



PULSE

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*What do you do when the whole world
suddenly...stops?*

THE PULSE EFFEX SERIES Book One

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PULSE

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PART ONE

ANDREA

AGE 16, JANUARY 11
DAY ONE

So my dad got all upset because when he went to leave for work the car went halfway down the driveway and died. His precious Mercedes. I was just walking out to wait for the school bus and he hurried towards me in a huff, yelling something about how the starter wouldn't even turn over.

"What'd you do to the car, Andrea?" he demanded. I stared at him. I couldn't believe he was trying to pin it on me.

"Nothing."

"What'd you do to it, huh?" he asked again. I turned and stalked blindly down the driveway to wait by the mailbox. My heart was pounding. Normally I'd enjoy the crunch of snow beneath my boots, and the way the pines lining our driveway are blanketed in white; but I barely noticed either.

Leave it to Dad to ruin my day before it starts.

Yesterday Mom let me practice driving for about thirty-five minutes and the Mercedes drove just fine. So I'm supposed to know what happened? I'm guessing it's frozen because we're having a mean cold spell. The bottom line is Dad loves his car more than me (he loves lots of things more than me). I blinked away tears that felt cold on my skin the moment they appeared. Where was that bus? I wanted to see my friends and forget about home.

I waited, beginning to freeze. Designer boots aren't made for warmth. I waited a long time; I knew the bus should have come already, but I didn't want to go back—Dad would say I overslept and missed it on purpose or something like that.

Finally, I had to go in. Sure enough, there was Dad, hands on hips, glaring at me.

"Why are you back?"

"The bus didn't come."

He stared at me as if he didn't believe me.

"So walk to school," he said. I gaped at him. Was he kidding? We live, like, five miles from my high school. My mother called him from the kitchen. I turned and stared out the window. Our secluded circular drive was a winter wonderland. In nice weather, it's a beautiful manicured front, maintained meticulously by landscapers. Today it was a world of white, so cold the snow glittered. No way was I going to walk to school. Anyway, my father says things he doesn't mean when he's mad, so I took off my coat and boots in the mud room. (There's rarely an ounce of mud in it but that's what we call it.)

I went to heat water for hot chocolate but Mom said, "NOTHING'S working, Andrea. NOTHING. We're having a black out." Our house is like, all electric--the stove, our heat and even the pump for the well. So when we lose electricity we're pretty much without everything. Mom's sort of freaking out about it. I'll bet her and Dad had one of their fights. We've lost electricity before and the world didn't end. But when my parents actually have a fight, as opposed to just being mad at each other silently, everything and anything makes them crazy.



Dad's been outside tinkering with his car for the longest time, but it still won't start. I hope he can fix it. I can't stand the thought of being home all day with him here. My little brothers are home (their bus didn't come, either) and so I'm stuck with the whole family but no one to talk to.

I'd call Lexie except I can't get my idiot cell phone to work. Of all times for this to happen! I charged that phone all last night, and we had power then because when I woke up my alarm clock showed the time--5:05AM. I asked Mom if I could borrow her cell and she said, "All the phones are dead. Something's going on."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing's working!" She tossed her head at me, looking exasperated and creaped out.

"The house phone doesn't work?"

"No. Nothing." She took off with baby Lily to put her down for a nap.

So I can't even text anyone. I can't check online to see if my friends have posted anything. I can't watch YouTube, and just now I turned on my iPod, only it didn't turn on. It should have, but it didn't. There's nothing to do. I may as well have gone to school.



Okay, so Dad said power lines might have been knocked down by the weight of the snow. That doesn't explain why we have no cell phones, but, whatever. I really don't care why this is happening. I just want it to be over.

Mom is still freaked out, nervously going around the kitchen like she doesn't know what to do with herself. She taped the refrigerator shut so we can't let out the cold air, and she unplugged all the appliances.

I heard my father come in the side door to the garage, muttering to himself.

"Why didn't he take the Lexus to work?" I asked, keeping my voice low so he wouldn't hear me. I knew he preferred the Mercedes, but I couldn't see why he'd be picky at a time like this.

My mom turned and went to the counter and leaned against it, her arms folded across her

chest. My mother is a pretty woman, slim, and a dark brunette like me, but she often looks strained and unhappy. I figure if I were married to my dad I'd look that way too.

"That's not working, either," she said.

"BOTH cars are dead? At the same time? How did that happen?"

"I have no idea." She looked disgusted. She went to the sink and started rinsing dishes with water from a plastic jug.

"Great, I hope that doesn't last," I said. One day with my father was more than enough for me. I thought of his motorcycle. The motorcycle was Dad's nod to freedom, to his old self, the man he was before the corporate monster mentality owned him. He hardly used it, even in good weather, but he'd never gotten rid of it.

"Too bad it's snow cover, or he could use the motorcycle."

My mom didn't turn around, but said, in a monotone voice, "That isn't working, either."

This was shocking. "He actually TRIED the motorcycle, in this weather?"

"Just to see if it would start," she said, still not turning around.

So dad was definitely home for the day. I decided to keep a low profile by disappearing to my room. Upstairs, I got in bed and picked up my iPad. When it wouldn't power on, I flung it down on the mattress and stared at it. Why wasn't anything working? Even with a power outage, my cell phone and iPad should work. I felt suddenly depressed. I wished I could talk to Lexie. We'd laugh about having the day off from school because Mr. Sherman, our World Geography teacher would be totally frazzled that class was off schedule. Mr. Sherman follows his schedule like a Nazi. At least that was something to look forward to at school tomorrow—hearing Mr. Sherman bemoan our day off.

I tried to sleep but got bored, so I headed back downstairs. The boys were sliding down the wide mahogany banisters of our marble staircase. They're not supposed to do that, but I stood watching, enjoying their glee. The real estate agent who sold us the house called the staircase a "showstopper." I think it's why my dad bought this stupidly big house. Just to show off. Anyway, as I waited to see them crash at the bottom, I suddenly heard a strange, muffled sound. In a few seconds I realized it was baby Lily—wailing from her room!

I rushed down the hall to her room and opened the door. She was on her back in the crib really going at it, screaming like a little banshee, arms and legs flailing. I leaned over to pick her up. Her wide-eyed terror made me hold her to my chest, saying softly, "Poor baby! Poor Lily! It's okay. We didn't hear you! Andrea's here."

I looked at the baby monitor and realized we'd forgotten it wasn't working! Lily's first stirrings are usually heard by one of us so she never has to work up to full-fledged crying before we get her. She was unused to being ignored this long. Even in my arms, her little lower lip still trembled, and her whole tiny body shuddered now and then. I held her close, rocking back and forth before changing her diaper, but she continued to fuss so I knew she wanted my mother.

