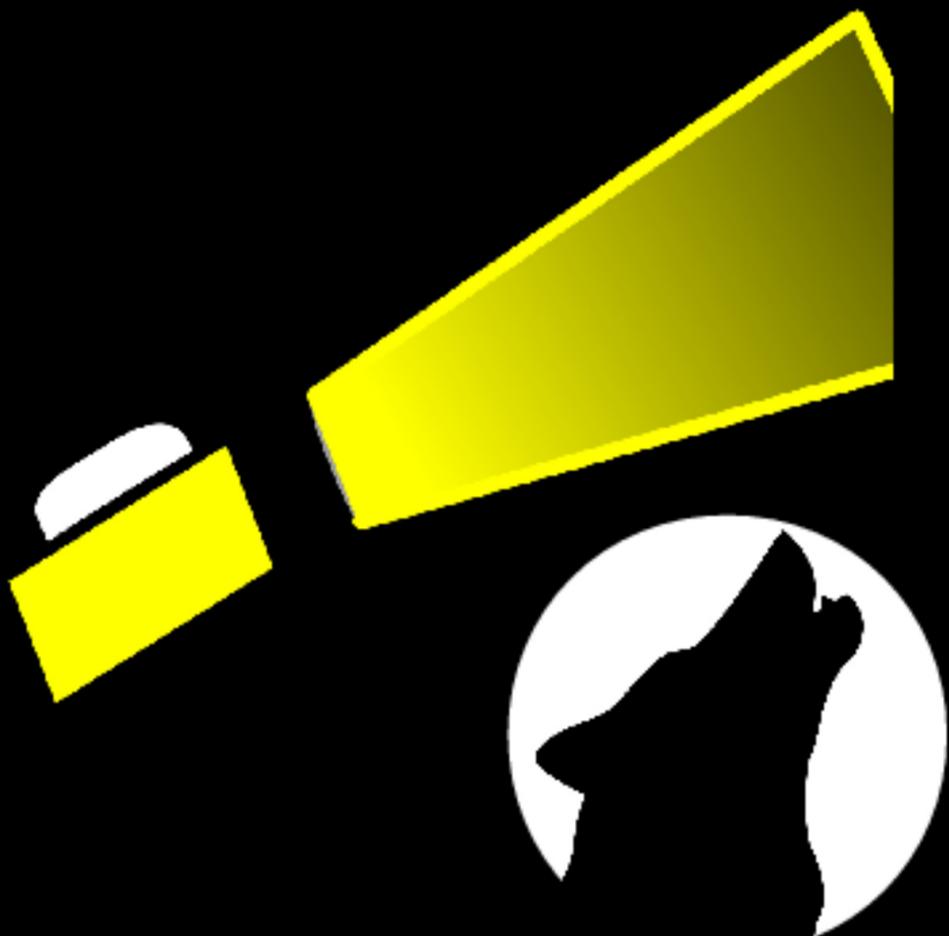


The Blackout



By Kanika G

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Tania was enjoying her after school snack. Mama was reading a book. All was quiet, except the sound of the fan. Suddenly the fan stopped working.

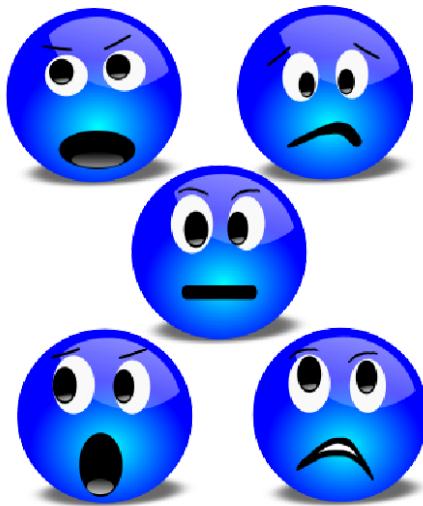
There was plenty of sunlight coming through the large window. So the fan was the only electrical appliance on in the room.



"It is probably the fuse, but I wonder what tripped it." Mama went to check the fuse box. The fuse box was fine. Mama opened the apartment door and saw the lifts had stopped working. "Seems like there is a power

outage." Mama said, as she closed the door.

Tania had experienced the occasional power outage. It typically lasted for about a quarter of an hour, and was usually maintenance related. But half an hour later, there was still no sign of the power being restored. Baby Sonia had already woken up because of the heat. Mama picked her up and went down to find out what was going on.



The lifts were working on emergency power. Many people were out trying to get information. Some were looking

anxious, while others looked annoyed or upset. Mama found out that a worker at a near by construction project had accidentally damaged a few power cables. So the power would not be restored until the next morning. There was going to be a blackout for the entire area.

