

Off Season
by
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BLACK: The sound of LAUGHTER, LAPPING WATER, SPLASHING.

1 INT/EXT. CABINS. DAY 1

These haunting SUMMER SOUNDS continue as a pale patch of light streaks the black revealing that we are moving over a wooden wall. It's hung with PHOTOGRAPHS. They're all summer lake scenes: sparkling water, wind-swept pine, granite shores, wooden cabins.

PHOTOS: A couple swimming. A boy in a bathing suit on a dock presents a turtle to the camera. A man and his daughter in an outboard motorboat. A woman in the sun by a cabin hangs laundry smiling.

We pass off these onto a canoeing TROPHY, a BATHING SUIT, long dry, hanging on a door knob. SOFA and CHAIRS covered protectively in newspaper.

Another cabin. We glide over an open, turned off FRIDGE, a kitchen SINK with a silent dry TAP.

We drift over an outboard BOAT sitting pulled up in a boat house next to a CANOE and a SAILBOAT HULL. A SPIDER spins a web round the propeller in the half light.

The summer sounds fade out.

FADE TO BLACK

Title: OFF SEASON

2 EXT. LAKE/CABIN NO1. WINTER DAY 2

CLOSE ON an old BOTTLE OF SUNSCREEN pokes from the snow. Next to it a DIVING BOARD slants out over a frozen lake. The granite shoreline is capped with snow and pine.

On the ice, sits a SLED, piled with BOXES of paper back NOVELS, bits of FURNITURE, a PAINTING, a TV, TINNED FOOD.

A mongrel DOG sits on top, a BLANKET draped over its body against the cold. It watches a cabin that sits at the edge of the woods. A MAN can be seen tumbling out of a window carrying a SATCHEL.

3 EXT. LAKE. MOMENTS LATER 3

The snow sweeps across the ice. We hear CRUNCHING FOOTFALLS and WHEEZING.

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED:

3

A new WAFFLE IRON is shown to the dog then thrown into one of the boxes. The rest of the satchel is emptied on to the sled: some more TINS, BATTERIES, a TROPHY.

Callused HANDS rub the dog behind the ear.

A well worn MAP is removed from inside a COAT; it shows many islands and bays. There are NUMBERS printed at various points along the shorelines. A cluster of the numbers have been CROSSED OUT in red ink.

A PEN crosses another one out and then traces a route from it to another blank number. A nearly empty BOTTLE of liquor is shook. A grunt.

MAN (O.S.)

Few more.

SKIS snap in. The empty bottle SMASHES on the ice.

4 EXT. LAKE. LATER

4

The hunch of Man's back skiing. The dog on the sled, ears flapping in the wind. An electric PLUG drags in the snow.

5 EXT. CABIN NO2. DAY

5

In front of a porch DOOR, partially covered with snow, is a plywood MAT with nails in neat rows poking deliberately *point up* through the surface. The words "ANTI-BEAR MAT" are stencilled on it.

It's kicked out of the way. The door knob is tried. A hand feels above the door frame: nothing there.

A SHUTTER is pulled back: a small, rusty, bunch of KEYS on a hook sit behind it. A soft CHUCKLE. So easy.

6 INT. CABIN NO2. DAY

6

NEWSPAPER covers the SOFAS and the DINING TABLE. Light comes through half boarded windows. SNOW is stomped through on the floor.

Summer PHOTOS on a wall. One of a PRETTY WOMAN in a bathing suit is ripped off and stuffed into a pocket.

A cheap holiday THRILLER is flicked through then cast aside. A BAG OF DOG BISCUITS and a DOG ROPE is pulled from a high shelf knocking over a JAR OF FLOUR.

7 INT. KITCHEN. DAY 7

A FRIDGE and FREEZER: unplugged, open. Man on his knees is buried head first in a CUPBOARD. Around him doors and drawers lie open.

He rummages around chucking stuff, he doesn't want out on to the floor next to him. There is the clink of bottles. A mute cry of joy. He reverses out turning and we see his face fully for the first time. Late 40s/50s, weathered.

He clutches a quarter bottle of COOKING ALCOHOL. He takes a swig from it and winces. It's terrible. He takes another swig.

