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## THE STORM

by William C. Anderson

I spurred Rocinante off the freeway at Concordia, a snoozing Missouri hamlet just east of Kansas City. The navigator found a nice little oasis complete with roaming tame deer, and we plugged in for the night. We hit the sack early and were soon lulled to sleep by the soothing chomping of the deer eating our welcome mat.

Along about midnight, however, our idyllic snoring was rudely ruptured by a growling, crackling, thunder-clapping electrical storm that sent Dortha to my side of the bed to grip me in a throttling embrace. "I would enjoy this even more, my dear," I croaked, "were your curlers not collapsing my windpipe."

"Sorry," she said, removing her curlers from my throat to plant them in my eye. "But this is a frightening storm. Look at the lightning!"

Raindrops the size of egg yolks began pelting the coach. A bolt struck nearby, flooding the sky with a million klieg lights. "That one did it," I said, noting the night-light was no longer burning. "There goes the power."

She cocked one eyelid at me. "Times like this I appreciate our little aluminum cocoon. We can switch to battery power."

I rolled over. "In the morning. Go back to sleep."

As she cuddled up, we both heard the knock on the door. "Who could be out in the storm this time of night?"

"Best I find out." I slipped into my robe, found the flashlight and opened the door. The beam illumined a small female figure, clutching a whipping kimono. The woman shielded her face from the spattering rain as she grimaced into the light. "I'm terribly sorry to bother you, sir, but it's a matter of extreme emergency."

"Won't you step in?"

"Thank you, no. This storm has blown out the campground power, and I must switch to our generator. But I can't seem to get it started. Do you know anything about generators?"

"A little." I turned the beam to sweep the out-

line of a large Superior coach that had driven into a nearby site during the night. "Is that your motorhome?"

"Yes. And it's absolutely imperative that I get the generator running. Can you help me?"

There was no denying the look of near hysteria in her face. "Of course. I'll get my raincoat."

"Oh, thank you!" She ran back to her coach.

"What is it?" asked Dortha, as I threw on my slicker.

"A damsel in distress. Gotta go."

"What could be so important as to need electricity this time of night? In this storm?"

"I dunno. But the lady's genuinely worried." I went out the door. "Stay tuned."

I joined the lady huddled over the generator well, trying frantically to get it started. The battery was not cranking the engine. "It might be grounding out because of the rain," I said. "Have you an umbrella?"

"Yes," she said. I noticed she was trembling.

"Get it. And some towels."

"Back in a flash."

I thrust my hand into the spaghetti of wiring. There was a crackling spit of electricity, and I found myself sitting flat on my butt in the mud. I swore, but fortunately had not been burned.

When the woman reappeared with the towels and umbrella, I propped the opened bumbershoot over the generator well to keep out the rain. "I think I've found the problem. The insulation on the wire from the battery has worn off. The naked wire is grounding out. I need some electrical tape."

"Be right back."

Isolating the guilty wire, I wiped it dry. When she returned with the tape, I soon had the wire reinsulated and tucked back into its place. I pressed the starter button. The generator kicked on, and lights began blossoming inside the coach. I turned to the lady to see an immense flood of relief wash over her face. "You're back in business."

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