



# CHOOSE YOUR OWN PATH TO **PREPAREDNESS**

**#2**



## **Inside the Whiteout**



Office of Emergency Management  
Department of Education

Bill de Blasio, Mayor

# **Ready New York**

**Choose Your Own Survival Story**

# Inside the Whiteout

“Sophia. Sophia, wake up.”

Despite her little brother’s poking, Sophia wanted to pull the warm quilt under her chin and sink back into the dream she’d been having. It was Saturday, after all.

“Soph. Come on. Wake up.”

Sophia didn’t have to open an eye to know how close her brother was. He did this all the time.

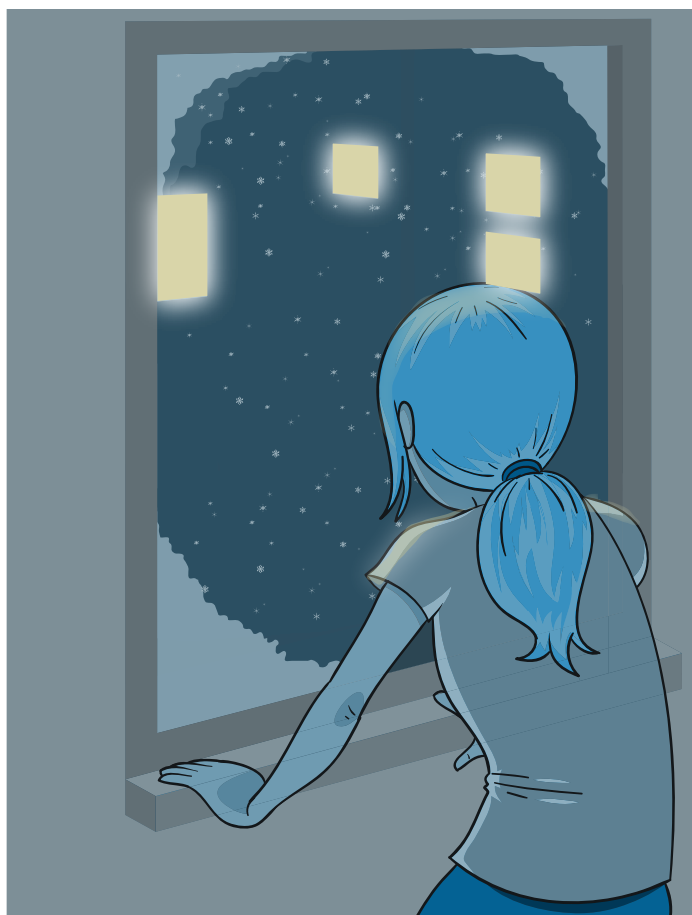
“Go watch your cartoons,” Sophia spoke into her pillow. “Go bother Mom.”

“But the snow!”

The word *snow* flipped a switch in Sophia’s head. She opened one eye and saw a self-satisfied grin cross her brother’s face.

“Yes, snow,” he said. “It’s a blizzard out there!”

Sophia closed her eyes again and rolled onto her back, but even with her eyes closed she could tell the light in her room was unusual. It was both darker and whiter than a normal Saturday morning in winter. She opened her eyes and sat up. She couldn’t believe what she saw—and what she *couldn’t* see. She couldn’t see the usual rooftops, neighboring buildings, or distant bridges. She couldn’t see clouds or the sun or even



rain or fog. If she squinted, she could see vague shapes of buildings and rooftops, but mostly she just saw snow. Fat dancing flakes raced by.

“Did you show Mom?” Sophia asked.

“No. She’s not here.”

“Not here? Joey, what do you mean she’s not here? Did you wake her up too or not?”

“No,” he said. “Because she’s not here.”

Sometimes Sophia found her little brother to be maddening. She threw back her warm quilt and then regretted it immediately. Joey bounced from one window to another. In his electric-blue pajamas, he looked like a bottle of lightning.

“Snow over there. Snow over there. And snow over there!”

Walking out of her room, Sophia wished she’d looked for her slippers. The floor was ice cold. And with every step away from her bed, she realized the apartment was unusually cold.

“Mom, tell Joey to leave me alone,” Sophia called as she went into her mother’s bedroom.

Sophia’s mother’s bed was made.

“Told you,” Joey said.

Sophia walked past the empty kitchen with her little brother following her. He was singing a song. All the words in the song were *snow*—“Snow, snow, snow, snow.”

On the couch in the living room, Sophia saw a girl a few years older than herself. She was wrapped in the family’s football blanket and quickly flipped through the channels on the television.

