

australian.  
**script**  
centre

# THE ICE SEASON

by Verity Laughton

EXTRACT

This script is distributed by the  
Australian Script Centre, trading  
as [australianplays.org](http://australianplays.org)

77 Salamanca Place Hobart  
7004 Tasmania Australia

[admin@australianplays.org](mailto:admin@australianplays.org)  
<http://australianplays.org>  
Tel +61 3 6223 4675  
Fax +61 3 6223 4678

© 2009 Verity Laughton

CAST LIST:

CATHERINE, a woman in her mid 30s

MICHAEL, a Scottish soldier, late 20s, (a good singing voice)

FATHER JOHN HOUSEMAN, a Catholic priest, about 55

VICKI, a young Australian woman, early 20s

JAKE, Catherine's husband's son, 38 (English)

SET: in a small country town in the hilly country close to a capital city in Australia.

TIME: contemporary

LOCATIONS: Vary from a country graveyard to a side bar of a pub to a courtyard between two houses, to a room in each of those houses, to a back yard with a broken fence

**THE ICE SEASON: ACT 1, SCENE 1**

*A graveyard behind a small church in an isolated country town in the outlying hills district of an Australian city*

*The end of summer*

*Dusk*

*There is an open grave, draped with ropes over which is suspended a coffin.*

*Near to the grave is a hawthorn tree, spiky with thorns.*

MICHAEL stands on one side of the grave, FATHER JOHN on the other.

CATHERINE stands at the head of the grave.

FATHER JOHN: Now.

*The men take the double ropes in their hands.*

*They lower the coffin into the grave. Wait.*

CATHERINE: Just the poem.

FATHER JOHN: Catherine –

CATHERINE: The poem.

FATHER JOHN

(beat) (reads)

“My tidings for you, the stag bells,  
Winter snows, summer is gone,  
Wind high and cold, low the sun  
Short his course, the seas running high

Deep-red the bracken, its shape all gone  
The wild goose has raised his wonted cry:  
Cold has caught the wings of birds  
Seasons of ice, these are my tidings.”

CATHERINE: And the next.

FATHER JOHN: “Dust to dust, ash to ash, for the life of a man is both brief and vain.”

CATHERINE: Yes. Thank you. Yes.

FATHER JOHN looks over to the Michael. A look passes between them, an almost imperceptible nod.

FATHER JOHN: We can go now, Catherine.

CATHERINE *shakes her head.*

FATHER JOHN *turns to go, then turns back*

FATHER JOHN: Thomas Allen. May the Lord bless you and keep you, may He lift up the light of His countenance upon you and give you peace both now and for evermore. Amen.

CATHERINE *gives him a filthy look*

FATHER JOHN: Catherine, he was a believer!

(beat)

Please come now.

CATHERINE: No.

*Exit* FATHER JOHN

CATHERINE *looks at MICHAEL. He looks away, then turns himself to face half away.*

CATHERINE *sinks to her knees in front of the grave. She sobs.*

*It passes. MICHAEL steps forward to offer a hand to help CATHERINE up. She shakes her head, casts about to push herself up by one hand. Her hand finds an empty bird's nest on the ground.*

CATHERINE: (horrified) A nest?

MICHAEL: (Scottish accent) It's an old one. I knocked it from the hawthorn there when I was digging. I tried to put it back. See?(his hand) Pox thorns have made a mess of me.

*She stares at him, blank.*

But no one's using it. The bird has gone.

CATHERINE: What did you say?

MICHAEL: I knocked it. It's old.

CATHERINE: The bird has gone. You said. The bird has gone.

MICHAEL: Yes. It has.

CATHERINE: It has.

MICHAEL: Has it?

*She wipes her eyes*

CATHERINE: He said. There is a place. You wake up each morning to the shock of it. You go to sleep each night with it hollow inside. It is vast; horizonless; echoing. That's how he spoke; how he wrote. He said - this place is inhabited by tiny figures, all separate, never touching, wandering without direction over cold grey ice.

MICHAEL: He said that? This man?

CATHERINE: He said - it will pass.

MICHAEL: He said.

CATHERINE: I don't believe him.

*She drops the nest back on the earth. He watches as she stands.*

*Exit CATHERINE.*

*MICHAEL picks up the nest. He throws it into the grave. He looks after Catherine. Then he picks up his shovel and thrusts a large mound of dirt on top of Thomas Allen's coffin.*

**THE ICE SEASON: ACT 1, SCENE 2**

*A side bar in the local pub. Night.*

*The dark outside*

*Inside, dull electric light. MICHAEL and FATHER JOHN are in raucous confabulation.*

*There are two lines of full glasses of beer in neat parallel on the counter of the bar, one line next to MICHAEL and one next to FATHER JOHN*

MICHAEL: So! What, Father John, is the meaning of Fate?

FATHER JOHN: Fate. Oh.

MICHAEL: A song. This time it's a song.

FATHER JOHN: Not an aphorism? Isn't round two an aphorism?

MICHAEL: A song, sod y'!

FATHER JOHN: Uhhh. Wait a tic. Uhhh.