Lily has the biggest, most beautiful blue eyes. I don't know where she got them because all the rest of us have green or brown, but I'm glad she does. She doesn't have a lot of hair yet, but I think it's going to be blonde and that's different from the rest of us, too.

Downstairs, I found Mom searching for batteries in a closet. I shook my head. "Mom, Lily was screaming her head off. This idiotic house is so big we couldn't hear her!"

"Oh, my goodness!" Mom held out her arms and took the baby, who let out a gurgle of satisfaction. She snuggled Lily to her chest, covering her little head with kisses, and headed for the kitchen.

"How did you hear her?"

"I was in the hall."

"Did you change her?"

"Yup."

"Thank you."

My mother looked upset, so I added, "She's fine, mom. Babies cry."

She reached for the fridge and then stopped. "Oh. I can't heat the bottle." She looked at me.

"I'll make her a new one."

"She likes them warm. How will we warm it?"

"Don't we have anything?" I asked. "Doesn't dad have a space heater?"

She nodded. "Yeah. It's electric."

I sighed, turning to get a clean bottle from the cupboard. "Well, she's going to have to drink it at room temperature today." Mom stood nearby as I measured the powdered formula into a bottle, then added water from a jug. She took one of Lily's hands to kiss it, but gasped.

"Her little hand is cold!" she cried. "I put her down for her nap not even thinking how she'd get cold up there." She tore off a sock to feel her foot, then put a hand behind her neck and sighed. "Her neck is warm. That's a good sign."

"She's fine, Mom." But I had begun to notice the temperature in the house dropping, too. Who would have thought one day without power would do that?

I took over hunting down batteries and heard my dad come in. He said he'd gone to speak to the neighbors to see if they knew anything. Our plat has about five roads and maybe two dozen houses. Turns out, none of our closest neighbors were home, but he found a family home at the far end of the street, and they're in the same boat we are. Everything's dead, cars, computers, phones, cell phones. Like us, they're hoping only this area was affected and that outside our neighborhood everything is okay.

If nothing changes by tomorrow, Dad's gonna walk a few miles down the main road with one of the neighbors to find out. He says we're blind as bats with no TV or radio or phones. It's depressing. I hate being stuck at home with this useless family and nothing to do.

EVENING

I never knew a house could get so cold this quickly. We really felt it when the sun went down. Whenever we've had a power outage before, Dad just took us to a hotel. Now we're stuck here. We have this gigantic fireplace—at least, I've always thought it's gigantic, but now that we need it for heat it seems hardly big enough. It's really the stone-flagged mantle and dark mahogany bookcases flanking it that make it seem huge. Anyway, Dad spent a long time getting a fire going, even with a fire-starter, but we still have to stay close to feel its warmth. We moved all the furniture into a small circle around it.

Mom got a camp stove from the garage (which I forgot we had. We haven't gone camping since before the twins were born) and by putting it over the logs, we could actually heat the tea kettle. Now we can warm the baby's bottles and I finally got to drink that hot chocolate I've been wanting all day!

So we sat around the room together, which is hugely odd. My family never sits and hangs together. Well, not with my dad, anyway. The boys had dragged in their bucket of building blocks and the baby was asleep in a portable crib near the fireplace.

I looked at my father. "When do you think power will be back?" When he didn't answer right away—he seemed to be thinking about it—my mom said, "I hope it's soon. But I don't get it—how come everything is out, even our cell phones and cars?" She was looking at my dad as

though she expected him to explain it all. He shook his head.

"I don't know. Those cars should start if it's zero degrees and it only got down to twelve today." He stared into the fireplace. "If it was only one of the cars, I could understand that. A fluke. But none of them work. I don't have an answer to that."

With nothing else to do, I tried reading with a flashlight but I guess the batteries are dying because it's too dim. We have a few candles on the dining room table but it's pretty dark in here, even with the fireplace. My little brothers are giggling and being silly like it's a family camp-out, but my mom and dad aren't even playing along. The baby is blissfully unaware that anything's changed; I envy her. Dad is worried because all we have are a few logs left from the holidays to burn besides some fire starters and cardboard boxes in the basement--but that's it. And the temperature is now below zero outside.

I'm not too worried—we've never had a long outage before, so why would we, now?

I tried to sleep in my room but woke in the middle of the night freezing. Carrying blankets and my pillow, I groped my way in the dark and went downstairs. Everyone else was in the family room. Mom was asleep on a sofa that had been moved in front of the big stone fireplace, and the boys were on the floor in front of that. Dad was asleep on another couch, moved so that it was adjacent to the one with Mom. I put down a few blankets and my pillow and slept on the rug like the boys. I'm only warm on the side facing the fireplace, though. Mom has baby Lily and so they have the best spot, followed by the boys.

I managed to fall asleep earlier without my music, but right now I'm wishing I had it. I'd give anything for one working iPod! If I at least had that I might be able to forget about everything else.

I hope the power is back by tomorrow.

This house is lonely and quiet and boring without electricity.

JANUARY 12

DAY TWO

Wretched morning. I had to get ready for school with no hot water or shower or anything—and then Dad walked out with me when I went for the bus. He wanted to talk to the driver and see what he could find out about the outage. The bus never came. I was so disappointed. I'd prefer a normal day at school (even without a shower) to this *grind*. Home with nothing working. The whole time we stood out there waiting, he said, like, two words to me. Sometimes he creeps me out.

So the living room looks like a campsite with our extra blankets and pillows around, and we have to dress in layers to keep anywhere near warm. If I need to use the restroom, I wear my coat! Speaking of which, the toilets stopped working last night. My father wasn't too concerned because he figured we can keep it flushing by bringing in water from the well. Even though it's powered by electricity, we have a manual hand pump. But after he went out to bring in the first bucket of water, he returned shortly, cursing up a storm. The pump handle was frozen, and when he tried to force it to operate, it came apart right in front of his eyes.

Seems he should have slowly defrosted it with heat instead of trying to force it to work. Now it's useless!

So I was given the lovely task of hauling in snow—bucket after bucket of it. I am SICK of snow. We have four bathrooms in this ridiculous house, and I was supposed to fill all the tubs. After filling just one, my arms and legs were aching and my hands were starting to freeze. I

begged Mom to let me rest. The layer of ice on everything makes it real work to get that stuff in a bucket and then into the house and then into the bathroom.

Mom said I could do more tomorrow. I thought, *Perfect! We'll probably have power by then!* I got warmed up by the fireplace and then went up to my room to hide. I didn't want Dad to see me and make me do more hauling. While I was out there he did help a little because he was making a depression in a wall of snow to put a cooler with the rest of the food that was in our freezer. (Even though the house feels so cold, it's still colder outside and he thinks it will keep better out there.) But his mood was still foul because of the broken pump and I had to ignore a good deal of "colorful" language while he dug.

