



BLEAK WINTER

by Ron Schaefer

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BLEAK WINTER

by

RON SCHAEFER

a drama in 5 acts

Characters:

Martin – a biochemist
Holliwell – an aging recluse
Annabella –
Gingerlyn – his two daughters
Norman – a rescuer
Lump – a mute servant

Setting:

An island in a cold climate – perhaps off one of the New England coasts or in the Great Lakes

Time Period:

Contemporary

Running Time:

1 hour, 45 minutes, approximate without break
5 Acts, 29 Scenes, 1 location with outdoor extension
73 pages

On staging: it was envisioned (in thrust/proscenium) as a single large interior divided into living room, dining room, and outlets to kitchen and elsewhere. A staircase ascends up to a balcony with 3 doors displaying 3 bedrooms which are lit only when it is necessary to see inside these rooms. Otherwise, by scrim, curtain, or other method, they are walls with doorways. The extreme down front is set aside for outdoor scenes – a place for snow and ice. There is one brief motel scene that can be set and spotlighted anywhere just for a diversion.

I-1

ACT ONE
Scene One

I-1

Interior of a rustic home, like a hunting lodge, walls of layered wood, either log cabin in style or just roughly shaped. Animal heads and pelts on walls. American Indian types of blankets on walls and furniture. A dining area, a living room area, a staircase up to a bedroom door with another two down the hall. Windows with shutters. An entrance to the outside world. A big, heavy fireplace assumes an austere presence somewhere in the midst of this with a collection of trinkets, oddities, and bones on the mantelpiece.

MARTIN, a man of about 30, dressed in all weather gear and backpack, steps up to one of the windows from the outside. He has a slight gash on his head. He goes over to the door and knocks. He steps back and peers again through the window, rapping on the pane. He returns to the door and knocks again. Finally he opens it and enters.

He steps about cautiously, looking for any sign of life, and finds himself staring at the oddities on the walls.

MARTIN

Hello! Anybody home? Mind if I step in for a minute?
I'm kind of lost. Do you have a phone? Mind if I use your
fireplace a moment? Anybody?

Martin goes to the fireplace and tries to start a fire, finds some matches and kindling, and some extra stored wood and lights up. He rubs his hands and shoulders and tries to stir some heat into his bones.

He sits, looking about the room. He attempts to bandage his wounded head with whatever he has in his kit. He then curls up by the fire and falls asleep.

An aging man, HOLLIWELL, covered up completely in a parka, boots, gloves, so that he is unrecognizable and has the appearance of some sort of animal enters from somewhere in back. Holliwell walks with an old selale-like cane. He approaches the fire, and sees Martin curled up on the floor. He stands waiting, and wondering.

Martin wakes. Startled, he sits up.

MARTIN

You live here? Sorry for barging in. The door was open.
I knocked. I was lost. I got separated from...

HOLLIWELL

Your canoe?

MARTIN

Excuse me?

HOLLIWELL

That was your canoe?

MARTIN

Uh yeah. Yeah.

HOLLIWELL

Bad luck.

MARTIN

You've seen it then.

HOLLIWELL

(pointing with cane)

It's having a merry cruise down the channel.

LUMP, a huge "wild man" steps up, also from the back. Martin flinches at his presence, but tries to remain calm. Lump carries a shotgun and a dead bird (such as a wild turkey). He dresses in something that looks like a big hairy suit giving him that "Bigfoot" appearance.

MARTIN

I didn't know anyone was on this island. I thought it was uninhabited.

HOLLIWELL

(pulling back his hood)

You and many others.

Holliwell gives Lump a signal. Lump stares at Martin for a moment and then exits. Holliwell begins to pull himself out of his parka. He is an older man, having something of the wild nature in him, but also has a sophisticated and civilized air about him.

HOLLIWELL

That fire will only warm your exterior.

Holliwell goes to the dining area, to a bar cabinet, and pulls out a bottle of bourbon. He sets aside two glasses and pours each. He returns to Martin and offers him one of the glasses.

MARTIN

Thanks.

