

Green (Black and Blue)

ENERGY



L. Robert Pyle

The back door slammed and heavy clumping announced an uninvited visitor in the mud room.

“Hoss, I ain’t gonna pay it!”

I glanced up to find my overweight, underworked neighbor, Mooch Greevy, standing just inside the kitchen door. He waved the piece of paper in his hand and stomped to the kitchen table.

“Hey, toast.” He grabbed a piece and chomped

down on it. “Cold,” he said and dropped it onto the table. “Don’t like cold toast.”

I raised my eyebrows. He turned and looked around the kitchen. “Whar’s the jelly? That’ll make it taste better.” He strolled to the fridge and opened the door. There was a clinking of glass and then he backed away with a jelly jar and the orange juice container. Next move was to the cupboard for a glass.

With his arms full, he moved back to the table and set everything down. He plopped onto the chair, which bravely resisted but not without loud protest.

After pouring his juice and spreading a thick layer of jelly, he plopped the toast into his mouth and chewed.

"What is it you aren't gonna pay - your grocery bill?"

His eyes bugged out and he shook his head. His cheeks colored but no noise came from his open mouth. Terrible visions of trying to perform the Heimlich maneuver on him raced through my mind. Since Mooch's 38-inch belt and 54-inch belly would preclude reaching around him, the only way I could see to do it would be to knock him down and jump on his stomach with both heels. I didn't think that would have a good result for either of us.

It was outrage not choking. He held up the paper and waved it around again. "This here power bill. I ain't gonna pay it. Hoss, they want too much and had th' audacity to threaten to cut off may power. In this weather, too!"

Since it was 70 degrees and sunny out, I wasn't sure about that last part. I grabbed the bill and glanced at the bottom. It was over \$1,200. I whistled. Then I saw the dates. "Mooch, you ain't paid this in six months. No wonder you owe so much."

"Yeah, but they sent out that letter last fall said that they couldn't shut you off in the winter."

I nodded, "So...?"

Mooch grinned and shrugged. "Well, mebbe I let it get a little behind." He slammed his fist on the table. "An' I'm glad I did. It gimme a good idea when I saw all that money on that bill. I don't need them folks. I can make my own 'lectric. So, I ain't gonna pay that bill. Let 'em turn it off."

A nightmare clouded my vision - of Mooch rigging a generator off his diesel truck and running it 24 hours per day in the backyard. Since the muffler on that thing is more rust than steel it would eventually begin to break plate glass windows all over the neighborhood, with mine being the first.

"Mooch, you're not gonna run that truck, are you?"

"Naw, Hoss, that would not be enmirevony . . . er, in-verminy . . . It wouldn't be good for the outdoors. I have decided to generate green 'lectricity."

"As opposed to blue or yellow?"

Mooch stared at me for a minute with a slightly puzzled look then nodded. "Right - 'stead a' blue or yellow." "And just what form will this take?"

Mooch reached into his back pocket and took out a magazine. It was an article about wind generation. There was a picture of a large wind farm and then a sidebar about home power generation.

"Ya' see, Hoss, you can buy one of them wind generta-

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tors. We could put it up on the property line and . . .”

The violent sideways motion of the whole kitchen table caught his attention. It was caused by the force with which I was shaking my head ‘no’. “Mooch, I don’t need a wind generator. I am not behind on my power bill.”

Mooch’s eyebrows shot up. “You ain’t? Even after they sent that letter saying they couldn’t shut you off?”

I shook my head. Mooch dropped his eyes and grimaced. “Dumber’n I thought,” he mumbled.

He looked up at me. “So, you don’t want to go halfers . . .?”

I shook my head. Mooch got up, grabbed another piece of toast from my plate and stomped toward the door. He turned, though, and came back to jelly the toast. “Well, I’m gonna do it. In fact, I’m gonna get a wind farm and a chicken coop and a garden. Get all I need without all them leeches. I am gonna live outside the lines.”

I puzzled over that for a second, then said, “Oh, off the grid.”