I asked my mother why he's so angry. She says it's because he can't get to work or even call in and it makes him feel crazy. He's a workaholic, so this is sort of killing him. He's also worried he'll get fired for not going in. And she thinks he's worried that other people are still going in and getting their jobs done while he's helpless out here in the plat, which is kind of isolated by surrounding farmland.

"Why would they fire him?" I asked. "He can't be expected to get to work when there's no power and no vehicles."

"They won't fire him," she answered, taking the single big black pot we've been using for heating food. She opened a few cans of stew, emptying them into the pot and I followed her as she brought it to the fireplace and positioned it on the camp stove. "He's just worried because he's like that."

Anyway, it figures that my father is more upset about work going on without him than he is about what's happening here. This is the gist of what's really getting to Dad. HE CAN'T DISAPPEAR TO WORK AND BURY HIMSELF IN HIS JOB. What if his co-workers have power? What if things are going on without him as usual? He can't handle the thought. He's worse than I am about having to live without my stuff working.

A strange thought hit me, though: Maybe he's just afraid. He's used to being in control of things and feeling like he's good at what he does, like in his office. Here, I don't think he knows how to take care of us with this outage. He's in upper management and calls the shots at work. Now, he's only got us to boss around. Otherwise, he's as powerless as our gadgets.

When I returned to the living room, the boys were doing a puzzle on the floor and mom was sitting with the baby, just staring ahead. It was like she was watching TV, only of course it wasn't working. Our useless big-screen sits in the corner like an altar, and at first it looked like mom was staring at it. But she wasn't. She's just staring at nothing, lost in thought. I want to throw a sheet over that huge, silent TV. It's just a reminder of what we can't do.

JANUARY 13 DAY THREE

I woke up to find Dad's been burning my books for heat! I can't believe it. Of all the stuff he could have picked, of course it had to be books that were mine. And he had the nerve to complain they weren't burning well! He says today we all have to scour the property for branches and anything that will burn, or else he'll start using furniture!

"Can't we wait and see if the power comes back?" I asked.

"It's ten degrees out there, Andrea," he said. "We can't wait."

It's not like we have a forest out there, either. Our property is one acre, most of which is carefully landscaped lawn and flowers when it's not covered in snow. So we have a small stand

of trees and bushes before you reach someone else's property. Mom calls it a natural privacy fence. Dad said it's the best place we've got for finding anything to feed the fire.

We've never had long outages before. We were always lucky, even after a bad storm that took out electric for thousands of people, 'cos we live near a substation. Since they always get that up and running quickly and we're nearby, we've always had power restored quickly. After last year's hurricane we only lost our electric for a day and a half. And my cell phone still worked. And our cars started. *What is going on?*

So Dad walked all the way to that power station today. Normally you can't walk on our main road, at least not safely. If you leave the plat you take your life in your hands because everybody speeds on the main road. But today it was eerie quiet, Dad said, and he passed four cars that were dead and abandoned in the middle of the road. He wanted to ask questions but the substation was empty. Dad's not sure if it was empty because there's nothing they can do, or if it's because no one could get to it. Another thing—usually if you get close to the station, you can hear wires crackling. Today Dad said he heard only one thing: a whole lotta nothing.

I so want to wash my hair. And I really want to talk to Lexie. I wish I was at school! Just so I could do something normal instead of having to haul in snow and now look for wood! And with all that snow and ice? How will it even burn if it's frozen?

I trudged out to the stand of bushes and trees, hoping someone was going to lose their job over this. Somebody must have done something wrong, somewhere, to cause this power failure. If you ask me, heads should roll!

When I got there I was glad to be alone for a change. Even the silence didn't bother me. Snow cover always brings a muffled quality with it, but today it felt different. It took awhile for me to realize it was because there wasn't a single sound of civilization; no one warming a car engine before leaving for work or to go shopping; no one using a power blower to clear their sidewalk or drive of snow; no one's radio or television turned up too loud and wafting out from their house. There wasn't a single sound except my own feet crunching in the snow.

I didn't find much to burn. Sure, there were bushes, but I had nothing to cut them with. I gathered the few sticks and branches that were sticking up out of the snow, but everything else is covered, and it didn't amount to a lot. When I went in complaining my feet felt like ice, Dad said, "Just be glad we have a fireplace." I wanted to give him a sarcastic answer cos' he's said about a hundred times, 'It's a good thing we have a fireplace.' A hundred times. And if you ask me, a fireplace is not good enough, because unless I'm right up next to it, *I'm still cold.*

EVENING

Jim is back! Jim is our neighbor on the right. Dad stepped outside and saw a faint flickering light coming from his house, so he went to speak to him right away. Turns out, Jim was at Wal-Mart when the power went out. Wal-Mart is about thirteen miles from here. Jim spent the first night at the store with other people who were stranded, but he's been walking home ever since. Jim's not a young man, or he might have made it sooner. He managed to bring one bag of stuff from the store. He said he bought a lot more but had to leave it in his car.

"So there's no power there, either," my mom said, flatly.

Dad shook his head. "Nope. Same as here. You should have seen Jim. He looked awful, like he barely made it home. He stopped by a few roadside fires people had going, but he thinks he may have frostbite on both his feet."

"My goodness," said Mom. "Poor man." Then, "Does anyone know why?"

"Why what?"

"Why this happened to the electric? Was it the snow? And what about cars and cell phones?"

"No one knows for sure. It's anyone's guess."

My mother sighed. "Did you ask him about water?"

Jim's well has a manual pump like ours, which hopefully isn't broken. We've been going through the bottled water my mom buys to mix up baby formula for Lily, but we're almost out of it. Hauling in snow and having to boil it is like sheer misery. I hope his pump works.

"I'll ask him tomorrow. He didn't want to talk right now." He paused. "He also said that if I had a gun, I should make sure it's ready to use." You could hear surprise in my father's voice.

"What does that mean?" I asked. I thought I must have heard him wrong. My dad looked at me. My mother was waiting to hear his answer, too.

"He said we might need to protect our homes. Looting could start soon if help doesn't come. If the power doesn't return. He reminded me of what happened after Katrina."

"But we're out here in the country. Who's going to loot us?" Mom asked.

Dad shrugged. "I think Jim's a little paranoid."

"Did he see any looting going on?" Mom persisted.

Dad nodded. "Yup. He said people were starting to panic at Wal-Mart because they wouldn't accept anything but cash. And some people actually started walking out with their arms full of stuff they hadn't paid for." He shrugged. "I mean, who carries cash today? Nobody."

"But if you did have cash," I said, "you could buy food and water. At least people in cities can buy that stuff. Unlike us, out here in the middle of nowhere."

Dad gave me a dark look. "Yeah. For a few days. And then it all runs out. And then they come looking for more."

