

theatre alibi



The Freeze

Education Pack

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The Freeze: the story

by Daniel Jamieson

This is the original story on which the show was based. The company used it as a basis for devising. The final script was written later on in the process.

Narrator: It never used to snow like this. Maybe once in a blue moon. You can tell how unusual it is because nobody's got the weather gear to cope with it. M & S don't sell arctic parkas yet. Pensioners are being pulled like ice lollies from snowdrifts up and down the country but in M&S the rails are still full of shower-proof anoraks.

Michael Fish says it's here to stay. Something to do with Global Warming and the Gulf Stream. It's all our fault apparently. Who'd've thought you could change the weather by mistake. Every time you turned the ignition key of your car – whoops! – another snow shower twenty years down the line. How do you explain it to your kids? “Wrap up son, 'cause your mother and I drove to B&Q once too often and inadvertently started an ice age.”

Look at these two. They've got other things to worry about than the weather. They came here to talk because it used to be a quiet wine bar. When they found it had changed to a nightclub two years ago they couldn't think of anywhere else to go. As it turns out, it doesn't matter anyway – there's nothing left to say. They made a baby without quite meaning to. Whoops. She wants to keep it. He doesn't - he can't say why - he just doesn't. She's about to leave him.

How simple other people's lives look from the outside – like snow clouds from space. It's only from the ground up you can glimpse how many million snowflakes might actually make a blizzard.

Sarah: I'm keeping it. I'll go to mum's.” “What are you scared of?” “It's not like we haven't talked about it. You said you liked the idea. It's not like we're too young or anything. What's the matter?” She suddenly places a chair next to his but facing the other way, sits in it and hugs him desperately as if to squeeze some truth out of him like juice out of a puzzlingly dry lemon. “Talk to me!” He strokes her hair but can only look ahead, eyes on the road of some long, solitary journey. After a while she stands, takes her coat from the back of the chair, says, “I don't want to see you again.” and leaves without looking at him.

Our man remains with his eyes on his bottles but his singleness gathers on him moment by moment. Hooplah. He's sick on his bottles as if trying to get their contents back into them and now he's up and off. Those tables really are too close together and for a moment he's in a maze. In fact everything he meets draws him into a complex country-dancing manoeuvre which he has to extricate himself from before proceeding.

Outside The Tropic Club a blizzard scours Waterbeer Street and Mark has left his coat on the back of his chair. Now he rants through the snow at the puffa-jacketted revellers. Inside Mark a little voice rings, a voice that doesn't belong to him. It belongs to a twelve year old boy. Somehow Mark's never stopped to think how strange it is, to live with the voice of a twelve year old inside your head. But tonight, he doesn't know why, it seems the voice is getting clearer, closer, harder to tell whether it's coming from the inside or from the outside.

Outside "The Tropics" a blizzard scours Waterbeer Street and Mark has left his coat on the back of his chair. Nevertheless he rages out in his Hawaiian shirt, ranting at the puffa-jacketted revellers coming in. Inside him a clear voice has always rung out on his behalf, articulating just how he has been wronged, misunderstood and ignored. This voice just never reaches his lips. And now, as he bellows and wails his misery outwardly the voice inside him is tolling forth as stridently as it ever has. Now this voice has a body, that of a twelve year old school boy in a scruffy, old fashioned uniform. He follows Mark, shouting his cause, as he sees it.

Mark: Like it's a game... like some kid's game... with a Wendy House and a mummy bear and a daddy bear and a fucking baby bear. She doesn't know. You can't know. No-one can. What shit happens in your little Wendy House... the shit people put through your letter box. And the baby bear gets all covered in shit and you're not even looking.

"He may look a bit skinny but he could knock you into the middle of next week. And you. He could knock seven bells out of you. I know he looks a bit soft but he goes mental if anyone rubs him up the wrong way..." Suddenly Mark sweeps up against a human boulder and somehow gets stuck. The boulder is a bouncer from a club down on the riverside. He's on his way home after a hard night, a seventies night, when all the students come. A girl in an afghan coat puked on his shoes. He couldn't even hit her, he had to get her a taxi instead. Mark falls silent but his little advocate goes berserk. "You want to get out of his way mister. My brother's a bit of an animal. He's done boxing and karate and judo and kung fu... and I've seen him beat up a bloke for just looking at him funny at the bus stop." It is with a much-enjoyed, tension-relieving punch that the bouncer flattens Mark's nose and sends him flying into a pile of piss-stained snow in the doorway of BHS, then he calmly walks away, phoning the police on his mobile.

The little boy puts his hand over his mouth. As an afterthought he shouts after the bouncer, "Next time pick on someone your own size." He crouches by Mark's head, watching the passers-by for any more signs of trouble. He gets a filthy handkerchief out of his pocket with which he ineffectually dabs at Mark's nose. Suddenly he has a bright idea. "You could be a priest! Nobody hits priests. Ever. You go straight to Hell." Mark has been crying with pain and self-pity, but now he starts to laugh. "What?" says the little boy, then he starts

to laugh too. A blue flashing light falls over them now and the little boy runs away. A policeman comes and looks at Mark and shakes his head at what a sorry sight he looks, lying in his shirtsleeves in the snow, blood all over his face, laughing quietly to himself.

"It's alright officer, My brother's looking after me. I'm going to be a priest!"



Finding herself with a gap between appointments, Sarah Jablonski is staring out through the window of her salon. From the comfort of its interior she watches an arctic blizzard sweeping up the High Street. She has a magnifying glass in her hand. It was the first thing Mark ever gave her. Not roses. Not perfume or chocolates or love poems but a magnifying glass. Snowflakes stick to the window. In the second before they melt, she peers at their infinitely various, crystalline shapes.

Finding herself with a gap between appointments, Sarah Jablonski is staring out through the window of her salon. From the comfort of its interior she watches an arctic blizzard cranking up the high street. What light there is at five to four this afternoon is stained nicotine yellow. The first, tentative snowflakes descend in the conventional vertical manner, but as they gain in number, so they gain in confidence and start to behave outrageously, screaming towards the ground in savage diagonals, thumping on parked car windscreens and perching acrobatically on the hips of lamp posts.

Sarah Jablonski has a magnifying glass in her hand. Snowflakes stick to the window. In the second before they melt, she peers at their infinitely various crystalline shapes. The local travel news pours from her radio but she doesn't seem to hear it. She goes to her worktop, takes up a pair of comb-scissors and looks at the hinge through the magnifying glass, then at a lock of hair. A picture of Mark in a clip frame behind a row of hair oil bottles catches her eye now. She picks it up and scrutinises his face with the magnifying glass as if she might de-code him from the outside in.

Her next customer arrives and for a moment the storm charges directly into the shop and sets eddies of snowflakes dancing with discarded locks of grey hair. "God!" says the man, leaning against the inside of the door for a moment. "Ridiculous!" He's fantastically dishevelled by the wind, and pants as if having escaped a wild beast. He's fiftyish, with an appearance unlikely to attract women but there is something soothing about him.

"Mr Sampson?" Sarah reads from her appointment book.

"Yes. Am I late?"

"No."

"The snow's just piling up at the side of the road. Parking's impossible."

He sits in the barber's chair and Sarah puts the cape round his neck. He gets rather a shock when he catches sight of himself in the mirror. "Christ Alive! It's the Wild Man of Borneo!" His hair is dampened by the snow, blasted and tangled by the wind.

"What can I do for you Mr Sampson?"

“Callum, please. Not a lot. Hopeless case! Just tame it a bit if you can. Round the collar and ears, you know.” Sarah has sidled off for a moment to write down the name Callum in the back of her appointment book, repeating the name under her breath as if trying it on like a hat. Callum watches her.

“Sorry.” She says, coming back and beginning to comb his hair before cutting it.

“When’s it due?”

“Is it that obvious? I thought this thing covered it.” She looks down at her midriff, covered in a faded tabard.

“No. Just the name thing.”

“Its due in February. February the 12th.”

“Everything OK?” asks Callum after a moment.

“Yes...”, Sarah answers hesitantly, suddenly feeling rather alone in her shop with such a curious man.

“Sorry. I’m a doctor. Obstetrics is my thing. I didn’t mean to pry. Force of habit, I s’pose!”

“There is something... Have you got any kids?”

“No. None of my own. Not yet anyway! No, I just pull them out of other people.”

“I can’t think of any names. That I like anyway. It’s, like, “my job” but I just can’t do it. You take your name so much for granted. You feel like it was sewn on a little label when you came out. But when you have a baby, you realise, everyone in the world had to be given a name by someone else. There’s all these babies coming into the world like cheap pink sausages with no names, nothing... and it’s up to me to come up with a name or it’ll just be another pink sausage out of the sausage machine...”

Sarah has stopped cutting Callum’s hair and is standing mesmerised by a machine in her mind endlessly churning out caterwauling sausages. She fiddles absent-mindedly with the scissors. Callum speaks gently, as if to lead her away from the machine. “I sympathise but, you know, I have the opposite problem. I live alone – not with another person, that is. But I live with Cato the Cat; Crannock the Cockatiel; Sophie the Sofa; Roger the Rubber Plant; my car is Victor the Volvo... I’m holding back from Travis for my new toaster. I know it’s twee but I’ve got a lust for naming.” Callum gently takes the scissors from her hands. She looks at him from another world until they are both distracted. A man pushes a pushchair past Sarah’s shop window with difficulty, into the wind and through the snow. He wears a huge, black trenchcoat that billows in the gale like a highwayman’s cloak. He wears big, old army boots, which are covered in mud, as are the bottom edges of his coat. His hair is very long, blonde, but matted into dreads that spill to leeward like ropes of tobacco. His eyes are covered by round, dark glasses. He’s trying to hand out leaflets as he goes. Suddenly, right outside Sarah’s shop, a particularly malevolent gust of wind gets hold of the pushchair cover and whips it off down the street. The man puts the leaflets in the child’s lap and runs after the cover. The child starts to howl as the snow pelts it in the face.

Sarah can’t stand it. “Oh...” She plucks a spare plastic cape from its hook and runs out into the street without putting on a coat. Her words can barely be heard through her shop window but her intent is clear from her actions. She

shields the mouth of the pram with the cape and comforts the child. When the father returns without the cover she says they must keep the cape and helps him tie it in place. The father is talking about the weather angrily. He gives Sarah a leaflet from his pile, thanks her and sets off again. The leaflet is shaped like a giant snowflake but with a red bar through it, as on a road sign. Sarah is looking at it when she comes back through the door. "A march in London, about the weather. I don't know who they think will come on a weekday." She looks after the father and child through the snow, suddenly despairing. "Maybe it's not right to have a baby now..." She remembers Callum's profession "I'm so sorry. You must think I'm terrible." "Not in the slightest." He gives her back her scissors. She starts to cut his hair gratefully. "You'll know," he says, "when you find the right name. Trust me. It'll just pop up somewhere and you'll know."



I love hearing confession. I always think it's the part of a priest's work that's the most directly helpful to his flock in the real world. The chance for a person to open up and talk about what's really bugging them to someone detached but sympathetic... it's worth its weight in gold in the real world. You can be sure your Woody Allens and your Ally McBeals pay a small fortune for the privilege in Manhattan Island with their top-dollar psychiatrists. A few Hail Marys and Our Fathers is a small price to pay for a bit of spiritual well-being nowadays I think you'll agree, gentlemen! Now. I want to start our work on confession today by getting you all to remember a childhood memory and telling us about it. I'll give you a few moments to think. Something that troubled you as a child. A secret perhaps. Something you would have benefited from talking to someone about at the time.

Mark sits in a circle of comfy chairs with eight other seminarians, racking his brain for some neatly packaged little memory to offer the group. Instead, his mind floats back to an evening long ago when he was sat watching Crackerjack, and hearing strange noises through the ceiling. Like someone getting on and off the bed. Standing up, sitting down. Standing up, sitting down. He turns up the television. There's a muffled, brief squeak like a guinea pig's, quickly stifled, then footsteps across the room above and down the stairs. His brother comes into the room. Lawrence. He's wearing a blue, sabre-toothed school shirt with the sleeves rolled up and grey trousers with the flies undone.

"Why's dad helping you with your homework in mum's room?"

"Shut up."

"You're flying low." Lawrence slaps his face. "Ow! You hit me!" but before he can start crying Lawrence drags him out of the back door and into the passage way beside the house, where he is promptly sick in the drain.

"Eurgh!" says Mark, shocked. Then he's sick too, purely in sympathy.

"Don't call him Dad."

"Mum wants us to..."

"I don't care."

"You can't call a grown-up Barry..."

"Lawrence?" calls their non-Dad Barry from inside.

"Run!" says Lawrence, so they run and run, only stopping when they are completely out of breath. They throw themselves down on a patch of blonde, late-summer, wasteland grass.

"You were sick", says Mark.

"So were you."

"I looked at your face."

"Where are we going?"

"The old army camp?"

"The old army camp!"

They run all the way to the old army camp. "Look! It's Mary O'Grady!" says Mark. Mary O'Grady is a serious looking child, nine or so, thick glasses. She's apparently oblivious to everything in the world except the sweeping of her metal detector from side to side. She's wearing olive green headphones. Mark and Lawrence stand and watch her for a while. "Oi, O'Grady." Says Mark. "O'Grady, give us a go." But she carries on without having heard, it seems. "O'Grady, your breath smells of cheese!" says Lawrence. They have a laugh and Mark has a go.

"O'Grady your breath smells like a cheesy bum!"

"She only ever finds Coke cans anyway", says Lawrence.

"No." Mary O'Grady takes the bait at last, but carries on detecting.

"Go on then, what've you found?", asks Mark?

"Roman coin on Martin's Fields."

"She's making it up", says Lawrence but Mary O'Grady gets a rusty disk out of her pocket and holds it out to Lawrence without looking at him. They examine it. It seems real enough to them, but what would they know. They give it back.

"Give us a go then", says Mark.

"What can you pay?" Mark and Lawrence rifle through their pockets.

"Lolly from a dib-dab?" says Lawrence.

"Got any cash?"

"5p", says Mark.

"That'll buy you a minute."

"Right!." Mark puts on the earphones. Mary O'Grady sits on the bank next to Lawrence, to count to sixty. Lawrence tries to put her off.

"Do you know how babies are actually born?"

"Of course. Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen..."

"How then?"

"Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four... I'm not telling you."

"You embarrassed?"

"No."

"You're blushing! Go on! I've heard the baby comes out of the woman's bum..."

Mary O'Grady jumps up in moral indignation.

"You're sick you are!"

"Found something!" shouts Mark.

“You haven’t”, says Mary O’Grady, but when she puts on the headphones she finds it’s true. She falls to her knees, gets a trowel out of her duffle bag and starts hacking at the springy grass. She hits the metal thing and they all start to scrabble round it. Suddenly Mary O’Grady jumps up. “Stop! It’s a bomb!” They look at her in silence for a moment or two, then they laugh. “No it is. A shell. It’s phosphur. My Dad says they used to fire them up here during the war. For practice.” They look at it.
“It’s old now though, isn’t it?”, says Mark, “It’d never work.”
“They can. It’ll burn you!” Mary O’Grady runs away.

