

A GLACIER STRIDER

by Kyle Walker

Suggested by Scott Baisden

Based on true stories

P.O. Box 686  
Valdez, AK 99686-0686  
Phone: 517-614-9445  
Email: [info@kylewalkerwriter.com](mailto:info@kylewalkerwriter.com)

### SYNOPSIS

On an Alaskan Christmas Eve, 1899, three unlikely companions become lost in a snowstorm on the Valdez Glacier. They find shelter in a makeshift cabin, but can it protect them from themselves or from the ghosts calling to them out in the storm?

### CHARACTERS

JOSEPHINE	F - 20s-30s, a photographer. Strong-willed and haunted.
EDWIN	M - 20s-30s, mission leader. Headstrong and hopeful.
STEWART	M - 50s+, expedition cook. Ragged and bitter.

### SETTING

A relief station cabin on the Valdez Glacier during the Klondike Gold Rush. The cabin is really just thin fabric stretched over a skeletal frame. Inside are an oil stove, sparse cooking utensils, stores of goods, and a few wooden chairs.

### TIME

Christmas Eve, 1899.

### PRODUCTION HISTORY

The 10-minute version of this play received a play reading at the FRIGID Play Festival in New York City in December 2024 and a workshop reading at the 8x10 Festival in Fairbanks, Alaska in May 2025. In November 2025, it received a full production and was a finalist in the Seoul Players 10-Minute Play Festival in Seoul, South Korea. The current one-act version of the play has received informal readings with friends and writing groups.

A GLACIER STRIDER

(Wind howls at the seams of a tented cabin. JOSEPHINE carefully cleans a small box camera, damaged and covered in snow. Urgent voices whistle with the wind. JOSEPHINE turns to the voices, expectant. The voices push against the wind, whirling into fury.)

EDWIN (OS)

We're nearly there!

STEWART (OS)

All I see is snow.

EDWIN (OS)

Come on!

STEWART (OS)

Watch it!

(EDWIN and STEWART enter, flinging the tent door open. JOSEPHINE slumps back in defeat and returns to the camera. EDWIN supports STEWART, who has an injured foot. They don't notice JOSEPHINE.)

EDWIN

I told you we'd make it!

(STEWART throws off EDWIN's helping hands and limps over to a chair.)

STEWART

We ain't made nothin'. There's a hundred of these damn relief cabins on the glacier.

EDWIN

Let me help you, Stewart.

STEWART

I don't need no help from you.

(STEWART painfully lowers himself to a chair.)

EDWIN

This storm can't last much longer. I'm sure if we-

STEWART

You crazy? They said that storm last year didn't quit for about a week.

EDWIN

That was last year. The storm of 1899 will be different. You just wait and-

STEWART

(Spotting JOSEPHINE.)

Hey. We got company.

EDWIN

Oh! I am terribly sorry, ma'am. We didn't see you. Is... Are you...? Are you alone?

JOSEPHINE

(Not removing her eyes from the camera.)

I don't see anyone else. Do you?

STEWART

This ain't a place for a woman.

JOSEPHINE

This isn't a place for anyone. But it's warm.

EDWIN

I... um... My name is Edwin and this is Stewart.

JOSEPHINE

Josephine Michaels. I'm sure it's a pleasure to meet you.

EDWIN

(Noticing Josephine's camera.)

Something wrong with your camera?

JOSEPHINE

I dropped it out in the storm.

EDWIN

I could take a look at it if you-

JOSEPHINE

Don't touch it!

EDWIN

Okay. I won't. I just...

STEWART

Say, maybe you can settle something for us. See, we got lost out in that storm. But Edwin here thinks we're on the fourth bench.

EDWIN

By my calculations, we must be near 12-Mile Camp.

JOSEPHINE

12-Mile. 5-Mile. Hell, Summit Camp could be just over that rise.

EDWIN

We left there this morning. We must be further along than that.

STEWART

Or the storm tossed us around in circles.

EDWIN

I'm sorry, Stewart. I promised we'd make it back before Christmas, but-

STEWART

Not to worry, fearless leader. I'll just add that to all your other broken promises.

JOSEPHINE

Christmas? What do you mean?

STEWART

Didn'tcha know? Tonight's Christmas Eve.

JOSEPHINE

No, I headed up here on... No... It can't...