MICHAEL: And the winner is –!

*He leans to take a glass from the line of drinks next to FATHER JOHN*

FATHER JOHN: Wait! (beat) (sings) "So you'll take the high road -!"

MICHAEL: Hah! Well done, ya poxy priest! " - and I'll take the low road! - "

FATHER JOHN: "And I'll be in Scotland afore ye!"

MICHAEL: Misapprehension, Father! I'll be there before ye! (singing)  
"Where me and –

FATHER JOHN: - "An' ma true love – "

MICHAEL: - ' Were ever wont to go – "

BOTH: "By tha' bonnie bonnie banks o' Loch Lomond!"

FATHER JOHN: So! Fate as choice! You're a comfort to me, Michael.

*He takes a drink from Michael's line and downs it smartly*

MICHAEL: Not choice, ya daft ignorant begger! One version of 'the

high road' was the pike they put your head on.

FATHER JOHN: What about the 'low road' then?

MICHAEL: Another version has 'y singer taking the low road down.  
– as in to the underworld, y' get it?

FATHER JOHN: So you're damned if you do and damned if you don't.

MICHAEL: Exactly. Fate. Modern version is -

FATHER JOHN: Surplus to requirements, Michael! It's my /

MICHAEL: Fate /

FATHER JOHN: / turn now! /

MICHAEL: / is just one bullet.

FATHER JOHN: (beat) That's not a song. (beat) As I was saying. My turn now, eh? What - (bad Scots accent) - ya poxy digger of holes - (normal accent again) - is the meaning of Work?! And I believe round three is an anecdote.

MICHAEL: (laughs) (beat) Right. Oh. Nah...wait.....(he has it) Right! Listen. First...There's the poxy sergeant and – erm – he was a poxy sergeant no doubt o' that – he had craters in his puir skin that ye could have driven the bloody moon buggy through. Yes. And – the sergeant gets us all together – y' new recruits y' know, y' puir wee tragics, y' soft lads – 'cause ye're all soft, see, no matter how hard you may think y' may happen to be, what bloody punishment ye've given, or taken, y' soft because y' got no discipline, y' just a lad –

FATHER JOHN: Michael.

MICHAEL: Father?

FATHER JOHN: Your point.

MICHAEL: Ta – upt! Attention, see. An' we stand in a row and he walks up and down and he goes – you – you – you – and it's one lad's boots an' another one's belt and another one's not shaved himself proper on account of someone nicked his good razor and he's only got some mangy disposable left – and they all, we all – 'cos the chap with the razor – that's me, see – we all get us some double guard duty and a cancellation of our next weekend pass.

FATHER JOHN: So your point is discipline.

MICHAEL: Aye. It's work to do it but it'll be what makes things work. Because once y're in the war zone who gives a shit about your shiny shoes or whatever 'cos it's not the shoes, of course it's not, but it's the lack of discipline will kill you.

FATHER JOHN: The discipline?

MICHAEL: I liked the discipline, man. What I didn't like was the war zone.

CATHERINE enters. She has a bottle of red wine in her hand.

Ey. War zone.

CATHERINE: Is it true he had a son?

FATHER JOHN: Catherine, I –

CATHERINE: Is it true Tom had a - !?

FATHER JOHN: My dear –

CATHERINE: It's not even on the internet!

FATHER JOHN: No.

CATHERINE: But you knew.

FATHER JOHN: (beat) He was very, very young. She was a lot older.

CATHERINE: And you never thought to tell me?!

FATHER JOHN: Tom never told you!

CATHERINE: No, he did not – yet now there is this – person – made from Thomas! - coming – here –

FATHER JOHN: Oh, no...

CATHERINE: - coming here! No doubt to press the point for his non-existent inheritance...

*The energy is almost gone. She's fading.*

FATHER JOHN: Catherine?

CATHERINE: Poor John.

FATHER JOHN: Poor John?

CATHERINE: The meat in the sandwich again, as ever.

FATHER JOHN: (smiles) Poor John.

CATHERINE: I'm sorry.

FATHER JOHN: Never mind. When - ?

CATHERINE: I don't know. Maybe he won't come. Maybe...

*Father John looks at her*

FATHER JOHN: How did you hear?

CATHERINE: A text message. This man on the other side of the world whom I did not know existed somehow has my number and has sent me a text.

FATHER JOHN: Texted you.

CATHERINE: (beat) I'll ring the lawyers.

FATHER JOHN: Better to see them face-to-face.

CATHERINE: You think?

FATHER JOHN: In this case. I think.

*She indicates the bottle of wine*

CATHERINE: There was no one in the Drive Away.

MICHAEL: The man's not here, neither.

CATHERINE *ignores* MICHAEL.

CATHERINE (to FATHER JOHN): Will you pay for it for me?

FATHER JOHN: Of course.

*She gives him some money*

CATHERINE: It might help me sleep. (the bottle of wine)

FATHER JOHN: It might.

CATHERINE: I have all this...stuff. How could there be so much...stuff? He said I must just...clean him out of my life.