“Bloody chicken!” says Lawrence in amazement. “Come on.” They carry on digging it out ‘til Lawrence stands up with it. “God. It’s heavy.”
“Let me feel. God.” It looks huge in Mark’s arms. “How are we going to get it home? We can’t just carry it like this.” Lawrence looks at Mark and thinks. He’s unintentionally swinging the shell like it was their baby brother.
“I know! But you mustn’t tell anyone. I mean it. This is serious now. You mustn’t tell anyone.”

“Father Mark,” says the kindly priest from his comfy chair, “You’ve seemed particularly deep in thought. I wonder if you’d care to share your secret with us?” For several seconds Mark is unable to speak.
“I’ve not been able to think of anything yet, Father.”



“So. What does it feel like?”

Sarah Jablonski is listening to the radio as she finishes work for the day. It’s dark outside the salon window but big snowflakes still sweep against it like the endless patter of white cats’ paws.

“That’s the question most women in their first pregnancy want answered about childbirth. What does it actually feel like? What, for example, do contractions during the first stage of labour feel like?”

The programme is narrated by an earnest sounding young woman. Now and again it is peppered with contributions from other women, veterans of labour.

“...I felt the contractions in my back – really intense – not where I thought I would feel them...”
“...The contractions were in my groin. It really hurt...”
“...The contractions were down in my bottom, very low down...”

Sarah is turning her “OPEN” to “CLOSED” and sweeping the day’s crop of discarded locks into a pile, but listens intently as she works.

“Consultant obstetrician, Callum Sampson, talked to us about how women felt, in his experience.”

She stops sweeping, recognising her customer’s name.

“...Most women say, however bad the contractions hurt, that it’s bearable because it’s not continuous pain. You get a space in between. Contractions at that stage feel more like waves that build up in strength gradually. Each one gets bigger and bigger, crashes on the beach and trickles away before the next one begins. During the second stage of labour the mother feels the contractions differently.”
A well-spoken woman speaks, “...The contractions were like shitting a brick. A very hard object. I remember thinking that while I was pushing!”

After sweeping up the hair with a dustpan and brush and putting it in the bin, Sarah goes to the loo for a pee, but she leaves the door open so she can carry on listening to the programme.

The narrator speaks again, “At the end of the first stage of labour, when the cervix is almost fully open, women often feel a range of symptoms that show the moving on to the second stage of labour. This period is called transition:”

Then Callum Sampson speaks again:

“...Transition is, or can be, marked by quite odd symptoms: shaking, suddenly feeling very cold, icy feet, hiccupping, being sick, feeling very weepy and helpless and wanting to give up, feeling very angry with everyone, including the baby, because labour hurts so much, being bad tempered and abusive...”
A softly-spoken woman says, “...My transition was very long and I stamped around shouting at the midwives, “Can none of you suggest something to do? I can’t think anymore!””

Sat there on the loo, Sarah has gone into a daydream. While the radio programme carries on she imagines Mark and Callum Sampson coming into her shop. Callum is wearing a surgical gown and hat. They come into the loo and tilt Sarah on to her back. Callum puts a screen across Sarah’s midriff, so she can’t see what’s happening to the lower part of her body, and puts her legs up in stirrups. Mark holds her hand.

“...In case you’re getting worried at home,” says the narrator, “very few women suffer all of these symptoms and some don’t have any of them at all. Whilst you’re wrapped up in contractions, transition can be a very anxious and emotional time for your supporter, especially if this person is your partner.”
“...I felt completely helpless. I didn’t have a clue what else I could do to help her. I was terrified that what was going on wasn’t normal, or that it was going wrong...”

“You’re nearly there!” says Callum Sampson brightly from Sarah’s nether end. Sarah talks to Mark.
“It feels very odd. It doesn’t really feel like it’s happening at all.”

“One more push!”

“It doesn’t feel right. It kind of aches inside where the baby’s touching. No. Sort of numb where it’s touching and achey behind that. “

“So close now!”

“You know? Like when you suck an ice cube – the feeling against the inside of your mouth. It feels like that. It feels cold.”

“There! You’ve done it!” They both look at Callum Sampson in surprise. The birth has happened without Sarah seeming to have any active part in it, with her not having made any effort.

“Is it alright?” asks Sarah, when no comment is forthcoming. Callum is looking at the baby out of sight, with a puzzled expression.

“I think it’ll be fine.”

“Well... Is it a boy or girl?”

“I can’t be sure. I suppose it doesn’t matter.”

“Can I hold it?”

“If you want to.” He brings the baby round and gives it to Sarah. She looks at the baby in her arms, then at Callum and Mark in confusion. It’s made of something glass-like, wet and smooth.

“It’s made of ice.”

“Yes.” Agrees Callum Sampson dispassionately. Sarah looks between him and Mark again. It seems she’s being left to take all the initiative.

“Is that alright?”

“I think it might be. But you have to keep it warm. Hold it tight.”

Sarah tries to. Mark and Callum watch her. Her arms get cold. She gets more and more uncomfortable, shifting it from side to side. “It hurts.” She tries harder. She wants it to be warm. She starts crying. “I can’t. It hurts too much. I can’t do it.” She gives it up to Mark reluctantly. He cradles it and takes it away, out of Sarah’s shop and into the night, into the snow. Callum follows him. “I’m sorry. Mark? I’ll have another go in a minute.” She dries her tears with loo paper and blows her nose. “It was just too cold.” When she hears the door close behind Mark and Callum she rushes out of the loo into her shop. “Mark?” She goes out of the door and looks up and down the street but can’t see him anywhere.

The radio is still droning on:

Callum Sampson is saying “...the baby may look very unlike what you were expecting. Some babies are purple when they are born, some look grey and lifeless which is frightening. In a surprisingly short period of time they turn pink and look quite different.

A monotonous woman says, “He cried and I knew he was alive. He looked like a grey lump of clay and they gave him some oxygen. Then he cried again and turned pink and they wrapped him in a green sheet. I asked if I could pick him up and I haven’t really put him down since...”

Sarah comes back into the shop shivering and downcast. She turns off the radio and stands thinking, leaning against the counter. Then she rummages in a rack of magazines and papers by her comfy waiting chairs. It takes her a

while to find the snowflake leaflet with the red bar across it. She puts it in her bag and leaves her shop, locking the door and setting off into the snowy night.



Mark bursts through the doors of the seminary chapel, celluloid dog collar gripped in his teeth as he does up the buttons of his black shirt. The old priest is at the font. He has his sleeves rolled up and in his arms, swaddled in a tea towel, is a two litre, empty Sprite bottle. Eight pairs of self-righteous eyes peer at him from a semicircle of Mark's fellow trainees. "Alarm trouble again, Father Mark?"

"Korry Kather..." he starts to say through his clenched teeth.

"Spare us the full story. Just tuck in the back there. Now," he continues with his lecture, "If you can get an altar boy to bring the water from the sacristy at this point, so much the better. I find that if you switch off the Burco at the beginning of the service, it's perfect by now. Only for Heaven's sake, test it before you pour it all over the child. The mother won't be thanking you for scalding little John Joseph Patrick like a pig." With that, the old priest baptises the Sprite bottle as tenderly as a real John Joseph Patrick. "Now Father Mark, step up to the font. You can make up for yourself by being the first to dip the nipper this morning!" The old man delicately hands Mark the bundle as if it were a real baby still, supporting its head.

But as Mark stands there with it, the tea towel falls away and he finds himself with a mud-caked incendiary shell in his arms. Lawrence is dragging their baby brother's pram over the hummocky grass towards him. "Um!" Young Mark is open-mouthed at the scale of the trouble Lawrence has probably got them in.

"Don't 'Um', put that down and help me." He dutifully drops the shell with a thud beside him. "Careful!"

"Mum'll be taking Jamie to Auntie Melanie's..."

"We'll have it back by then."

"People'll look in and see it."

"No. 'Cause I brought these." Lawrence holds up a pale blue babygro and a mauve woolly helmet.

"Um!" says Mark again and starts to run away, only Lawrence catches him and holds him in a headlock.

"If we put it in the clothes and cover it with the blanket they'll just think it's Jamie."

"It's all dirty though."

"I brought stuff to clean it." He lets go of Mark and pulls cotton wool and baby lotion out of the pram.

"Alright." Says Mark, but he's still unsure.

"Scrape off the mud." He crouches and picks off the dry clumps of mud sticking to the shell. Lawrence lays out a white blanket and puts the babygro on it, opening it up carefully. "Bring it here. Lay it on there." He hesitates. "Go on!" He lays it on the babygro. It's already seeming more human.

"Boy or girl?" asks Lawrence as he starts to clean the shell with lotion.

"It hasn't got a willy."

“Girl then.”
“You brought blue clothes.”
“There isn’t a rule, is there?”
“She might get bullied.”
“She’s just a piece of metal!” Mark sulks a bit. “Alright, well... we won’t let anyone bully her, alright?” Mark seems consoled.
Lawrence asks, “What’s her name?”
“I don’t know.”
“Just choose one you like.”
“I don’t like any girls’ names.”
“There must be a girl you like?” Mark can’t think of one straightaway.
Suddenly he says,
“Jane.”
“That’s mum’s name.”
“There isn’t a rule, is there?” he says, mimicking Lawrence’s voice.
“Alright. Baby Jane.”
“What’re you doing?”
“Got to clean the poo from between their legs or they get rash. Won’t she!” He puts on a talking-to-baby voice and tickles the shell under its armpits. “Jack and Gye went out in the rye...”
“Don’t.” says Mark.
“Why not?”
“It was mine and Dad’s.”
“He used to say it to me too.” Mark sulks. Lawrence poppers the shell into the babygro. “Do you want to hold her?”
“I can’t.”
“Mum isn’t here now.”
“I’ll drop her.”
“No you won’t!” He gives Mark Baby Jane. “Hold under her head like this. And under her bottom.” He shows him how. “Now just rock her gently.” They both look lovingly at Baby Jane and recite their father’s nursery rhyme to her.
“Jack and Gye went out in the rye
And they found a little girl with one black eye.
Come says Jack let’s knock her on the head.
No says Gye, let’s buy her some bread.
You buy one loaf, and I’ll buy two,
And we’ll bring her up as other folk do.”

After tucking Baby Jane into the pram under the white blanket they set off.
“Lift the other end.” Says Lawrence, so Mark lifts the front of the pram as much as he can and they half lift, half drag the pram off the old army camp.
Lawrence says to Mark, “You’d be a good dad.”

“No.”
“Why not?”
“If I had a baby and they were sick, I’d be sick too.”
“I’d be a good dad.” They get on to the pavement at last and Lawrence pushes the pram. “We know what Baby Jane likes! She likes to go weeeeeeeeeee!” He pushes the pram along as fast as he can. Mark can barely keep up, until they’re out of breath and have to stop.

They round the corner into Elm Road and bump into a fourteen-year-old girl leant against the wall, smoking a cigarette. Lawrence knows her and halts.

"It's little Florence!"

"Do you know her?" Mark asks Lawrence, but he's too intimidated to answer.

"Out with Dougal and Zebedee then?"

"Lawrence?" asks Mark again but he still can't reply.

"This pouf your brother?"

"Shut up!" says Mark, but the girl doesn't even look at him.

"You two missing your Dad then?" Mark is shocked into silence. "Bet your mum's gutted. So gutted she went straight out and got herself up the duff." He laughs. "Must be hard lying in bed listening to some new bloke porking your mum all night!"

"Come on Lawrence." Mark tries pushing the pram away, but the girl stands in front of it and stops him.

"Shame your Dad didn't go further away to do his dirty business. He's still living on the Ferrier, isn't he? On the other side. In a flat. With his boyfriend. My Dad's seen them at it. Didn't shut the curtains. Oh dear. Everyone seen 'em. Bumming in the window. Bumming each other off."

"Fuck off fuck off fuck off..." Lawrence can't stand it any longer and he attacks the girl, but he's much smaller, much weaker. The girl twists him by the shirt and holds him bent over.

"Like it like that? Eh? Like your dad? Up the arse?" She kicks Lawrence viciously from behind.

Then Mark hits her on the head with the shell and she falls dazed on the ground. "If you ever, ever touch my brother again, Baby Jane will come round your house and beat you to a pulp and burn you up to ashes." The girl writhes slowly on the ground with her mouth open.

Mark puts the shell in the pram and they go home.

When they get back, Lawrence says, "I'll go in and check the coast is clear. If I get stuck go to the empty church and wait for me."

"Is it true?"

"What?"

"About Dad."

"No."

"Why doesn't he come and see us then?" Lawrence thinks for a while but he can't think of anything to say to make it alright for either of them.

"I don't know." He goes inside. Mark waits. He waits some more. Then Lawrence appears in the lounge window and draws the curtains. As he does, he looks at Mark but his face gives nothing away. Mark pushes the pram towards the empty church.



Borrowing a pigeon's perch on a lime-streaked girder at Waterloo Station, you would probably be able to see a young woman emerge into the throng from the Sock Shop at eight thirty this Wednesday morning with a snowflake leaflet held in a new pair of red woolly gloves. You would probably fail to hear her

tiny snatch of breath as she narrowly avoids a floor washing machine swimming unseen through the crowd. Her breath would be drowned by the confluence of millions of footfalls clapping softly on the concourse like a half-hearted round of applause.

At nine thirty, later that same morning, borrowing Nelson's good eye and casting it with naval precision down through the tumbling snow to the extreme right of the fourth step rising from Trafalgar Square toward the National Gallery, you might pick from the thicket of upraised arms a red gloved hand urgently punching a snowflake leaflet in the air, keeping time with all the others. But Nelson's poor cannon-battered eardrums would fail to discern one particular voice timidly added to the rising chant. "STOP THE SNOW! STOP THE SNOW!"

And later still, at ten thirty, soaring into the snow-thickened air over Whitehall with a cloud of freed balloons and looking through one of the round, unblinking eyes printed on half of them, there's no reason why you shouldn't make out the woman with the red gloves packing fresh snow into snowballs and hurling them, with many others, at the police. But the ears printed on the other half of the balloons would be inadequate to pick up, through the drumming of batons on riot shields, the whinnying of scared police horses and the clamour of protest, would not hear the sound of a heartbeat sheltering within a heartbeat, pulsing with life and fear, although as yet innocent of the significance of either.



Mark's back home for Christmas from the seminary. He expects to bump into Sarah round every corner - half with hope, half with terror. Maybe she'll be pushing a pram. He never does though. Now he's waiting outside a church in a part of town he's never been much. He's been waiting fifteen minutes in the snow and he's nearly ready to call it a day when the old church-warden appears with a bunch of big keys.

"Father Mark?"

"Yes..."

"Mrs Agnoli. Sorry to keep you waiting out here only I lock the door after school time nowadays. We've a little fire-raiser on the loose at the moment. It's just a quick look you're wanting Father?" She's unlocking the door and ushering Mark inside.