Mooch nodded. “Yea, I knew it was somepin’ like ‘at.’”

I had to go out of town on business for a week. When I got back, a tall pole with a large contraption on top was in the middle of Mooch’s back yard and a shed with a pen on one end was on his back property line. I stepped out the door to get a better view.

“Hoss, come on over here and lookit my wind farm.”

As I walked toward him, I said, “Good lookin’ coop. How many chickens you got?”

Mooch looked proud. “You’re right. That worked out good. I even spent good money for the wood ‘cause I couldn’t find any in your gara. . . er, at the dump.” I looked around quickly and noticed that the steel shed I had ordered had been delivered. At least, the sheet metal sides were visible lying on the new concrete slab.

Mooch slapped my shoulder, drawing my attention back to his yard. “Hey, Hoss, I got 12 chickens and they are all layin’.”

“How’s that? Normally they have to grow a few months before they lay.”

“These here are full-grown chickens. Didn’t cost nothin’, neither. Found ‘em out by Cheney wanderin’ in the road.”

I squinted one eye and asked, “Didn’t happen to be a farm nearby, did there?”

Mooch ignored me and turned back toward the pole in his yard. The pole was a flag pole. I don’t have a flag pole so I was sure it was not mine. Just above his head was one of four slats attached to a hub at the top of the flag pole.

“Mooch, what is this?”

Mooch’s eyebrows rose and his nose went up in the air. This was his lecturing look. It was going to be a long explanation. “I was gonna buy one a’ them wind turnips but they want a whole lot a’ money for ‘em. An’ I read in Poplar Science that you can use a alternator from a truck – does the same thing. So I moved my flag pole, and mounted the alternator on top. The wooden wings I built didn’t work so well ‘cause they broke when the wind got high enough to make ‘em spin fast. I seen a pitcher of a windmill in a book so I made a steel frame outa’ some scrap steel . . .”

Mooch’s cheeks reddened and he looked away as if he had just committed a terrible *faux pas*. I began to visually search my yard. I did not see the steel frame for my new shed. Mooch walked away. With his back to me, watching the turbine gently stir in the increased breeze, he said: “Say, Hoss, since we are such good friends and you lend me all that stuff an’ all, how about we share all this free ‘lectric?”

I harrumphed but didn’t answer as I became interested in the slowly spinning blades. As the wind increased, the turbine got up to 20

rpm or so. A light on a box at the base of the flag pole lit up.

“There,” Mooch yelled. “We are makin’ free ‘lectric.”

I walked up alongside Mooch to examine the device. Dubious, I asked, “How much are you making?”

“Eight Kiwis.”

“Eight what?”

“Kiwis. That was what was printed on the side of the alternator. It was inebriated, of course, but I figured it out.”

“You mean abbreviated?”

“Naw, Hoss. Abbreviated is like them undershorts. This was inebriated on the nameplate.”

I gave up. Once a word enters Mooch’s mind, there was little chance of it getting out in any recognizable fashion. “What exactly was the inebri . . . er, abbreviation?”

“It said 8 KW. So, I figured if this thing makes currants – which it does; we figured that out with the potable spa – well, if it makes currants, then the inebriation was probably for another fruit and the only one that made sense was kiwis. Now, you’n I know it ain’t real kiwis – it is jest the way them scientists talk.”

“But, Buddy, just because it is an 8 KW generator does not mean it is producing 8 KW.”

Mooch snorted. “Hoss, ‘at is some ridicoolus logic. If’n it is a 8 Kiwi alternator, what else is it gonna make?”

“Mooch, it depends on how fast it is turning – how fast the wind blows. You saw how fast it had to turn to make the light burn. Mooch, you don’t know how much . . .”

Mooch smirked and pointed at the light bulb glowing on the box. I shrugged. It wasn’t a problem for me – yet. “OK, so how did the chicken thing work out?”

Mooch put up one finger and walked to his back door. He grabbed an egg carton and handed it to me. “Some of us share our good for-



tune,” he said and walked back into his house. The carton contained 12 small eggs.