Mama returned to give Tania the bad news. Tania was worried but also excited. "No electricity all night! What will happen? Has that ever happened before?" asked Tania in awe.

"When we were kids, power outages like this were common." Mama said, laughing.

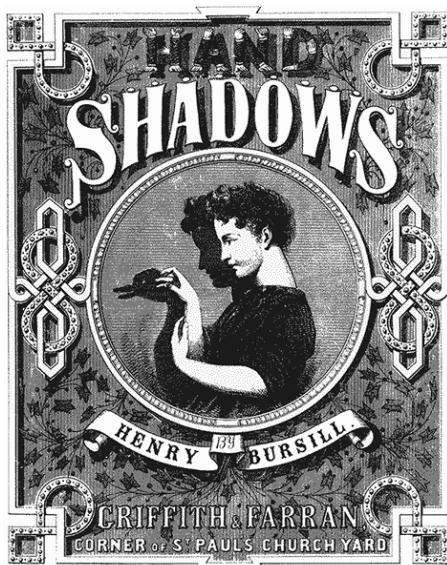


"Really?" Tania asked, wide-eyed. "What did you do? You can't read or play board games in the dark. You

can't watch TV. The laptop and cell phones may work for sometime on battery, but you did not have those when you were kids. What about the fridge? Will the food all go bad?"

"Actually you can read or play board games in candle light. We also told each other ghost stories, because they sound so much scarier in the dark. Wait.. I just thought of something fun to do during blackouts"

"What is that?" asked Tania intrigued.



Mama rummaged through one of the storage cupboards and pulled out a very old book, that belonged to grandpa. It was about hand shadow puppets. She showed it to Tania.

With the sunlight streaming in, Tania could read the book. She was fascinated by the number and variety hand shadow animals that could be made. Tania got a torch and drew the curtains. Then Mama and Tania tried out a few of them together.



The bird was easy, but the elephant was more difficult. It was great fun

getting such realistic representations of the animals with shadows of the hand.



Mama showed Tania how she could make the elephant big by keeping the torch close to her hands, and the bird small by keeping the torch far from her hands.

Suddenly, Tania had an idea. She shared her idea with Mama. Mama thought it was brilliant and agreed to help.

Tania gathered together all the members of her reading club *The Bookworm Babies* in the clubhouse. The clubhouse had large windows and the last couple of hours of daylight poured in. Tanisha, Karishma, Sonali, Rajiv, Nikhil and Vivek were, curious to find out, what Tania was up to.

Tania showed them the book about the shadow animals. "I think we should do a shadow puppet show. We can make up a story with animals from this book and then do a show for the entire housing society." Tania said, beaming with excitement.

Before anyone could respond, she continued "Mama is setting it up with the society chairman. The watchmen will go and inform everyone about it. Mrs. Desai, from the first floor, has agreed to hang a large white sheet from her balcony. The watchman will nail it to the walls of the garage below to make a screen. We can use a torch and stand behind the screen to make the shadow puppets. So what do

you think?" she asked, finally stopping to breathe.

To Tania's relief, all her friends responded with enthusiasm. What a great way to spend a blackout! They leafed through the pages to make a list of possible animal characters. It did not take them long, to come up with a simple story. Each kid chose to play one or two of the shadow animals. They worked on perfecting their chosen shadow animals and the voices for them. Tanisha was going to be the narrator, so she worked on improving the script of the story. Once the light faded they all went home to have dinner. The show was scheduled for 8:30 p.m.

At 8:00 p.m. *The Bookworm Babies* all gathered in the garage behind the screen. They had brought along four powerful flashlights. Mama was helping the watchman set up the mats and chairs for the audience.

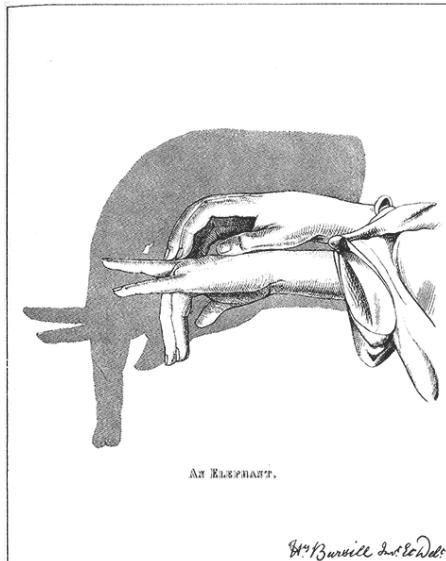
There were no street lights or glowing signs in any of the

neighboring areas. So it was pitch dark. Tania spent a few moments admiring the gorgeous night sky in the absence of the usual light pollution. Soon, the chairs and mats were occupied.

