

DISCONNECTED

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NFC Feature Short Challenge 2025

[BROADCAST FROM THE HIGHER-UPS: THE INTERNET WILL BE  
RETURNING IN A MONTH]

'WEEK 1'

**INT. THE GRID CAFÉ - MORNING**

There is an analogue TV playing quietly. Everyone else in the café is sitting in groups facing each other, talking with no phones out. MAN and WOMAN sit in a corner, side by side to each other. WOMAN wears a baseball cap and MAN wears a hoodie, with the hood up. They sit with newspapers up over their faces, with front page headlines reading

'BACK OUT OF THE BLACKOUT' 'GOVERNMENT SAYS: NO MORE LIES...  
WE PROMISE'

They don't make eye contact. There are two black coffees on their table.

They look over their newspapers and focus in on [TWO  
CHARACTERS FROM ELSEWHERE IN THE FEATURE], sitting on a table  
in front of them, eating food and drinking coffees.

CHARACTER #1

You know what I was thinking?

CHARACTER #2

Hm?

CHARACTER #1

What's going to happen to all the  
people the government hired? The  
people-watchers?

WOMAN side eyes MAN. He doesn't look back.

CHARACTER #2

The what?

CHARACTER #1

You know, the *offline* police?

WOMAN sighs and puts her newspaper down. MAN side eyes her.  
She doesn't look back.

WOMAN

What's the point?

MAN

Hm?

WOMAN

Of the past eleven months?

MAN puts his newspaper down.

MAN

Like, what's the point of a job we're about to lose?

WOMAN

No, like, it's not even for public safety.

MAN

You haven't reported anyone in?

WOMAN

Well... the one group I found, their sole aim was to reconnect estranged family members from other countries. Hardly *bad*, is it?

MAN

You know it's an offense not to report...

WOMAN

Oh, I reported. Have you seen anything?

MAN

No.

A pause. They sip their black coffees.

WOMAN

The higher-ups just needed a way to still keep an eye on... people. And that's all we've been. Their eye.

MAN

We've been their database. Some days I pretend I'm a spy at war to feel like I'm fighting the good fight. Or doing... something. At least.

WOMAN

It just makes me feel kind of disconnected, you know, from the disconnected.

MAN

They clearly know about us.

MAN and WOMAN focus in on CHARACTER #1 and CHARACTER #2.

CHARACTER #2

Those ones, the ones who traded honesty for connection? Can't trust 'em. Can't speak to 'em. Who knows what they'll do.

WOMAN

They don't see us. They've always been watched. They've been under constant surveillance for decades anyway. They learned to tune it out.

MAN

I just think, what's the point in a job we haven't even been paid for?

A pause.

MAN (CONT'D)

Well, hardly.

'WEEK 2'

**INT. THE GRID CAFÉ - DAY**

There is an analogue TV playing quietly. Everyone else in the café is sitting in groups facing each other, talking with no phones out. MAN and WOMAN sit in a corner, side by side to each other. WOMAN wears a baseball cap and MAN wears a hoodie, with the hood up.

They don't make eye contact. There are two black coffees on their table.

They focus in on [TWO DIFFERENT CHARACTERS FROM ELSEWHERE IN FEATURE], sitting on the table in front of them, looking lovingly into each other's eyes and holding hands.

MAN sighs.

WOMAN

What's with you?

MAN

Nothing.

WOMAN

Oh.

They keep watching the couple.

CHARACTER #3

I love you.

CHARACTER #4

Oh, I love you too.

MAN sighs, again.

MAN

Connection.

WOMAN

It got so much... better.

MAN

People switched off the screens.

WOMAN

You saw *something* on the job then.

MAN

Now, they're led to see the light  
*beyond* the LEDs. The whole world  
that's always been in front of  
their faces. Now, they see the *good*  
things in life.

WOMAN

And that's... a bad thing?

WOMAN side eyes MAN. He doesn't look back.

MAN

They did say that going offline  
would get rid of misinformation.

WOMAN

So?

MAN

Means people communicate better.

WOMAN

Hm. You really *did* see something on  
the job then.

A pause. WOMAN sips her black coffee. MAN stares at his  
reflection in the surface of his.

MAN

My girlfriend broke up with me.  
Last night.

WOMAN almost chokes on her coffee at hearing this.

WOMAN

Oh. Why? Are you okay?

MAN

I told her. About the last eleven months.

WOMAN

She didn't know?

MAN

She didn't know about our connection.

WOMAN

Our connection?!

MAN.

The connection. That we *have*.

WOMAN

Oh. Right. Of course.

A pause. MAN and WOMAN side eye each other in turn, not at the same time.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Just disconnect. That's what I do.