Joey’s snow song ended. “She knows where mom is,” he said, jumping onto the couch beside the stranger.

“Who are you?” Sophia asked as she rubbed her eyes.

“It’s me, Olive. From down the hall.” Olive paused as Sophia remembered. *Olive! Of course*, she thought. It was no wonder Sophia didn’t recognize her neighbor. Last time Sophia saw Olive, her hair wasn’t bright pink.

“Your mom went to help your grandma. Her car is stuck in the snow. You can go back to bed if you want. She said she’d be back in a few minutes,” Olive said.

“Oh, okay,” Sophia said but then stopped. “Wait. She’d be back in a few minutes? When did she say that?”

Olive reluctantly pulled her arm out from under the blanket. Somewhere on her wrist, among dozens of bracelets, she found her watch.

“About an hour ago,” she said.

Back in a few minutes. But that was an hour ago? Something didn’t add up. Sophia figured she could go back to sleep and wake up when her mother was home or she could get dressed—including putting warm socks on her freezing feet—and review her family’s emergency plan for what to do if a blizzard struck.

**IF SOPHIA DECIDES TO GO BACK TO BED, TURN TO PAGE 6.**

**IF SOPHIA DECIDES TO GET DRESSED AND REVIEW HER FAMILY’S EMERGENCY PLAN, TURN TO PAGE 8.**

**SOPHIA DECIDES TO GO BACK TO BED.**

As she walked back to her bedroom, Sophia heard an emergency broadcast interrupt whatever it was Olive was watching. She heard words like *record*, *blizzard*, *power outage*, and *indoors*. It was more than she cared to worry about. She just wanted to be back underneath her warm blankets.

Sophia curled inside her quilt until only her nose stuck out. A sound like a distant squeal reminded her that a blizzard was thrashing about outside, but soon her mother would be home and it would be a normal Saturday again. Maybe her mom would make pancakes.



Sophia fell back to sleep, but it was not a restful sleep like before. She was bothered by the howling wind rattling the windows. And she wasn't warm and relaxed anymore. Now, she couldn't seem to get warm again.

Sophia opened her eyes. She found Joey staring at her again. This time he was shivering.

"Power's out. Warm me up," he said, his voice quivering a little as he jumped under the blanket beside her. His feet were like blocks of ice.

"No more cartoons?" Sophia asked.

"Cable went, and then we lost power anyway."

"Well, Joey-ice-feet, I think it's time for us to get up, get dressed in our warmest clothes, and get on top of this cold situation," Sophia said. "Go to your room and find your favorite warm clothes. Thick socks, warm pants, some long-sleeve shirts or a hoodie or both, or that sweater Grandma Mame got you last Christmas."

"Yuck. No!"

"Yuck, yes," Sophia said. "It might be ugly, but I'll bet it's warm. Once we get dressed, we're going to have to figure out what to do."

**PROCEED TO "STORY CONTINUES" ON PAGE 10.**



**SOPHIA DECIDES TO GET DRESSED AND REVIEW HER FAMILY'S EMERGENCY PLAN.**

Just then, whatever it was that Olive was watching was interrupted by an emergency broadcast. One of the local television weather personalities appeared on the screen, his smile as white as the snow swirling outside. He sounded as pleasant as always.

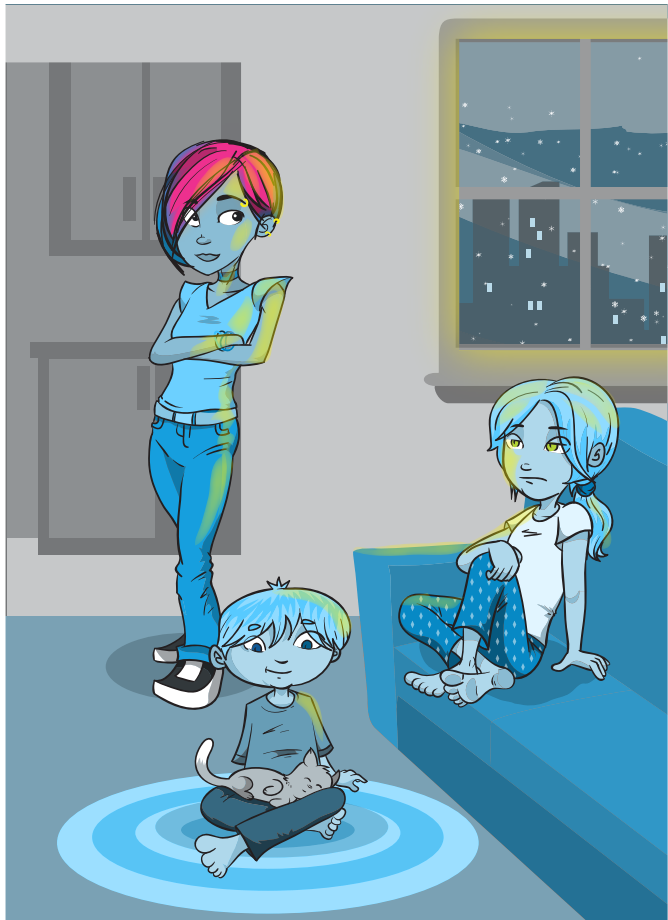
“Well it sure is snowing outside!” the weatherman said.