"Well, they won't find it here," I quipped. I'd been noticing our pantry wasn't all too stocked. I didn't usually pay much attention to that stuff, since it was mom's job to shop and cook. But already we were eating the less desirable items from the pantry like peanut butter and jelly. The boys actually like this, so for them, that's just dandy. I would be fine if I never ate peanut butter again in my life.

Anyway, we're going to run out of food, and then what? Nobody knows how long this is going to last. And no one knows why it's happening. I wish I could get on Facebook and ask my friends. I wish we could watch the News and find out. I feel so alone.

Another thing; the quiet inside the house is driving me crazy. Outside it seemed okay, even restful. But in here? I never realized how appliances make noise, but with nothing working in the house there's a strange silence that is grating on me. It's like a lull before the storm. It's quiet but not *peaceful*.

And I think the storm has already hit.

JANUARY 14

DAY FOUR

Today is the FOURTH day without power in this freezing house. I hate it. I can hardly believe it's been four full days. I never thought this would happen to US. I know other people have experienced long outages after a bad storm or tornado, but we didn't have a bad storm! We had snow, and it froze overnight, but that's happened before without causing a power failure. I'm really sick to death at how nothing is working. I WANT TO TEXT MY FRIENDS. I WANT TO TALK TO SOMEONE. I WANT TO USE MY COMPUTER. It would help if we knew what

was going on and how long we'll have to wait for power to come back. But there's no way to know anything—I feel crazy.

Dad went to the main road hoping to get information from someone, anyone, but when he got back his mood was darker than ever. I heard him talking to Mom. "Yeah, I saw people. Pulling sleds loaded with stuff."

"Why?" asked Mom.

"They were heading to town to look for an emergency shelter."

"Maybe we should go there," I said.

"You really want to walk into town in this cold?" Mom said. "That's five miles, easy. I won't take Lily out in this weather." She looked at my father. "Maybe if the car is working...?"

He shook his head. "Nope. I've tried it every day. I've tried them all."

"Do you think there is a shelter in town?" she asked.

"I have no idea." He shrugged. "Maybe in the Civic Center; or the school gym. Other than those places, I don't know where they'd be able to accommodate a lot of people." I thought of trying to squeeze into the gymnasium with people I knew from town and thought better of wanting to go. Who would want to be stuck inside with all those people? Even the thought of seeing friends didn't appeal to me. I hadn't showered in three days and my hair felt like dry spaghetti. Then I wondered if they might have running water. If they did, I'd go, no matter how I looked. Hot, running water—the very idea filled me with longing. "If there was a shelter," I said, "would there be running water?"

"Not unless they've got power," said Dad. He looked at my mom. "If nothing changes by tomorrow, I'll make the walk into town and see what's what."

"What about those big water towers?" my mom asked. "They would still work, wouldn't they? Because of gravity?"

"For a couple days, maybe longer," Dad replied. "But once the pressure falls, they'll fail, just like everything else." I thought of the three jugs of water mom had left for baby Lily's bottles. I got up and put my gloves on, and a pullover hat.

"Where you going, Andi?" asked Aiden, scampering over to me with bright eyes. He looked utterly normal. The twins, seven years old, weren't feeling nearly as deprived as I was. They missed video games and television, but didn't seem to mind that nothing else worked. They layered t-shirts under their clothes as if it were second nature, and couldn't care less that hot running water was a thing of the past. They liked the whole family being in one room every day. I tousled Aiden's hair.

"I'm gonna collect more snow. I think we might need it." Mom looked appreciatively at me, though she said nothing. Dad was elsewhere, lost in thought. He was often like that; present, but not really there. I wondered what he was so busy thinking about.

"Can I help?" Aiden asked, looking up at me eagerly.

"You certainly can!" I replied.

"I can too!" yelled Quentin, not to be outdone by his brother. I found two mop buckets this time and mom gave the boys empty Chinese food plastic tubs. She stood at the door and

received our snow-laden containers to take them to the nearest bathtub, emptied them into it, and then returned the containers to us to fill again. With the boys and mom helping, we were able to fill up all the tubs. I was exhausted when we finally scrambled back inside and settled in front of the fireplace.

As I sat there cross-legged with Aiden and Quentin leaning up against me, their little faces red from the cold, I realized I was enjoying the fire. Both its warmth and mesmerizing depths. I liked the way different colors would appear within the flames here and there, and the crackle of a spark now and then would pop out like mini fireworks. I was even enjoying my little brothers being near me. It felt like we were a cozy family. Then, to my delight, mom filled the kettle with snow and announced she was making hot chocolate. She brought in granola bars and crackers on a tray. The boys got a burst of energy and started dancing around the room, playing. Then Lily woke up and started fussing. I was ready to get her but mom asked my father to. It was the weirdest thing: When he picked up the baby, I saw no emotion on his face. He sat back down holding her, and I couldn't help staring, startled by the sight. I never saw him holding her; Mom always had her. I wondered why he never held her, but I didn't say anything. He still seemed to be elsewhere anyway, he wasn't looking down, or enjoying her the way most people enjoy a baby. He was staring at the fire, lost in thought. I felt sorry for Lily. Then I felt angry. *My father is a loser!* I don't care how much money he makes. I will never marry a man just because he earns a good income. I want a guy who looks into my eyes and sees who I am. I don't understand how my mother fell in love with my father. It seems impossible.

EVENING

It's dark and I'm restless. There's nothing to do except read. Dad found a couple more flashlights in the garage, so I'm using one, but it's a pain. A flashlight doesn't seem heavy until you have to keep it at the right angle for reading. A candle isn't bright enough unless I hold my book right up next to it and that's not comfortable. So I only read a chapter and then I'm tired from the effort. We had the last of the burgers tonight. I can't wait for this to end so we can get more food. I miss hearing from my friends more than anything. I picked up my cell phone for the thousandth time just to see if it might work. (I knew it wouldn't, but I couldn't resist trying.) When it just stayed black and didn't start up, I felt like throwing it in the fireplace. I would have, too, except my father was in the room. I didn't feel like getting yelled at.

JANUARY 15 DAY FIVE

We are in much worse shape than I thought. I mean, regarding the power being out. I thought it was just temporary like in the past, but Dad doesn't think so. I was helping Mom get ready for lunch, taking out paper plates, napkins and plastic forks, while Dad was outside grilling hotdogs. Suddenly she said, "Your father thinks he knows what's going on."

I stopped and stared at her. "What?" I asked. "What's going on?"

She gave me a look. "He won't say. You know your father."

"Oh, wonderful," I said. I was tempted to get on my mother's case and tell her she ought to force it out of him. We had a right to know, didn't we? But I thought about how moody and angry my dad is, and how, if you push him, he just flies into a rage. Mom added, "He says he doesn't want to believe it, yet."

