

OFF THE GRID

Written by

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FADE IN.

INT. HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

PEONY, 30, in overcoat, stocking cap, and fingerless gloves, zips a toddler, HOPE, into a snow suit. A run-of-the-mill room with king bed, baby bed, and bureau. In the background, a keening wind blows past windows covered with plastic.

PEONY

We have to keep warm, don't we.
It's sooo cold outside.

The lights dim and then wink out, leaving the room in gloom.

PEONY (CONT'D)

Ronnie! The lights are out.

She gets no answer, so she picks up Hope and walks out.

INT. HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A large room that doubles as great room and dining room, with a kitchen in the background, a farm house. In one corner there is a small wood stove. All the windows are covered in plastic.

Peony walks in and lays Hope in a playpen. She looks around

PEONY

Ronnie?

No answer. She frowns and goes into the kitchen where she grabs a cup from a cabinet and tries to fill it with water. Nope, no water.

PEONY (CONT'D)

What? RONNIE, THE WATER'S NOT
WORKING.

Still no answer.

She sets aside the cup and goes to the fridge. When she opens it, the light doesn't come on--no electricity. She grabs a baby bottle, unscrews the cap, and places the bottle in the microwave. She taps the keyboard, but nothing works.

PEONY (CONT'D)

Damnit, Ronnie. Nothing's working.

Through the back door comes RONNIE, 30, bearded, coated with snow, carrying several small logs, wood for the stove.

PEONY (CONT'D)

Where have you been? The lights are out, and the microwave won't work.

Ronnie goes to the stove, opens the grate, and tosses in the few logs he carries.

RONNIE

The batteries are dead. There's no electricity.

PEONY

What do you mean, no electricity. What's wrong with the solar panels?

RONNIE

It's a blizzard. There is no sun. Even if there was, the panels are covered with ice and snow.

PEONY

What's wrong with the windmill?

RONNIE

It's a wind turbine, and it's shut down.

PEONY

You shut it down?

RONNIE

I didn't shut it down. It shut itself down. When wind speed exceeds forty miles per hour, the turbine shuts down to save itself.

PEONY

Save itself. Who's gonna save us?

RONNIE

Relax. We have plenty to eat. We just have to stay warm.

PEONY

We got no water. What are we gonna do with no water?

RONNIE

We have bottled water, and you don't need any for cooking because the range won't work without electricity.

PEONY

We got a baby, Ronnie. It's already freezing in here. How are we gonna use the bathroom?

RONNIE

We'll melt snow. It's only for a little while.

PEONY

Don't you have a generator or something?

He stokes the stove, watching the fire.

RONNIE

We're off the grid, Peony. No fossil fuels. We're saving the planet.

She looks around.

PEONY

We're gonna need more wood.

RONNIE

There isn't any more.

She scowls.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

It's been a long winter.

She goes to the microwave, removes the bottle, and takes it the stove where she places it on top.

PEONY

This ain't good, Ronnie. It ain't good at all.

INT. HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - LATER

Carrying Hope, Peony paces back and forth in a noticeably colder room. The wind HOWLS outside. The room is gloomier than before. She sings softly to the baby.

PEONY

He's gonna buy me a diamond ring. And if that diamond ring don't shine, he'll surely break this heart of mine.

Ronnie enters with a bucket of snow which he sets down before he struggles to close the door against the wind and cold. He grabs the bucket and places it next to the stove.

RONNIE
It's getting colder.

PEONY
We need more heat.

RONNIE
The stove's doing all it can.

PEONY
Then we gotta get out of here.

RONNIE
How we gonna do that?

PEONY
We got a car in the garage.

RONNIE
Even if the roads weren't drifted shut, how far do you think we'd get?

PEONY
Far enough to be safe.

RONNIE
It's an electric car, Peony. Crank up the heater and it won't go twenty miles.

PEONY
You mean we're stuck here?

RONNIE
It's gonna be OK. Storm can't last forever. We got any candles?

Her look is murderous.