8 EXT. LAKE. DAY 8

A number is crossed through on the map. The sled grinds forward sagging under its growing load.

Man hauls. The dog munches on a pile of dog biscuits.

9 EXT. CABIN NO3. DAY 9

Plywood protective COVER is torn off a window.

10 INT. CABIN NO3. DAY 10

Man flicks through a GUEST BOOK in another cabin.

MAN

"An August to remember. Great food, great company." Pah.

He rummages around on top of a shelf amongst some COCKTAIL GLASSES. He cursing under his breath, his fingers trying to feel out bottles. Glasses tumble over.

He finds something. He strains on tip toes pulling it towards him. He's got it. It's a LARGE FULL BOTTLE OF AGED SCOTCH. His face cracks into a huge smile.

11 INT. CABIN NO3. MOMENTS LATER 11

The cabin, a mess from Man's intrusion, is empty once more. The guest book lies open on a table. Underneath the last comment is scrawled in Man's red pen. THANK U.

12 EXT. DOCK. MOMENTS LATER 12

The dog stares at the bottle then licks Man's hand.

MAN

That's right. Home.

13 EXT. LAKE SHORE. DUSK 13

Man's skis and now empty sled sit against the side of a ramshackle CABIN hidden in a small bay. LIQUOR BOTTLES, TINS, ENGINE PARTS and FURNITURE scatter the snow.

14 INT. MAN'S CABIN. LATER 14

Man's cabin, filled with loot, looks like a thrift store. A FIRE burns in the hearth. The dog munches from a BOWL. Man pulls a CRYSTAL WHISKEY GLASS from one of the boxes.

MAN

Good glass for the good stuff.

He unscrews the bottle of scotch and pours himself a generous drink. He sits and takes a long quaff.

MAN (CONT'D)

Tastes even better cause it's free. Gifts of the off season.

He has another drink and fumbles in his pocket. He pulls out the dog rope he found at one of the cabins.

He dangles it in front of the dog, playfully. The dog bites it and pulls. Man tugs back. The dog wiggles its head back and forth getting down low, tail wagging.

Man gives a hard yank. Too hard. He's a bit drunk. The dog lets go. Man's arm flies back knocking the bottle of scotch. Man desperately tries to catch it as it falls.

The bottle SMASHES on the floor. Man yells and turns on the dog arm raised. He scampers back and Man drops to his knees scrabbling on the floor, trying to save some of the liquor as it seeps between the cracks.

He drinks from a broken piece of bottle and as he does sees his cowering dog. He drops the bit of glass and turns away ashamed: every bit the guilty bully.

15 INT. CABIN. LATER 15

The map is unfolded angrily. A pile of damp broken GLASS lies in the corner.

Man, with his back to the forlorn looking dog, runs his finger over the cluster of "X"s searching for a cabin he's perhaps missed.

He notices a tiny group of NUMBERS far North of the cluster. He taps them. He beckons the dog, without turning around. The mutt approaches cautiously. Man rubs his muzzle in gruff apology.

16 EXT. CABIN. LATER 16

We see the cabin; a single light in the dark wilderness.

FADE TO BLACK.

17 EXT. LAKE. NEXT DAY 17

A grim day, snow falls. We see the small silhouette of Man trundling with sled and dog over the ice. They pass between granite islands that punctuate the bleak vista.

CLOSE ON Man skis peering uncertainly at a COMPASS through frozen eyelashes. He wheezes, muttering under his breath as heading out to the open ice far from the shore.

18 EXT. LAKE. LATER 18

The runners of the sled sit still. The dog looks worried.

Man, shivering heavily, peers at the map in his hands; he's in a bay surrounded on three sides by a black, ominous, shoreline. He peers in front of him trying to find a match with anything on the map.

The dog, behind, gives a BARK: the first it's made.

MAN

That doesn't help.

Another BARK. Man turns. The dog is sitting up. BARK

There's a LIGHT on the opposite shore. Man looks harder. In the trees, almost hidden, there's a BUILDING. Man looks back at the map, puzzled.

The dog jumps off the sled.

