

POWER OUTTRAGE

a one-act play

by

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Summary

An evening at home turns surreal for an older married couple when the power goes out.

Characters

JIM: An aging baby-boomer. Solidly middle-class, opinionated, rough around the edges.

PEGGY: In the same class and age range as her husband. Smart, spirited.

OFFICIAL/VAL: These two roles can be played by two different actors, male or female, or the same actor (male or female) can play both roles. The Official is slick, overly friendly, and pseudo-caring; Val is honest, passionate, and determined. The Official and Val should look entirely different.

Time/Place

Evening in a middle-class living room, in a middle-class home, somewhere in middle-America.

SOUND of "Long Time Gone," from the album Crosby, Stills & Nash (1969) being played on a turntable. Lights already up on JIM and PEGGY dancing together. Jim prepares to dip her.

PEGGY

Oh, no, Jim, don't do it--

He dips her, strains his back.

JIM

Ooph, Jesus--

PEGGY

(laughing)

I told ya! Those days are gone. Like this music.

JIM

No they're not. Got plenty of dancin' left to do, Peg.

(she starts to leave)

And this music is coming back!

PEGGY

Ya want anything? Ice pack?

JIM

Very funny. What're you havin'?

PEGGY

I dunno yet. Somethin' desserty.

She disappears offstage.

JIM

(picks up album cover, yells to her)

A cookie.

PEGGY

(yells back)

K!

He turns it up and sings along with the song:

JIM

"And it appears to be a long, appears to be a long--"

The stage goes black and the LP slows to a stop.

JIM (CONT'D)

Shit!

PEGGY
(from offstage)

Oh, no!

JIM
You okay?

PEGGY
Yeah, it's just pitch black in here. Wait, I'm gonna--
Sounds of cabinets opening, shutting.

JIM
There's a flashlight in the-- in the--

PEGGY
I know. I'm--
More sounds -- drawers.

JIM
Ya find it?

PEGGY
Yeah.
(pause)
Well, shit. Batteries are dead. Oh, wait! My phone is... here. Aha.

She returns using her phone as a flashlight, carrying candles, and a lantern/lamp.

PEGGY (CONT'D)
I always forget this has one. Throws off a lotta light.

JIM
Where's my cookie?

PEGGY
You're jokin'.

JIM
What the hell happened? Is it rainin'? Windy?

PEGGY
I don't think so.
(looks out window upstage)
Well, what is... c'mere. Look at this.

He gets up, clutches his back.

JIM
Damn! What.

PEGGY
They've got power over there. Look. Across the street.

He looks out.

JIM
What the...? What about--

PEGGY
I'm gonna see.

She walks to another window, SL.

PEGGY (CONT'D)
No way!

JIM
Them, too?

PEGGY
Lit up like a church.

He goes to one last window, SR looks out.

JIM
Jesus H. Christ. You gotta be kiddin' me.

PEGGY
This is crazy.

JIM
It's bullshit! I'm calling the Power Company. Gimme your phone.

PEGGY
Where's yours?

JIM
Left it in my car.

She hands it to him, then lights a few candles and the lantern/lamp.

PEGGY
Did you pay the bill?

JIM
Yes, I paid the bill.
(dials, listens. Into the phone:)

Yeah, I'll bet it is. Super fucking important.

PEGGY

What is?

He waves her off.

JIM

Unbelievable. Call wait time... ninety minutes. Like I'm gonna sit on hold for ninety minutes.

There is a loud knock at the front door. They look at each other, startled.

JIM (CONT'D)

Who the hell...

PEGGY

Maybe it's a neighbor.

JIM

(looking out the window)

Looks official.

He opens the door. The OFFICIAL steps in, wearing business attire and carrying a small gift bag.

OFFICIAL

(friendly, smooth)

Hello Jim, Peggy. I'm here to answer any questions you may have about your power loss.

JIM

Oh! Thanks, well, yeah...

(chuckles uncomfortably)

How about, where is it?

OFFICIAL

It's been discontinued.

JIM

What?

PEGGY

You shut it off?

JIM

I've paid all my bills. On time, too. Mostly.

PEGGY

There's gotta be a mistake.

OFFICIAL

No, no mistake. We simply can't provide power to you anymore.

Stunned silence as they take that in. Then:

PEGGY
I don't get it. Why?

JIM
Yeah, why?

OFFICIAL
Our research shows that it's not in your best interest.

JIM
What?? What kind of bullshit...

PEGGY
Wait. This isn't right. Something's wrong.

JIM
What about our neighbors? Look!
(points SL and SR)
Over there, look at that. They've got power. And the other ones. Look.