Tanisha announced that the show was about to start. There was applause followed by silence. Tanisha introduced herself as the narrator and explained that all the characters would be shadow animals appearing on the white sheet screen.

Tanisha as Narrator: Elle the elephant is out on her morning walk.

Tania made the elephant shadow puppet move along the screen.



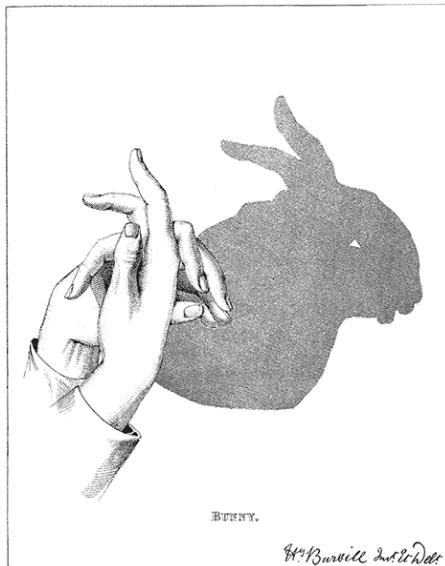
Narrator: It is an uncomfortably hot summer morning. After five minutes of determined walking at a brisk pace, sweating and panting, Elle switches to a stroll. She is very thirsty. So she walks over to the forest pond.

Tania playing the role of Elle: Oh my goodness! The pond is more than half empty. There was a lot more water, when I was here yesterday morning.

Narrator: Oh look, the bunny twins Bob and Bobette are here.

(Bunnies Bob and Bobette appear on the screen alongside Elle)

Elle: The water is getting depleted much faster than usual, isn't it? What do you think Bob and Bobette?



Karishma playing Bobette the bunny:
Yes. It is so hot. We need to drink twice as much as usual.

Nikhil playing her brother Bob: And because the sun is so strong, the water is evaporating faster too.

Bob and Bobette bob their heads up and down in agreement and then scoot off. Tania brings Elle back on screen.

Narrator: Elle looks worried. A water shortage would be a disaster. All the animals would fight for water.

Hey, look, it is Bubbles the blue jay. She has come for a sip of water.



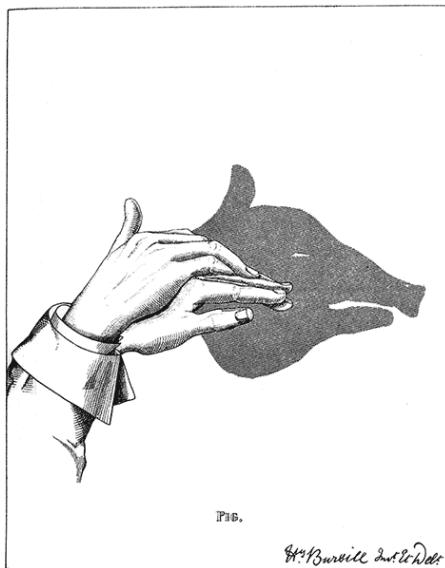
Sonali playing Bubbles in a chirpy voice: What's up Elle? Why do you look so glum?

Elle: I am worried about the water situation.

Bubbles: Yes that is worrisome. Some of the trees are drying up too.

Elle: May be us herbivores should eat more fruits like water melons, so we need less of the water from the pond

Narrator: Now Pemberly the pig is here. Lets see what he has to say about this issue.



Rajiv playing Pemberley: That's not a solution any more pal. The monkeys

have already polished off most of the melons, over the last few days. May be it will rain soon. That is our only hope.

Narrator: Scruff the mutt just arrived. He looks tired. It is quite a long run from the nearest town, where Scruff is a stray. But this lovable mutt has lots of friends everywhere. How could he not? Look how cute he is.



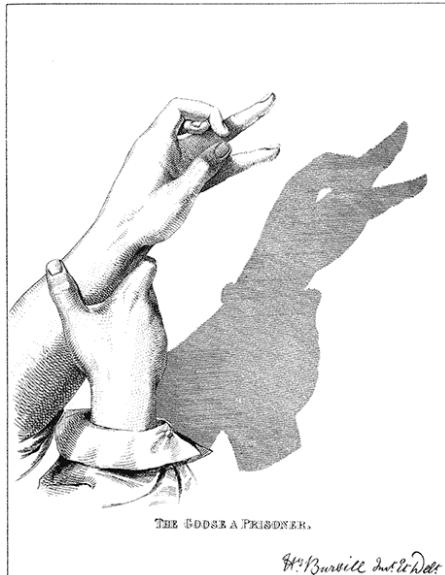
Vivek playing Scruff: Not much hope of that, Pemby. I just heard the

weather forecast on the radio. They said that, the rains are going to be even later than usual. The humans seem worried too. I heard a couple of the village elders discussing water rations for each house.

