

FIFTEEN BELOW ZERO

Karen and Peter separate after one visit in a long distance relationship. For the last time?

FADE IN:

EXT. FARM YARD MORNING

New fallen snow coats the yard and the fields beyond, a plain of white meeting a plane of blue.

A large, round, outdoor thermometer nailed to the trunk of a tree in the yard reads fifteen below zero. Wind blows a drift up one side of the trunk and leaves a hollow behind.

INT. FARM KITCHEN MORNING

Pulling back we find PETER, dressed warmly and casually, standing over the kitchen sink, grimly observing the cold yard through the window. We follow his look to the left.

Seen through the window, the bundled figure of KAREN approaches the house. He listens to her SHUFFLING and STAMPING in the entry way as he swallows coffee from a mug. Fire crackles in a wood stove.

KAREN, having shed boots, hat, coat, mittens, and jeans enters the kitchen. She is wearing long-johns, wool socks and a flannel shirt.

KAREN

Hey.

PETER

Good morning.

(takes her in)

Beautiful.

KAREN

(smiling)

Pal kept getting in the way while I broke the ice on her water bucket. I think she's going stir crazy in there. I doubled her blanket. At least the barn is tight. I'll let her out if the wind dies down.

PETER

I put a few logs on the fire  
and made some coffee. Want a  
mug?

KAREN

Sure. I won't get the car  
out today. The road doesn't  
get cleared right away.  
Sometimes it takes a day or  
two.

PETER

I'll hike into town and catch  
a ride to Wilton. The bus  
will get me to Bismarck in  
time for my flight.

KAREN

It's fifteen below zero out  
there. There's a wind.  
Feels like thirty below.

She sees his pack leaning against the wall, ready to go.

KAREN

Eight inches of snow.

PETER

Yeah so much for global  
warming.

Karen sits down at the kitchen table, but doesn't make it  
to six. Exasperated. She lashes out.

KAREN

Global warming doesn't mean  
the whole world feels like  
San Diego. It means the  
climate gets fucked up. In  
ninety nine we had four and a  
half inches of rain in one  
day. Then six years of  
drought. You know what that  
does to the economy around  
here?

PETER

I know, I...

KAREN

Try to harvest wheat from a muddy field before it molds, half of it useless to market. Try taking a hit for six years on reduced crop yields because you're irrigating like crazy just to get the plants to grow. I lose income. The farmers who lease my land lose income. Families pay more for food.

PETER

OK. I got it. Got it. I'm sorry. Can I make you some breakfast?

KAREN

I'm not hungry.

PETER

Maybe it's time for me to go.

KAREN

I'll call Carl when you're gone, get you a ride from town. Thirty six will be cleared.

PETER

Come with me.

Karen just looks at him.

PETER

San Diego is beautiful now. Always. It will be seventy and sunny tomorrow. We can drive down to La Jolla in the evening and watch the sun set from the cliffs. I'll take you to dinner at the Tampenade.

KAREN

Be real. Who's going to look after Pal? Who's going to keep my pipes from freezing? We've been through this.

PETER

Sell this place. Come be with me in sunny warm California. Bring the horse. We'll find a place with a little pasture and a barn.

KAREN

Peter, I live here. When do you think you can come out again?

PETER

Oh, I don't know, Karen. Let's see. I've been here twice since you traveled because you wanted to see Sequoia. You'd think a guy with a good job could find a nice girl in sunny San Diego.

KAREN

You'd think.

(takes a breath)

I have a pair of snowshoes somewhere. Do you want to use them? You can leave them with Carl.

PETER

Karen. I'm sorry.

KAREN

It's OK.

She gets up and goes to him.

KAREN

I know.

She puts her hand on his chest.

KAREN (continued)

We just keep doing this.

Peter pulls her in close and holds her until she pushes away.

KAREN

Let me get your coat. I'll loan you a scarf. Put on your sweater. You'll be out there for an hour and a half.

PETER

Fifteen below zero.

KAREN

That's right.

He pulls a heavy sweater out of his pack and pulls it on while she retrieves outdoor clothing for him. She helps him on with his coat in silence. He drags the pack onto his shoulders, takes a hat and heavy mittens.

PETER

I'll see you.

KAREN

Are you sure? You can stay.

PETER

I'll be fine.

KAREN

Call me when you get to town.

PETER

I will.

Karen closes the door and goes to the window. She watches the bundled figure of Peter heading down the drive, toward the snowbound road, toward town, toward the far away.

FADE OUT:

THE END