

AN ALARMING NIGHT

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Chris Lee walked slowly to the parking lot at midnight Friday night. Chiplinks Company had hired Chris six months ago, as an assistant plant manager, but Chris was not happy.

Chris had come to work late Friday evening after a business trip, determined to catch up on paperwork (and take some work home) before Monday morning. Once inside the plant, Chris had decided to wander around. It always made sense to chitchat with the senior scientists. Many worked odd hours; a Friday night would be a good time to touch base with any round-the-clock type who happened to be there, Chris thought.

Chris had been greeted by the security guard at the desk and then had gone back to see the guard an hour later to ask a question: "Why are the toxic gas alarms off, on the third floor?" The guard had looked nervous and denied noticing that the alarms were turned off, even though the alarm box lights were obviously off at the front desk. Chris had gone back to the third floor, methodically turning alarms back on in each area of the third floor, and methodically closing and locking the safety doors between the third floor work areas, since the toxic gas alarm system would only work when the doors were all properly closed.

At the end of the third floor, Chris found Piro Pati. Pati was a technical assistant to Y.T. Links, founder and CEO of Chiplinks Company. Links held patents on a number of computer chip innovations and was well-known for continued research in chip design. Pati was one of the several technicians working on a new idea. This was an area of the plant that Chris had hardly seen before; it was Y.T. Links' personal domain.

Chris was upset about the alarm system. "How can you not have noticed that the alarm system was off?" demanded an angry Lee of Piro Pati. At first Pati wouldn't answer – then Pati dissembled – then finally muttered that Dr. Links always turned the system off when working at night, to facilitate moving from work area to work area. Chris had then surveyed the work area around Pati: open beakers, unlabeled bottles, odd-looking bits of things on the floor. "Don't you realize that these habits might endanger everyone on the whole floor, when they come in to work the next day?" Pati had merely nodded. "You know what Dr. Links is like," replied Pati.

Chris did indeed know what Links was like. Links' temper tantrums were legendary. Employees, even valuable employees, had been humiliated in public and fired on the spot, just for asking questions. Chiplinks people were paid far above industry average, they had extraordinary benefits.....and they kept their mouths shut.*

*Most of the time. But just the other day one fearful employee called the federal government's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to complain about unsafe conditions in the lab. The employee was told OSHA would contact the company and consider investigating.

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