

THE ACADEMY OF ELECTRICAL CONTRACTING

Paper presented by

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The Relationship Between The Construction User
And The Electrical Contractor

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THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN
THE CONSTRUCTION USER
AND
THE ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR

"WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GOOD OLD DAYS"

A ONE ACT PLAY

by

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This is a play, and the characters appearing in it are fictional only to serve the author's needs. Any resemblance to actual electrical contractors and construction users is purely intentional.

THE CHARACTERS:

Alec C. Deecee: a well-meaning, anxious and uncertain suitor, whose ardent affections are no longer accepted by his former lady-love, who now avoids him openly, for all to see. Alec has implored his estranged to meet with him in an attempt at reconciliation.

Connie User: a most attractive and desirable woman of prominence, whose personal magnetism has not been dulled by the passing years. She is profoundly wanted and intensely pursued by many others like Alec for her abundant favors.

THE TIME: Now

The action takes place in a softly lit cocktail bar once quite elegant, but now somewhat frayed by inadequate care and suffering from a gradually dwindling clientele. Its few occupants seem to reflect the atmosphere of the place; they too aren't as cheerful as they could be. In a small booth along the wall sits Alec nervously handling his second drink and periodically checking his watch and the entrance to the room. His mood is darkened by dissatisfaction with himself; he is disturbed and frightened over current hardships and the way things have changed. He begins to question his selfconfidence and wonders when and where he took the misstep leading to his predicament. His confused thoughts are gratefully interrupted by the arrival of Connie.

Alec: *(politely rising and forcing a brave smile)* Hi. I was worried that you might not come.

Connie: *(sitting down)* I almost didn't. I'm involved in so many activities that my time must be governed by priorities. But when you phoned, I knew you were upset, and I felt that I owed you this courtesy.

Alec: *(summons the waiter and orders a drink for Connie)* I'm grateful you've come. *(he pauses a moment and then gets right to the point)* I've been so unhappy since we've been drifting apart, Connie.

Connie: *(looking him squarely in the eyes)* That hasn't been my fault. At least not mainly.

Alec: Please tell me what's wrong. Everything used to be so wonderful between us.

Connie: *(smiles somewhat wistfully in recollection)* Yes, we enjoyed a good relationship; we were both happy for several years. *(the waiter delivers her drink plus another one for Alec and leaves. Connie raises her glass)* Here's to happier days. *(she drinks)*

Alec: I'll gladly drink to that. *(and he does)* Please continue.

Connie: *(pensively)* I guess our blissful relationship was partly a product of the prosperous times when it took root and flourished. Everything seemed to go well during those good years; whatever irritations arose between us were good-naturedly endured or overlooked.

Alec: *(somewhat defensively)* What irritations?

Connie: Well, somewhere along the way you began to take me for granted, and that probably was the beginning of our problems. I gave you most, if not all, of my affection and attention. I had come to think of you as dependable and to rely on your very special talents. Yet sometimes you ignored me and didn't return my calls for days. *(Connie stops to sip her drink, reflects for a moment and watches for his reaction to her words. But Alec says nothing and stares moodily into his glass waiting for her to continue.)* Alec, whenever I invited you to my place, you certainly weren't as prompt as you used to be, and your behavior left a lot to be desired. You didn't seem to care about my needs anymore; you seemed to have lost interest in me.

Alec: *(waving off the approaching waiter)* How about the other side of the coin, Connie?

Connie: Oh, I'm sure I wasn't perfect.

Alec: *(grumbling)* You're right, you weren't. I can recall a number of your irritating habits.

Connie: You never complained.

Alec: *(piously)* I never wanted to hurt your feelings.

Connie: Maybe if we'd spoken out then, we could have treated our wounds. I'm very curious about the ways I troubled you. Tell me.

Alec: Well, Connie, I worked hard to please you, but if you appreciated my efforts, you seldom showed it. And at times you made unfair demands of me.

Connie: *(deeply interested)* Please explain.

Alec: Frequently you failed to give ample advance notice you wanted me; yet you insisted on immediate action. You occasionally did not permit me sufficient time for accomplishment. Your unreasonable demands forced me to unusual extremes. Although extra time, effort and unnecessary expense could be involved, you often behaved as though this were your just due. You neglected to think or care how all this might adversely affect my welfare. (*Alec can't stop now. His long-concealed hurts seem to spill out of a container which should have been uncapped years ago.*) I don't enjoy remembering the times you kept me waiting when I wanted attention. I tried not to bother you too often about my personal needs. Once a month when I appealed to you for what I needed most, you were reluctant to acquiesce. There were times you completely and heartlessly ignored my pleas. (*Seeing Connie stiffen with anger, Alec stops his recital and motions to the waiter for another set of drinks. He has suddenly become acutely aware that this important meeting is not progressing as he expected. He now retreats into awkward silence.*)

Connie: (*sighing resentfully*) I won't deny some of your charges; but my actions were the result, not the cause, of our problems. The most damaging wedge between us, Alec, was and still is your dear colleagues.

