



Source: Peter Beaumont, 'Where the shepherds tend guns by night', *The Observer* in *Guardian Unlimited*, 06/08/06.

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She lit a match. She struck several before she realised that the candles were at the other end of the garage. She fumbled, struck more matches and stumbled her way over boxes, rakes, plastic bags full of last season's discarded clothes and shoes. Easels and paints, carefully wrapped in plastic and stored in the garage for 'another time. All this paraphernalia of life, boxed and packed into the space that should have housed the car. Instead, her old four cylinder stands outside, gathering dust and rust, unprotected from the winter storms that scream over the headland and lash the house. This winter had seen a series of violent storms that have burst across the ocean and torn at her sanctuary, threatening to tilt the wooden framed house into the sea. Winds had brought down power lines and were eroding the sand dune foundations of what had been the family holiday shack and which now she called home.

The blackout came suddenly, she was not prepared.

Without the light, all is larger, noisier, more frightening, less safe. Without the light her body felt clumsy and awkward, not sure of her steps nor her direction. The wind howled and the garage shook as if each blast would peel its corrugated iron skin of protection and scatter everything within, without.

The matchbox was almost empty but she struck another. The flame flared and she threaded her way through her stacked and contained life. The old kitchen cabinet she had hated as a child loomed large at the rear of the garage. That's where the candles were: in the third drawer down, of course, with the rolls of cling and wax and foil, the screw drivers and string and tools for domestic survival.

United at last, match with candle, the flame stretched and bowed in time with the wind that fractured its way through cracks in the garage skin. Now she could see the neat stacks of different sized boxes and white goods that had tumbled and bumped their way into each other, cascading contents out onto the floor where she had stumbled her way through the space. One box, the one containing photographs and cards, had been up-ended onto the concrete floor. She bent, lowering the flame to inspect, methodically gathering the photographs back into the box, a shoe box, her filing shoe box. It was a filing system that brought time, place and people together in a neat group.

When was the last time she had taken a photograph of people? A real photograph, not just a quick shot from her new digital camera? The new technology allowed images

to be discarded with such little effort of thought. She had always considered that to be a careless way to take photographs, taking multiples and tossing all away so easily. These photographs in the shoe box had been taken with her old Pentax. They'd been developed and processed, returned to her, kept by her, brought out every now and again, looked at, touched and wondered at. Even with the candle she could see them, not clearly, but she could see them. Even with no other light source, she could still see them, she knew them well and filled in the dark and light with memories of line and shade. The negatives were there as well. A panic gripped her. Without power she didn't have the digital images of more recent life. Without power, the computer didn't work. Without power did those images exist at all?

She sat in the draughty garage, listening to the buffeting wind and marvelling at the old photographs. The candle was now secured on the stored washing machine, glued there by its own melted body. She held and turned each photograph, checked the date, confirmed the memory, fingered the edges. Her memory was stretched back to the time of taking the photographs, of measuring the distance, reading the light metre and rationing out the shots according to each roll of film. Each image meant something, means something. She recalled the act of taking the photograph as much as the subject in the emulsion. Lost in a tangle of threads to the past, she sat hunched against the howling wind, suddenly noticing the cold creeping in.

She broke the candle's base from the washing machine, held the box under her arm and began to negotiate her way back to the garage entry.

The sudden force as she opened the door blew out the candle and plunged her back into the darkness. Outside, she bounced off the wall of the garage, the wind blustering around, forcing her to grip the photographs and the now extinguished candle closer to her body. Hair whipped her face causing streams of tears. She tunnelled her way to the back door of the house. She paused to catch her breath and search for the matches from the depths of her coat pocket. The box of photos fell from her grasp at the same time as the door was sucked open, thrown back against the outside wall. The scattered images flew out the door and into the black night, whooshing down the space between garage and house, into the darkness and into oblivion.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Patsy Vizents.*