"Believe what?" I asked.

"What might be happening."

"I don't get it," I said. "What might be happening?"

Mom turned and folded her arms across her chest. "I'm wondering if we might be at war or something." I felt a chill creep down my spine which had nothing to do with the cold. Such a thought had never occurred to me. My idea was that a major storm had taken down power lines, but I never would have thought of war.

"Who would we be at war with?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. Radical Muslims? They've hated us forever."

I thought about that a moment. "My world history teacher said Islam is a peaceful religion."

"Ha!" said my mother. "Tell that to the Christians who have been beheaded over there this year!" She paused, and said more quietly, "He's obviously never read the Koran. That doesn't say much for his grasp of world history, either. More Christians were killed for their faith by Muslims in the past one hundred years than the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust." I stared at her. The Holocaust was another thing my teacher had been fuzzy about. I wasn't actually sure how many had died in the Holocaust but I didn't want to say so.

"How would war stop our cars from starting?" I asked.

My mom sighed and shrugged. "I don't know."

Later, while we ate hotdogs sitting around the fireplace, my father mentioned that some of the people he'd seen on the road yesterday were still trying to get home. They were stranded when the grid went down, he said.

"What do you mean, 'the grid went down?'" I asked.

"The electric grid," he said. "It's down, ruined, kaput."

"How could that happen?" asked my mother, putting down her hot dog. I felt my own stomach flip. Surely what he was saying was not possible.

"I was talking to Walt, you know, the guy down the road who owns the convenience store in town?" She nodded. "He said a solar pulse could do this. It affects all electronic circuitry, everything that has electronic parts."

"At least it's not war," Mom said. "And I guess that explains the cars."

He nodded. "And our phones, and computers....you name it."

"But we didn't feel anything," I said. "How could that happen without our knowing it?" Dad spread out his hands.

"Okay, a giant sun flare sends out this huge pulse, a magnetic wave, but people don't feel it. It doesn't affect us. But anything electronic gets fried."

"So how long does it last?" I said.

“How long does what last?” he asked.

“The solar pulse. How long until it's over?”

“Oh, it's over,” he explained. “It's over and done with.”

“Okay,” I said, trying to understand the implications, “so now we can fix everything?”

Dad looked as though my question had annoyed him.

“Well, that's the million dollar question, isn't it?” He sounded angry. “How to fix everything. How do you get a new car motor? Or how do you know what got fried and needs to be replaced? And even if we have the parts (parts that did NOT get fried) how do you get them where they need to be if nothing's working?”

Mom had a disturbed look on her face, mirroring what I was feeling. I said, “You're making it sound like we're going to be like this for a long time.”

He nodded, and a dark look came over his face. “That's exactly right.”

Mom stared off sadly into the fireplace, and Dad stood up. “I'm going to look for more wood to burn.” We knew he meant he was going to scrounge around the basement and attic for old furniture. Mom said, “Please don't use anything valuable.”

He put his hands on his hips. “What's valuable if we freeze to death protecting it?” I felt bad for my mother, because she cares about furniture and antiques and things like that, but I also hoped my dad would find something to burn. I was frightened by what he'd told us. And angry, but I didn't know who to be angry at. If it was really the sun that had caused this mess, there was no one to blame. No one but God, I guess. Was God punishing us? We certainly could have gone to church more. Now it was too late. We couldn't go anywhere.

Thoughts kept coming at me as I took in the enormity of what he'd said. If I'd been at school when it happened, I would have had to walk miles—in this weather—to get home. The idea scared me. I thought of the people Dad mentioned, who were still trying to reach home. That could have been any one of us! I wondered if that was the reason we hadn't seen our two closest neighbors. I thought of Chase Jones, this guy at school. He lives the furthest of any of us—thirty-five minutes by bus. His house was right on the border of school districts, so he was allowed to choose which one to go to and his mother chose ours. Imagine if he'd been at school when everything shut down! The thought made me shudder. I felt as though gloom was deepening all around me, like I was being engulfed. Suddenly I couldn't stand it, feeling like I was suffocating. I shot to my feet.

“Where are you going?” my mother asked.

“I don't know,” I said, and I was appalled to find that I was crying. She had a look of pain on her face; I knew she felt badly for me, but she just nodded, so I started walking aimlessly around the house, moving, I had to keep moving. I was tired of sitting in one stupid room all day to stay warm; tired of wearing heavy garments or my coat in the house; tired of not being able to take a shower or listen to music, or call a friend. I ended up in my bedroom, fell onto my bed and buried my face in my pillow and sobbed. I didn't want to believe what my dad had said. If I believed that this situation wasn't going to change for months and months, it would be unbearable. How was I supposed to survive alone with my family for months? How could I live

without any friends or music or the internet? I felt as though I'd just received a death sentence. Goodbye, life. Hello, wretchedness.

After crying my eyes out, I suddenly had a new thought. My father didn't know for SURE that we'd had a solar pulse. Even Walt, that store owner, didn't know for sure. They were guessing. Guessing! That meant they could be wrong. I sat up, grabbed a tissue from my night stand, and blew my nose. Maybe I was all upset for nothing. Maybe I'd wake up tomorrow and everything would be back to normal. I got up and went back downstairs, my stomach grumbling with hunger. I raided the pantry for cheese crackers and opened a can of ravioli. I felt better after I'd eaten. But I don't think it was the food that helped me as much as my decision not to believe what my dad had said about a solar pulse. Right now I feel sure things will turn around soon. They have to.

JANUARY 16

DAY SIX

It snowed last night, on top of the snow that's already there. I stood looking out my window at the street, all white, because no plow has come through. The snow didn't look pretty anymore. It looked threatening. Latest calamity? When Dad went outside to get bacon from the cooler, we found out we're not the only hungry creatures around. Something managed to open the cooler--probably raccoons. Mom was mad as all get-out that my dad put the food outside to begin with. He thought it would stay colder that way, but boy is he sorry now. I refuse to cry about it, but it's very aggravating. Our pantry supplies suddenly look paltry to me, because there's no way to go shopping to replenish anything. I think I can safely say my father is clueless about what to do. And he always acts like I'm the clueless one.

So Dad and I and the boys pushed and dragged our refrigerator into the garage and put what was left inside it. We lined it with snow and ice, first. It's plain to see, now, that we are going to need more food—and water, for that matter. I'm still the one bringing in snow every day for mom to boil the heck out of in the kettle. I've been making the tea or coffee and washing Lily's bottles and bringing in wood, besides snow for water. But what happens when the snow melts? Not to mention I hate going out in the cold every morning—but at least we have something to boil and drink.