"Just to say hello to the place really. You don't have to call me Father. I'm not actually ordained yet."

"Oh?" She looks him over suspiciously for a moment. "How long are you with us for then?"

"Just for the holidays then I'm back to the seminary again."

"You're not in your own Parish then?"

"They've got three Polish Fathers with them for Christmas so Father Daly suggested I came across and lent a hand here."

"Ah! Always the poor relation to Saint Matthew's, that's us. They get three Polish fathers, we get one rookie. Still, Father Johnny'll appreciate the help with the drop-in centre I should think. There aren't many services nowadays.

It's all running down before the conversion next year – flats for the homeless. Such a shame.”

The warden turns on the overhead lights, and tries to cross herself from the bowl of holy water by the door but it's frozen. She bashes the surface of the ice with the end of her torch. “Sorry Father. The heating pipes burst a couple of months ago and there hasn't been the money to fix them.”

“How much will they be changing the inside of the church?”

“Gutting it – top to bottom. Father Johnny warned them they'd better not mess about too much with the crypt but they won't listen. They did some work down there in the eighties and they opened up a spring down there.”

“A water spring?”

“That's right. Church has been sat on it all this time. Of course, when they uncovered it, it came out like a fountain. Had a hell of a job capping it off, they did! I'll leave you to look round yourself Father. I'll just show you our Sacred Heart chapel.” She genuflects in front of the altar. So does Mark. “It's just repainted this last year and all new gilt. Such a pity – some dog-person'll be dossing down in there soon. Where will Our Lord sleep round here when they take away the tabernacle? Nobody thinks of that. Where will his body and blood lie?” She touches the tabernacle tenderly.

She turns on the light in the Sacred Heart chapel and Mark is shocked. The colours are extremely garish. A grave Christ looks down at them. He points at his heart, which is crowned, engorged and flaming. “What do *you* think the flames mean?” Mark speaks quietly.

“A sort of visible holiness, I think Father, but not burning hot. Like the flames on a Christmas pudding.”

“Not suffering?”

“I wouldn't know Father. I only unlock the doors. I'll leave you to look round yourself.” She gives Mark the keys.

“Thank you.” When she's gone, Mark kneels to pray. He prays for Sarah and he prays for their child, trying to imagine what it will look like. But he's troubled and can't concentrate.

He goes to the tabernacle and genuflects in front of it. Something makes him want to open it now. He draws back the little curtain to uncover the brass door and turns the key. A little body sits inside. It wears a blue babygro and a mauve woolly helmet. Mark delicately lifts the phosphur shell out of the tabernacle. The overhead lights start to flicker and go out one by one until Mark is left in what little dusky light that falls through the high, small church-windows.

The door of the church creaks ajar and a small boy's face peeps round it.

“Mark?” he calls in a very little voice.

“Where've you been?” Mark is a little boy again, waiting anxiously in the empty church.

“At home.”

“It's almost dark. I was really scared.” Lawrence shuts the door behind him and stands near Mark, but facing away. “Was Mum there?”

“No. She was out looking for us in the car with Jamie.”

“Was Barry there?” Lawrence takes a long time to answer.
“Yes.”
“Are we in trouble?” Mark sounds as if he doesn’t want to hear the answer.
“He said... he said he’d teach me a lesson I’d never forget.”
“What did he do?” Mark is very frightened. They are both crying.
“I can’t tell you.”
“Why not?”
“I don’t want anyone to know. Ever.”
“Will he do it to me?”
“No. We’re not going back. You and me. Or Baby Jane.”
“Where are we going?”
“I don’t know. Where’s Baby Jane?”
“Here.” He hands it over. Lawrence rocks it.
“Where’s the pram?”
“Outside.”
“Will you go and get it?” He sets off obediently. “Mark?” Lawrence calls him back, His voice trembling. “I’ll always look after you mate.” He hugs him. Mark doesn’t squirm. Lawrence lets him go. When Mark reaches the door he turns to look at him. He’s rocking Baby Jane, quietly singing to her. He goes out and looks for the pram. It’s dark now. He lets off the brake and is moving the pram backwards and forwards to turn it round.

A noise comes from inside the church like a bursting bag of flour, only very much louder; and Lawrence screams for his brother, screams for it to stop, screams for his father, screams for his life. Mark screams for his brother. When he goes into the church the light and heat are blinding and he cannot see his brother, only hear his screams over the roaring of chemical fire. He struggles towards the source. It emanates from the tabernacle of the Sacred Heart – white flames pour out of its door as from a furnace mouth, and carry his brother’s agony to him. The door is closing, shutting them apart. He puts his hands against the door and screams with pain. The grave Jesus looks down at him, pointing at his own heart all the while.



After the riot, when the crowds have melted from Trafalgar Square and Whitehall, and clean snow has covered their traces, and when those present have finally laid their heads on pillows fat, thin, striped, flowered, plain, hospital or police station issued, the second tumult begins. It is behind their eyes and between their ears. The shouts and crashes are rendered down to whispers and restless rustling as they speak witness incessantly to themselves. They sift the chaos for minute grains of sense, some more successfully than others:

“...where did Mina go after the horses came?”

“...there are people in the world who want to smash my face in, people I’ve never met before...”

“...I have never felt more alive. I will never feel more alive...”

“...nothing is worth more than my teeth. Now I know. That’s the sort of person I am. I’m ashamed, but it’s true. Nothing...”

“...nothing. This was nothing. History is full of people who have done more for less. I feel humble. I feel tired...”

“...I think I broke his nose. I couldn’t punch a dog. How could I punch a person in the face?...”

“...someone will pay for all this. The wrong people, sure as day follows night...”

“...it was so right. Who thought of snowballs? The crowd thought of snowballs. It was anonymous...”

“...bottles, sticks with nails in, bits of smashed drain cover, bits of glass, molotovs, bags of shit...”

“...what they say about them not treading on people, it’s not true. It’s medieval, sending animals that weigh, what, half a ton into a crowd of people. People had their feet crushed. A girl fell. A horse trod on her arm. I saw it. It was mush. Blood was spurting out of it...”

“...there was a screwdriver sticking out of her side, they’d tried to cut her belly open with a bottle by the look of it. I saw one lad going for her eyes with a biro. And they probably call themselves animal lovers...”

“...I saw him swinging the baton. I put up my arm – I heard it break. What really shocked me was he did it again...”

“...this horse was just going berserk. People were trying to keep out of the way...”

“...my son gave me his cricket box. I said don’t worry, they give us one of those, a black one. He said I wonder if it’s the same people who make them. I meant to look, but I forgot...”

“...he was still when he fell. Like a turtle on its back. People didn’t hesitate. They did it by instinct. They stripped him near naked and started beating the shit out of him...”

“...where did she come from? I mean, why the fuck was a pregnant woman there?...”

“...no-one else could have done it. I’ve thought since, no-one else on the planet could have done that then...”

“...I stood still and watched. I cried like a baby ‘til I was knocked down...”

“...it started to snow again. I could see the goosepimples on his bruises. She came and held him like a baby. Nobody touched him then. She kept him warm with her arms. She was wearing red gloves. She tried to cover him. In the middle of all this ugliness. It was strange, I’ve never missed my Mum so much in my life...”

“...we haven’t stopped it snowing, I thought. All this and we haven’t stopped it snowing. When will it stop?...”

“...when I saw her there, I wanted to sing, from no-where, Good King Wencelas. We had the Daily Mail book of carols when I was a kid. We used to sing them with my Dad playing the piano...”

Lots of people saw them, the girl in the red gloves and the naked, bleeding policeman laid shivering violently over her lap, a sudden rough pieta carved in the middle of the trouble, but none heard a whisper of the little they said to each other before the paramedics arrived.

“There was this golf course near our house.” The policeman says through his chattering teeth.

“Don’t speak.” Sarah is looking in terror at the battle surrounding them.

“You couldn’t go there. All private. Beautiful grounds of a big, white house all out of bounds. Do you know, those rich fuckers, if we went there they’d try and hit us with their golf balls!” He laughs, then coughs up some fluid from his lungs.

“I don’t know if it’ll help you to speak.” But the policeman carries on anyway.

“One year it really snowed. When was it? ‘78? Back when it was unusual. And guess what? Those bastards couldn’t play for weeks! I went there on the first day. It was deserted. Perfect! Not a soul. Not a whisper. Not a footprint. Just me. Nobody said I could go there, but I decided, it was my right. I stepped out of the birch trees and on to the fairway and just kept going. It was pure me, every step. Up to my knees sometimes where it had drifted in the bunkers. I crossed all the fairways. It was huge. Like Russia. To the other side of the golf course, to Chislehurst. Another land. There was a kid sledging on the final fairway. Cocky bugger, I thought, his dad’s probably a member of the golf club. The kids were different in Chislehurst. But it was a girl. She was sledging on a tractor inner tube. Did you know, they make the most amazing sledges?”

“No.”

“Neither did I. I stood and watched her come down twice. Then she came up to me and said, “Your turn.” Just like that! She had dark hair in a bob and very pink cheeks. “Your turn,” she said! I stayed all afternoon. Christ, we had fun!”

“What was her name?”

“Rosa.” He stops shivering and smiles. “I never told anyone that in my life. Rosa. I never saw her again.” He starts to shiver again.

Someone somewhere starts to sing in a dream. Only we can hear it.

“Good King Wencelas look’d out on the feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night though the frost was cruel.
When a poor man came in sight, gathering winter fuel...”



It's Wednesday afternoon, and Mark sits behind a table at the end of the church with a cardboard sign propped on it saying, "Drop-In Centre – Welcome to St James!" No-one has dropped in so far this particular windswept afternoon. In fact, the drop in centre is rarely attended, Mark has discovered. But he dutifully unlocks the doors, switches the Burco on for tea and puts up the sign. Now he's reading the paper all wrapped up in his overcoat, his breath all turning to steam. There's a terrible draught screaming under the old, central doors that are rarely opened any more. Mark shifts uncomfortably. After a particularly evil gust he decides to go and sit in the confessional box for warmth. In there he settles more comfortably to reading the paper. He breaks open a Kit Kat and munches on it happily. He's half way through it when he hears the heavy church door open.

"Hello?" he calls. "Father Jack?" Mark guiltily swallows the last of his Kit Kat and is trying to fold up his paper without making any noise when the door to the next confessional opens and shuts.

"Hello?" says a boy's voice, a bit adenoidal.

"Hello?" says Mark back.

"I can't see you."

"I can't see you either. It's to make it easier to confess, so you can't see the priest."

"I've never done it before."

"I'm sorry, I'm not a priest yet. I can't hear your confession. You want Father Jack for that. Tuesdays and Thursdays at five."

"Father Jack?"

"Yes, if you want to confess, you know, ask God's forgiveness."

"I prob'ly ought to. I've got to tell him what I've done?"

"Yes, that's why it's called confession."

"Doesn't God just know?"

Mark is beginning to lose his patience a bit. "He knows, but if you want forgiveness you've got to say your sins to Father Jack."

"Like owning up."

"If you like."

"But I can't talk to you."

You can if you want but I can't absolve you."

"Well," says the boy matter-of-factly, "I like burning things."

"What?" Mark is shocked, but the boy thinks he's asked a question.

"Buildings, garages, warehouses..."

"Why do you do that?"

"It's a laugh, isn't it?"

"Not really."

"You're not supposed to tell me off."

"Why's it a laugh?"

"You do a little bit of work – get the petrol, pile some stuff up, rubbish an' that, pour on the petrol... But once you light it, WOOMF! It does all the work. And it's so big, what happens. And I think, hey, I made that happen. Hey!" Mark

has thrown open the door to the boy's confessional, dragged him out by the shirt and thrown him on the ground.

"What if someone gets hurt?" Mark shouts at the boy.

"What sort of a priest are you?"

"You might burn a person."

"I don't. I choose buildings with no-one in them."

"Did you ever think you might kill someone by mistake? A child?" Mark kicks him.

"You can't do that..."

There's a great crash outside the front door of the church. The boy looks shocked. Mark runs towards the door. "Don't open it!" calls the boy, running after him. When Mark opens the door there's a fire raging so fiercely in the vestibule, he narrowly escapes it blasting in his face. Mark runs towards the sacristy where there is another door out of the church. "I lit one there too." The sacristy is ablaze and impassable too.

"Are you mad?"

"There must be another door..."

"No." A splintering, crackling sound draws their eyes up to the ceiling. "It must have got in the roof."

"I only came in to check there was no-one here."

Mark tries to pile up chairs to reach a window, but they won't stay piled up and the window is too high. Part of the ceiling by the door suddenly crashes down in a flurry of sparks. The boy begins to panic. "Help! Help!" He throws chairs up at the windows. The sight is pitiful. Mark is appalled at himself, all of a sudden. It's only just occurred to him that the boy might actually be frightened. He grabs the boy and holds him in a bear hug.

"Calm down."

Mark remembers something now, which sends him into overdrive. "Find something like a metal bar. Something strong. Quick." They both search around.

"Like this?" The boy brings a window pole.

"Yes." Mark has found the metal staff from a statue of Saint Christopher. "This way." He leads them down the stairs into the crypt just as another large chunk of the ceiling drops into the nave of the church. The crypt is thick with smoke, which makes them both cough horribly but Mark is determined to find something he has seen on the floor – a circular concrete plug. At last he finds it, set down in a shallow hole with just enough room round it to get the window pole in beside it. "Push down." Says Mark to the boy. They lever downwards but the plug won't budge. Mark puts the metal staff down the hole too and they both throw all their weight on the two levers.

After ten seconds there is a sudden give and water streams across the floor under extreme pressure. However, the plug is only half out and still largely blocking the hole. "Round the other side." And they re-insert the window pole and the metal staff under the far side of the plug. It gives more easily. The force of water released lifts the concrete plug thudding up against the ceiling of the crypt and tosses it to the side.

Now the crypt echoes with an entirely opposite elemental roar to the one that filled it moments before. The water rises in a column, hits the ceiling and bursts down over Mark and the boy in a welter that drives the smoke before it. It's already three feet deep and rising fast. The two of them instinctively crouch in the water, putting their faces at water level to breathe the pure air on its surface. "The stairs!" Mark can only just make himself heard over the sound, and points to the stairs. They half-wade, half-swim across the crypt and float up the stairwell with the rising flood. When the water reaches the crypt ceiling and is confined by it, it surges with renewed vigour up the stairwell and coughs Mark and the boy into the nave of the church. They struggle back into the doorway against the current just in time to avoid a lethal fall of roof timbers, and huddle there, wedged against the flow. They have to wet their faces often as they look into the body of the church, so fierce is the heat.

Pews are burning, hymnbooks, kneeler cushions, the board displaying hymn numbers, the confessionals... Most strange, the heads, shoulders and hands of wooden statues burn, making them look like so many novelty candles. The body of the church is filling swiftly. Soon it is up to the level of the top of the crypt door, and Mark and the boy are forced to tread water, clinging to a narrow pillar. Up and up the water rises, carrying them perilously closer to the burning roof. Surely the church can't contain all this pressure much longer, thinks Mark. But he remembers the fortress thick walls and the huge old door, inward opening and wedged now like a colossal oaken bathplug in the door frame. When the water reaches the level of the windows it easily pushes out the leaded glass that remains unbroken. It brims out of them like an overflowing bath.