Two hours later, while trying to get used to the drone of the turbine next door, the phone rang. I picked it up and Mooch yelled, “I tol’ you. I tol’ you. C’mon over and see me livin’ outside the lines.”

I walked out the back door and headed for Mooch’s house. The breeze had picked up – maybe 20 or 30 miles per hour. The turbine was doing about 15 rpm. A loud periodic squeak came from the top of the flagpole. A thin wisp of smoke rose from the bearing on the turbine shaft. “Mooch, the bearing on the turbine shaft looks a little hot. Did you grease it?”

“Oh, I didn’t have no bearings. I just shoved the shaft through an old piece of pipe that was a close fit and packed it with grease.”

“Well, it looks like it needs more grease. Where’s your grease tube?” “Ain’t got one. I’ll go up later and grease it good. Hoss, c’mon in the house. I done disconnected the power from them crooks at the power company. The whole house is runnin’ on the wind farm.”

I looked around. The light bulb in the entry glowed weakly. “You runnin’ the whole house?”

Mooch shook his head. “Jest the lights. Got everything else turned off. C’mon in and watch me turn things on.”

I followed him into the living room. “Son, we gonna watch TV for free.” With that, he pushed the button on the remote and the green power light on the TV glowed. We waited. There was a hum from the set. Random colors flashed across the screen. I thought the noise in the backyard increased slightly. There was a pop from inside the TV and a wisp of smoke came out the vent in the back. Then there was a loud pop and a flash of light and more smoke poured out of the TV. About then, I heard the fan on the furnace start

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to turn – at least, it hummed loudly. Smoke and the smell of hot insulation filled the room. Outside, the squeaking became a loud groan. I looked out the window and smoke was pouring from the alternator.

“Mooch, disconnect it! Disconnect it!”

Mooch ran to the breaker box and threw the switch. The whole house went dark and all the noise from the fan and TV stopped. I looked at Mooch and said, “Phew! That was close.”

From outside came a loud whistling sound. We ran out the door. The turbine was running at about 100 rpm in the strong wind and no load. The “bearing” glowed cherry red. “Mooch, throw the wind vane control.”

Mooch looked forlorn and shook his head. “Didn’t put one on it yet. I’ll stop it.” Mooch ran toward the rotor and grabbed one of the spinning blades. The blade didn’t notice. Mooch did. I ran to where he landed to help him up. The jar of throwing

that much weight started the top of the flag pole moving side to side.

About that time, a turkey buzzard looking for a meal at the chicken coop but distracted by the antics of those strange people in the yard below, glided into the very top of the spinning blades. There was a crash and an explosion of feathers. The bird fell to the ground and the top of the flag pole began to oscillate in a large circle. One of the blade tips clipped the ground. The shock snapped the rotor shaft and the rotor took off across the lot touching the ground on the tip of each blade in turn. The chickens, seeing a monster running at them did what chickens do – they ran into their coop for protection. To say this was the wrong action to take would be a massive understatement.

One blade crashed through the chicken coop, scattering chickens, eggs, feathers and less desirable things throughout the air. The rotor continued through the wooden

building only slowing slightly and quickly disappearing down the incline into the adjacent field scattering pieces of wood and chicken feathers in the wind. Occasionally, something white and feathery flew off the blades with a loud squawk.

Mooch stared at the wreckage. Pin feathers and malodorous dust began to drift down on us. The buzzard clambered to its feet and began to waddle off, sans tail feathers.

Mooch looked at the wreckage and sniffed. He saw the buzzard and said, “Well, at least we didn’t kill the buzzard,” looking for some bright spot.

I looked at him and grimaced. “Just detail, son. Just detail.”

“Guess I’ll pay the ‘lectric bill.”

I nodded. “Woul’da’ been cheaper had you done that first.”

Mooch nodded and then grinned. “Oh, de tail. I get it. Har-Har!” He slapped me on the back and we started to pick up the non-organic pieces.

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