'WEEK 3'

# **INT. THE GRID CAFÉ - EVENING**

There is an analogue TV playing quietly. Everyone else in the café is sitting in groups facing each other, talking with no phones out. MAN and WOMAN sit in a corner, side by side to each other. WOMAN wears a baseball cap and MAN wears a hoodie, with the hood up.

They don't make eye contact. There are two black coffees on their table.

They focus in on [TWO DIFFERENT CHARACTERS FROM ELSEWHERE IN FEATURE], sitting on the table in front of them, drinking beers.

CHARACTER #5

We won't be in the dark anymore.

WOMAN

Everyone will have what we've been hiding from them the whole time. What we've been helping *them* hide.

## CHARACTER #6

We'll know about the world! It'll be so interesting!

## MAN

It'll be awful. If only people could see...

## WOMAN

Won't they?

## MAN

I mean, who knows?

## WOMAN

But, what they let us-

## MAN

Shh!

A pause.

## MAN (CONT'D)

Look, if they went as far as to turn the whole internet off before, who knows how... *different* it will be when they give it back. To the masses.

## WOMAN

Well, will people even trust it? They didn't trust the news outlets, what they were drip fed from the higher-ups. Because it was *from* the higher-ups. That's why they switched off the TVs. That's why they put the phones away.

## MAN

And started seeing the people around them.

## WOMAN

They see. We just watch.

## MAN

They'll all go back to watching. Watching the screens.

MAN and WOMAN focus in on CHARACTER #5.

## CHARACTER #5

Nothing will change, you know. The government stayed connected, with their exclusive elite secure network, and made sure we couldn't be. They'll keep doing that, holding things back, things we need. Information. Knowledge. Even after this is over.

A pause. MAN and WOMAN sip their black coffees.

MAN

It's never been for public safety.  
It's right they should know.

WOMAN side eyes MAN.

WOMAN

You think so?

MAN side eyes WOMAN.

MAN

I have seen things. On the job.  
Groups, illegal connectors. I never reported them in.

WOMAN

Oh.

MAN

Do you want to go to the cinema?  
Watch a movie?

WOMAN looks ahead of her.

WOMAN

I think I've watched my fair share.

**'WEEK 4'**

**INT. THE GRID CAFÉ - NIGHT**

Silence.

MAN and WOMAN sit in a corner, side by side to each other. WOMAN wears a baseball cap and MAN wears a hoodie, with the hood up.

They don't make eye contact. There are two black coffees on their table.



They are the only people in the café.

WOMAN

Nothing to watch today.

MAN

Nothing to watch after tomorrow.

WOMAN

Except the screens.

MAN

What are you doing after this?

WOMAN

I don't know. I don't have a job. I don't know... anything. About *after this*. I'll be a silhouette of society.

MAN gets his phone out. He opens up a secret but officialised internet channel.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

MAN

It's okay. There's no one here.

He scrolls through all the horrible headlines of today, and WOMAN reads over his shoulder. War. Genocide. Extermination. Occupation. Famine. Fascism. Congo. Yemen. Sudan. Gaza. Ukraine. America. England. America. America. England.

MAN (CONT'D)

You were right. What's the point?

WOMAN

Hm?

MAN

It wasn't worth it. The internet disappears and comes back, but time doesn't stop. There wasn't anything for us, during this, or after this. The graves won't un-dig themselves, but at least people may know about them now. But just to get what *they* had this whole time, to stay online... Helping them keep control over people, just to stay connected-

WOMAN  
Have you felt connected? To  
anything?

A pause.

At the counter, MAN notices a card machine over a sign saying  
'CARD PAYMENTS BACK TOMORROW'.

WAITRESS  
You paying for both?

WOMAN  
No.

MAN  
Yes.

MAN pays, with cash.

WOMAN  
Wha- why?

MAN takes his hood down and looks WOMAN in the eye. They look  
at each other for a while.

MAN  
This is it. If I won't... see you.  
After this.

A pause. WOMAN takes off her cap.

WOMAN  
Am I allowed to know your name?

Another pause. MAN smiles, for the first time in the film.

KEITH  
Keith.

WOMAN smiles, for the first time in the film. Then she goes  
to the door of the café, gets her phone out, and calls  
someone.

WOMAN  
Keith, I am arresting you for  
illegal internet use against  
professional policy that states  
granted network connections may not  
be used in public spaces, and  
failure to report illegal internet  
use elsewhere.

KEITH

What?

WOMAN leaves the café, smiling to herself.

KEITH (CONT'D)

Wait!

KEITH quickly gets his phone out, and tries to log in to the secret but officialised internet channel, to a screen that reads: 'DISCONNECTED' with an official government logo.

KEITH looks up from the screen with a face of defeat.

**END.**