19 EXT. OLD DOCK. DAY 19

An old dock and next to it a BOATHOUSE with a rusted SIGN nailed into its side: "TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED".

Further up sits an OLD CABIN half in the woods: lifeless except for an ELECTRIC BULB glowing on the porch.

The sound of panting and scuffling gets closer. The dog runs up onto the DOCK stopping when it reaches the shore.

Man skis in behind it breathing hard. He kicks off his skis. The dog lets out another BARK at the cabin.

MAN

(An eye to the sign)

HELLO!

His voice echoes through the trees. There's a CREAK. Man sees that the boathouse door is partially open.

20 INT. OLD BOAT HOUSE. CONTINUOUS 20

Man pushes open the door. There's nothing in it. No boat in the rafters. No sails. No life jackets. He looks back over his shoulder and sees the dog heading to the cabin.

21 EXT. OLD CABIN. MOMENTS LATER. 21

The dog is scratching and growling at the porch DOOR as Man arrives. This is the most energized we've seen him.

MAN

What's with you?

The cabin appears lifeless except for the light.

Man raises an eyebrow at the tungsten BULB then glances back towards his sled at the dock. He tries the door.

It *opens* swinging into the darkness. The dog immediately jumps in and YELPS.

Man, startled, stops in mid-step. His foot hovers over a BEAR MAT, that sits just inside the door. The nails are filthy. BLOOD runs down the length of one.

MAN (CONT'D)

(Stepping over it)

What the hell?

He peers into the gloom.

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED: 7.
21

MAN (CONT'D)
BOY? You OK?..Christ.

22 INT. OLD CABIN. CONTINUOUS 22

Man steps over the mat and into the cabin. Like the boathouse it's totally devoid of a human touch, all the furniture is there but no photos, no paintings, no books.

23 INT. KITCHEN. CONTINUOUS 23

The dog is sniffing the floor in circle trying to find something. He holds his back right PAW off the ground. Man bends down finding a deep CUT in between the pads which bleeds lightly.

MAN
That's what you get for not staying put.

He looks for something to cover the wound but there's nothing in any of the drawers. On the counter, he sees a BOOK with "GUEST BOOK" stamped on its cover. He opens it; it's completely blank inside. He shuts it uneasily.

He opens the FRIDGE. It's not on, but inside is a large, full bottle of AGED SCOTCH, the same as the one he'd found the day before. Man grabs it incredulous.

MAN (CONT'D)
Someone's looking out for me.

Shaking his head he opens it and...

The dogs caught the scent it was looking for and starts scratching and pawing urgently at the BACK DOOR leading off the kitchen. Man lowers the scotch, a flicker of concern on his face.

He turns the knob and this time holds the straining dog back with his leg.

The door opens to reveal a dark room lit only by weak beams of light slicing through the cracks in the walls.

A low HUM emanates from it.

24 INT. BACK ROOM. CONTINUOUS 24

He cautiously enters but now the dog won't follow.

(CONTINUED)

MAN

Make up your mind.

The room is bare except for an old-fashioned front opening FREEZER about 5ft x 3ft with a metal lever LATCH on the outside.

It's the cause of the HUM. It's on.

The Man reaches forward, bottle almost at his lips and pulls the handle, swinging the door open.

Inside the freezer is a LITTLE BLONDE GIRL in a swimsuit. She is maybe only 6 at best. She clutches a TEDDY BEAR. She and the bear are completely frozen solid. Both their eyes stare out at him.

Man drops the bottle which shatters on the floor. His face pales. The dog starts BARKING loudly from the door.

Man backs out of the room, sliding on scotch and glass.

INT. KITCHEN. CONTINUOUS.

Man backs into the kitchen gasping for breath. He turns to leave and sees inside the fridge: there's an identical SCOTCH BOTTLE. He freezes terrified and then bolts.

EXT. DOCK. MOMENTS LATER

Man runs down the icy dock. He looks behind and sees the dog limping slowly down towards him from the cabin. He hesitates, not wanting to go back but sees the dog is struggling.

He scurries back cursing grabbing the dog up in his arms.

He looks back at the cabin. There's a FIGURE with a pale face in one of the windows. Man turns and bolts.