Which reminds me that we've run out of milk. The cream ran out two days ago, so even though milk is a lousy substitute, coffee was still drinkable. Now with no milk I have to resort to using that horrible powdered stuff. I can't drink black coffee. I hate the thought that I'll never have another good cup. We've also used up our eggs, and pancakes taste lousy without milk or eggs. Today mom made us oatmeal—I hate oatmeal. She says it's all we've got for breakfast food. Ugh! I never in my life dreamed I'd go hungry! My dad has a big bank account! Who would have thought we'd ever go hungry?

Dad looks grim. He took Aiden and Quentin to gather sticks again. I'm glad he didn't make me go along. I have enough to do in here, heating water over the fire and other terrifically stupid things that only pioneer people should have to do. I'm sweating hot when I work near the

fire, and then I get numb with cold when I'm away from it. Today I was waiting for some water to heat up in the kettle because I wanted hot chocolate, and I could feel Mom looking at me. Suddenly she said, "You're going to have to change who you are, Andrea. At least until things get back to normal."

"What?" That's all I could say, because I had no idea what she meant.

"Life is going to be full of work until we get some power back..." She looked away and I could see she was holding back tears.

"Mom, what's wrong?" I hate to see her cry. No matter how mad she makes me, I still hate that. "It'll come back soon," I said. "We'll be okay." She looked at me, her eyes teary and hopeless. "No, no," she said. "It won't." My heart skipped a beat, but I decided instantly not to believe her. "How do you know it won't?"

"That's what your father said. He said if it's really a solar pulse that did this, it could take months or a year or more, to see power restored." She sniffled and reached into her coat pocket for a tissue. (We're all wearing our coats—it's the only way to stay warm enough in this stupidly big house. The living-room ceiling is like nine and a half feet high—I've heard my dad brag about it. Right now I'd like to be in a little room that one fireplace could heat up entirely.)

Anyway, I didn't like what I was hearing, so I said, "Well, how does he know? He could be wrong."

She shook her head again. She didn't look at me, but stared at the fireplace. "He's right. If the cars were working, I'd think he was wrong, but nothing is working. He's right." Baby Lily was starting to fuss on her lap, so she got up. "We have to change her," she said. I automatically went for the baby supplies, all piled on a plush corner chair. There was no longer any use for the baby's room because it was too cold, so we'd moved all her changing stuff into the living room. I grabbed a diaper and saw that we only had about a dozen left. I didn't mention it to Mom.

As I did my best with a blanket to keep the baby warm while Mom changed her diaper, I asked, while trying to fortify myself to a possibly stinging reply, "What did you mean about me having to change?"

She shrugged and was silent a moment. "You'll have to get used to doing a lot more work than you're used to. So will I."

"Like I haven't been?" I was annoyed. "I've been doing my own laundry since Lily was born. But you said I'd have to change WHO I am. What does that mean?"

She had finished, and after we got Lily's clothes in order and buttoned up her little one-piece winter suit, Mom took her and returned to the couch. She cried, "I mean, you'll have to stop thinking about wanting hot chocolate and using our little bit of boiled water for yourself only! We have to think about the baby first!" I just stared at her. I'd gone out and gathered the snow for that tea kettle myself. And I'd been doing it for the baby's bottles, or for tea for her and dad and the boys, too. I felt tears forming in my eyes, so I just left the room. I'm used to my father being insulting, but now my mother is, too? I hate this.

I walked around the house, looking at all the appliances that are dead and useless. I went into my bathroom, glad that it still smelled clean—thanks to all the snow we'd hauled in to fill

the tub. With a sinking heart, I realized I'd need to get more snow already—the tub was less than half full. As I stood staring at the snow, knowing that the only way to get water for now on was by hand, I felt a terrible foreboding. What will we do if Dad's right? If there really was a solar pulse?

How will we live?

JANUARY 17

DAY 7

Today dad noticed how low our food supplies are. Like I said, he's always in a fog, so it figures he wasn't taking stock until now. He'd gone looking through the pantry and then came at my mom, really angry.

"Why can't I find anything good to eat?" he demanded.

"How can I possibly buy food when I can't get to a store?" Mom said.

"You know what I mean, Tiffany," he sneered. "There's hardly anything on the shelves like in a normal home. What happened to stuff like bagels and chips? Where's the mac and cheese?"

"You know I've been trying to lose my baby weight," she said, her voice getting tight. "I stopped buying junk food weeks ago—if you were home more, you'd have noticed. I didn't want them in the house while I'm trying to lose weight. You knew that."

"Great," he said, with deep sarcasm. "Nice time to let the food run out." His tone of voice made me want to crawl under a rock. I hate it when they fight.

"How was I supposed to know this would happen?" Mom cried.

"How about the rest of us?" he asked. "The rest of us aren't on a diet. All you ever think about is yourself."

My mother just stared at him but I saw her eyes tearing up. I hated my dad right then. She went back by the fireplace and snuggled up with the baby, but I could tell she was crying. Even the boys felt badly and went over to her for a hug. They'd been playing with toy cars on the floor but had stopped and stared during the argument. Sometimes they come to me when they're scared by my parents, but this time they just froze where they were until it was over. Mom kissed them and stroked their hair.

"It's okay. We'll get by."

I wonder if she meant it. I think she was just trying to make them feel better.

I certainly don't feel better. I don't see how we can survive for long. My hair feels itchy and cruddy, and I didn't even THINK of putting on makeup or earrings or anything, today. It's like life has stopped. Maybe mom's wish is coming true: I am changing. I have no choice.

When dad stepped outside for something, I did some scrounging around in the pantry, and I found a bag of chocolate chip cookies beneath a box of powdered milk. I'm not telling anyone. I'm hiding it. I grabbed the powdered milk for our coffee. I knew it would taste lousy but it was something.

When Dad got back, I heard him telling my mother he'd spoken to a neighbor who'd been out on the road towards town and passed a stranded car. He could see someone was in it. When he got closer it looked like a little old lady so he knocked on the window but she didn't move. He opened the door and there she was, just sitting in her car, dead! There was no purse or anything to identify her, so he figures someone stole it. He asked my father if he'd help bury her as soon as the weather allows. I felt like I was in a movie. Things like that just don't happen in real life.

I guess they do, now.

I was deeply disturbed after hearing that. I kept picturing this sweet little old lady dead in her car, right near our plat.

"Why did she die?" I asked.

Dad looked at me as though he'd forgotten I was in the room. He shrugged. "I don't know; could be from the cold, exposure. Or maybe she had a heart attack."

I am haunted by the image of that lady. Why didn't she leave the car and look for help somewhere?

My stomach is starting to bother me. I think I might be sick. I know I'd like to cry. I don't know if it was the story of that lady or because I'm starting to believe we really did have a solar pulse and we won't get power back for months, maybe not for a year. I didn't want to believe it, but the image of that dead woman tells me it must be true.

