

## VISIONS OF DEMENTIA

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Ever feel that life is getting a little crazy? One step forward and two steps back? Now I can see the events of last night bordered on the ridiculous, and today I am laughing, but last night ...well...I was all alone, grousing about with a very juicy head cold, shivery, sneezing and dripping; box of Kleenex nearby, and cooking my dinner. It was a wintery dark outside, lights on inside, TV tuned to Pierce Morgan, cozy evening with more TV planned ahead. Whoops! Disaster lurking!

The next few minutes contained a weird mixture of events.. First the kitchen light flickered on and off. I checked the rest of my apartment. All lights working. In my flu-like state, I wondered if I were being visited by a ghostly apparition.... Charles Boyer from "Gaslight" had mistaken me for Ingrid Bergman? The kitchen lights dimmed again, then went out entirely. But now all my other lights went out.. Total blackness. I sneezed five times in a row. Blew my nose some more. Then the smoke alarm began to chirp, like it does when its battery is dying. Was Charles Boyer tapping out a message? I couldn't smell any smoke, but then my nose was too full to let any aromas thru anyway!

Staggering around in the total darkness I found the fuse box. Sneezed some more. Fuses were fine. Smoke alarm still chirping though. Swell, now the phone has started to ring.. I found my way back into the kitchen, groped along the counter and up the wall where the phone hangs. A recorded voice told me my electric bill was overdue and they planned to disconnect my service by June 15. By now I was totally disoriented. Was this June 15<sup>th</sup> already? No, that it was ten days away! I sneezed and dripped some more. The voice continued, "Call this phone number now! Do not mail payment as it may not get there in time." Well, yeah lady, now tell me how to find a pad and pen to write this number down in total blackness? Still attached to the kitchen wall phone and sneezing constantly, I could feel panic hovering nearby. Where was the Kleenex box?. Now my nose was flooding down my chin and onto the floor., Smoke alarm still happily chirping.. hmmm... My sense of smell told me nothing was burning on the electric stove. Nothing even *cooking*. Of course not, Stupid, have you forgotten there's no electricity? I hung up the phone, groped till I found the kitchen chair and dragged it toward the chirping sound and stood on it and felt along the ceiling till I found the alarm. I pulled off the cover, couldn't feel a battery, but it stopped chirping anyway. Charles Boyer must have given up trying to send me his message. I climbed off the chair and the phone rang again. Groped again and found it, and a voice in the darkness said "Hi this is Billy Crystal".. BILLY

CRYSTAL? Now I'm sure I've crossed over into the Twilight Zone. Two sneezes and my nose dripped happily into the phone. Billy's recorded voice was urging me to vote yes on Proposition 82. Just then I could hear banging on my front door, so I hung up on him. Sorry, Billy. I really love you. I mopped my nose with my shirt and crept through the blackness out of the kitchen, bumping my leg on the cocktail table in the living room on the way to the door.. It was my neighbor saying our half of the building had no electricity. The electric company would put us on their repair list, and to be patient, the list was long.

At this point I was actually glad for the darkened hallway so my handsome neighbor couldn't see my nose gushing so unattractively. I was also relieved my electricity wasn't off because of non-payment. The neighbor left, and I felt my way back into the kitchen which took quite a while because I made several wrong turns and ended up in the bathroom. Located some crackers and a banana for dinner, plus another box of Kleenex, followed along the walls to my bedroom, took my shoes off and pulled off my shirt and jeans. Climbed into bed in my underwear (you didn't think I was going to try and find my toothbrush in that total darkness did you?) and fell asleep to the lulling sound of a machine pumping something out back somewhere.

Around midnight I was startled awake when all the lights went on and the TV blared out to the strains of a loud rock group.

That morning someone told me there had been some kind of flooding in the alley which caused the electricity to go out. No rain, just a flood from nowhere. Uh huh. The blackout, the chirping smoke alarm, the threatening call from the electric company, the phone call from Billy Crystal, the apparently out of control Red Sea out back, my crazy cold symptoms, all were just coincidences? And you wanna' buy a bridge?..Coincidence my foot! Actually I guess it's just typical of everyday life, accompanied by hysterical politicians, forest fires, floods, third world famines and road rages. BUT, when I consider the alternative...as the great wit Dorothy Parker once said, ..."Razors are painful, rivers are damp, guns aren't lawful and drugs cause cramp..you might as well live!" She's right. But I still regret having to hang up on Billy Crystal.