



Blackout

I had not intended to write about Japan's ongoing disaster here in A Story A Week. Over the past few days, I have had any number of amusing incidents, but I cannot write about such things in the face of the overwhelming tragedy that many people and families are currently enduring. I think though, that this story will not be found disrespectful.

I am not typing this story, but am *writing* it. In pencil. By lantern-light.

Yes, in Ome tonight, it is our turn for a rolling blackout, imposed upon us by the power company, due to a shortage of electricity as a result of the ongoing disaster at the cluster of nuclear power plants on the coast, a few 100 kilometres north of here.

Just how that event will play out, I cannot foresee as I sit here tonight. It may be brought under control soon, or it may expand into a massive calamity of epic proportions. But it has already brought me a special present - tonight, standing just outside my front door, I looked up at a sight I had never seen here before.

Orion! Over there, the Dipper. And that whitish band across the sky ... the Milky Way!

I quickly put some shoes on, and took a stroll around the neighbourhood. Not a soul. Not a sound. Not a light in sight. I suppose some of my neighbours must have been using candles, but any such faint light was invisible to me. The town was completely still and dark, but the light from the sky was easily enough to navigate by.

Further down the street I did see a light, and when I got closer saw that it was at the home of an American friend who lives there. A bright lantern hung in their living room, and the family could be seen inside, apparently enjoying an evening of conversation together.

I found this quite curious. Why should the only two families on the street to illuminate their homes during the blackout be the two foreigners? Is this cultural? Perhaps the Japanese residents are willing to 'accept their fate' and wait it out in darkness, but the foreigners want to 'fight back' and maintain a normal situation? I'm not sure, but perhaps it's better not to over-think this, especially on the basis of such a small sample size!

After a turn around the neighbourhood, I returned to my own home, where the bright lantern welcomed me from behind the paper *shoji* screens. Pouring some hot tea from the thermos pot (these blackouts are *scheduled*, making preparation easy), I scribbled this story, then spent the rest of the time until power was restored sitting peacefully writing [a post for my blog](#).

I of course am hoping that the emergency situation can be resolved soon, but as for these blackouts, I think I could get used to them!

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