This whole situation seems unreal. I WISH I could talk to Lexie or Sarah! I want to forget about all this and go back in time to how things used to be. I thought my life sucked because I have a rotten father, but now it looks like I had it great.

I just didn't know it.

Our little neighborhood started gathering outside today to exchange ideas. Normally, we rarely see each other. Everybody minds their own business—we only know the neighbors on either side of us. But today probably everybody who lives here (and wasn't stranded elsewhere when the grid failed) was outside. Except for one guy at the end of our street who hasn't come out and doesn't answer his door. His name is Mr. Herman, which I know because I sold him chocolate bars for a school fundraiser once. I didn't like him then, and now I really don't like him. Why won't he come out? We know he's home because there's smoke coming from his chimney. It's like he's trying to hide or something.

Anyway, all we found out is that everyone else is pretty much as miserable as we are except for a few people who had a generator and some extra fuel. They've rationed their usage of it, but even they are going to run out of fuel soon. And having that generator didn't put any extra food in their pantries.

Mitchell Hughes was out there—he goes to my high school. I saw him just before we went back to our house. We nodded hello but that's it. We've never been what I consider friends. He's quiet or shy or something. He acts like a Noob. Even though he rides the same bus as I do, we've never gotten to know each other. I like a guy to be friendly first, before I am, and he failed to do that. But I was glad to see him today. It reminded me that I'm not the only teenager having to survive at home in a world that's stopped. I wonder if we'll become friends now that there's no way to see anyone else our age, at least not until this snow clears and we can get around.

No one knows any more about the cause of the power failure than we do. We'd love to know whether or not all of Ohio is like us, or the whole country, or the whole planet! One person has been trying to get a radio station all week with no luck—they have a battery-operated radio, imagine that. If they find a working station we may be able to find out if help is on the way. Dad says if the whole country isn't affected, either the government or charities will send help soon.

I hope so. I mean, we're not the only ones in trouble. There's got to be loads of people like us, people who will need help and food and who might not have a good heat source.

I'm also re-thinking that emergency shelter—if there is one. I think now that we should go to it.

More people were out on the main road today, despite this awful cold. Dad said they probably don't have a fireplace, like we do, and have no choice but to seek shelter elsewhere.

"Maybe we should do what they're doing," said Mom. "If there's food and shelter somewhere, we'd be better off."

"Farmingham said there's no emergency shelter in town," said my dad. Mr. Farmingham lives in our plat. "So they'll have to go to Dayton. And if Dayton is powerless like us, it will be dangerous, worse than staying home. Every city without power will have looting and rioting. Remember Katrina."

I don't know why, but I wanted to see the road for myself--maybe just to see other people. I saw a whole family walking along together. Two little kids were bundled up on a sled, and there was a baby in a backpack. I don't want to think about them being out there when it gets dark. Dayton is thirty minutes from here by car. So I told them what my dad said about cities. At first they looked startled. They asked what we were doing to stay warm and I told them our situation.

"You see? We can make it with the fireplace," the woman said to her husband.

"I guess," he said, grudgingly. I turned around to go home, and I think they went home too, because I saw them heading back the way they'd come. I was glad!

I passed one other young couple. The woman was pushing a stroller full of stuff, but there was no child with them. The man had a big backpack on. They said they never used their fireplace and now it wasn't safe. Raccoons were living in the chimney or something, so they had to seek shelter. I watched them go on with a heavy heart, but if it hadn't been for the cold, I would've wanted to go with them—just to get away from home.

I guess we are lucky to have the fireplace. I'm getting used to not having central heat. It's been a week and I feel okay if I'm layered up. (Now I see why they used to wear so much clothing in the old days. Like, in Shakespeare's time; did you ever see Queen Elizabeth's dresses? They look so heavy! But weight is warmth, I'm finding out. This is so not me— I don't even care what I look like, just so I'm warm.)

EVENING

Dad used a staple gun to put sheets over the doorways and now the living room is livable. It's bliss to sit around without feeling chilled. But I can't be alone in here, so even though the house is dark and cold I wander up to my room at least for a few minutes every day. For my sanity. It's driving me crazy, all this staying in one room all the time. Up there I can pretend nothing's changed. Even though none of my stuff works, I bundle up and hang out, visiting my old life. It doesn't work for long because my nose and fingers get cold. So I come back and sit near the fire, and then I'm hot. This is life now, hot or cold, never comfortable.

I keep hoping the whole downstairs will warm up from the fire, but Dad says most of our heat is lost through the chimney. I'm confused, because isn't that how they used to heat houses? With fireplaces? I don't get why it doesn't work anymore.

I wish I could fall asleep and then wake up to everything the way it used to be.

I miss my friends, and being online, and my music.
Even my brothers are bored. We all miss video games.
We're stranded like a bunch of helpless sitting ducks.
Nighttime is the worst. I can hardly sleep without my MP3 player. Sometimes I cry myself to sleep. But I have to be careful because I don't want the boys to hear me.
Last night was hard. I guess my mother heard me sniffing, because she came and hugged me and I cried on her shoulder. I can't remember the last time she did that. She said things like we can get used to living without power. "Think of the Amish," she said, "they always live this way."
"Even the Amish have stoves and refrigeration," I said.
My mom was silent a moment. "Not anymore."
It makes no difference. I'll never get used to this.

JANUARY 18TH DAY EIGHT

I've never written so faithfully in my journal before. I have time now, and nothing else to do, I guess. I was feeling sorry for myself and then I remembered the chocolate chip cookies. I went to where I hid them—in the drawer of a hallway table that no one ever uses. It's there just to hold an enormous vase with dried flowers—another stupid showpiece. Anyway, I took out the cookies and went up to my room. I got snuggled under a bunch of blankets and tried to pretend away my misery. I ate a cookie. I was only going to have a few cookies and share the rest. But one after another, they just kept going down.

I ate the whole box. Then I cried and hated myself for being a pig. It's all because of this power-outage! I would never have done that before.

I'm a selfish, gluttonous, pig.

To my joy I found an old wind-up watch that seems to be telling the time! I told my dad and he tried to take it, but I fought for it. I can't explain it, but having a working watch feels like an unbelievable luxury. It's like SOMETHING is still okay in this world. I started crying because he was making me give it up, and that's what actually saved the day. He turned away in disgust because I was crying over it, but I don't care because now I have it.

Dad is changing. At first I couldn't put my finger on it, but then I realized what it was. He's growing a beard. I can't remember ever seeing him with a beard before, so it's sort of spooky, like he's someone else and not my father. Up to now he looked unshaven and sloppy, but now I can see he's been growing out a beard. I guess he's doing it because he can't go to work anymore. At his office none of the men wear beards. Or maybe he's just getting into this Davy Crockett thing with the rifle and hunting. (Did I mention he keeps a rifle out, now? It's on the mantel, looking ominous. He says we may have to defend ourselves. I think he's nuts. He also says he may go hunting. I'll believe it when I see it.)