The heat is so fierce, Mark and the boy have to keep their faces in the water almost all of the time, taking only tiny sips of scalding air. The sight down through the water into the church is extraordinarily beautiful. Most of the debris is carried on the surface and the water is very clear. The infinitely random flicker of firelight falling on the slopping of the water sends kaleidoscopic glints into its depth. Up through this shoal of light, Mark believes he can see a swimmer struggling towards the surface. They both scream in terror as it breaks the water beside them. It's the statue from the chapel of the Sacred Heart, the grave Jesus. He lies flat in the water on his scorched face. The hand that isn't pointing at his heart he raises in a salute of benediction, providing a neat umbrella in his armpit now from the showers of sparks falling on the water. Mark guides the boy under it. The statue has reminded him of the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the Sacred Heart.

He takes a deep breath and plunges down through the water to the chapel. The grave Jesus seems to fly on the surface watching Mark descend, holding the boy safe under his wing. Mark goes down and down. And there is the brass tabernacle, glinting softly, its curtain still attached but floating up like a skirt around its waist, revealing the door and its Alice-in-Wonderland key. Mark wants to open it but he's scared. He gathers his courage and lays a

hand on the door. Nothing happens to him. He turns the key and thrusts his hand into the tabernacle, searching for something.

At that moment Mark is plucked backwards with huge, smooth force from the tabernacle which remains in place, bolted to the altar. Candlesticks, charred hymn books, pews, everything jerks in the same direction. Turning in the water, Mark sees that the end of the church by the door, weakened by the fire, has gone completely, and that the huge body of water in which he floats is finally claiming its freedom. Timbers, statues, a scrawny arsonist, an ill-suited priest, everything in the water is sent surfing over the churchyard in a tsunami of spring water. The image comes to Mark's mind of ice cubes toppling from the spout of a jug into a glass of water as he is swept right through the lych gate and into the empty road beyond the churchyard wall.

When the water has all spread out, Mark finds himself lying on his back looking at the stars through the yew trees. There's a clambering in the branches as the boy frees himself from the place where he was strained, unharmed from the flow. "Thanks for confession Father." He says to Mark and runs away. Mark staggers to his feet. The water's warmth on the frozen ground sends clouds of steam into the air. Mark looks at his right hand, which clutches something soft. He wrings it out and holds it up to the last light of the fire. It's an old fashioned, powder blue babygro, perfectly good, clean now and useable. He puts it in the inside pocket of his coat and sets off at a run.

The wind is roaring by the time Mark reaches the middle of town, and the air is clogged with great clumps of snowflakes. The sun set long ago and his progress is lit by the glow of shopfronts and a sickly haze of orange sodium light from the street lights that turns the snow into orange slush puppy. Mark's clerical black shoes aren't coping well with the new snowfall and he slithers about as he half runs, half walks up the street. He has to negotiate a stream of better equipped pedestrians coming the other way: a kid in a too-big arctic parka with a hood like a snout; a woman with a pram on little skis; an elderly lady pulling a Yorkshire terrier in an adapted cat-litter tray; even an old man in snow shoes – Mark has to "excuse me" past them all until he finally arrives in front of Sarah's salon.

It's dark inside and empty. Having geared himself up, Mark wasn't expecting this. He looks at his watch desperately. Five past five. He looks at the sign. The salon closed at five. Five minutes ago. It's with a cartoonish turn of the head, a stretch of the neck and a widening of the eyes that Mark suddenly executes a text book "slow burn". He sprints back down the street, constantly on the verge of disaster. He overtakes Mr Snowshoes. He runs past the lady pulling her dog, which snaps at his ankles and nearly sends him into a lamp-post. He reaches the parka kid and stops, panting, puzzled, looking all around.

To his left begins a path apparently unblemished at first glance, leading beside the park, lit at intervals by old fashioned lamp posts. Looking closer, a set of footprints is just visible, and two, long, straight, parallel lines being busily filled in by the snow – a minute later and they would be gone forever.

And there, third lamp post along, the woman has paused to fasten up the cover on her pram a little tighter with her red-gloved hands. Because the old lamp posts shed a warmer, yellower light and the snow along that way is cleaner, the path looks like another realm entirely to the one Mark is standing in. He is looking across a boundary, a border. The woman is talking through the tiny gap in her pram cover. "Is it cosy in there? Is it?"

Now he is beside her with no knowledge of crossing the ground in between. The woman starts at his sudden appearance on the quiet path, then looks at him long and hard. Suddenly she cries out and pushes him into a bank of snow. She immediately covers her mouth. He doesn't try to get up. After lying still for a bit, he remembers the babygro in his inside pocket and offers it to her.

"It's blue", says Sarah, looking at it.

"She's a girl?"

Sarah nods.

She takes the babygro and puts it in the basket under the pram then she goes and helps Mark up out of the snow.

"Can I see her?"

"No. You'll make her cold. You'd better come home."

"Can I push the pram?" asks Mark. Sarah nods and they set off along the path. "What's her name?"

"Rosa."

"Rosa. That's nice."

As they pass under the light of the fourth lamp post she is brushing the snow from his back with her red-gloved hands.

theatre alibi

The Freeze

by Daniel Jamieson

Working script devised from original story by Daniel Jamieson
First performance Exeter Phoenix February 8 2002

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Narrator: It never used to snow like this. Maybe once in a blue moon. You can tell how unusual it is because nobody's got the weather gear to cope with it. M & S don't sell arctic parkas yet. Pensioners are being pulled like ice lollies from snowdrifts up and down the country but in M&S the rails are still full of shower-proof anoraks.

Look at these two. They've got other things to worry about than the weather. They came here to talk because it used to be a quiet winebar. When they found it had changed to a noisy student pub they couldn't think of anywhere else to go. It doesn't matter anyway – there's nothing left to say. Sarah's pregnant. She wants to keep it. Mark doesn't - he can't say why - he just doesn't.

How simple other people's lives look from the outside – like snow clouds from space. It's only from the ground up you can glimpse how many million snowflakes might actually make a blizzard.

Sarah: I'm keeping it. I'll go to mum's. What are you scared of? It's not like we haven't talked about it. You said you liked the idea. It's not like we're too young or anything. What's the matter?

(She suddenly places a chair next to his but facing the other way, sits in it and hugs him desperately as if to squeeze some truth out of him like juice out of a puzzlingly dry lemon.)

Talk to me! I don't want to see you again. (She leaves without looking at him.)

Narrator: Inside Mark a voice rings out, a voice from the past. (Lawrence's voice) Where's Baby Jane? (Mark looks around in confusion and staggers into someone.)

Do you want to hold her?

You'd be a good dad.

(Mark bumps into someone big who knocks him down.)

Lawrence: Maybe we could be priests. Nobody hurts priests. Ever. You go straight to Hell. (Mark has been crying with pain and self-pity, but now he starts to laugh.)

Mark: It's alright, My brother's looking after me. I'm going to be a priest!



Narrator: Finding herself with a gap between appointments, Sarah is staring out through the window of her salon. An arctic blizzard sweeps up the High Street. (Sarah finds out a magnifying glass.) It was the first thing Mark ever gave her. Not roses. Not perfume or

chocolates or love poems but a magnifying glass. Snowflakes stick to the window. In the second before they melt, she peers at their infinitely various, crystalline shapes.

(Sarah's next customer, Callum Sampson, arrives.)

Callum: God! Ridiculous.

Sarah: Mr Sampson?

Callum: Yes. Am I late?

Sarah: No.

Callum: The snow's just piling up at the side of the road. Parking's impossible. (He sits in the barber's chair and Sarah puts the cape round his neck. He gets rather a shock when he catches sight of himself in the mirror.) Christ Alive! It's the Wild Man of Borneo!

Sarah: What can I do for you Mr Sampson?

Callum: Callum, please. Not a lot. Hopeless case! Just tame it a bit if you can. Round the collar and ears, you know. (Sarah has sidled off for a moment to write down the name Callum in the back of her appointment book, repeating the name under her breath as if trying it on like a hat. Callum watches her.)

Sarah: Sorry. (She comes back and begins to comb his hair before cutting it.)

Callum: When's it due?

Sarah: I thought this thing covered it.

Callum: No. Just the name thing.

Sarah: Next month.

Callum: Everything OK?

Sarah: Yes...

Callum: Sorry. I'm a doctor. Obstetrics is my thing. I didn't mean to pry. Force of habit, I s'pose!

Sarah: There is something... Have you got any kids?

Callum: No. None of my own. Not yet anyway! No, I just pull them out of other people.

Sarah: I can't think of any names. That I like anyway. It's, like, "my job" but I just can't do it. You take your name so much for granted. You feel like it was sewn on a little label when you came out. But when you have a baby, you realise, everyone in the world had to be given a name by someone else. There's all these babies coming into the world like cheap pink sausages with no names, nothing... and it's up to me to come up with a name or it'll just be another pink sausage out of the sausage machine...

Callum: I sympathise but, you know, I have the opposite problem. I live alone – not with another person, that is. But I live with Cato the Cat; Crannock the Cockatiel; Sophie the Sofa; Roger the Rubber Plant. My car is Victor the Volvo... I'm holding back from Travis for my new toaster. I know it's twee but I've got a lust for naming.

(Callum gently takes the scissors from her hands. She looks at him from another world until they are both distracted. A man pushes a pushchair past Sarah's shop window with difficulty, into the wind and through the snow. He's trying to hand out leaflets as he goes. Suddenly, right outside Sarah's shop, a particularly malevolent gust of wind gets hold of the pushchair cover and whips it off down the street. The man puts the leaflets in the child's lap and runs after the cover. The child starts to howl as the snow pelts it in the face. Sarah plucks a spare plastic cape from its hook and runs out into the street without putting on a coat. She shields the mouth of the pram with the cape and comforts the child. When the father returns without the cover she says they must keep the cape and helps him tie it in place. The father is talking about the weather angrily. He gives Sarah a leaflet from his pile, thanks her and sets off again. The leaflet is shaped like a giant snowflake but with a red bar through it, as on a road sign. Sarah is looking at it when she comes back through the door.)

Sarah: A march in London, a protest about the weather. I don't know who they think will come on a weekday. Maybe it's not right to have a baby now... I'm so sorry. You must think I'm terrible.

Callum: Not in the slightest. You'll know, when you find the right name. Trust me. It'll just pop up somewhere and you'll know.



Priest: I love hearing confession. I always think it's the part of a priest's work that's the most directly helpful to his flock. The chance for a person to open up and talk about what's really bugging them to someone detached but sympathetic... it's worth its weight in gold. You can be sure your Woody Allens and your Ally McBeals pay a small fortune for the privilege in Manhattan Island with their top-dollar psychiatrists. A few Hail Marys and Our Fathers is a small

price to pay for spiritual well-being, I think you'll agree gentlemen!
Now. I want to start our work on confession today by getting you all
to remember something that happened to you as a child. Then I
want you to tell us about it. I'll give you a few moments to think.
Something that troubled you as a child. A secret perhaps.
Something you would have benefited from talking to someone
about at the time.

Narrator: Mark racks his brains for some neatly packaged little memory to
offer the group. Instead, his mind floats back to an evening long
ago when he was sat watching Crackerjack, and hearing strange
noises through the ceiling. Like someone getting on and off the
bed. Standing up, sitting down. Standing up, sitting down.

Mark: Why's Dad helping you with your homework in Mum's room?

Lawrence: Shut up.

Mark: You're flying low. (Lawrence elbows him.) Lawrence! (But before
he can start crying Lawrence drags him out of the back door and
into the passageway beside the house, where he is promptly sick in
the drain.) Eugh! (Mark is sick too.)

Lawrence: Don't call him Dad.

Mark: Mum wants us to...

Lawrence: I don't care.

Mark: You can't call a grown-up Barry...

Barry: Lawrence?

Lawrence: Run! (They run and run.)

Mark: You were sick.

Lawrence: So were you.

Mark: I looked at your face.

Lawrence: Ha haa.

Lawrence: Where are we going?

Mark: The old army camp?

Lawrence: The old army camp!

(They run all the way to the old army camp.)

Mark: Look! It's Mary O'Grady. (Mark and Lawrence stand and watch her for a while.) Oi, O'Grady. O'Grady, give us a go.(But she carries on without having heard, it seems.)

Lawrence: O'Grady, your breath smells of cheese

Mark: O'Grady your breath smells like a cheesy bum!

Lawrence: She only ever finds Coke cans anyway.

Mary: No.

Mark: Go on then, what've you found?

Mary: Roman coin on Martin's Fields.

Lawrence: She's making it up. (Mary O'Grady gets a rusty disk out of her pocket and holds it out to Lawrence without looking at him. They examine it. It seems real enough to them, but what would they know. They give it back.)

Mark: Give us a go then.

Mary: What can you pay? (Mark and Lawrence rifle through their pockets.)

Lawrence: Lolly from a dib-dab?

Mary: Got any cash?

Mark: 5p.

Mary: That'll buy you a minute.

Mark: Right! (Mark puts on the earphones. Mary O'Grady sits on the bank next to Lawrence, to count to sixty. Lawrence tries to put her off.)

Lawrence: Do you know how babies are actually born?

Mary: Of course. Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen...

Lawrence: How then?

Mary: Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four... I'm not telling you.

Lawrence: You embarrassed?

Mary: No.

Lawrence: You're blushing! Go on! I've heard the baby comes out of the woman's bum...

Mary: You're sick you are!

Mark: Found something!

Mary: You haven't." (When she puts on the headphones she finds it's true. She falls to her knees, gets a trowel out of her duffle bag and starts hacking at the springy grass. She hits the metal thing and they all start to scrabble round it. Suddenly Mary O'Grady jumps up.) Stop! It's a bomb! (They laugh.) No it is. A shell. It's phosphur. My dad says they used to fire them up here during the war. For practice.

Mark: It's old now though, isn't it? It'd never work.

Mary: They can. It'll burn you! (She runs away.)

Lawrence: Bloody chicken! Come on. (They carry on digging it out 'til Lawrence stands up with it.) God. It's heavy.

Mark: Let's have a feel. God, it's heavy. How are we going to get it home? We can't just carry it like this.

Lawrence: Our Jamie's pram!

Mark: Mum'll kill us.

Lawrence: Not if she doesn't find out. You mustn't tell anyone. I mean it. This is serious now. You mustn't tell anyone.

Priest: Mark. Mark! You've seemed particularly deep in thought. I wonder if you'd care to share your secret with us?

Mark: I've not been able to think of anything yet, Father.



Radio presenter: So. What does it feel like? (Sarah Jablonski is listening to the radio as she finishes work for the day.) That's the question most women in their first pregnancy want answered about childbirth. What does it actually feel like? What, for example, do contractions feel like?

Woman 1: I felt the contractions in my back – really intense – not where I thought I would feel them...

