

## THE LAB TECH'S TALE

### THE LAB TECH'S PROLOGUE

There was silence when the tale was done,  
Nor was there much desire in anyone  
To speak or offer up another tale.

Hoping that this time he might prevail,  
The bartender said, "Now we should move on  
Before the vast majority are gone,  
And end this game. It's getting rather late --"

But once again someone shouted, "Wait!  
I have a tale that I would like to tell,  
And I have been assured I tell it well.  
It's about a --" "Please! We've had enough!"  
The bartender implored. "All this new stuff --"  
"A vote! A vote!" immediately was heard  
From those who'd no idea what had occurred,  
But had from gambling recently come in,  
And, restless, wanted something to begin.

"Just tell your tale!" the bartender, disgusted,  
Shouted out. A tall young man adjusted  
His pants and tucked his shirt, then stepped right  
up  
Before the crowd and raised an empty cup.

"Water!" he shouted. "Water! I need some water!"  
The bartender then filled it. "Now a quarter!"  
He held his hand out, swung it left and right.  
"Come on, come on, now we don't have all  
night!"

Someone put a quarter in his hand.

He plopped it in the cup. "Now I had planned  
To make a million dollars down below,  
Gambling. But as sadly we all know,  
The odds are all against us. But suppose ..."  
And here he put a finger to his nose,  
"Suppose, as with the alchemists of old,  
I could turn this quarter into gold?"

Silence, as he paused theatrically.  
"Of course I can't," he said. "But seriously,  
A modern version of the ancient scam  
Exists, as I will tell you if I can.

"I worked for what would be an alchemist  
Searching for the secret catalyst  
That would turn water into energy  
Without one bit of input. As you'll see,  
You simply put two wires in a cup  
And to some sort of meter hook them up.  
One is copper, the other one is zinc --  
Oh, yes! It's quite as simple as you think!

"This water then becomes a battery  
That runs any device you want for free.  
Two cups will run exactly double, four  
Will increase your output that much more.  
Ten will run your house, ten thousand will  
Run a warehouse, factory, or mill."  
"Really?" someone said. The audience laughed.

"Please!" the lab tech said. "He isn't daft.  
Getting energy from water is  
Done already by electrolysis.  
The only problem is that you get out  
Less energy than you put in. No doubt,  
The equivalent of alchemy right now  
Is getting more than you put in. And how  
My boss did this is the subject of my tale,  
After which the trick will be on sale."

#### THE LAB TECH'S TALE

Once there was a scientist who dreamed  
Of saving the world. When he was young, it  
seemed  
Quite possible to find the perfect cure  
For poverty and hunger. He was sure

The answer lay in finding energy  
That would be safe, clean, plentiful, and free,  
The engineering simple – just a kit  
That anyone could use. He thought of it  
As a child in school where he had learned  
That water was made of fuel that could be burned  
And oxygen, that all such fuels require.  
My God! he thought. Then water's frozen fire!

And from that moment he became obsessed  
With what he dreamed that H<sub>2</sub>O possessed:  
A genie in an ordinary glass  
Whose liberation he would bring to pass.

He fantasized that like a monk he would  
Devote his every moment to The Good,  
Living sparely, even after he  
Had made his Nobel-Prize discovery,  
Using his vast fortune to supply  
Kits to all who could not such things buy,  
Until each rural factory and farm,  
School, house, office, hospital and barn  
Hummed with power, absolutely free.

This was what he dreamed his life would be.  
And so it was, at least the part before  
He made his great discovery. The more  
He slaved and sacrificed, the more he would  
Ignore himself to serve the greater good,  
Eating little, living in a room  
Resembling a tiny, airless tomb,  
One set of clothes to wear while one would dry,  
No family, lovers, friends, no gifts to buy,  
Just work, work, work, to find the alchemy  
That would turn water into energy.

Of course this had been done, but with one lack:  
One put more power in than one got back.  
The current one would need to separate  
The H<sub>2</sub> from the O was far too great.  
But this did not deter our scientist,  
Convinced the problem was the catalyst  
Required to produce a current strong  
Enough to move the process right along.  
And so for years, decades, he tried many  
Minerals and alloys, but not any  
Seemed to be of measurable use.

One day while reading a typically abstruse  
Article on ionizing water  
And twiddling absent-mindedly a quarter  
Between his left forefinger and his thumb,  
Wondering whether he was simply dumb  
Or the author of the article an ass,  
He dropped the quarter into a small glass  
Of water recently electrolyzed.

About to rescue it, he realized  
He might have left the current on, and checked  
The voltmeter, whose filthy face was flecked  
With grime from years of dust, grease, oil, and  
sweat.

Twelve volts, it seemed to read. Too much to get  
The quarter from the glass. And so he turned  
To switch off the transformer before he burned  
His fingers diving down to save the quarter  
Drowning in the glass of salty water.

But wait a minute! The transformer wasn't on!  
Where was the current coming from? Upon  
His heart there lay an ingot of pure gold  
Preventing it from beating. He turned cold,  
Icy, trembling, too afraid to touch  
The voltmeter, the transformer, the glass – too  
much  
Shot through him in that instant to contain,  
His ecstasy indistinguishable from pain --  
For where had those volts come from but from  
water  
Catalyzed by his rambunctious quarter?