EXT. DOCK. MOMENTS LATER

Man slides off the end of the dock, almost falling with the weight of the dog.

He fumbles with his skis with one hand, clutching the dog with the other. He doesn't look up. The skis snap in.

28 EXT. LAKE. MOMENTS LATER 28

Man skis hard, the dog in his arms, resting on the satchel. No sled. The light fading quickly.

Blood from the dog's paw runs down the bag and into the snow. In Man's pocket the top of the scotch bottle clunks. He couldn't resist.

29 INT. MAN'S CABIN. LATER 29

The flare of a MATCH as an OIL LAMP is lit. Man kneels on the floor over the dog.

He unscrews the bottle of scotch puts a MUG underneath the dog's injured paw and pours the liquor over the cut.

The dog whines softly, Man strokes its head.

MAN

Sorry.

Blood and scotch mingle in the mug. Man hesitates, then drinks it down.

30 INT. MAN'S CABIN LATER 30

Man sits at the table, the half empty scotch bottle next to him. The dog lies bandaged, breathing shallowly at his feet.

He looks at the map, his finger on a bay where no cabins are marked.

He stares at his reflection in the black window horribly distorted by the old glass. It's a blurred pale FACE, malevolent, hooded.

It's NOT his face.

He stumbles violently to his feet grabbing the lamp as he does so. He trips on the dog. Man falls and the lamp flickers then goes out.

31 INT. MAN'S BEDROOM. LATER 31

Only dimly lit we see Man lying in bed. The covers are pulled tightly up. He has one arm around the dog. The other clutches the bottle of Scotch. His eyes are wide.

31 CONTINUED:

31

The wind whips round the cabin making the drawn lock on the door rattle.

FADE TO BLACK

Faint dog barking FADES IN

FADE IN:

32 INT. MAN'S CABIN. EARLY DAWN

32

Man wakes slowly. A blur. Very pale dawn flickers through thin curtains. Muffled BARKING in the distance.

Man blinks the sleep out of his eyes. He cuddles the dog tightly. But what's barking then? His forehead creases, he looks down at what he holds.

It's the TEDDY BEAR. Its black eyes stare up at him. The dog's BARKING comes into sharp loud focus instantly.

Man bounds out of his camper bed. He wears only dirty long johns. He's wide awake backed up against the wall.

He recovers slightly and begins rummaging in amongst the blankets. But no bear. Nothing. Not in the bed or under it. It's not there. His imagination perhaps.

Man turns his attention to the BARKING and sees a trail of BLOOD, worse than the day before leading out of the bedroom. He looks panicked.

33 INT. CABIN. DAY

33

The trail of blood continues out the front door which swings wide open letting snow blow into the cabin. The half bottle of scotch sits on the table. The door swinging open.

In the distance he can see the black silhouette of the dog far out on the lake barking into the distance.

MAN

HEY!

He grabs his thick coat and hops into his boots.

34 EXT. CABIN. DAY

34

Man runs out of the cabin but the lake's empty now. No dog. Silence.

(CONTINUED)

34 CONTINUED:

34

Man spins round peering into the dark woods. He looks back at the door to his cabin swinging open, the scotch on the table.

Then starts walking cautiously down to the lake.

35 EXT. LAKE SHORE. DAY

35

Paw tracks and blood lead from the shore into the distance. Man stands on the edge of the ice. Then a BARK from way off in the distance.

MAN

(Shouting into the lake)

I'M NOT COMING...NOT COMING.

Silence.

MAN (CONT'D)

(Shouting)

NO WAY. GET YOURSELF HOME!

He moves to the cabin. Then shakes his head in frustration.

36 EXT. LAKE. LATER

36

Man trudges along the ice. He's shivering in his long johns. The tracks have disappeared in the snow.

He's completely lost. He searches on the ground looking for traces of blood or paw prints. Bubbles, from the weight of his body, skitter unpleasantly in the blackness beneath the ice.

Then a BARK. The dog is on a distant, empty, shoreline. Man struggles to his feet and stumbles towards it.

37 EXT. SHORELINE. DAY

37

Man gets to the shore. He pauses breathing hard. He looks round. His eyes widen.

