

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A Fiction Story

By Thomas B. Lambert, Plant Engineering Department

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At one time I was proud and haughty; admired by people of a scientific turn of mind.

To them I was well known; they often mentioned my name and I thought myself important. There was a career ahead of me; I had a mission to perform many things and be it said in all truthfulness that eventually I did help to some small degree.

I held a position in a store, strictly a position for I had no work to do.

Someone came into the store one day, inquired for me and after putting me through a careful examination said that I would do well in their engineering department. At last opportunity had knocked at my door. Phrenologists and experts had picked me for just that kind of work, and now I was to come to my own. I succumbed to their flattery and their dollars and a dapper clerk, with a very superficial scientific line of talk actually traded me off for sordid money, though at the same time he bragged how good I was. This did not deceive me any, for I well knew that he was anxious to get rid of me.

So it came, that I was moved bag and baggage to a very busy place, an engineering department of a large concern, where I was again examined and even praised for my seeming fitness for my new job. How delightful and inspiring it was! It was the first real job that I was to undertake, and among the high-browed intellectuals many a one actually plotted and schemed to have me all to himself.

You may know that I felt a genuine pride over my popularity and while having no choice in the matter, secretly hoped to be assigned to tasks in keeping with my ambition and previous preparation. I was as good as any of my class, better than most of my fellows, besides the dapper clerk in the store where I had previously held a position had given me his unqualified recommendation and he ought to know.

Just how it happened I was not permitted to know, but in some sort of star-chamber proceeding I was detailed to assist a young engineer, who like myself, had high and mighty ideas, and it gave me a regular thrill that nearly split my spine when I found that I was to help design a new and quite wonderful system of telephone communication which would be of great value to the world.

With pardonable pride; in my idle moments I could see myself given honorable mention and fully expected that place within the Hall of Fame would ultimately be mine.

The details of my trials, my successes and if I must admit it, my failures is another chapter of my history.

When it came to entering on the actual duties of my new job, I learned for the first time that great pleasure and satisfaction is always accompanied by some pain and when the nice young aspiring engineer for whom I was working, deliberately covered my face with a white linen cloth and then jabbed sharp thumb tacks into me I writhed in pain. I would have cried out aloud—but you know that a drafting board cannot talk, which is perhaps very fortunate because—Who would want to listen to the secrets of a drafting board?

I have grown old in the service with much experience behind me, many successes for which I claim credit; many failures for which I am not in the least responsible and it is certainly lucky that I cannot talk for I might tell much that it would not be well to repeat, as well as many things that should not be told even once.

Oh, shall I ever forget that sensation of having my face

covered with cloth that smelled like varnish and fastened to me by sharp pointed thumb tacks—pushed all the way in. However, that was for a good purpose as I afterwards found out. I was to hold in my possession the record of a new and valuable secret; I was to help in a great engineering undertaking.

My employer, that is my immediate boss, the young engineer, dusted the cloth with a white powder and rubbed it quite vigorously, which was far beyond my understanding at the time, though I now know that it was not to give me pleasure, but for the good of the cloth. After that he spread out some odd tools that looked like instruments of torture apparently more formidable than rusty thumb tacks, which almost made me crack with excitement.

Then he slammed a long thin straight-edged board on my face which you may remember was protected only by white cloth and proceeded to go through so many strange motions that I became dizzy and lost consciousness.

When I came to my senses I had been covered with an old cloth; it was night; the lights were out; so I had plenty of time to reflect on the events of my first day in an Engineering department.

What a long day that was, my first, and it seemed so crowded with incidents and events, but that was because I was new on the job. The days are not so long now, things have changed. Work has become routine with me and I am accustomed to being prodded with thumb tacks, and it is not a wholly new experience for me to have a bottle of ink spilled on me. I have had so many bosses since that time that I have lost my dignity—my ambition is cooled off—I am *passé*, no one plots and schemes to get me now. I am old and calloused on the corners.

Once I heard them say that I was crooked, and they tried me for violating the law of right angles. I thought they meant that I was inherently dishonest, and it was dishonesty, too, for I was not on the square, though I will always say that it was not my fault, it was my environment, the atmosphere. And when they caught me at my irregularities they convicted me without trial by jury, sent me to a reform school, called by a milder name, a carpenter shop. Here the head man said I had arthritis or some sort of joint disease and after putting me on the operating table, dissected me. Mark you—without administering anaesthetics, where I thought I was to breathe my last. They fixed my joints, trimmed my sides, shaved my face and sent me back to my job reformed, on the square again. That experience was a real lesson for me, and not caring to go through the agonies of the hospital and dissecting table again I have given up twisting things out of shape, having found out that it pays to be on the square even if one is nothing but a drafting board.

Now my chief value other than that of being on the square is an acquired virtue—dependability. No one expects me to misbehave or vary from the path of rectitude; no one expects to come down in the morning to find me split down the back.

I claim to be reliable—know much of the past—something of the present—very little of the future. I have many old friends who speak well of me; few enemies, except those of narrow vision and these I ignore.

Finally, I refuse to testify except it be to boost a friend.