

David Stephenson

Wiring Simplified

When I was ten or twelve years old, my dad
Got interested in electricity
And got into the fuse box, and soon had
A plan for beefing up the circuitry.

He kept his books and magazines downstairs,
Variously stood up, stacked, and filed
On a workbench by his reading chair.
There was soon an addition to the pile,

A burnt orange booklet from the hardware store
Called *Wiring Simplified*, Illustrated,
The Home Handyman Series Volume IV.
We brothers were told not to mess with it.

*It had pictures of all kinds of wires
Cut open with the insulation stripped
And rubber-handled screwdrivers and pliers
And meters rigged with alligator clips*

And a fold-out wiring diagram
With grids of lines connecting staggered rows
Of Greek letters and cryptic pictograms
Like hieroglyphics or a secret code.

One day he came home with coils of wire
And metal tubing and a paper sack
That clanked when it was set down on the drier,
And he started getting things unpacked

And measuring and pencil-marking spots.
Then he used his electric drill to bore
A long series of rafter holes, and got
Wood shavings in his hair and on the floor.

Then he sawed and filed the metal tubes
And fitted some ends with a metal box,
And drilled more holes and tightened lots of screws
To mount them to the posts and cinderblocks.

Then he fed wire through the holes and pipes
Into each box, and trimmed and stripped the ends
To leave small clusters of bare copper spikes
Sticking out like fingers or whole hands.

I was upstairs when he cut the power
To wire his circuits into the main box.
You could hear him working through the floor,
Muffled footsteps, flashlight clicks, and coughs.

When I went back downstairs he was done.
There were plugs and switches everywhere,
Plus a pull chain fluorescent shop light hung
Over his workbenches and his chair.

He showed me all the galvanized hardware,
The wires snaked through the rafters overhead,
The holes all lined up, all the angles square.
I wish I could remember what he said.