STEWART

Season's greetings, little lady.

EDWIN

What day did you head up here?

JOSEPHINE

The... um... 13<sup>th</sup>.

EDWIN

Did you go to 12-Mile? Miss Michaels?

(JOSEPHINE goes back to her camera, ignoring EDWIN's question.)

STEWART

Give it a rest. She don't know. You don't know. Probably gonna end up like poor old Doc Logan.

EDWIN

That's not going to happen.

STEWART

You shoulda just left me out there in the storm. My carcass is just draggin' you down.

EDWIN

We'll make it back. By this time tomorrow, you'll be warm and safe at the fort.

JOSEPHINE

(Drawn away from the camera.)

Fort? So, you're the ones building the military road.

EDWIN

We're a part of the expedition team, yes.

JOSEPHINE

And you think that's smart? Building a road from Valdez to the Alaskan interior?

EDWIN

Better than sending the prospectors over the glacier here.

JOSEPHINE

It was the military that sent the prospectors over this glacier in the first place.

EDWIN

That's why we're here. Before the snow started coming, we laid down 93 miles of road. And 26 bridges.

JOSEPHINE

Those 26 bridges will be dead and buried after the avalanche season.

EDWIN

They were built with strong American hands.

JOSEPHINE

(Scoffing; venomous.)

American hands building an "All-American Way" to the Klondike. Blind leading the blind is more like it.

EDWIN

Gold fever is gripping the entire country. We can't stop them from coming. All we can do is build a better way.

JOSEPHINE

There is no better way. There wasn't in 1897 when you told them to go up this glacier. There won't be in 1900 when you send them up that road of yours. And even if they make it, what will they find? Your road drops them off hundreds of miles from the Klondike gold fields.

EDWIN

We're here to help.

JOSEPHINE

You're here to sell a lie.

STEWART

What about you, darlin'? Why're you here?

JOSEPHINE

I have my reasons.

STEWART

We all got reasons. And reason's got a funny way of stabbin' ya in the back. I joined this here expedition to save myself from rotting away in the states. Well, now I'm gonna be rotting away on this lifeless piece of ice.

JOSEPHINE

I'm going to make sure no one else gets stuck on this lifeless piece of ice.

STEWART

And how ya gonna do that?

JOSEPHINE

By taking photographs.

STEWART

With your broken little camera there?

JOSEPHINE

It's not broken! I just need to keep the film from being exposed until I can get it back to my studio.

EDWIN

Is it really that important?

JOSEPHINE

In here are photographs of what's really happening on the glacier. Not those framed fantasies that make Alaska look like some beautiful paradise.

EDWIN

Alaska is beautiful.

JOSEPHINE

Alaska is dangerous.

STEWART

Beauty's always dangerous. I should know. I got three ex-wives. Danger makes everything beautiful.

JOSEPHINE

Even when it tries to kill you?

STEWART

Especially when it tries to kill you. The human animal was born in the wilderness and the wilderness does everything it can to kill us. But no matter what, we keep tryin' to get back to it.

EDWIN

We are trying to conquer it.

STEWART

That's the real question, ain't it? Are we conquerin' the dangerous beauty out there? Or the beautiful danger inside us all?

JOSEPHINE

These photos aren't beautiful. Frostbite. Scurvy. Starvation. Death. All out there on the glacier. All here in this camera.

STEWART

(Chuckling.)

Well, after I die up here, make sure to photograph my corpse.

JOSEPHINE

Edwin, was it? Are you the expedition leader?

STEWART

(Breaking out into giggles.)

Ha! You mean our fearless leader? Ha!

EDWIN

(Ignoring Stewart.)

No, but I am the leader of our mission here on the glacier.

STEWART

(Breaking out into more laughter.)

Don't ya mean our wild goose chase? Wait! Our wild horse chase!

JOSEPHINE

Why would you bring horses onto the glacier?

STEWART

That's the thing! We didn't!

EDWIN

(Struggling to ignore Stewart.)

We were sent to Woods Canyon back in October to find 13 horses that were left up there last summer and—

STEWART

And what we found was 13 starvin' horses turned wild. And all of them went belly up by the end of November. Timed out well, though, didn't it?

EDWIN

Stewart.

STEWART

Horse meat ain't too bad once you got nothin' left to eat. And it stores pretty easy. If you can hold on to it. Right, Edwin?