FATHER JOHN: Not yet. Not on your own

CATHERINE: I am on my own.

FATHER JOHN: We'll find help.

*She looks at him*

*Exit* CATHERINE.

MICHAEL: Well.

FATHER JOHN: Whatever you are thinking, stop thinking it now.

MICHAEL: I'm not a mangy priest, given his balls to God! I'll think what I like!

FATHER JOHN: Her husband's just dead.

MICHAEL: I seen him. I seen them both these last couple of months. They come up here for the dying. They must have.

FATHER JOHN: Look, I know. A woman like that –

MICHAEL: Yes?

FATHER JOHN: A woman like that is something of a miracle. A man's eyes are drawn to her, a man's heart leaps as if it's found an answer, he imagines that – with that woman – he can be the man he should be, the man he was born to be – but -

MICHAEL: She loved that sorry speck I covered with dirt the other day. She come back after I filled it to sit by the grave.

*Pause.*

MICHAEL: What is the meaning of Love, Father John?

FATHER JOHN: Ah.

MICHAEL: What?!

FATHER JOHN: (beat) (drinks) Red wine. Soft skin.

MICHAEL: Yes. Red wine. Soft skin. Yes.(drinks) How long since you've been with a woman, Father?

FATHER JOHN: How long since you've been to mass, Michael?

MICHAEL: Ha! Well defended on the right flank! I'm not a Catholic.

FATHER JOHN: Then what are you doing digging graves in my churchyard?

MICHAEL: I'm digging graves in your churchyard, Father, because ye're the only beggar'll give me a job!

FATHER JOHN: I don't believe that, a handy chap like you. You'd pick up work wherever you went.

MICHAEL: I've went here.

FATHER JOHN: You know. I noticed that.

MICHAEL: That poem she had you read.

FATHER JOHN: ( sings)  
"Speed bonny boat, like a bird on the wing -

MICHAEL: The poem's a Scots one -

FATHER JOHN: So's my song!

MICHAEL: Y' no Kenneth Mackellar! /

FATHER JOHN: /Onward the sailors cry -!" /

MICHAEL: / The poem. The original is in Gaelic.

FATHER JOHN: So you're a literary man now?

MICHAEL: I'm no literary man, Father. But I went to school. Bit of a Gaelic revival scene there for a couple of years. I could quote you that poem and half a dozen others. I'm a man who remembers stuff.

(beat) "Dust to dust, ash to ash, for the life of a man is both brief and vain." Did he write that? Thomas Allen?

FATHER JOHN: Yes, a long time ago. At the time as I recall he was definitely not a believer in anything other than Thomas Allen.

(sings)  
"Baffled our foes  
Stand by the shore,  
Ocean's a royal bed - "

MICHAEL: Why does a woman choose a Gaelic poem and mourn like a babby for a man she's fucking furious with?

FATHER JOHN: None of your business.

MICHAEL: What if I make it my business?

FATHER JOHN: Then I would have to warn you not to.

MICHAEL: One of the good things, Father, about no longer being in Her Majesty's employment is that I no longer have any obligation to obey some fucker's orders.

FATHER JOHN: What's a Gaelic poem between friends and why wouldn't a woman mourn her husband?

MICHAEL: When I was a kid I used to imagine me mam had been something like that. The finest thing, perfection. Clear enough from what my Granny said that she weren't. But I've always had an imagination of what it might be. So, you're right. It's not the poem. It's more like – who is she, this fine thing?

FATHER JOHN: Grieving. The woman's grieving.

MICHAEL: "The bird has gone."

FATHER JOHN: She's lost her love!

MICHAEL: She's lost more than love, man. She's eviscerated!

FATHER JOHN: I find you a tad presumptuous, Michael.

MICHAEL: The place she's in. I know that place. I know every footfall, I know it.

FATHER: Michael, this may be an over reaction but I feel it my duty to repeat the fact that I consider Catherine as being under my protection.

MICHAEL: I'm just the gravedigger, man!

FATHER JOHN: Under my protection.

MICHAEL: Ye're a pompous drunken old fool!

FATHER JOHN: D' y' want y' job, Michael?

MICHAEL: I wasna insulting you!

FATHER JOHN: And I was not passing an idle comment!  
(beat) Catherine –

MICHAEL: Ye're a priest, man! Y' field is the hereafter.

FATHER JOHN: You know, Michael, there are times when even a priest would settle for a human life with a lovely woman and no hereafter.

*Michael stares at him*

MICHAEL: Ye'll have left y' left flank undefended there, Father.

FATHER JOHN: But you'll have taken my warning.

MICHAEL: "Poor John".

FATHER JOHN: (really angry) You thankless, faithless – !

MICHAERL: (sings)  
    'Baffled our foes  
    Stand by the shore.  
    Ocean's a royal bed –

FATHER JOHN: (Sings)  
    Rocked by the waves  
    Flora will keep  
    Watch by his weary head –

BOTH: (sing)  
    Speed bonny boat like a bird on the wing  
    Over the see to (they harmonise, beautifully) – Skye!