

Over the Back Fence
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Approx 640 words

Power failure
By Alva Wood

It happened just a little before dusk. Terry Brown was out feeding the turkeys when the power went off. The lights in the turkey shed flickered once, and then died.

Terry finished pouring the feed. Then he went back to his house.

Sid Carter, our village's female minister, had been preparing evening dinner. She stared at the pans that weren't getting hot on the stove.

"So," she asks, "do we order pizza, or go out?"

"Maybe the pizza place doesn't have power either," Terry replies.

"You could phone them and find out," says Sid.

But he couldn't. Terry had replaced his regular phones with those new wireless models on sale at Costco. The new phones don't work without power.

"Well," says Terry philosophically, "I guess I've got time to read a few of the magazines that have been piling up."

Unfortunately, *Scientific American* uses big words and small print. As the light fades outside, Terry has more and more trouble reading. He gets up and flips a light switch.

"There's no power," Sid reminds him.

Terry lights a couple of candles. They don't give very much light. Absentmindedly, Terry drops the magazine and clicks the TV remote. Nothing happens, of course.

He goes to the kitchen to get a cup of coffee. The pot has grown cold.

He pops the cup of coffee in the microwave to heat it up. Nothing happens.

He starts to fill a kettle with water.

"I told you," he hears Sid's voice, "I told you to get a gas range when you remodelled the kitchen. But no, you had to have electric. Because it doesn't use fossil fuels, you said."

By now, it's pitch black outside. Terry's starting to feel hungry.

"I might have one of those old phones in my workshop," he says. He takes a candle with him. One wall of his workshop is lined with shelves loaded with boxes of stuff that doesn't work but that's still too good to throw out.

Terry holds the candle high while he finds the box containing a bird's-nest jumble of telephone cords, phone jacks, and, yes, an old phone.

The candle sets off the smoke alarm directly over his head. Its sudden squeal makes Terry drop both the box and the candle. He can't find anything in the darkness.

He fumbles back towards his living room, bashing his shins on an invisible sawhorse and getting his feet tangled up in the fallen telephone cords.

Half a dozen flickering candles make the living room seem homey, even if it's steadily growing colder.

"At least we know the battery in the smoke alarm is still working," he says.

"Maybe there's some news on the radio about how long this will last," Sid wonders.

Terry turns on the radio. Silence.

"When did you last change the batteries?" Sid asks.

"I don't think I've ever changed them," Terry admits. "But I should have some more in a bin in my workshop."

"Take a flashlight this time," suggests Sid.

"I think I have one in the bedroom," says Terry. He comes back with the flashlight in his hand. Its bulb glows dull orange.

"Dead batteries," he explains. "Again."

"There should be a flashlight in the car," says Sid. "Didn't you put one in the trunk as part of the emergency kit?"

"I'm not going out again," says Terry, rubbing his bruised shin.

This time Sid takes a candle. As she shuffles toward the door, she bumps against a bookcase with several potted plants on top of it. A spider plant topples and lands on her foot. The pot shatters.

“Ow!” Sid yelps. “God damn this darkness!”

At that instant, the lights come back on.

“Wow!” says Terry, awed. “You really do have connections!”

“But,” he adds after a second’s thought, “are you sure that counts as prayer?”