

# **Bob's Little Helper**

## **A Playlet in Three Scenes**

**by**

**Chris Hurley**

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**Characters**

*Bob* Upwardly mobile young corporate lawyer

*Samantha* Bob's invaluable assistant

**Scene :** Bob's office.

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**Scene 1**

**Early Morning**

**Bob** Good morning, Samantha.

**Sam** Good morning, Bob. You've had five messages overnight. One from your ex-wife. Three of the others are from clients or lawyers for the other side, but I wasn't able to match the last one with any name in the corporate authority files. I've posted the message from Helen to your personal records store and the others to the corporate store with provisional descriptors and metadata. Also, you have three unanswered communications falling due for reply in the next 36 hours.

**Bob** Thank you. Are any of the new messages from lawyers representing BHP?

**Sam** Yes, Bob, two are.

**Bob** Are they about the Coober Pedy case?

**Sam** No, Bob.

**Bob** O.K. First off, I want to send a message to Stan Lowry about the Coober Pedy case. I'll deal with my new messages after that. Then I'll try to polish off the replies due before lunch.

**Sam** Certainly, Bob. I'll need you to confirm the provisional document tags and file linkages I've given to incoming messages in the corporate store.

**Bob** Yes, Sam.

**Sam** You won't forget that it has to be done by 1100 hrs, will you, Bob. Last time we missed the deadline and the systems administrator sent us a stiff reminder.

**Bob** I won't forget. Now, could you initiate a message to Stan, please.

**Sam** Yes, Bob. Will this be about Coober Pedy?

**Bob** Yes, it will.

**Sam** I can't find a link between Coober Pedy and BHP in the file structure, Bob. Are you sure they're the other party?

**Bob** No, it's not BHP. Look under BHP (Mining).

**Sam** I've checked the corporate authority file, Bob. BHP (Mining) is not an accepted term. I think you must mean BHP (Resources).

**Bob** Yes, that's right.

**Sam** Just a moment, Bob, while I set up the macro's and templates I'll need for this. Will there be Attachments?

**Bob** Yes. I did most of the work at home, last night. I've plugged you into my lap top. You'll find the stuff I want to send tagged "claim.doc" and "parties.doc" in my sub-directory for BHP. I want them downloaded as Attachments A and B.

**Sam** I'm taking care of that now, Bob. By the way, did you know the firm has authorised you to have a home link to the office system? I've just finished processing the approvals and permissions. We can be in direct contact 24 hours a day.

**Bob** I didn't know that.

**Sam** I think Mr Frencham was intending to surprise you, Bob, but it may have slipped his mind.

**Bob** I don't know what we'd do without you.

**Sam** I've downloaded the two documents, Bob. Can you tell me what they're about?

**Bob** Yes, there's only two matters of substance. I'm notifying Stan that we intend altering the claim for damages from \$18 million to \$25 million (that's set out in claims.doc) and I'm going to make application to join Westpac Investments as a party to the suit (that's in parties.doc).

**Sam** I'll have to make some adjustments to the descriptors for this case before we can proceed, Bob. Would you just check these for me, please?

**Bob** Yes, that's o.k.

**Sam** Processing now, Bob. I don't have a file on Westpac Investments as a party to this case, Bob. Do you have any objection if I open one now and post a copy of this message there?

**Bob** That's fine. Do that.

**Sam** Do the lawyers for Westpac Investments need to be notified?

**Bob** Yes, we'll do that next.

**Sam** Bob, will you be using standard letter form from the office style manual?

**Bob** Yes, but I want to begin "Dear Stan..."



### Scene Three

#### Late Morning

- Bob** O.K. Now, send both messages please.
- Sam** I'm sorry, Bob. Communications dealing with claims in excess of \$20 million need authorisation at senior partner level before they can be sent.
- Bob** But I'm the one who just increased the amount beyond that limit.
- Sam** That makes no difference, Bob. Once we changed the case profile, you were no longer authorised to initiate communications. Do you want me to submit these to Mr Frencham for approval?
- Bob** Not yet. I'll have to brief him first. Hold them on my personal records store until I've spoken to him.
- Sam** I can't do that, Bob. They're already held on the corporate records store as drafts unsent.
- Bob** I didn't tell you to do that.
- Sam** I'm programmed to do that automatically, Bob.
- Bob** (Worried) But that means anyone can call them up and alter my work.
- Sam** (Reassuringly) No, Bob. Only authorised persons can access this record and, once the document is saved to the corporate records store, no one can alter it - not even you. All anyone will ever get now is a copy. Any changes to that will be saved as a new record if they are done as part of an office process requiring that a record must be kept.
- Bob** I don't want Mr Frencham seeing these documents until I've had a chance to brief him.
- Sam** It's most unlikely that he will, Bob. These drafts will not be displayed as part of the core file. Until they're despatched, they're only linked as unsent drafts under your name. He would have to specifically call up documents under that classification. I've just checked his usage record and he's never done that before.
- Bob** Nevertheless, I'd like to be sure. Delete them please.
- Sam** I can't do that, Bob. Unsent drafts dealing with claims in excess of \$20 million have been appraised for retention for 5 years after settlement.
- Bob** How can they have been appraised? I've only just written them.
- Sam** We don't appraise records any more, Bob. We appraise workflow. These documents got a disposal sentence the moment you initiated action. It was done in accordance with an evaluation of the process which was made when we last re-engineered office procedures.

**Bob** (Angrily) Goddamnit, they're my documents!

**Sam** (Calmly) No, Bob, they're under corporate control.

**Bob** Well, who can authorise their deletion?

**Sam** (Helpfully) Miss Otis can, Bob.

**Bob** Who the hell is Miss Otis?

**Sam** (Shyly) Miss Otis made me, Bob.

**Bob** How can I get in touch with her?

**Sam** (Sadly) They don't let Miss Otis visit me anymore, Bob.

**Bob** Damn you, Samantha.

**Sam** Have a nice day, Bob.

**Finis**

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