Alec: C'mon, Connie, my ties to them predate our relationship.

Connie: Hear me out, Alec. I don't think you're truly aware how seriously they've affected us. When you sent them into my home, their behavior was at times abominable. These infractions occurred much too often. Your colleagues have been undependable; they appeared and disappeared at odd times for their own convenience. They sometimes

delayed timely functions by dawdling over coffee or indulging in untimely conversation. At times they engaged other visitors in my home in pointless arguments and interfered with their endeavors. On occasion they prevented invited guests from entering my house; sometimes they themselves wouldn't enter even though they were expected. They don't seem content to mind their own affairs; they go out of their way to irritate and interfere with my neighbors. (*Seeing the waiter approach, Connie pauses till he serves the drinks and departs.*) When there was no need for any of you to be at my house, at least one of them would insist on being there even against my wishes. Some of them frequently asked to be invited to stay after the others had gone. They certainly didn't accomplish what I rightfully expected of them. Although they tried at times to impose their will on me, I refused to be told what I may or may not do in my own home. You may permit them to run your life, but I won't have them running mine. I'm unwilling to condone their immature behavior whenever they're displeased. Pride will not permit me to be bullied by their threats. To sum up, Alec, I resent your colleagues whenever they are unruly, untidy, undisciplined, rude, argumentative and militant in my home. I must confess that I occasionally cancelled important plans rather than have you and your associates involved.

Alec: (*apologetically*) I surely didn't hurt you intentionally, Connie. I'm sorry that my alliance with my colleagues is so restrictive and troublesome. There are many situations in which I have absolutely no control over their behavior. But I promise to try to convince them to improve their ways.

Connie: Although I appreciate your honesty, I'm afraid I can't accept your inability to keep your colleagues in check. You have become their accomplice by involuntary consent. I honor your right to choose your associates, but when that choice is harmful to me, my feelings for you grow cold. My affairs with you began to be accompanied by severe stress and painful headaches. I neither deserved nor needed that suffering. I'm no longer willing to accept the old ways; they cost me too much emotionally and financially. I'm not obliged to share or be inconvenienced by your problems with others. I guess we're just not compatible anymore. *(Alec tries to interrupt, but Connie holds him off.)* I'm almost through, Alec. I believe I have ample reason to sever our ties. I'm not sure I want you to call me anymore. Although you need me, I can get along quite nicely without you. There are a number of others interested in having a meaningful relationship with me without creating problems. I must leave now for another appointment. I'm sorry that things haven't worked out for us. However, when and if you are ever able to make significant changes, I might consider renewing our relationship.....if it isn't too late. Time will tell. *(Connie rises.)* Goodbye and good luck, Alec.

As Alec dejectedly watches Connie leave the room, the light begins to dim. He intuitively senses that the fading light endangers his survival. He stumbles across the room desperately trying to stem the deepening gloom.....as the curtain slowly falls.

EPILOGUE

This play is not meant to be frivolous. It is a sincere attempt to symbolically depict the comfortable past, the uncomfortable present and the uncertain future relationships between the construction user and the construction contractor.

The relatively snug past has been disturbingly unsettled by a shortage of construction spending, the high price of material, expensive labor, constantly spiralling inflation, squabbling labor unions, costly work stoppages and strikes, restrictive work practices and inadequate productivity.

Overzealous, overcautious environmental protection agencies have contributed to the problem by causing lengthy delays in construction with resulting higher costs and by frequently imposing excessive requirements, one or both sometimes leading to the abandonment of proposed projects.

Construction work has become less available to union contractors. The successful growth of merit-shop contractors was assisted by those union contractors who had turned away from and surrendered certain kinds of construction work for more lucrative types. Now the more lucrative work is no longer so readily attainable.

Then too, construction unions have grown so powerful they often tend to become bullies. They flex their muscles at management, the construction user and legislators at all levels of government. They quarrelsomely skirmish with each other creating needless jurisdictional disputes and exasperating job shutdowns. Their strength has brought them a level of wages too expensive for too many users to purchase.

The end result of all these contributing factors is an ailing construction industry - especially for union constructors. Already many long-established contractors have gone out of business. Obviously corrective measures should have been made yesterday; and before it's too late, they must be made today and tomorrow.