He's at the old cabin and the dog is already limping towards it.

MAN

No. Come on, Boy.

The dog doesn't listen as though propelled by an unseen force.

(CONTINUED)

37 CONTINUED:

37

Man, hesitates, then desperately follows passing the door of the boathouse which gapes open to the darkness inside.

He's so focused on the dog that he doesn't see what we do: the little girl's swimsuit in a dirty, wet, pile on the floor, slowly defrosting.

38 EXT. CABIN. DAY

38

The dog pushes open the porch door. Man frantically tries to get to him before he enters but, as he grabs for him, the bulb above him flickers on. The tungsten glows a sickly orange.

Man begins to tremble. Sweat beads on his upper lip. The screen door screeches as he opens it and steps inside.

39 INT. CABIN. CONTINUOUS

39

The nails of the bear mat sink into Man's foot. A long one poking out through the top.

He lets out a stifled cry, tears coming to his eyes. He lifts his foot off, biting his lip so hard it bleeds in an attempt to keep quiet.

He sees the dog sitting in the darkness by the kitchen entrance staring at him.

He limps towards it and as he does he sees The Guest-book lying open, its pages no longer blank but soiled with a messy, brownish scrawl. The comments are barely legible: "GET OUT. GET THE FUCK OUT. GET FUCKING OUT. GET OUT."

Man pushes it away and desperately beckons to the dog.

MAN

(Whispering)

Let's go Boy. Let's go.

He gets closer and sees that the dog, bleeding copiously from all of its paws, is transfixed.

Man suddenly realizes that he is not looking at him but past him.

We see behind Man a LARGE DARK SILHOUETTE at the screen door, facing out towards the lake.

Man turns to see the FIGURE who in one hand grips the NECK of the LITTLE GIRL, holding her bent, frozen, body, like a piece of luggage. Man GASPS.

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED:

39

The dog leans forward towards the figure its lips pulled back in a snarl. Man grabs it, clenching its jaws shut. He picks it up and awkwardly carries it back into the cabin away from the thing at the door.

40 INT. OLD CABIN KITCHEN. CONTINUOUS

40

He backs into the kitchen. There is nowhere to hide. He can hear the SQUEAK of the screen door opening.

The dog scrabbles desperately in his arms. There is a slow, heavy, step. He grasps the knob to the back room: the only exit.

41 INT. BACK ROOM CABIN. CONTINUOUS

41

Man slips in and closes the door carefully. It's very dark. Only a few weak beams of twilight illuminate his terrified face.

Another sliding creak, surprisingly close. The dog scrabbles in Man's arms. He desperately tries to keep it quiet.

He sees the light around the door frame blocked.

He backs up further crouching into the darkness. The door handle shifts slightly

Man takes a steps back. His heels catch something. He slips backwards. CLUNK.

TOTAL BLACK. There is just the breathing of Man and the slight mute whine of the dog.

A low electrical HUM clicks in. Man's breath catches. A soft moan.

There is the sound of fumbling. A match is lit. Man's face in the flickering light fills with absolute horror.

They're curled up in the freezer and it's been switched on.

The match goes out. Pitch darkness again. He slams on the door, but it's a tiny space. The dog starts to bark and scrabble. Man hammers on the door.

MAN

HELLO? HELLO? PLEASE? I'M SORRY.
I'M SORRY.

42 EXT. BACK ROOM. CONTINUOUS

42

We see the freezer rocking back and forth but the latch on the outside holds firm. The pitiful cries of the man and the frenzied barking of the dog are muffled.

We pull out of the back-room through the now open door into the kitchen.

No one is there. There is complete silence other than the receding cries and thumping.

We pass the open fridge and the empty shelves.

There's no blood on the floor now. It's spotless. The Guest Book lies shut.

The cries and the thumping get fainter.

We move out through the living room and onto the porch where the bulb is dead already collecting light snow on its top.

Man's distress is almost inaudible now.

We move past the boathouse and the "Trespassers will be prosecuted" sign.

Out on to the dock and then the empty lake, leaving the silent, receding, shore waiting for the return of summer..

FADE TO BLACK

CREDITS