Woman 2: The contractions were in my groin. It really hurt...

Woman 3: The contractions were down in my bottom, very low down...

(Sarah is turning her "OPEN" to "CLOSED" and sweeping the day's crop of discarded locks into a pile, but listens intently as she works.)

Presenter: Consultant obstetrician, Callum Sampson, talked to us about how women felt in his experience.

Callum on radio: Most women say, however bad the contractions hurt, that it's bearable because it's not continuous pain. You get a space in between. Contractions at that stage feel more like waves that build up in strength gradually. During the second stage of labour the mother feels the contractions differently:

Woman 4 :The contractions were like shitting a brick. A very hard object. I remember thinking that while I was pushing!
(Sarah goes to the loo for a pee, but she leaves the door open so she can carry on listening to the programme.)

Presenter: At the end of the first stage of labour, when the cervix is almost fully open, women often feel a range of symptoms that show the moving on to the second stage of labour. This period is called transition.

Callum: Transition is, or can be, marked by quite odd symptoms: shaking, icy feet, hiccuping, being sick, feeling very weepy and helpless and wanting to give up, feeling very angry with everyone, including the baby, because labour hurts so much, being bad tempered and abusive..."

Woman 5: My transition was very long and I stamped around shouting at the midwives, "Can't any of you idiots suggest something to do? I can't think anymore!"

Presenter: In case you're getting worried at home, very few women suffer all of these symptoms and some don't have any of them at all. Transition can be a very anxious and emotional time for your supporter, especially if this person is your partner.

Partner: I felt completely helpless. I didn't have a clue what else I could do to help her. I was terrified that what was going on wasn't normal, or that it was going wrong...

(Sat there on the loo, Sarah has gone into a daydream. While the radio programme carries on she imagines Mark and Callum Sampson coming into her shop. Callum is wearing a surgical gown and hat. They come into the loo and tilt Sarah on to her back. Callum puts a screen across Sarah's midriff, so she can't see

what's happening to the lower part of her body, and puts her legs up in stirrups. Mark holds her hand.)

Mark: Mr Sampson.

Callum in Sarah's daydream: Callum, please.

Mark: (To Sarah) You're doing really well

Callum: You're nearly there!

Sarah: (To Mark.) It feels very odd. It doesn't really feel like it's happening at all.

Callum: One more push!

Sarah: It doesn't feel right. It kind of aches inside where the baby's touching. No. Sort of numb where it's touching...

Mark: Come on!

Sarah: ...and achey behind that.

Callum: So close now!

Mark: Come on!

Sarah: You know? Like when you suck an ice cube...

Mark: Come on babe!

Sarah: ...the feeling against the inside of your mouth. It feels like that.

Mark: You can do it!

Sarah: It feels cold.

Callum: There! You've done it! (They both look at Callum Sampson in surprise.)

Sarah: Is it alright?

Callum: I think it'll be fine.

Sarah: Well... Is it a boy or girl?

Callum: I can't be sure. I suppose it doesn't matter.

Sarah: Can I hold it?

Callum: If you want to. (He brings the baby round and gives it to Sarah. She looks at it in confusion. It's made of something glass-like, wet and smooth.)

Sarah: It's made of ice.

Callum: Yes.

Sarah: Is that alright?

Callum: I think it might be. But you have to keep it warm. Hold it tight.

(Sarah tries to. Mark and Callum watch her. Her arms get cold. She gets more and more uncomfortable, shifting it from side to side.)

Sarah: It hurts. I can't. It hurts too much. I can't do it. (She gives it up to Mark reluctantly. He cradles it and takes it away, out of Sarah's shop Callum follows him.) I'm sorry. Mark? I'll have another go in a minute. It was just too cold. Mark? (She goes out of the door and looks up and down the street but can't see him anywhere.)

Callum on radio: The baby may look very unlike what you were expecting. Some babies are purple when they are born, some look grey and lifeless which is frightening. In a surprisingly short period of time they turn pink and look quite different.

(Sarah comes back into the shop shivering and downcast. She turns off the radio and stands thinking, leaning against the counter. Then she rummages in a rack of magazines and papers by her comfy waiting chairs. It takes her a while to find the snowflake leaflet with the red bar across it. She puts it in her bag and leaves her shop, locking the door and setting off into the snowy night.)



Priest: ...and make sure not to cover the baby's face from all those lovely video cameras.

(Mark bursts through the doors of the seminary chapel. He's late. The old priest is at the font. He has his sleeves rolled up and in his arms, swaddled in a tea towel, is a two litre, empty Sprite bottle.)

Priest: Alarm trouble again, Mark?

Mark: Sorry Father...

Priest: Spare us the full story. Just tuck in the back there. Now, (he continues with his lecture,) If you can get an altar boy to bring the water from the sacristy at this point, so much the better. I find that if you switch off the Burco at the beginning of the service, it's perfect

by now. Only for Heaven's sake, test it before you pour it all over the child. The mother won't be thanking you for scalding little John Joseph Patrick like a pig. I baptise you John Joseph Patrick in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Now Father Mark, step up to the font. You can make up for yourself by being the first to dip the nipper this morning!

(The old man delicately hands Mark the bundle as if it were a real baby still, supporting its head. But as Mark stands there with it, the tea towel falls away and he finds himself with a mud-caked incendiary shell in his arms. Lawrence is dragging their baby brother's pram over the hummocky grass towards him.)

Mark: Um!

Lawrence: Don't "Um", put that down and help me. (Mark dutifully drops the shell with a thud beside him.) Careful!

Mark: Mum'll be taking Jamie to Auntie Melanie's...

Lawrence: We'll have it back by then.

Mark: People'll look in and see it.

Lawrence: No. 'Cause I brought these. (Lawrence holds up a pale blue babygrow and a mauve woolly helmet.)

Mark: Um!

Lawrence: If we put it in the clothes and cover it with the blanket they'll just think it's Jamie.

Mark: It's all dirty though.

Lawrence: I brought stuff to clean it. (He pulls cotton wool and baby lotion out of the pram.)

Mark: Alright.

Lawrence: Scrape off the mud. (Lawrence lays out the babygro). Bring it here. Lay it on there. Go on! Boy or girl?

Mark: It hasn't got a willy.

Lawrence: Girl then.

Mark: You brought blue clothes.

Lawrence: It's a free country.

Mark: She might get bullied.

Lawrence: She's just a piece of metal! Alright, well... we won't let anyone bully her, alright? What's her name?

Mark: I don't know.

Lawrence: Just choose one you like.

Mark: I don't like any girls' names.

Lawrence: There must be a girl you like.

Mark: Jane.

Lawrence: That's mum's name.

Mark: It's a free country.

Lawrence: Alright. Baby Jane.

Mark: What're you doing?

Lawrence: Got to clean the poo from between their legs or they get rash.
Won't she! (He puts on a talking-to-baby voice.) Jack and Gye went out in the rye...

Mark: Don't.

Lawrence: Why not?

Mark: It was mine and Dad's.

Lawrence: He used to say it to me too. Do you want to hold her?

Mark: I can't.

Lawrence: Mum isn't here now.

Mark: I'll drop her.

Lawrence: No you won't. Hold under her head like this. And under her bottom.
Now just rock her gently.

Both: (to Baby Jane) Jack and Gye went out in the rye
And they found a little girl with one black eye.
Come says Jack let's knock her on the head.
No says Gye, let's buy her some bread.
You buy one loaf, and I'll buy two,
And we'll bring her up as other folk do.

(After tucking Baby Jane into the pram under the white blanket they set off.)

Lawrence: Lift the other end. You'd be a good dad.

Mark: No.

Lawrence: Why not?

Mark: If I had a baby and they were sick, I'd be sick too.

Lawrence: I'd be a good dad. We know what Baby Jane likes! She likes to go weeeeeeeeeee! (He pushes the pram along as fast as he can until they're out of breath and have to stop. They round the corner into Elm Road and bump into a fourteen-year-old girl leant against the wall, smoking a cigarette. Lawrence knows her and halts.)

Girl: It's little Florence!

Mark: Do you know her?

Girl: Out with Dougal and Zebedee then?

Mark: Lawrence?

Girl: This pouf your brother?

Mark: Shut up!

Girl: You two missing your dad then? Bet your mum's gutted. So gutted she went straight out and got herself up the duff. Must be hard lying in bed listening to some new bloke porking your mum all night!

Mark: Come on Lawrence. (Mark tries pushing the pram away, but the girl stands in front of it and stops him.)

Girl: Shame your dad didn't go further away to do his dirty business. He's still living on the estate, isn't he? On the other side. In a flat. With his boyfriend. My dad's seen them at it. Didn't shut the curtains. Oh dear. Everyone seen 'em. Bumming in the window. Bumming each other off.

Lawrence: Fuck off fuck off fuck off... (Lawrence attacks the girl, but he's much smaller, much weaker. The girl twists him by the shirt and holds him bent over.)

Girl: Like it like that? Eh? Like your dad? Up the arse? (She kicks Lawrence viciously from behind. Then Mark hits her on the head with the shell and she falls dazed on the ground.)

Mark: If you ever, ever touch my brother again, Baby Jane will come round your house and beat you to a pulp and burn you up to ashes. (The girl writhes slowly on the ground with her mouth open. Mark puts the shell in the pram and they go home.)

Lawrence: I'll go in and check the coast is clear. If I get stuck go to the empty church and wait for me.

Mark: Is it true?

Lawrence: What?

Mark: About Dad.

Lawrence: No.

Mark: Why doesn't he come and see us then?

Lawrence: I don't know.

(He goes inside. Mark waits. He waits some more. Then Lawrence appears in the lounge window and draws the curtains. As he does, he looks at Mark but his face gives nothing away. Mark pushes the pram towards the empty church.)



Narrator: Imagine we're borrowing a pigeon's perch on a lime-streaked girder at Waterloo Station. It's 8.30 Wednesday morning. From up here we'd be able to see a young woman emerge into the throng from the Sock Shop with a snowflake leaflet held in a new pair of red, woolly gloves.

At 9.30, later this same morning, if we borrowed Nelson's good eye and cast it with naval precision down through the tumbling snow to the extreme right of the fourth step rising from Trafalgar Square, we might pick from the thicket of upraised arms a red-gloved hand, tentatively punching the air, keeping time with all the others.

And later still, at 10.30, if we floated up with a cloud of freed balloons into the snow-thickened air over Whitehall, we'd see the woman with the red gloves, along with many other protesters, packing fresh snow into snowballs and hurling them at the police. But from right up here, through the drumming of batons on riot shields and the whinnying of scared police horses and the clamour of protest, we'd not be able to hear a tiny heartbeat, sheltering within another heartbeat.



Narrator: Mark's back home for Christmas from the seminary. He expects to bump into Sarah round every corner - half in hope, half in terror. Maybe she'll be pushing a pram. He never does though. Now he's waiting outside a church in a part of town he's not been to much before.

Mrs Mack: Father Mark?

Mark: Yes...

Mrs Mack: Mrs Mackareyevic. Sorry to keep you waiting out here only we've had some trouble recently, Father. I lock the church when the schools are closed. We've a little fire-raiser on the loose at the moment. It's just a quick look you're wanting Father?

Mark: Just to say hello to the place really. You don't have to call me Father. I'm not actually ordained yet.

Mrs Mack: Oh? (She looks him over suspiciously for a moment.) How long are you with us for then?

Mark: Just for the holidays then I'm back to the seminary again.

(The warden turns on the overhead lights, and tries to cross herself from the bowl of holy water by the door but it's frozen. She bashes the surface of the ice with the end of her torch.)

Mrs Mack: Sorry Father. The heating pipes burst a couple of months ago and there hasn't been the money to fix them. You're not in your own Parish then?

Mark: They've got three American Fathers with them for Christmas so Father Daly suggested I came across and lent a hand here.

Mrs Mack: Ah! Always the poor relation to Saint Matthew's, that's us at St James. They get three American fathers, we get you. Still, Father Johnny'll appreciate the help with the drop-in centre I should think. There aren't many services nowadays. It's all running down before the conversion next year – flats for the homeless. Such a shame.

Mark: How much will they be changing the inside of the church?

Mrs Mack: Gutting it – top to bottom. Father Johnny warned them they'd better not mess about too much with the floor but they won't listen. They did some work under there in the eighties and they opened up a spring. Just here.

Mark: A water spring?

Mrs Mack: That's right. Church has been sat on it all this time. Of course, when they uncovered it, it came out like a fountain. Had a hell of a time capping it off, they did!

Mark: And this is the cap?

Mrs Mack: Yes, you'd think they'd do a nicer job. I'll leave you to look round yourself before I go Father. I'll just show you our Sacred Heart chapel. It's just repainted this last year and all new gilt. Such a pity – some dog-person'll be dossing down in there soon. Where will Our Lord sleep round here when they take away the tabernacle? Nobody thinks of that. Where will his body and blood lie?

(She turns on the light in the Sacred Heart chapel and Mark is shocked. The colours are extremely garish. A grave Christ looks down at them. He points at his heart, which is crowned, engorged and flaming.)

Mark: What do *you* think the flames around the heart mean.

Mrs Mack: A sort of visible holiness, I think Father, but not burning hot. Like the flames on a Christmas pudding.

Mark: Not suffering?

Mrs Mack: I wouldn't know Father. I only unlock the doors. I'll leave you to look round yourself. (She gives Mark the keys and leaves.)

Mark: Thank you.

(Mark kneels to pray but he's troubled and can't concentrate. He goes to the tabernacle. Something makes him want to open it now. He draws back the little curtain to uncover the brass door and turns the key. A little body sits inside. It wears a blue babygro and a mauve woolly helmet. Mark delicately lifts the phosphur shell out of the tabernacle. The overhead lights start to flicker and go out one by one until Mark is left in what little dusky light that falls through the high, small church windows. The door of the church creaks ajar and a small boy's face peeps round it.)

Lawrence: Mark?

Mark: Where've you been?

Lawrence: At home.

Mark: It's almost dark. I was really scared. Was mum there?

Lawrence: No. She was out looking for us in the car with Jamie.

Mark: Was Barry there?

Lawrence: Yes.

Mark: Are we in trouble? What did he do? Will he do it to me?

Lawrence: We're not going back. You and me. Or baby Jane.

Mark: Where are we going?

Lawrence: I don't know. Where's baby Jane?

Mark: Here. (He hands it over. Lawrence rocks it.)

Lawrence: Where's the pram?

Mark: Outside.

Lawrence: Will you go and get it? Mark? I'll always look after you mate. (He hugs him. Mark doesn't squirm.) Maybe we could be priests. Nobody hurts priests. Ever. You go straight to Hell. (Lawrence lets him go. Mark goes out and looks for the pram.)
Jack and Gye went out in the rye
Found a little girl with one black eye
Come says Jack, lets knock her on the head...