INT. HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - EVENING

A few candles cast feeble light. Under a blanket, on the sofa Peony watches Hope who's asleep under a blanket in her playpen. Peony sews a baby garment with stiff fingers. She pauses to blow on her hands.

From the bedroom, carrying a headboard and a hand saw, comes Ronnie. He lays the headboard across the table.

PEONY
What you doing?

RONNIE
We need wood.

PEONY
That's our bed.

Ronnie sets the saw on a leg and prepares to cut.

PEONY (CONT'D)
That's our BED!

RONNIE
(sawing)
I know what it is. We don't need a
headboard in order to sleep.

He saws viciously as she watches.

INT. HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - NIGHT

A single candle struggles to keep the dark at bay. Peony and Hope, under two blankets, sleep on the couch. The wind SCREAMS as Ronnie looks out the window. He raises a fist as if to hit something and then lowers his hand.

He goes to the table. He picks up a chair, sets it on the table, and grabs a hammer. With grim determination, he knocks out the legs of the chair.

INT. HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - MORNING

Peony wakes, quickly checks Hope, and looks across the dim room. Table gone, Ronnie sits in the only chair left. He half smiles. The wind seems a bit more tame, a bit.

RONNIE
Good morning.

PEONY
Hope is gonna be hungry.

Ronnie goes to the fridge, takes out a bottle, and places it on the stove.

PEONY (CONT'D)
How much longer?

RONNIE
Don't know.

PEONY

You gotta call someone. We need help.

RONNIE

And just how am I gonna call? Cell phone's dead since we ain't got the power to charge it. No radio because that takes power too. I could try smoke signals, but we ain't got enough wood to keep us warm let alone send a signal to no one. Cause sure as hell no one's out in a blizzard watchin'. So, just how the fuck do you expect me to call for help?!

PEONY

Watch your language.

RONNIE

She ain't old enough to know better.

He takes a deep breath.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. It's just, just, well, it's just so damn cold.

PEONY

It wasn't supposed to be like this.

RONNIE

DAMNIT! DON'T YOU THINK I KNOW THAT?!

Peony stands, holding Hope. She starts out of the room.

PEONY

I gotta change Hope.

Ronnie watches her go. He picks up the bottle to see if it's warm. It's not, so he replaces it. Then, he goes to the playpen, pulling out the mat, and grabbing his hammer. He smashes out a support with special violence.

INT. HOUSE - GREAT ROOM - DAY

The playpen is gone. Peony feeds Hope a bottle. Ronnie comes from outside with a bucket of snow that he places next to the stove. It's brighter, but no lights are on.

RONNIE
Wind's down. The turbine kicked
in.

PEONY
Thank god. At last, some heat.

RONNIE
Not right away.

PEONY
Why not?

RONNIE
We got to charge up the batteries
before we turn on the heat.

PEONY
What the hell for?

RONNIE
Because they're our reserve if the
wind dies.

PEONY
You mean *when* the wind dies.

RONNIE
Without the panels, we got no other
way to charge the batteries.

PEONY
What are you sayin'?

RONNIE
I'm sayin' we have to be smart
about this. The snow's quit, so
I'm goin' up to clean off the
panels. In the meantime, we keep
using the wood stove.

PEONY
Look around. What're we gonna
burn?

RONNIE
Clothes, we'll burn clothes if we
got to. Won't be for long.

She merely stares. A shaft of sunlight shoots through a
window.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
See? Sun's out. We're gonna be fine.

PEONY
When the road's clear, I'm going to my parents. They got heat.

RONNIE
We're gonna be fine.

PEONY
And when the next snow comes? What are we gonna burn then? The house?

RONNIE
I'll lay in more wood.

PEONY
And when it gets real hot, gonna have enough power to run the air conditioning?

He frowns and heads for the door.

RONNIE
I gotta clear the panels.

PEONY
It's no way to raise a baby!

He's gone, and she looks at Hope.

PEONY (CONT'D)
Don't you worry, honey. As soon as it clears, as soon as it clears.

FADE OUT.