“I hope they are paying him the big bucks. He’s very smart,” Olive said with a sneer.

“The city is recommending that everyone stay where they are, to shelter in place, and to take all precautions during this major snow event,” the weatherman continued. “The streets are piling up with blowing and drifting snow. We’re starting to receive reports of power outages.”

“What do you guys do in a situation like this? My mom usually sends me to the store for milk and batteries,” Olive said.

Sophia thought about this for a moment. She and her mother had discussed this sort of thing. Together, they made an emergency plan and put together an emergency supply kit. The kit contained anything they would need to survive for several



days in their apartment. Hurricane, blizzard, power outage—it didn't matter. They were ready.

“Okay. Here's what I think we should do,” Sophia announced. “Joey and I need to get dressed in our warmest clothes. Think thick socks, warm pants, warm shirts or sweatshirts, whatever. We need to be ready in case the power goes out and we have no heat. Then you guys need to help me take out the emergency kit at the back of our pantry. We'll be okay. Olive, I have some extra sweatshirts that you can borrow.”

And then the power went out. The apartment was suddenly silent. There was only the ticking of the antique clock on the bookshelf and a *meow* from Mr. Whiskers, Joey's cat, somewhere in the kitchen.

**PROCEED TO “STORY CONTINUES” ON PAGE 10.**

**STORY CONTINUES**

A short time later, dressed and armed with her flashlight, Sophia went into the kitchen pantry with Olive and found the emergency supply kit she and her mother had put together. When they opened it, Olive was impressed.

“This really has everything you need, doesn’t it?!”

“My mom didn’t want to be unprepared. We decided to put this together so we could stay in the apartment for almost a week without having to venture outside. We’ve got a windup radio, flashlights, emergency blankets, food, and water. There’s even food for Mr. Whiskers.”

“My family doesn’t have anything like this,” Olive said, as she looked through the emergency kit. “This is a good idea. Look, you’ve got water, all kinds of easy-to-prepare food, cans of food, a can opener, batteries, a first aid kit.”

The power flickered back on and then off again. Joey jumped into Sophia’s lap and threw his arms tightly around her neck.

“I want Mom!” Joey whispered into Sophia’s neck.

“Do you think we should go out and look for her?” Sophia asked.



**IF SOPHIA AND OLIVE DECIDE TO GO OUT TO  
LOOK FOR MOM, GO TO PAGE 11.**

**IF SOPHIA AND OLIVE DECIDE IT IS TOO DANGEROUS TO  
GO OUTSIDE TO LOOK FOR MOM, GO TO PAGE 13.**

**SOPHIA AND OLIVE DECIDE TO GO OUT TO LOOK FOR MOM.**

“This feels like a rescue mission,” Joey said as the trio locked the apartment door behind them. “It’s like we’re Navy SEALs or something.”

“You’re such a goof,” Sophia said, pressing the elevator button.

“Um, hello? *He’s* a goof? Exactly what electricity is going to bring that elevator up for us, Sophia?” Olive said with a smile. Opening the door to the stairwell, she added, “We have to take the stairs, guys.”

Going down the stairwell wasn’t going to be easy. With the electricity out, the emergency lights just barely kept darkness at bay.

“Creepy,” Joey said.

“We should have gone back for another flashlight. I am going to get in so much trouble with your mom because of this,” Olive said.

“Everything’s going to be okay. Let’s just stay together and try not to block the light.”

Sophia was fearlessly leading the way. They had descended just one floor, with 11 more to go, when Sophia caught her boot on her pant leg, lost her balance, and fell hard on her knees and wrists. “Sophia!” Olive cried.

Sophia cried out in pain, “Ouch!”

Olive and Joey found Sophia sitting on the floor, covering her right wrist with her other hand.

“Soph, Soph, are you okay?” Joey cried.