PEGGY
They all do.

OFFICIAL
Yes. Well, they're on a different system.

PEGGY
Must be a better one.

OFFICIAL
No, no, Peggy. It's terrible.

PEGGY
Really?

OFFICIAL
Abysmal. You definitely don't want what they have. What you have is way, way better.

JIM
This is crazy.

PEGGY
Totally. Wait, is this... this is a joke, right?

JIM
Oh, yeah...

The JIM and PEGGY laugh. The Official laughs with them.

PEGGY

Yeah, okay--

JIM

There's a camera, or audience or somethin'. Funny.

PEGGY

Ha ha. I love it.

JIM

You can turn it back on, now, and we can get back to our dancing.

OFFICIAL

No. There's no joke, Jim. It's not coming back on.

PEGGY

Ever?

OFFICIAL

Not as long as we're in charge. But please, keep dancing.

Another stunned silence.

JIM

Okay. That's enough. This is bullshit. Turn my power back on.

OFFICIAL

No can do. You see, it's not really yours. It never was. It's ours.

JIM

I paid for it!

PEGGY

(to Official)

He did.

OFFICIAL

And we so appreciate your support.

JIM

It's not support--

OFFICIAL

Your vote of confidence means we can continue to provide the level of service you and your beautiful family deserve.

JIM

I'm calling the Power Company.

OFFICIAL

I am the Power--

JIM
You're just some clown. I'm gonna talk to someone in charge.
(to PEGGY)
Gimme your phone again.

PEGGY
Battery's getting low...

JIM
I don't care.

She hands it to him. He dials, listens. He looks incredulous, then gets more and more angry-looking. He hangs up.

PEGGY
So?

JIM
They're "no longer accepting calls from customers."

PEGGY
So what are we supposed to do?

JIM
"Talk to our local service representative."

PEGGY
(to Official)
That's you, isn't it.

Official smiles.

JIM
This is fuckin' bullshit.

JIM leaves.

PEGGY
(to Official)
We're not the *only* ones, are we?

OFFICIAL
Only ones what.

PEGGY
In the dark.

OFFICIAL
I'm not sure...

PEGGY
Are there lots of us?

OFFICIAL

Don't know.

PEGGY

Huh. So let's say there were lots of us, and we wanted to get our power back--

OFFICIAL

Look, you're the only ones complaining. Everyone else is perfectly happy.

PEGGY

Really.

OFFICIAL

Absolutely. They're smart people. They know how lucky they are.

PEGGY

Okay, well... let's just say that a lot of us wanted to change things--

OFFICIAL

Trust me, they don't.

JIM re-enters, with a gun.

JIM

Turn it back on.

OFFICIAL

Hey hey hey, now Jim... don't get overheated. I can't turn it back on. You shoot me, you end up in jail and still -- no power.

PEGGY

Then what're we supposed to do? Move across the street??

OFFICIAL

In theory, but I guarantee you won't like it over there. Here.

(holding out the gift bag)

This should help.

Peggy takes it.

OFFICIAL (CONT'D)

And my card's in there. Contact me any time! *We're here to serve.*

Official leaves. Long pause as Jim and Peggy stare at each other, speechless. There's a knock at the door. JIM aims his gun at it; PEGGY opens it to reveal VAL, wearing jeans and a leather jacket.

VAL
Hi, I'm Val--
(sees the gun, draws back)
Oh! God!

PEGGY
(to Jim)
Put that down! It's-- He's not--

JIM
(putting it down)
Sorry.

PEGGY
Come in. Please.

VAL
(entering)
That's okay. I understand.

JIM
You do?

VAL
Of course. But it's not the answer.

JIM
No?

PEGGY
What is?

VAL
I'll show you.

Val walks downstage, points out at the audience.

JIM
Holy shit. Look at all of 'em...

PEGGY
In the dark...just like us.

VAL
But they're together. That's where the power is. You coming?

PEGGY
Maybe we don't have to. That official gave us something, right? To help?
(looks inside the bag, laughs)
Christ. One nine-volt? Seriously?

JIM

We're comin', Val.

PEGGY

Damn straight.

(tosses the bag aside)

But what about your back?

JIM

It's better. I told you, Peg: my dancin' days aren't over.

(picks up gun)

Should I bring this?

VAL

Not yet. But this...

(picks up the lantern/lamp)

This'll come in handy. Ready?

Jim and Peg hold hands, nod.

Let's go.

They exit together through the audience. Once they're gone, the turntable starts back up as the lights return. The song finishes: "Appears to be a long time, Such a long, long, long, long time before the dawn."

END OF PLAY