HOLLIWELL

I'm afraid you're stuck for a while. We have no way of getting you to your conveyance.

MARTIN

You live on this island and don't have a boat?

HOLLIWELL

I'm afraid we don't. We have things sent for when we need

them.

MARTIN

A phone, maybe? I had a cell but it died. Couldn't get reception anyway.

HOLLIWELL

I'm afraid we don't go in much for gadgets. Power is very limited here.

MARTIN

You don't find that inconvenient?

HOLLIWELL

No I don't. You are welcome to stay though.

MARTIN

Thanks.

HOLLIWELL

As for your boat, we'll see what we can do. Dinner will be at seven. I hope you like wild turkey. This one's young, it shouldn't be too tough. I'll give you something to wear as well. You may want to get out of those things.

MARTIN

Thanks for all the trouble you're going to.

HOLLIWELL

It's no trouble.

Holliwell limps through one of the doors. Martin sits alone wondering what to do. He hears giggling somewhere nearby, undoubtedly from female voices, looks about him, and can't find its source.

Martin stares off into the fire when a robe is thrown over him.

HOLLIWELL

That'll do for now. You may change in there.

Holliwell points the way to a room upstairs, and Martin follows the direction, robe in hand. There is more giggling from somewhere. Holliwell disappears somewhere in the back.

Martin returns, berobed, and descends the staircase. He has a look at the bookcase set aside in the living room. On it he finds some bleached bones – some of which have been painted.

Holliwell returns, and watches Martin examining the bones.

HOLLIWELL

Hollow. Clever animal group – birds. Ornithology is something of a hobby of mine. Well, the robe seems to have done you no harm. I'll let the girls see to your things.

MARTIN

Girls?

HOLLIWELL

Oh yes. May I present my daughters. Come on out, you shy little things; he won't bite.

Two Young Women poke their heads out from behind a door, making whispering and giggling noises as they do. They approach the open room with the caution of wild squirrels. One is blonde, one is brunette. They are dressed in garments that have a ring of peasantry in them. They appear to be too young to be Holliwell's daughters.

HOLLIWELL

Come, come. Don't be all day about it. Come and meet our guest.

They stand shyly near their father, ready to run at the slightest noise.

HOLLIWELL

This is...

MARTIN

Martin DeBaines.

HOLLIWELL

A Mister DeBaines. He's had a little accident. He'll be staying with us for a little while. These are my daughters: Annabella, and Gingerlyn. My name is Holliwell.

MARTIN

Just call me Martin.

They look him over like a new source of food. Annabella, the dark-haired one, speaks first.

ANNABELLA

He doesn't look at all like you told us.

GINGERLYN

He has a wankie, doesn't he?

HOLLIWELL

You must forgive them, they don't get many visitors out here.

MARTIN

I'm not surprised. Is anybody on the mainland even aware of this place?

HOLLIWELL

One or two.

MARTIN

Don't you – they – find it a bit lonely out here?

HOLLIWELL

We all find what we need when we need it. And we don't appear to be in want of anything, including companionship. Go on, girls, you've got his laundry to freshen up.

The girls run away, giggling.

HOLLIWELL

Some more bourbon, perhaps?

MARTIN

Uh, sure.

HOLLIWELL

Here. I'll leave the bottle. I'd love to stay and chat, you must have some fascinating tales of your exploits; but as we are never ready to receive guests, I'm afraid I must see to the preparation of dinner myself. It gets dark early and we only have a nominal use of electricity. We are not much for many of the conveniences of civilization so I'm afraid there's no television. There are, however, books you may peruse here and in the library down the hall.

MARTIN

Thanks. I'll be fine.

HOLLIWELL

I leave you to yourself.

Holliwell disappears through a door as Martin takes another sip of brandy. Giggling is heard from somewhere in back. Martin stares out the window.

I-2

Scene Two

I-2

Evening. The home is mostly lit with oil lamps, candles and such. There is a glow of some electric light coming from the kitchen. Everyone is sitting around the dining table. Dinner is served. Holliwell heads the table carving the gamebird he shot earlier in the day. Lump is not present.