(It's dark now. He lets off the brake and is moving the pram backwards and forwards to turn it round. A noise comes from inside the church like a bursting bag of flour, only very much louder; and Lawrence screams for his brother, screams for it to stop, screams for his father, screams for his life. Mark screams for his brother. When he goes into the church the light and heat are blinding and he cannot see his brother, only hear his screams over the roaring of chemical fire. He struggles towards the source. It emanates from the tabernacle of the Sacred Heart – white flames pour out of its door as from a furnace mouth, and carry his brother's agony to him. The door is closing, shutting them apart. He puts his hands against the door and screams with pain. The grave Jesus looks down at him, pointing at his own heart all the while.)



Narrator: After the riot, when the crowds have melted from Trafalgar Square, and when those present have finally laid their heads on pillows fat, thin, striped, flowered, plain, hospital or police station issued, the second tumult begins. It is behind their eyes and between their ears.

Voice 1: ...I have never felt more alive. I will never feel more alive...

- Voice 2: ...nothing is worth more than my teeth. Now I know. That's the sort of person I am. I'm ashamed, but it's true. Nothing...
- Voice 3: ...nothing. This was nothing. History is full of people who have done more for less. I feel humble. I feel tired...
- Voice 4: ...I think I broke his nose. I couldn't punch a dog. How could I punch a person in the face?...
- Voice 5: ...it was so right. Who thought of snowballs? The crowd thought of snowballs. It was anonymous...
- Voice 6: ...bottles, sticks with nails in, bits of smashed drain cover, bits of glass, molotovs, bags of shit...
- Voice 7: ...this horse was just going berserk. People were trying to keep out of the way...
- Voice 8: ...The policeman was still when he fell. Like a turtle on its back. People didn't hesitate. They did it by instinct... started beating the shit out of him...
- Voice 9: ...where did she come from? I mean, why the fuck was a pregnant woman there?...
- Voice 10: ...I could see the goosepimples on his bruises. She came and held the policeman like a baby. Nobody touched him then...
- Voice 11: ...no-one else could have done it. I've thought since, no-one else on the planet could have done that then...
- Voice 12: ...I stood still and watched. I couldn't stop crying...
- Voice 13: ...when I saw her there, I wanted to sing, from no-where, Good King Wenceslas. We had the Daily Mail book of carols when I was a kid. We used to sing them with my dad playing the piano...

(The policeman falls to the ground and Sarah goes to shelter him from the violence.)

Policeman: Talk to me. Tell me something.

Sarah: What?

Policeman: Something nice. I don't know... Anything. Something that happened when you were a kid.

Sarah: I can't think of anything.

Policeman: How about when it snowed when you were a kid? When it was still special.

Sarah: It never used to snow like this.

Policeman: It did once, didn't it. When was it? '78?

Sarah: No. It must have been '79, cause it was my first year at secondary school. We had nearly a week off.

Policeman: Did you have a sledge?

Sarah: No.

Policeman: But you went out?

Sarah: Yes. There was this golf course near our house. Normally you couldn't go there. It was all private. If you did they tried to hit you with their golf balls! (The policeman laughs which makes him cough. Sarah strokes him.) I went there the first day off school. It was deserted – not a single footprint. I crossed all the fairways. It was huge – like Russia or something. I went right to the other side, right to Chislehurst, which was like another land to where I lived. And there was this kid sledging on the final fairway. Cocky bugger, I thought. I bet his dad's a member of the golf club. Kids were different in Chislehurst. But it was a girl. She was sledging on a tractor inner tube. Did you know, they make the most amazing sledges?

Policeman: No.

Sarah: Neither did I. I stood and watched her come down twice. Then she came up to me and said, "Your turn." Just like that! "Your turn."

Policeman: What did she look like?

Sarah: She had dark hair in a bob and very pink cheeks. Rosa, she was called. I remember cause it went with her cheeks. Rosa. We had such a brilliant time. I stayed there all afternoon. I've never told anyone that before. Rosa. I never saw her again.



(Mark enters the draughty St James Church and puts out a cardboard sign saying, "Drop-In Centre – Welcome to St James!")

Narrator: Mark's come to St James' and opened the drop-in centre every afternoon this week. So far nobody has dropped in.

(Mark reads the paper all wrapped up in his overcoat, his breath all turning to steam. He shifts uncomfortably.)

Narrator: It's less draughty in the confessional box.

(In there he settles more comfortably to reading the paper. He breaks open a Kit Kat and munches on it happily. He's half way through it when he hears the heavy church door open.)

Mark: Hello? Father John? (Mark guiltily swallows the last of his Kit Kat and is trying to fold up his paper without making any noise when the door to the next confessional opens and shuts.)

Boy: Hello?

Mark: Hello?

Boy: I can't see you.

Mark: I can't see you either. It's to make it easier to confess, so you can't see the priest. Shouldn't you be in school?

Boy: Holidays.

Mark: I'm sorry, I'm not a priest yet. I can't hear your confession. You want Father John for that. Tuesdays and Thursdays at five.

Boy: Father John?

Mark: Yes, if you want to confess, you know, ask God's forgiveness.

Boy: I prob'ly ought to. I've got to tell him what I've done?

Mark: Yes, that's why it's called confession.

Boy: Doesn't God just know?

Mark: He knows, but if you want forgiveness you've got to say your sins to Father John.

Boy: Like owning up.

Mark: If you like.

Boy: But I can't talk to you.

Mark: You can if you want but I can't absolve you.

Boy: Well, I like burning things.

Mark: What?

Boy: Buildings, garages, warehouses...

Mark: Why do you do that?

Boy: It's a laugh, isn't it?

Mark: Not really.

Boy: You're not supposed to tell me off.

Mark: Why's it a laugh?

Boy: You do a little bit of work – get the petrol, pile some stuff up, rubbish an' that, pour on the petrol... But once you light it, WOOMF! It does all the work. And it's so big, what happens. And I think, hey, I made that happen. Hey!

(Mark has thrown open the door to the boy's confessional, dragged him out by the shirt and thrown him on the ground.)

Mark: What if someone gets hurt?

Boy: What sort of a priest are you?

Mark: You might burn a person.

Boy: I don't. I choose buildings with no-one in them.

Mark: Did you ever think you might kill someone by mistake? A child?
(Mark kicks him.)

Boy: You can't do that...

(There's a great crash outside the front door of the church. The boy looks shocked. Mark runs towards the door.)

Don't open it! (When Mark opens the door there's a fire raging so fiercely in the vestibule, he narrowly escapes it blasting in his face. He runs towards the sacristy where there is another door out of the church.) I lit one there too. (The sacristy is ablaze and impassable too.)

Mark: Are you mad?

Boy: There must be another door...

Mark: No. (A splintering, crackling sound draws their eyes up to the ceiling.) It must have got in the roof.

Boy: I only came in to check there was no-one here.

(Mark tries to pile up chairs to reach a window, but they won't stay piled up and the window is too high. Part of the ceiling by the door suddenly crashes down in a flurry of sparks. The boy begins to panic.)

Help! Help! (Mark grabs the boy and holds him in a bear hug.)

Mark: (Mark remembers something now, which sends him into overdrive.) Find something like a metal bar. Something strong. Quick.

Boy: Like this? (The boy brings a window pole.)

Mark: Yes. (Mark has found the metal staff from a statue of Saint Christopher. He's determined to find something he has seen on the floor – a circular concrete plug. At last he finds it, set down in a shallow hole with just enough room round it to get the window pole in beside it.)

Boy: What are you doing?

Mark: Water... There's a spring down there.

(They lever downwards but the plug won't budge. Mark puts the metal staff down the hole too and they both throw all their weight on the two levers. After a few seconds there is a sudden give and water streams across the floor under extreme pressure.)

Round the other side.

(Water fountains out of the spring and starts to fill the church.)

Keep away from the walls.

Boy: It's getting higher.

Mark: Can you swim?

Boy: Yes. My face is burning.

Mark: Keep it in the water.

Narrator: The water is very clear. Mark watches shoals of firelight swimming down, darting through reefs of pews, illuminating the parquet like ribs of sand. A few glimmers find their way down into a dark corner

where they meet the glint of all new gilt, down in the chapel of the Sacred Heart...

(Mark takes a deep breath and plunges down through the water to the chapel. And there is the brass tabernacle, glinting softly, Mark wants to open it but he's scared. He gathers his courage and lays a hand on the door. Nothing happens to him. He turns the key and thrusts his hand into the tabernacle, searching for something. At that moment Mark is plucked backwards with huge, smooth force from the tabernacle. He bursts back onto the surface next to the boy.)

Mark: What's happening?

Boy: Look – the wall's going!

(They're sucked by the escaping deluge out of the church and into the churchyard outside. When the water has all spread out, Mark finds himself lying on his back looking at the stars. The boy is lying unharmed nearby.)

Boy: Thanks for confession Father.

(He runs away. Mark staggers to his feet. He looks at his right hand, which clutches something soft. He wrings it out and holds it up to the last light of the fire. It's an old fashioned, powder blue babygrow. He sets off at a run. On his journey he passes a young woman all wrapped up in hat, scarf and red gloves, pushing a pram. Finally he arrives in front of Sarah's salon. It's dark inside and empty. Mark suddenly realises something and looks back down the street the way he came. He sprints back panting, puzzled, looking all around. To his left begins a path apparently unblemished at first glance. Looking closer, a set of footprints is just visible, and two, long, straight, parallel lines being busily filled in by the snow – a minute later and they would be gone forever. And there, the woman has paused to fasten up the cover on her pram a little tighter with her red-gloved hands. The woman is talking through the tiny gap in her pram cover.)

Sarah: Is it cosy in there? Is it?

(Now Mark is beside her. Sarah starts at his sudden appearance on the quiet path, then looks at him long and hard. Suddenly she cries out and pushes him into a bank of snow. She immediately covers her mouth. He doesn't try to get up. After lying still for a bit, he remembers the babygrow in his inside pocket and offers it to her.)

It's blue.

Mark: She's a girl?

(Sarah nods. She takes the babygro and puts it in the basket under the pram then she goes and helps Mark up out of the snow.)

What's her name?

Sarah: Rosa.

Mark: Rosa. That's nice. Can I see her?

Sarah: No. Not here. You'll make her cold. You'd better come back to mine. (Sarah starts to leave. As she passes Mark she stops and brushes the snow from his sleeve. The narrator enters at the back of the stage and watches unseen.)

You can push.

(Mark pushes the pram. They go home. The narrator comes downstage and looks up at the falling snow. Lights Fade to black.)

THEATRE ALIBI'S STYLE OF WORK

Why tell stories?

We think humans need to tell stories. More than that, we think this need to tell stories is part of what makes us human, part of the unique intelligence that makes us different from other animals. Telling stories, listening to them, watching them, talking about them, thinking about them... without necessarily realising it, we're processing our experience in a very sophisticated way when we're doing these things. When watching an episode of **Eastenders** and wondering whether Sharon and Phil might get back together, we might be chewing over our own urges and inclinations. When we reach such a moment in real life we might not immediately think of Sharon and Phil, but in some tiny way we might have used their story to expand what we think about that aspect of reality.

If we're constantly using stories to get an angle on a chaotic world, then as the world changes, so must our angle. Theatre Alibi is always searching for the right stories to tell and the right way to tell them to best question the world as it is.

The way we've chosen to tell stories is through theatre. Here's why. In theatre the actor is right there in the same room with the audience. As a result, and this is absolutely unique to theatre, a split reality is presented to the audience in which the actor is both himself, here and now, and someone else in another time and place, a character in a fictional world. When we approach our work, we try to take advantage of this split reality. We often begin shows with the actors talking directly to the audience, beginning to tell a story and then slipping from describing a character into becoming them. So unlike many of theatre companies we choose to reveal to our audience the moment when the actor takes on their role.

"So what?" you might ask. But wait. This actor is here in the room with you, and then suddenly they step through an invisible wall into a realm where anything, anything imaginable, can happen and if they're doing their job well, they've taken you with them! It's like someone's taken you by the hand and led you through the back of the wardrobe, or through the looking-glass, or into a DeLorean sports car and back to the future or whatever.... You're not watching it happen on telly, it's happening right there in front of you.

In keeping with these thoughts, here are some of the ways we choose to work:

- We reveal transformations: actors leap from being themselves to being a character (or several) and back again before the eyes of the audience, not in the wings with wigs and makeup; simple props and set are taken up by the actors and used to suggest places and things that weren't there before (a duvet becomes a field of snow, a walking stick becomes the rail of an ocean liner).
- We develop our actors' resources to help them suggest other characters, things and places: their voices, dance, puppetry etc.
- We enjoy working in unconventional theatre spaces, from shopping centres to warehouses, where audiences are made especially aware of the "here and now".
- We incorporate other artforms into our theatre to make it more effective at whisking people from the "here and now" to the realm of the imagination: music, sculpture, photography, film etc.
- We work from stories rather than scripts. This helps us remember to ask certain questions such as why are we telling these stories, and how, then, should we be telling them? This lets us experiment in rehearsal with how the actors can best bring the audience to the particular imaginary world in question.

IDEAS BEHIND *THE FREEZE*

While I was thinking about writing this show I read an article about the effect global warming might have on the Gulf Stream. The Gulf Stream is an ocean current coming up from the Caribbean towards Britain that has warmed our shores for millennia. Without it our country would be much colder than it is. Labrador in Canada is on a similar latitude but experiences temperatures in January as low as minus twenty Centigrade compared with ours of about five degrees Centigrade. The Gulf Stream goes round like a conveyor belt – warm water flows towards Britain on the surface, cools and sinks in the Arctic and slowly returns south along the ocean floor. Scientists now fear that global warming might suddenly stop this conveyor belt effect, and spell the end of the Gulf Stream. Without the warmth it brings us, Britain would suddenly become as cold as Labrador. From one year to the next a new Ice Age would begin. There is a real fear this might happen. I was fascinated and appalled by this notion.

I wanted to write about how people respond to change in their lives – big change, the sort that you haven't necessarily chosen, that fate visits on you unexpectedly. I was interested in how change can churn up things from our past lives that have to be dealt with before we can move on, and how it can bring us face to face with the future too. Having a baby seemed like one such massive life change that many people experience. Ultimately a positive experience in most cases, but one that might shake up all manner of stuff in people's hearts.

We were reading Jane Austen's novel, *Emma*, at school for 'A' level English. What's that got to do with it, you might wonder? There is a connection, trust me! There was a spate of bad weather in this Jane Austen book, and somehow, very subtly, it seemed to mirror what was going on in the characters' hearts, someone pointed out (not me – someone cleverer). "Ah yes," said our English teacher, "A fine example of pathetic fallacy!"

"What?" we all said at once.

"Pathetic fallacy is when human emotions are attributed to inanimate nature in literature."

"Eh?"

"Like saying, "...*the clouds frowned down on us.*" or, more indirectly, by having the weather reflect what the characters feel. Like Emma feeling miserable and by chance, the weather going all wet and windy and miserable too." Since then I've loved the idea of the weather in a story somehow reflecting what's going on inside people - what a rich sort of metaphor it seems to me.