Yesterday he started building a small shed outside. He had wood in the garage for a project he never started. I thought, when he discovered this wood, that he would use it in the

fireplace but no, he's building something. (Why? When we could use it for heat!) Every day we still go looking for wood and sticks but everything is frozen. It's a waste of time.

I didn't ask about it because he snaps at anyone who talks to him. But when I got too cold in my room and came down, Aiden and Quentin were arguing over something stupid and the baby started crying and I couldn't stand it. So I ran outside to get away from everyone and almost ran smack into my dad. He didn't look mad—just tired. I didn't know what to say, so I asked, "What're you building?" I looked at the shed. It was high enough to stand in, but not much bigger than what would hold one person.

"An out-house," he said, wiping his face with one sleeve.

I guess I looked shocked because he said, "Get used to it, Andrea. This is life—unless things ever get back to normal."

"Will they?" I asked.

He shook his head, looking around. He was silent for a very long minute.

"I don't know."

He didn't say we are in serious trouble, but I'm wondering more and more what we'll eat when our food runs out. We can't drive to a store (we can't even walk to one; they're too far) and Mom says the shelves would be empty by now even if we could.

I asked again when help will arrive from the government and Dad says he just hopes the whole country didn't have an "EMP."

"What's that?"

"It's an electromagnetic pulse; a catastrophic high voltage power hit—like I told you. Could have been from the sun, or maybe terrorists."

He gave me a look that sent a shudder down my spine. I wish I'd paid more attention when Lexie talked about the ways her family practices homesteading. It seemed so unnecessary. Even stupid. So much work. But I bet they're warm and well fed and not so worried like my mom and dad.

Lexie is someone I wouldn't even be friends with except we both have twins in our family. Mom had dragged me along to a Twins' Club Meeting, and Lexie's mom had dragged her along. We got to talking for the first time—we'd never talked at school—and that's when I discovered how nice she is. And funny.

I don't think about it a lot, but I'm glad we're friends because knowing Lexie has been good. She's not into clothes or boys like I am, but she's smart and very religious—she talks about "The Lord" (like she knows him) and she says things like, "I'm praying for you," whenever I tell her something I'm struggling with.

I hope she's praying for me now, because I sure could use some divine intervention.

I REALLY dread using that disgusting out-house. It's bad enough having to use snow every night to make the toilets flush, but an outhouse is, like, primitive! Dad says if we had a constant water source we could continue to use the bathrooms when the snow is gone, but we don't have more water. Jim's manual pump handle is working but it will be a long haul just to get drinking water from there every day.

EVENING

All of a sudden my mother stood up tonight and said, "What is wrong with us? The Hendersons still aren't home, right?" The Hendersons are our neighbors on the left. We haven't seen them since the grid went down. My dad nodded. "THEY have a wood stove--on the first

floor!" My mother shook her head like she couldn't believe it. "Why haven't we thought of this?" She started picking up blankets and wrapping baby Lily up more than ever.

"What are you doing?" asked my dad. "They aren't home."

"I know. We're going there. We're going to stay there until they come and chase us out. IF they come and chase us out. We can cook on the woodstove and maybe they even have food."

"Um. Aren't you forgetting something?"

My mother gave my dad a look.

"The house is locked."

She straightened up and put her hands on her hips. "Yes, Peter, the house is locked," she said. "You'll need to break in." She said the words like he was an idiot not to realize it himself, and I sighed. It would have been nice if they were trying to get along right now, seeing as how everything else in life is so much harder. But no such luck. My dad stared at my mom for a moment and soon I heard the garage door open. I figured he was getting some tools or something. Mom said, "C'mon, Andrea, don't just sit there. Grab some of our stuff. Take whatever food is left."

When dad returned about forty-five minutes later we were sitting with our arms full, ready to go. The boys were yawning but ready. Mom said, "What took so long?"

"They had some wood near the stove," he said. "I started a fire to warm up the place. C'mon."

So now we're in the Henderson's house with a real wood stove. The Hendersons are just a working couple with no children, so there are no toys or anything like that. I can tell with just our candlelight and Dad's one flashlight that it's pretty here. I think they might even have more money than us. And the pantry is full! I know I shouldn't be excited about that, but I am. A week ago we would have been horrified at the idea of breaking into anyone's house, and here we are, gloating. I wonder if the Hendersons were stranded somewhere and couldn't get home. I'm sorry they couldn't, but I'm also glad. I just hope they're okay. We don't know them well, but I think they might have welcomed us here during this cold spell for the baby's sake. (Maybe not, but I want to think so.) If they don't come back, Mom thinks we can manage on the food they've got-- at least for a couple more weeks to a month, maybe more.

I just can't think about what will happen after that.

[End of excerpt]

PULSE is available in both print or Kindle versions:

For the Print Edition, Click [HERE](#).

For the KINDLE Edition, Click [HERE](#).

Praise for *PULSE*

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REALLY ENJOYED IT

“I really enjoyed *PULSE*! L. R. Burkard does a fantastic job depicting what life might be like for those that are prepared--and those that are anything but. (If you wonder why some people bother "prepping" read this book!) I also enjoyed the strong emphasis on faith and how focused on Christ some of the characters were.”

CHRIS RAY, PreparedChristian.net

A PAGE TURNER

“*PULSE* is a page turner from the very beginning. I wanted to know what would happen to the characters and their families, and you will, too! The world has become increasingly dependent on technology for just about everything. What if all of that technology failed? How would we survive, what things would it impact? *PULSE* is a fascinating answer to that question.”

JOY BICE, Pastor's Wife, Author

RIVETING

“L.R. Burkard's *PULSE* is a riveting story of the effects of an EMP that takes place in the United States. Centering on the lives of three different families, Burkard accurately captures the complexities of life without electricity as well as other hardships they must face. I found her story chock-full of clever and ingenious ways of dealing with the disaster. Blended with loss and hope, *PULSE* is full of surprises making it a great read. Considering the times we are in, I find it a must read for the church.”

REGINA GROEGER, Ordained Minister of Music

REALISTIC AND FRIGHTENING

“I loved this book! L.R. Burkard takes a realistic and frightening look at what would happen if an electromagnetic pulse hit the United States. The story of each teen gradually unfolds and includes carefully researched details that make you really feel what it would be like to go through this!”

CAROL RIFFLE, High School Science Teacher

HEART POUNDING

“Loved it! Loved it! Loved it! I cried over (SPOILER REMOVED). My heart pounded at the first sight of the marauding gang and didn't stop till (SPOILER REMOVED)! Holy Cow, guess I better invest in a rifle!”

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EXCITING

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