HOLLIWELL

White or dark meat, Mister DeBaines? I'm afraid there isn't much in the form of white meat on a wild bird such as this.

MARTIN

Doesn't matter.

HOLLIWELL

You know we've had a spell of fairly decent weather recently. You were in luck not to get here during one of our arctic blasts, you could've froze to death out there.

ANNABELLA

It gets awfully nippy sometimes.

GINGERLYN

Sister used to say it'd freeze your tits off.

ANNABELLA

Tsszt!

GINGERLYN

Well you did!

HOLLIWELL

Girls.

ANNABELLA

What brings you up this way?

MARTIN

Research.

GINGERLYN

Research? What kind of research do you do out here?

ANNABELLA

Tch!

HOLLIWELL

Actually, that's a fairly respectable question, if our guest doesn't mind indulging us a bit further...

MARTIN

No, I don't mind. I'm a biochemist. I work at an independent lab that's partly funded through the state university system. Our primary work at the moment is in looking for trace elements of various pollutants in both the ground and running water in the area.

HOLLIWELL

Hear that, he's here to make our water clean.

GINGERLYN

I thought it was clean already.

MARTIN

Well it, for the most part, is. But there's always that small percentage we need to find out about.

HOLLIWELL

We use exclusively well water around here.

GINGERLYN

Is that safe?

MARTIN

As far as I know.

ANNABELLA

So what do you do exactly?

MARTIN

I take samples of water from various locations: the shore of a stream, middle of a lake, bottom of a well – put 'em all in these little tubes, spin 'em in a centrifuge, look at 'em under a microscope...that kind of thing. And that's all I do all day long.

GINGERLYN

Well that sounds boring!

ANNABELLA

Sister!

MARTIN

Ha-ha! She's right, y'know. It *can* get a little boring. That's why I volunteer for field work, so I'm not stuck in a lab all the time.

GINGERLYN

What's a centrifuge?

HOLLIWELL

(sighs)

It's a machine that spins things around.

MARTIN

It separates lighter from heavier compounds.

GINGERLYN

That's important?

HOLLIWELL

You must forgive my daughters. I've tried to give them a proper education all alone; but, you see what I have to work with.

MARTIN

They were raised on this island?

HOLLIWELL

Oh yes.

MARTIN

And they have never been to school?

HOLLIWELL

At times. When I could afford it. When I didn't disapprove of what was being taught through their curricula.

MARTIN

And their Mother also taught...

HOLLIWELL

Their Mother is dead.

MARTIN

I see. Have either of you thought of continuing your studies...

HOLLIWELL

No. They have not.

MARTIN

Hm.

HOLLIWELL

More meat, Mister DeBaines?

MARTIN

No. No thank you. I have plenty.

HOLLIWELL

Are you sure? You know, fowl is one of Annabella's specialties!

MARTIN

Oh, is it, now! So you were the chef?

ANNABELLA

Just on the bird.

MARTIN

Well then, maybe just a little bit.

HOLLIWELL

Aha! That's a healthy man speaking!

GINGERLYN

(jealously)

I made the dressing!

MARTIN

Yes, it's very good.

HOLLIWELL

Now now, you eat up what you like, as much as you like. You have to get your strength back. We'll see about getting you ashore in the morning. You leave that to us!

MARTIN

Thank you, I sure do appreciate all this.

HOLLIWELL

Believe me, it's our treat.

Martin continues to eat. Holliwell and the girls smile at each other. Martin looks up and smiles back at them. They continue their dinner.

I-3

Scene Three

I-3

Upstairs. Martin readies himself for bed. Annabella stops by, knocks.

MARTIN

Yes?

ANNABELLA

How do you sleep?

MARTIN

Excuse me?

ANNABELLA

How do you sleep? Do you like something on your feet? Do you wear something to bed? Or do you sleep...you know.

MARTIN

I guess since I'm used to knocking about in the woods, I dress to suit the occasion. Why?

ANNABELLA

Papa asked me to give you one of his nightshirts, if you wanted it.