The Freeze isn't really "about" the stopping of the Gulf Stream or about the beginning of a new Ice Age. It's about two people experiencing the turmoil of change. The snowy world the story is set in serves to reflect this emotional turmoil.

DANIEL JAMIESON (Writer)

Why did you choose to be a director?

I was more interested primarily in being a performer. But at university everyone got a chance to direct and it was then that I discovered that I could do it and I liked it, and that my interest in performing informed my directing. I carried on performing when I left university, but I think the lifestyle of a director began to appeal to me more and more – having to sell yourself day to day as a performer didn't appeal to me very much, I would have found it difficult. Also, it's easier as a director to continue on a particular line artistically.

How old were you?

I had elocution lessons aged nine and enjoyed them very much. I decided to be a performer then! It was at university when I was about twenty that the question of directing entered my head, although I was given a bit of Twelfth Night at school to direct when I was fifteen and I really enjoyed that.

Where/how did you train?

I went to drama group once a week from the age of seven to eighteen, which was run by the same, inspirational woman through all that time. I was in school plays, did Drama O Level, Theatre Studies A level, and a degree in Drama at Exeter University. My training as a performer continued at Alibi – we got the opportunity to work with an inspirational Polish theatre company called Gardzienice, and I learnt on the job from the previous artistic directors of Alibi.

What's your role in the rehearsal process for *The Freeze*?

I'm a co-ordinator – I decide what order we work on things, get the right people in the rehearsal room at the right time. I'm an outside eye – I can see what things look like from out the front. I make the final decisions about things. I try to hold on to an overview of the whole show. I'm not the type of director who goes in with a vision, I see the rehearsal process as a voyage of discovery in itself. I find it better to generate the material with the actors rather than planning it all out beforehand. If I plan anything beforehand it's the way to generate material in the rehearsals. I try to promote an atmosphere of creativity in which lots of ideas are generated then I choose the ones that work!

What particular challenges does this show present to you as a director?

In this show you follow two characters who are together at the beginning and then are separate for most of the show. It's a challenge to get the audience to care equally about both characters, and to have a sense that their stories are connected even though you don't see the two of them together much. This was solved by having a storyteller who sees Mark and Sarah together at the beginning then follows them on their separate journeys. Also the storyteller helps give the whole show a sense of shape and momentum. The high action stuff like the flooding of the church was a challenge too – I was scared it would just look like kids playing a playground game! I was surprised by the power of strong, realistic sound effects combined with committed acting to make a very convincing picture on stage.

What is particular about working for Alibi?

How the work is generated in the rehearsal room feels very particular. The storytelling is very particular too, if not unique. We try to make shows where we enjoy what live theatre can offer us. You often see images being constructed rather than it happening in secret. We never switch off the lights to change the set (which often makes life difficult!). We really enjoy revealing the transformations from actor to character and from location to location. We also draw on a particularly wide breadth of forms – music, film, our set designs are quite sculptural, the musicians usually aren't theatre musicians.+

Why did you choose to be a designer?

I didn't really choose to be a designer, it happened a bit by mistake. I was lucky in my choice of Foundation Course. I went along to that knowing that I wanted to do some kind of visual art, but didn't really have a clue what I wanted to do with it at all. Then they said to me on the Foundation Course, "How about theatre design, 'cause you get to do loads of different things?" That's probably a strength of mine, crossing over between all different types of making. I didn't think I could cope with being an "artist", working in isolation. I wanted to have people around, that I could bounce ideas off.

How old were you?

Nineteen or twenty. I didn't really know much about theatre design before then. I was aware of it. I always used to go and see things and was in things and used to be interested in costume, not set so much – I always got disappointed by school productions, that the art teacher would come in at the last moment and paint something on the back wall!

Where/how did you train?

I did GCSE Art and then A Level Art and that was pretty much all I liked. I was pretty crap at other things at school. Then I went on to do an Art Foundation Course after taking a year out. I went to Nottingham Trent College. It was the first place I looked at, and the moment I walked in through the door I liked the atmosphere – it was a little bit tatty and there was paint on the floor. I thought, "I can be at home here!"

What's your role in the rehearsal process for *The Freeze*?

Specifically, working with Alibi, things have to be kept quite changeable. When the show goes on there has to be a set and costumes and props. That's my responsibility. At Alibi, the challenge is that up until the last minute, any of those things can change quite dramatically. You have to be able to think on your feet.

What particular challenges does this show present you with as a designer?

I always feel that it's the performers who have more of the challenge, because whatever you give them as the set, they're going to have to find ways of using it, so you need to give them something that's useable, adaptable. It's a challenge to do the indoors and outdoors thing, and that the whole set has to be used for both those places, but there's a whole load of other things happening like lighting and sound which help.

Every theatre company must have a different flavour. What is particular about working for Alibi?

With Alibi you really are working with a team of people. When you design for other companies you can end up in a situation where you present them with a design and it doesn't change much. You do the drawings for it and then it's built by other people. You don't actually have to be present for a lot of it. Alibi seems to work more as a team of people. Everyone has particular strengths – it's about all those things working together.

Why did you choose to be a musician?

Jane: I heard a violin on the radio and I said to my mum that I wanted to play. I knew then that's what I wanted to spend my time doing.

Alex: I wanted to be a rock star. I enjoyed music more than anything else. I started playing drums, wanting to be a rock drummer, then played the electric guitar and then the mandolin.

How old were you?

Jane: I was four years old.

Alex: I was fifteen.

Where/how did you train?

Jane: I learnt from my mum who was a music teacher, and from Doctor Suzuki in Japan. I spent six months there when I was ten and again when I was thirteen. I was the only child – everyone else was an adult. I was scared into playing well. I'd play a piece and he'd judge my vibrato on a scale of one to ten and give me one and everyone else nine or ten. I liked it though. He made no concessions to me being a child, but he was very warm. He inspired me to play with gusto.

Alex: I was the opposite of Jane. I had no formal training and I flunked music at school. I played along with records and bought some books. I use written music to learn stuff, but I can't read it fluently.

What's your role in the rehearsal process for *The Freeze*?

Jane/Alex: We work with the actors a little to begin with. Then we go away and listen to tapes of our music that we've amassed over several years of playing together and choose appropriate stuff to go with the action. We like starting with existing music because you're in a certain state of mind at the time when you made it up and there's an emotional sense behind the music that you can't just make to order. Then we work two or three days a week with the actors, tailoring the music to the action, we also work on our own through that time, trying to make thematic sense of the music, choosing key moments when the music should relate back to other moments. This is so that the audience gets to remember the themes and care about them, in the same way as they get to know and care about the characters.

What particular challenges does this show present to you as musicians?

Alex: I normally play the mandolin but my music for this show was generated on computer, an Apple Power Book. I was sampling sounds then making them into music – it was difficult to manipulate the sounds into the music I wanted, as the technology is quite new to me. Also, finding the right sounds to suggest the snowy world in the show wasn't easy – I chose some quite unusual instruments in the end, a percussive zither and a bowed psaltery among them!

Jane: I was doing something different with this show too. I normally play the violin but most of my music for this show is me singing! I knew I couldn't sing words as they'd distract from the action in the show, but I didn't know what to sing. First I thought I might sing Latin words, or even made up language. Then I settled on a sort of "Ah" sound which is good because it makes your voice like a musical instrument. It was difficult to sing fast passages with this "Ah" sound though.

Jane/Alex: Working with session musicians was difficult. Neither of us is used to it. They just have to do what you tell them – there's no time for debate. It's hard being bossy and fussy with someone you've never met before. Also, we composed half the music each, then worked it together, which is another first for us. It's a miracle it came together but we think it works well.

What is particular about working for Alibi?

Music isn't an afterthought at Alibi, it's very integrated and a lot of thought goes into how it works with the action. Alibi seems to appreciate the music making overall emotional sense rather than having a big, showy effect at one moment. Themes are allowed to be established. It's almost filmic, how the music works emotionally with certain characters and scenes.

Why did you choose to be an actor?

It wasn't really a conscious choice. It seemed to choose me. I've always had a facility for putting on characters and funny voices, and been physically adept at becoming different people too. But I was very unsure that I would be good enough to do it professionally.

How old were you?

I felt like I was improving at college but I didn't feel I was a real actor until I was about twenty five. I wasn't absolutely sure about it then though, and I'm still not. I always tried to give myself space to say, "Well, I'm acting at the moment, but I'm thinking of going on to do something else." That's never materialised but I still think about doing it sometimes.

Where/how did you train?

I went to Dartington College in Devon. We were taught the Stanislavskian method of acting. That was very useful. I still use that structure but I don't go into it in depth. I do things much more by intuition nowadays. We had a lot of visiting tutors people like Edward Petherbridge and Max Stafford-Clarke. That was fantastic, having all these different inputs. I also trained in dance, Mary Fulkeson, Ian Paxton... very avant-garde – release and contact improvisation which actually helped to straighten my body out. I was quite a crooked sort of chap! I think it's very important to find a physical centre. That does affect my work.

What's your role in the rehearsal process for The Freeze?

For me rehearsals are about relaxing so you can tap into your creativity. It's important to create an environment where you can do that. My role is to learn and understand the characters in the show, and to breathe life into them, make them my own. I've got to make sure the balance between them is right as well. Other than that, it's my job to make suggestions, question things I don't understand and basically, to have fun.

What particular challenges does this show present you as an actor?

It's a lot about finding loads of different characters. It challenges all my work with accents. Also, I've got to become a narrator – that, I find, is the most challenging thing at the moment, trying to find the personality of this narrator who seems to be many things. I'm finding it hard to find the unity of it. Also, pretending to be a child is pretty challenging too, trying not to be kind of babyish in what I'm doing, trying to listen to the power of the character.

What is particular about working for Alibi?

Many things, really. There are the particular challenges of the work, having to do things you haven't done before. The sheer volume of props! I've never had to deal with so many in my life before. The mixture of tragedy and comedy in Alibi's work – I love that mixture, plumbing the depths of despair and finding large doses of humour in the work. There's a good cross-fertilisation of ideas between all the practitioners. Everybody seems to have something to put in. On a personal note, I like the allowances made for me in booking the tour, to let me see my children at the weekends. This is quite unusual in theatre companies.

Why did you choose to be an actor?

Ultimately, I didn't choose to be an actor, acting chose me. I first started getting interested when I was still in high school but I didn't decide to be an actor 'til I was in my early twenties, 'til I'd finished university. Then I got offered a job by Theatre Alibi! Which saved me really because it stopped me having to make a decision. I kind of fell sideways into it. Ultimately, I chose to be an actor because I found nothing else more stimulating, more interesting, more self-fulfilling. Although I was passionate about Art, passionate about English, they didn't provide the constant challenges that acting did. I've never found anything that's more constantly challenging. Every night you do a show, you're constantly learning, constantly pushing yourself.

How old were you?

Thirteen to fourteen when I first got interested.

Where/how did you train?

First at Cumbria Youth Theatre where you worked with professional directors, then when I chose to train, I went on to Exeter University, and I chose to do English and Drama. The course was fundamentally practical and based on people working together, which was, and still is, what I'm interested in.

What's your role in the rehearsal process for *The Freeze*?

In most rehearsal processes your job as an actor is to be like the clay, to show as clearly as possible what the director wants you to show, and that changes all the time. In this rehearsal process it's very much trying one thing and seeing if it works and then trying another. The job is to get up there and try to make what's on the page real. Often that demands doing things over and over and over again. So you have to work very hard with your brain, trying to stay alert through the day, remembering what worked last time, what didn't, to take on new instructions and scrap what didn't work last time. Because the stuff we're doing is quite delicate you have to give it at least ninety percent every time you do it so the director can tell whether it works or not.

What particular challenges does this show present to you as an actor?

What makes it different is that an awful lot of this show is what's not said, and the character that I play actually doesn't say very much and she inhabits almost a bubble. So you're not explaining how you're feeling, you're having to show what's happening inside your head. What makes this difficult as an actor is that the audience might not relate to you on stage. What you want to be able to do, even though you're not speaking much, is to be able to reach through the glass and make the audience feel like they have contact with that person on stage.

Every theatre company must have a different flavour. What is particular about working for Alibi?

Alibi has a particular flavour of work. The least tangible thing with any company is understanding what the work is about, and what the style of work is, and I think with Alibi it's very delicate. It's often about making something that's incredibly complicated look very simple. It's not confrontational theatre, not in your face or trying to be cleverer than the audience, if anything it's trying to make the audience feel comfortable enough to go on what can be quite a difficult journey. Though they might not have been in the situation on the stage, the emotions are just about being people, it's about being human, it's about living.

PRACTITIONER FACT FILE – THE STAGE MANAGER

Name: John Collingswood

Why did you choose to be a stage manager?

I didn't really. Stage management chose me. I was doing some design for a little theatre company in Cambridge and ended up designing a show for them. Their stage manager for that show was pretty inadequate and it wasn't 'til afterwards that I realised I'd done his job. Then I was taken on as company stage manager for a couple of years.

How old were you?

I started when I was about twenty-six. I'd never been involved with theatre before then.

Where/how did you train?

My background is in creative media with a degree in Fine Art and experience of various projects in clubs and festivals but I didn't have any theatre training until I was doing the job. So I trained myself and I got little bits and pieces of advice from other people, but nothing really formal. It was just experience more than anything.

What's your role in the rehearsal process for The Freeze?

Kind of co-ordinating person. I make sure that everybody including the designer and all the makers know what they've got to be doing and that they've got the resources to do those things. I also make sure that people are updated if anything changes. Solving problems, finding things... If somebody wants something by this afternoon I have to go out and find it.

