dialogue. The lights come up on BORIS, alone at his desk, stamping papers. He removes them from an IN tray and places them into an OUT tray. Suddenly his stamp breaks. Pause. The sound of the company GROWS LOUD for a moment. Hesitantly, Boris picks up the phone.

BORIS: Hello, Stationary Department? Geoffrey?
It's Boris. Boris. From room 3-6-6-5-B ...
Yes! I have a bit of a problem. My stamp -
it broke. (beat) Oh, thankyou! Yes, thankyou
Geoffrey!

Boris replaces the handset. He examines the papers he has been stamping. The door opens and GEOFFREY enters. He regards Boris suspiciously.

BORIS: Hello, Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY: You realise the company can't just keep
throwing stamps at you.

BORIS: Yes, I realise.

GEOFFREY: Do you know how much stamps cost these days?

BORIS: No?

GEOFFREY: Thirty-seven cents each.

BORIS: Oh.

GEOFFREY: And that doesn't even include the cost of
shipping and distribution.

BORIS: I see.

GEOFFREY: So the company can't afford to have people
like you just breaking them willy-nilly
every twenty or thirty years.

BORIS: I'll try and be more careful.

GEOFFREY: Johnson in the next room has had his stamp
for over forty years. It's a pity you couldn't
be more like Johnson, isn't it Boris?

BORIS: Yes, yes it is. I've always admired
Johnson.

GEOFFREY: I should think so. (exhales loudly) Well,
anyway, I have a stamp for you. The last one.

THE PEOPLE WHO STAMP PAPERS ALL DAY 2.

But you'll have to sign for it.

He thrusts a wad of papers at Boris.

BORIS: Okay.

GEOFFREY: (*flicking through papers*) This one is to acknowledge you received the stamp in good working order - this one is to affirm that you will in fact use the stamp for its correct purpose - this one clears the company of any responsibility should the stamp disintegrate, catch fire, explode or otherwise cause you any grievous bodily harm whatsoever - and this one ensures that in the event of epidemic, war, riots, public disturbance or general national calamity, you will return the stamp to the Stationary Department and not attempt to defend yourself or your family with it.

BORIS: That seems quite reasonable.

Boris stares at the paper.

GEOFFREY: Are you going to sign them?

BORIS: Well, actually, you see, I don't have a pen.

GEOFFREY: You don't have a pen?

BORIS: No. Your department wouldn't let me have one.

GEOFFREY: And probably for a very good reason, Boris! We probably thought you couldn't handle the responsibility of a pen!

BORIS: I know - I was just saying -

GEOFFREY: Well, there's no need to get aggressive!

BORIS: I wasn't - I was just saying -

GEOFFREY: We have a job to do too, you know!

BORIS: I realise that -

GEOFFREY: Don't take that tone of voice with me! It wouldn't be to your benefit to get the Stationary Department offside!

BORIS: I was just saying -

GEOFFREY: I know what you and your friends say.