Pemberly: (*Produces a magnificent snort of disdain*) Those humans use too much water. They should have water rations everyday. Anyway, it's because of them, that we are in trouble. We can't get to the river, because their town is in the way. They make it too dangerous, for us to get water from the river.

Elle: (*Nods in agreement*) They set traps for us and hunt us too. Such uncivilized barbarians!

Narrator: Geegu the goose has startled everyone with her dramatic entrance. She swoops in, takes a sip and flies out, all in one continuous, graceful motion. Now, much to Elle's annoyance, she has parked herself on Elle's broad back. (*giggles*)



Sonali playing Geegu: I have been listening to you for a while from that tree there. You are pretty loud, you know, when you complain. And a fine lot you are! What good is complaining about those humans going to do? Do you have any solutions?

Narrator: Elle and Pemberly are turning pink. They obviously don't have any solutions to offer.

Geegu: I have a far-fetched idea. It probably wont work, but it is worth a try.

Everyone except Geegu together: What is it?

Geegu: These humans are not all bad you know. They can be smart, sometimes. Many years ago they lived in the forest. In those caves towards the west.

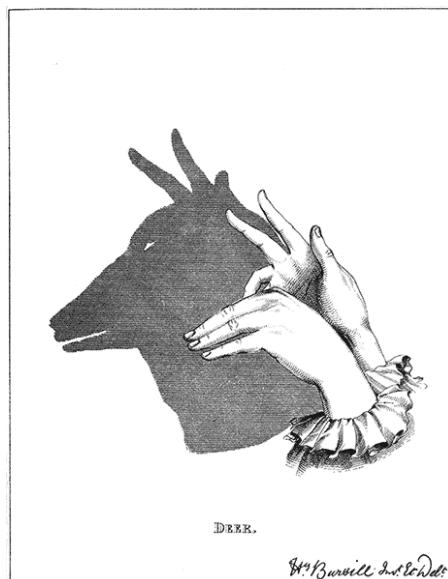
Scruff: (*In an awestruck voice*) They did? No way!

Geegu: Yes, they did. At that time, they figured out a dance. They believed, if 6 of them got together in a circle and did the dance, it would rain. I don't know if it works, but I know the dance. They made pictures on the walls in the caves, that tell you how to do it.

Elle: So, what is the problem? Just do the dance and see if it rains.

Geegu: I think, it would have to be six heavier animals. We geese are too light.

Narrator: Donald the deer is passing by, and wait, it looks like he has heard Geegu. He is going to join in the conversation.



Donald played by Nikhil: Geegu, I just heard what you were saying. My herd has half a dozen deer, and we love to dance. We can give it a try. It is a worthy cause.

Narrator: Geegu spends the afternoon teaching the deer the dance. They have finally understood all the complicated steps. Some of them are

difficult for 4 legged animals, but Donald's herd is talented. Look they are ready to start their performance right next to the pond.

Six dancing deer played by Tania, Tanisha, Vivek, Nikhil, Sonali and Rajiv appear on the screen along with Bobette played by Karishma for about a minute

Narrator: All the animals have come to watch. Bobette is beating two stones together to make a rhythmic sound that Geegu says is an essential part of the process.

(Abhijeet, an older boy who sometimes bullies Tania and her friends, helps out by making loud rhythmic sounds by beating together 2 cricket bats.)

Narrator: What a beautiful dance. But it is almost over. Will it work? I sure hope it does.

(Abhijeet startles everyone by emitting a fairly realistic thunder like sound.)

Narrator: Yikes was that thunder? Oh yes, it is raining. The dance worked. Oh wait now ! That is funny. It is raining only for a little distance around where the dance was done. The animals have never seen anything like it. They are amazed and thrilled. Now they will have enough water for the rest of the summer.

All the animals celebrate together shouting Hooray and Yay and the shadow animals are all seen running around on the screen for a few seconds.

Elle: May be these humans are not so bad after all. At least, those old tribes developed some smart tricks.

Scruff: Yes. But I don't think the modern humans would believe this.

Bobette: Don't tell them. This will be our secret, to get through droughts. Those humans use more than enough water, as it is.

Narrator: That's the show. Hope you enjoyed it.

(All the shadow puppets took a little bow on screen and then the Bookworm Babies and Abhijeet came and took a bow in front of the screen.)

There was great applause from the audience. What an ingenious idea for a blackout. Papa came back stage and gave Tania big hug. He told her that he was very proud of her for coming up with the idea. Then he congratulated all *The Bookworm Babies* for a thought provoking story and a lovely performance.

A big thank you to openclipart (openclipart.org) for making their pictures freely available

The shadow puppet pictures are taken from he public domain book on shadow puppets by Henry Bursill.