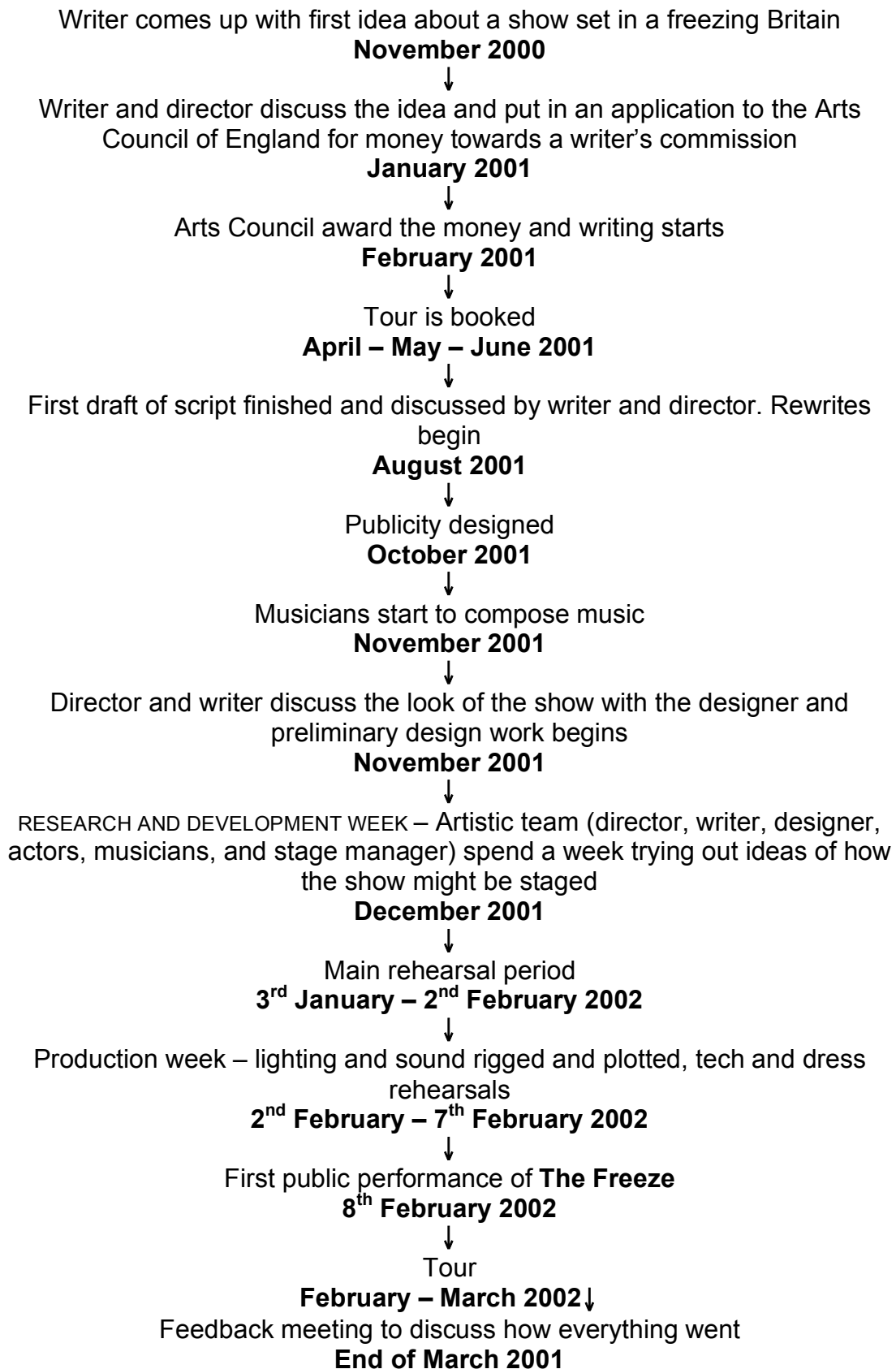
What particular challenges does this show present to you as a stage manager?

With this show the challenges are all to do with the "epic-ness" of some of the images towards the end of the show, really filmic, really huge, and we've just got to make it work.

What is particular about working for Alibi?

Because the rehearsal process is one of devising, things change every day. Half way through something you think you're getting on top of it and solving the problems, then new problems arise because the story changes or the script changes or something about the characters changes. So I have to be on my toes. You get quite a lot of tight deadlines, quite a lot of pressure. But it's great. It's a challenge. The good thing is there are so many highly skilled practitioners working as a team you can just trust other people to come up with the best. And it works – we all work well together.

TIMETABLE OF EVENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF *THE FREEZE*



SOLVING A MOMENT IN THE FREEZE

How we staged the moment when Lawrence arrives.

Near the beginning of **The Freeze**, when Mark staggers drunkenly out of a pub into the snowy night, there is a moment when the uninvited memory of his brother as a child, Lawrence, comes back to him. As this is such a significant moment in Mark's story we wanted it to be just right. We didn't want the audience to be confused.

An early idea was to have Lawrence first appearing as a puppet operated by the actor who later plays Lawrence. It worked well in some ways. The puppet was relatively small, smaller than a real ten-year old child. The sight of this tiny figure running after Mark in the snow triggered an instinctive sense of tenderness for the child – it looked so vulnerable. Also, you understood clearly it was a child, and that it was something magical and strange in Mark's world, not a real child that happened to have wandered by. But there were difficulties. We didn't want Lawrence to be played by a puppet throughout the whole show. The moment when the puppet-Lawrence changed to the actor-Lawrence was potentially confusing for the audience. It also felt stylistically inconsistent, to have a puppet for a few moments at the beginning then never see it again.

Next we had Lawrence played by an actor appear suddenly beside Mark and tag along with him. He was dressed as a ten-year old schoolboy and talked like one. Mark couldn't see him, just hear his voice. We could see him, like a visual projection of the memory stirred in Mark's head. However, this abrupt appearance of Lawrence without any helpful explanation or context was ambiguous at best. At worst it looked as if a middle-aged man in school uniform was following Mark and that he was trying to ignore him!

The role of storyteller was growing in significance throughout rehearsals. So, it seemed appropriate for the storyteller to help us understand the appearance of Lawrence. The storyteller was given the job of telling the audience that Mark was hearing a voice, a memory, more and more clearly. Then we experimented with the storyteller changing into Lawrence before our eyes on stage. But the act of the narrator changing his costume was an unimpressive transformation, possibly distracting and confusing.

Finally we settled on a very simple solution. Lawrence would not physically appear at this moment at all. Instead, the storyteller tells us that Mark is hearing a voice in his head, a voice from the past. Then the narrator speaks into Mark's ear in this voice from the past. He speaks some of Lawrence's most significant lines from later in the show, giving Mark, and us, a foretaste of the memory that is about to unfold.

STAGECRAFT

How we staged the moment when the burning church floods

Towards the end of **The Freeze**, Mark and a teenage boy are trapped in a burning church. They release a capped spring in the floor and flood the church until it is full of water. Mark swims down through the flooded church before the end wall gives way and the two characters are swept out on a wave of spring water.

“How on earth do we stage this?!” we thought. Technology allows film-makers to put before our very eyes more and more incredible images. But how do we conjure up a burning church filled with water on a near-empty theatre stage? The solution would have to come from the heart of what makes theatre different to film – imagination. Rather than depicting the scene literally we’d have to invite the audience to play the game of imagining it.

In our early experiments we tried all sorts of things. We had actors climbing on chairs and ladders as if floating up on the rising flood. We tried large sheets of fabric to suggest the surface of the water – these were tilted down at the front to show the top of the water to the audience, then tilted up at the front at down at the back to give the impression of looking up at the surface from underwater. We tried one actor carrying another on their back so they could appear to swim along horizontally. We played with different qualities of light and sound to depict the contrasting worlds above and below the water. Although we didn’t use all these ideas we found that certain things were very helpful in imagining the scene: a sense of the characters floating up on the flood and a feeling of the contrast between above and below the water.

Here’s how we try to achieve these things:

- We use a powerful, realistic soundscape of the burning church and the roaring of water as it floods from the uncapped spring.
- We included a ramp as part of the set design – allowing the actors to walk up it as they “float” up on the surface of the water.
- As the church catches fire, we gradually saturate the stage with red light (as the set is predominantly white, it takes light very well, changing like a chameleon according to what colour is thrown at it.) As water fills the church, we flood the downstage area of the set with blue light. Eventually most of the stage is lit blue with only a flash of red high upstage. The church is now full of water.
- When the characters mime dipping their heads into the water we lower the sound level of flames roaring to reflect what they would be hearing.
- When Mark “swims” underwater, the sound of the burning church fades away and the audience hear music that suggests the magical world he is entering. He walks down the ramp. His movement indicates the action of

swimming, of pulling oneself through the water. This action is reinforced by the quality of movement with which the tabernacle is carried towards him by another actor.

- As Mark returns to the surface, the sound of roaring gradually resumes. The actors run around the set, appearing and disappearing through all the exits to show them being swept out of the church.

EXERCISES FOR STORYTELLERS

The following series of exercises for storytellers is taken from a theatre paper written by Mike Alfreds in 1979 called *A Shared Experience: The Actor as Story-Teller*, unfortunately now out of print. He has kindly allowed us to reproduce this excerpt for you. Theatre Alibi takes a great deal of inspiration from the ideas expressed in this document. We hope you get some inspiration from them too.

Also, here is a list of fundamental questions about storytelling we ask people when we run workshops on the subject. These questions can be applied to individuals and to society at large:

- Why tell stories?
- When do we tell stories?
- Where do we tell stories?
- How do we tell stories?
- What stories do we tell?

FOR SOLO STORY-TELLERS

(Suitable for narrators, outside the action, of a story when the narrative is in the third person. Either with a text or improvised)

1. Tell a story, relying totally on vocal expressiveness.
Decide on a clearly defined response you want to get from your audience; have a definite attitude to the story. Explore the vocal techniques which will achieve your aims.
2. Tell a story using gesture.
There seem to be four basic purposes for gesturing:
a) Illustrating b) Commenting c) Responding d) Contacting

Illustrating – acting out or duplicating what is being said creates either an intensification of an image or a deliberately naïve, highly coloured one. The way in which the story-teller carries out his illustration may possibly give another texture or nuance to the verbal information.

Commenting – implies strong attitudes and value judgments on the part of the story-teller to what he is narrating – gestures of approval, disapproval, made for an entirely didactic purpose.

Responding – the other side of the coin to Commenting is the spontaneous reaction to the story he is telling with which he may identify or become subjectively involved.

Contacting – gestures are those used to make sure the audience follows the story to the narrator's satisfaction; also to emphasise details.

Of course these techniques can overlap; for example, a gesture of illustrating which is also coloured by an emotional response. However, the point of the exercise is to isolate and work on one technical problem at a time. The same text or story should be used each time.

IMPORTANT: gesturing is not confined to the hands and arms alone; search for all sorts of body and facial gestures.
To clarify this, try telling stories with National stereotypes as your story – teller: Italian, American, Chinese.....

3. Tell a story using sound effects:
a) made vocally and bodily
b) with objects available in the immediate vicinity e.g. the floor
c) made with musical instruments.

EXERCISES FOR SOLO STORY- TELLERS USING FIRST PERSON NARRATION

1. Tell a story, emotionally reliving the experience narrated.
2. Tell a story, emotionally responding to your past experience from the vantage of the present
3. Try to tell the same story with a blend of these two emotional standpoints.

EXERCISES FOR SOLO STORY – TELLERS USING THIRD – PERSON NARRATIVE BUT IN WHICH THEY WILL FUNCTION AS BOTH NARRATOR AND CHARACTERS

1. Tell a story, characterising the protagonists, whenever there is dialogue. The changes from narrative (as yourself) to dialogue and back should be sharply defined.
2. Do the same exercise, this time giving the narrative (from yourself) a very strong attitude, preferably conflicting with the characters' views of themselves and their situations. Try to make your transitions between opposing or differing attitudes clear.
3. For emotional changes, see the trampoline exercises already described.
4. Describe a character, starting from the outside (from yourself quite objectively) but gradually, during the narrative, transform yourself into the character so that by the end of the description you are totally in character. It should be possible for an observer to pin-point the moment you stopped 'being yourself' and became the character.
(Note: this is always using a third-person narrative)
5. To refine these exercises describe, as a narrator, the character critically – but as the character, sympathetically.
6. Both “show” a character while simultaneously “commenting” upon him.
7. Tell a story, suggesting the change of environment, mood or atmosphere which occur as the story unfolds.

All these exercises are designed to create physical, vocal, mental and emotional flexibility as well as the ability to change focus. They should be done with the greatest economy possible. You should eventually find that the subtlest inner change (of attitude or emotion) should affect you physically and vocally. Always make sure you know what effect you want to have on your audience. Ultimately, as a story-teller or narrator, your focus must be on the audience and not on yourself.

EXERCISES FOR NARRATORS OUTSIDE THE ACTION OF A STORY AND ACTORS CREATING CHARACTERS WITHIN A STORY

Improvised Stories

1. Narrator initiates story which the actors take up and fulfil to the best of their imaginations, always keeping within the structure created by the narrator. There must be strong awareness between the actors and the narrator so that he allows them enough space to develop what he has given them and they, in turn, allow him to continue his function.
(Beginners tend to turn narrative into straight 'dialogue' scenes).
Clarify the terms of the exercise before you start – for example, will the actors create their own dialogue or will they only repeat the dialogue provided by the narrator. The narrator must remember that he has a double focus: on the actors AND audience.
2. A variation of the above : the actors/ characters develop ideas and suggestions initiated by the narrator but can take them in directions of their own; the narrator improvises on their developments in order to keep the narrative flowing. Again, both narrator and actors must be very sensitive to each other and the logical flow of the story.

Improvised or using a text

3. A narrator decides to tell a story in particular style or manner; the actors – as the characters in the action – try to perform their roles in the manner which they think is implied. (There should be no discussion before the exercise begins; the actors only have to respond to the narrator). A second narrator then treats the same story in a totally different way. The actors must try to carry this out. And so on. A more difficult exercise than it may sound. It is imperative that the narrator knows exactly what he wants to achieve. (An interesting point; texts often offer themselves to more justifiable treatments than one might initially expect. For the sake of the exercise, the narrator can choose a 'style' which is clearly not suitable to the story).

EXERCISES FOR NARRATORS SHARING A STORY.

The main point is to develop sensitivity between partners. It is also vital to clarify functions e.g.

- a) The main narrator with an understanding supporter who eagerly adds details he feels have been understated or ignored.
- b) two narrators with totally different viewpoints refute each other's views: (sections of the narrative can be divided between them in advance or left to improvisation).
- c) One narrator tells the story; the other provides all the sound-effects, illustrations, gestures etc.

An extension of these exercises are those for group narration.

The sequence is improvised; each narrator wants to contribute but must not trample on the narrative of others.

- a) group narration trying to help and support each other
 - b) group narration trying to prevent each other from narrating
- But the narrative must never become confused or blurred.

POSSIBLE SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STORY-TELLERS AND AUDIENCE

1. Story-tellers tell a story in such a way that the audience is required to move: e.g. whispering so that they must move closer to hear; creating a story amongst them so that they must give up space.
2. They tell a story from a position which might create the maximum impact for that particular story on the audience e.g. above the audience, below the audience, distant from the audience, very close to the audience, all around the audience, with the audience around them.
3. Story-tellers use audience as part of their story: e.g. crowds in streets, courtiers.
4. Story-tellers move freely amongst audience eliminating any established acting area while they tell story.
5. Several actors narrate story consecutively from different focal points around or within the audience.
6. Several actors, individually and simultaneously, form clusters with audience to tell their own story; or different sections of the same story so that various parts of the audience learn the whole story in different sequences.

POSSIBLE NARRATOR/ CHARACTER RELATIONSHIPS

1. Narrator and characters have no contact.
2. Narrator comments on characters; points them out; walks amongst them
3. Narrator comments on characters; characters do not react; characters can comment on "comments" of the narrator amongst themselves or to the audience, but do NOT relate to narrator.
4. Characters comment or relate to Narrator and his story about them and/or his 'narrative technique'; narrator does NOT react; or he MAY react.
5. Narrator addresses characters directly at high moment, i.e. he gets caught up with them emotionally: "How brave you were!"
6. Characters react LIKE audience to the narrator and his story about them.
7. Characters, willingly or unwillingly, adjust to narrator's emphases.
8. Narrator adjusts to character's behaviour and attitudes, should it conflict with his.