My God! My God! My God! he kept repeating,  
Unaware his heart was hardly beating.  
I've done it! But how? And what precisely were  
The steps that made this miracle occur?

Quickly he scribbled notes upon the page  
That earlier elicited his rage:  
Proportions of the salts in distilled water,  
The nickel-to-copper ratio in the quarter,  
The distance between the copper lead-in wire  
And the zinc wire leading out. He was on fire!  
He scarcely was aware what he was writing.  
Would he – should he – dare another sighting?

He leaned over towards the voltmeter and saw  
Again twelve volts. Thank God! He looked once  
more.

Twelve volts again! It was, it was, it was true!  
His mind leaped towards what he had to do:  
Replicate it first, and then again.  
Then vary salts and volumes, noting when  
It stopped, the electrolysis complete.  
And then a thousand times repeat, repeat.

And then, before pursuing publication,  
He'd submit a patent application.  
Millions, tens of billions this was worth!  
Not to speak of freeing the whole Earth  
And all its beings from their slavery  
To filthy, hot-house, high-cost energy.

Just three years later, or no more than four,  
A shorter time than ever seen before,  
In consideration of his age  
And that his great discovery set the stage  
For universal wealth and equity,  
Peace, health, freedom, joy, and dignity,  
A Stockholm audience would turn its eyes  
On him, the winner of a Nobel Prize!

He fantasized his speech, which would be short,  
But would touch lightly on the things it ought:  
Like all those years of selfless sacrifice,  
Of loneliness, a life not very nice,  
But, yes, sublime in aim and quiet passion,  
And rich in ways unknown to flesh and fashion.

Of course the breakthrough was an accident  
(Describing in some detail the event),  
But one that happened at a place and time  
Where there was someone ready to refine  
It into science, replicable and sure,  
His method painstaking, his purpose pure ...

By this time he had put himself to sleep,  
Exhausted by his unexpected leap  
Into greatness, wealth, and recognition.

Morning found him in the same position,  
Having barely moved for many hours,  
Dreaming of bouquets of fancy flowers

Sent to honor some success or death,  
He wasn't sure which one. He tried his breath,  
Relieved to find it working, so it seemed.

Then some success. But what? He sensed he  
    dreamed  
Of some discovery, a sudden breakthrough  
That – wait! -- now he scrambled over to  
His voltmeter to see what it might read,  
Remembering all, believing nothing, greed  
Gripping him for the first time like a pair  
Of pliers, pulling him near panic by his hair.

It's mine! he thought. But there it was - it wasn't --  
Just what he might hope it does, it doesn't --  
The meter was at zero, but he saw  
The same dark spot of grease he'd seen before  
Spotched across the twelve. Oh, God! So that  
Was it? No Nobel Prize? No billions? Nor at  
The age of seventy-three a chance to win?

As though his disappointment were a pin,  
And all those years a balloon that kept on filling,  
He burst right there, just burst, no longer willing  
To follow his obsession any longer.  
A wasted life! The sense of that grew stronger,  
Grew into anger, into determination  
To salvage something from this brute frustration.

Thus idealists turn their cherished dreams,  
Corrupted, into calculated schemes.  
If he could not get energy from water  
Catalyzed by what was in a quarter,  
He yet could get some greedy fools to think  
That what they saw was real, and so to sink  
Some money into it, so as to be  
In on this new source of energy.

Yes, that was it! Then all was not yet wasted!  
Once the sweet ambrosia has been tasted,  
It isn't easy to relinquish it.  
And so our scientist used all the wit,  
So long and fruitlessly on good expended,  
At last to serve himself. It all depended  
On some reliable source of energy,  
So well concealed no prying eyes could see,  
And then the pretense that things must be kept  
Absolutely secret. The whole plan leapt

Into his mind at once – the invitations  
Marked “Top Secret,” the mini-free vacations  
In posh resorts, the secret, closed-door sessions  
At which the pitch was made, the morning  
    lessons

In chemistry and physics, then finance  
Seasoned with the flavors of romance,  
And in the afternoon aggressive closers  
Going after prospects like bulldozers!

He needed an immoral electrician,  
Part techno-geek, part bona fide magician,  
Who could rig up the apparatus so  
The mini-solar battery would not show.  
You know he'd hire the first poor slob he'd see,  
Who, as it happened, turned out to be me.

What happened next is better left unsaid.  
The scientist – unnamed – alive or dead --  
Managed to make millions from his scheme  
And so fulfilled a portion of his dream,  
The portion that he could. The other part  
Was far beyond ability or art,  
An alchemy much like the one of old,  
Which tried to turn base metals into gold.

But you can fool your friends with this small kit,  
Just as we did our investors. Wit  
Combined with shameless chutzpah will ensure  
Success in life as long as you're not pure  
And undermine yourself. The causes of  
One's woe are ever honesty and love.

Just \$15 each! A buy! A steal!  
And all your friends will swear that it is real!  
Come one, come all! I have only a few!  
Hurry, or there'll be none left for you!