“I’ll be okay, Joey. I came down on my wrist pretty hard, but it’ll be fine. It feels like that time I fell playing basketball. It’s okay....”



“That’s it guys. Let’s turn around. We never should have left the apartment. We’re safer staying where we were,” Olive decided.

The trio turned around and hiked back up the stairs to the apartment. They let themselves inside and then stood looking at one another. What should they do now?

**GO TO “SOPHIA AND OLIVE DECIDE IT IS TOO DANGEROUS TO GO OUTSIDE TO LOOK FOR MOM” ON PAGE 13.**

**SOPHIA AND OLIVE DECIDE IT IS TOO DANGEROUS  
TO GO OUTSIDE TO LOOK FOR MOM.**

“I want Mom,” Joey wailed.

“It’s okay, Joey. I’m here. We’ve got Olive. And we’ve got some really cool food,” Sophia said, going over to the emergency kit and showing him a package of ready-to-eat noodles.

“Don’t worry, little man,” Olive added. “This is like an adventure without going anywhere. It’s a stay-at-home adventure.”

He rolled his eyes.

“She’s right,” Sophia said. “Think about it. How would we even find Mom if we went out in this?”

“I have an idea, Joey. I don’t know why I didn’t think of this sooner!” Olive said. “My cell phone still works. Let’s text your mom.” Olive held up her phone.

Joey came right over from the window and pushed his way between Olive and Sophia. He hogged much of the blanket Olive had wrapped herself in.

“And while you two do that, I’m getting out a board game for us to play,” said Sophia, tucking her blanket around Joey.

“I typed ‘Mom, where are you? Is everything okay? We’re okay and waiting for you. Text us back. This is Olive’s phone. Joey and Sophia.’ Does that sound good?” Olive asked.

“Send it!” Joey said.

Olive and Sophia agreed that they should give Sophia’s mom some time to respond. There was no need to worry if she didn’t reply right away. Her phone could be in her purse. She might not hear it if the wind was loud. She might have gloves on. Joey agreed too, and Sophia was relieved to see her brother relaxing a little. The power flickered on momentarily, but then it went off again.

“Seems like the perfect time for a board game!” Sophia said, spreading out the choices so they could pick.

Just then, Olive’s phone beeped. It was a reply to their text.

“A few blocks from home. All okay. Hard to type in mittens. Love, Mom.”

Olive and Sophia let Joey pick the first game to play—and, of course, he picked the one he was most likely to win. After a few rounds, however, he realized something was still wrong.

“How long does a couple blocks take?” he asked.

Just then, the power came back on.

“We should go down to the lobby and wait for mom,” Joey suggested.

“I guess we could,” Sophia said.

“Maybe we should stay put,” Olive said. “The power’s back. The apartment will warm up soon. We’re safe here.”



**IF THEY DECIDE TO GO DOWN TO THE LOBBY, GO TO PAGE 15.**

**IF THEY DECIDE TO STAY PUT, GO TO PAGE 16.**

**THEY DECIDE TO GO DOWN TO THE LOBBY.**

Joey raced out the door first. He desperately wanted to see his mother. Olive wasn't so sure they had made the right decision. Locking the apartment door, Olive told Joey and Sophia that they both needed to stick close to her.

"The storm isn't even supposed to be at its worst until later this afternoon," Olive said. "It's not even lunchtime. We still need to be careful."

"You're pretty responsible for someone with pink hair," Sophia replied.

Joey was repeatedly pushing the elevator call button.

"The more you press it, the faster it goes," he said. "It's a scientific fact."

"Of course, right," Sophia said.

A tinny bell rang.

The elevator had arrived. But just as the doors slid open, the power went out once again. Another louder bell inside the elevator rang. Olive grabbed Joey's arm as he was about to step onto the elevator. She pulled him back.

"Whew! Quick thinking," Sophia told Olive.

"Come on, you two. Back to your apartment. I knew we should have stayed where we were."





**THEY DECIDE TO STAY PUT.**

The trio played one board game after another. Just as they began a game of checkers, they heard keys in the lock, and Sophia and Joey's mother walked through the door with their grandmother.

"Who wants to go out and play in the snow?" she asked, smiling.

Joey ran to his mother and nearly knocked her down with his hug.

"I think he missed you," Olive said.

"What makes you say that?" Joey's mother said as she picked him up and hugged him. She kissed his cheek. "Olive, I can't thank you enough. You really helped us out today. This snow is crazy!"

As if on cue, Joey started singing his "snow, snow, snow, snow" song. This time, he sang it loudly and happily, content that everyone was home safe.

