

AN ENGINEER'S NIGHTMARE
BY N.V. CLEMENTS

Home from his toil, an engineer
Sank wearily to bed,
The plans of wings and landing gears
Were buzzing through his head.

Then there appeared before his eyes
A dreadful apparition
Much like the Ancient Mariner
In very poor condition.

Who laid upon the bed a tome*
of 40 thousand pages.
"Spec-if-i-ca-tions" it was marked,
And showed the wear of ages.

He frowned a military frown,
His eye began to glisten,
And pointing with his horny hand
He throatily croaked, "Listen!"

"Design for us, O Engineer,
An airplane that is hot.
A two-place Fighter's what we want,
The best that can be got."

"Of course, you should be quite prepared,
Like any good go-getter,
To change it quickly to a Scout
If we decide that's better."

"Now don't forget-it must be fast,
Three hundred's not enough.
But it must land at 20 knots
As light as downy fluff."

"Remember too, it must be dived
Or 'dove' – or its it 'diven?'"
No matter – it must go like hell
Nor land the crew in hivven"***

"A clean design, for Speed's sweet sake,
That's a necessity,
The wings of course must fold, but PLEASE
NOT unexpectedly."

"The wings need flaps, the cowl does, too,
The ailerons must droop,
And seaplane floats would be right nice
For landing in the soup."

"Since no one knows if this design
Will base on beach or boat,
Arrange to have the wheels retract
Into the seaplane float."

"Put in some gas, enough to fly
From Hindoostan to here,
A crew of two – a radio
And add flotation gear."

"A battery of ten-inch guns –
No, wait – that's battleships.
Oh, well, you'd better put them in,
We'll leave them out on trips."

"The radio will be – let's see –
This one-no that one – Wait,
Leave room for Both – we'll pick one out
At some much later date."

"That's all – except of course for bombs
And cameras for mappin',
Torpedoes too, and smoke-screen tanks –
No telling what may happen."

"Let's see – the last one was how strong?
No multiply by three.
One never knows, does one, when one
Will strain it mightily."

"Now hark ye well, 'tis writ in blood
That you'll be in a kittle
If you should deviate from specs
One single jot or tittle."

"Each part must be well anodized,
Ten coats of paint you'll give it,
And bonding wire must connect
Each bolt and nut and rivet."

"There's more, much more, that I could tell
But I must go, I fear
Just read this book (He tapped the tome)
You'll get a rough idear"****

"So there you are – now go ahead
And dash off this design.
Ten weeks we'll give you – not enough?
We'll compromise on nine."

"Because you see, 'twill take us years,
To carefully peruse it
And fully satisfy ourselves
We simply cannot use it."

* We had to look that one up, too,
it means book.

** His father came from Ireland.

*** But his mother came from Boston.