EDWIN

That's enough.

STEWART

You see, our fearless leader here insisted upon carrying the supplies. Until he slipped and went tumblin' into the river.

EDWIN

I said stop!

STEWART

Thirteen bundles of meat charging down the river.

EDWIN

Stewart!

STEWART

Think they're still out there? Maybe they're with Doc Logan. Rancid and wanderin', lookin' for home!

JOSEPHINE

Who is Doc Logan?

STEWART

You haven't heard the story? Oh, it's a good one!

(STEWART staggers to his feet, but loses his balance.)

EDWIN

Stewart, be careful!

STEWART

Ah! This damn foot!

(EDWIN goes to the stores of goods.)

EDWIN

Let me see if there's some medicine in here.

JOSEPHINE

Edwin, if I can get these photographs developed, could you get them to the expedition leader?

EDWIN

Why?

STEWART

Don't be daft, Edwin. She thinks it'll change his mind about buildin' the road. Ain't that right, darlin'?

JOSEPHINE

Someone needs to see the truth.

(EDWIN starts opening the food stores.)

EDWIN

Right now, we need to find some food. These cabins are supposed to have food supplies and— Oh, my God!

STEWART

What? Found us some cold, dry hardtack?

EDWIN

No! We've got beans, coffee, and, sweet Jesus... bacon!

STEWART

Bacon? Really?

(STEWART hobbles over to the stores, gawking at the goods.)

EDWIN

It'll be a Christmas feast!

JOSEPHINE

Are you sure it's Christmas Eve?

EDWIN

Yes! Time for celebration!

JOSEPHINE

I don't feel like celebrating.

(JOSEPHINE returns to her camera and STEWART slumps back into his chair.)

STEWART

Ma would always make us a heap of bacon on Christmas morning. The whole house would smell of it. Our clothes would smell of it. Even after supper, the bacon'd still be there. In the snow, in the fire, in the carols we'd sang.

EDWIN

Carols! That's it! Let's sing some Christmas carols! Stewart, start us off!

STEWART

I ain't good at singin' or nothin'.

EDWIN

That doesn't matter! It's Christmas!

STEWART

(Singing; uncertain at first but growing louder.)  
"The first Nowell the angel did say,  
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay."

(EDWIN joins in.)

EDWIN & STEWART

"In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,  
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell...  
Born is the King of Israel."

(EDWIN pulls at JOSEPHINE's arm, trying to coax her. Over the following dialogue, STEWART continues singing under his breath.)

STEWART

"Then let us all with one accord,  
Sing praises to our Heavenly Lord,  
That hath made Heaven and earth of naught,  
And with His Blood mankind hath bought.  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell..."

JOSEPHINE

You'll expose the film!

EDWIN

The camera is broken. You should sing with us.

JOSEPHINE

I don't sing.

EDWIN

Well, what do you do on Christmas Eve?

JOSEPHINE

Nothing.

EDWIN

How about your family? What did they do on Christmas?

JOSEPHINE

We... my father... told ghost stories.

STEWART

Ghost stories? Musta been a regular Dickens!

EDWIN

Tell us one of your father's ghost stories, then.

JOSEPHINE

I don't remember any of them.

EDWIN

Then tell a new one.

JOSEPHINE

A new one?

EDWIN

Come on.

JOSEPHINE

(Considering.)

You want a ghost story? I'll tell you a ghost story. A year ago, an old man and his daughter arrive in Valdez aboard the steamship *Excelsior*. Faces bright and beaming, hungry for gold.

(Pointed.)

But the "All-American Way" was not the smooth, easy trail they were sold. Heavy, wet snow falls for five days. But they finally reach Summit Camp and the snow stops. The old man goes out to beg for firewood from the other rushers. His daughter tells him to stay inside. He should have never come with her in the first place. Gold and adventure are the daughter's dream. Not his. Yet, he insists on tagging along. She needs a man to protect her. She knows it is really her protecting him. She knows they should've turned around. But she believes in the "All-American Way." She believes in her dream. She thought she could protect him. She thought...

(Emotion breaking through.)

That night, Christmas Eve, 1898, an avalanche rips through Summit Camp. The daughter watches from their tent door as the snow crawls across the glacier like some wraith. The December moon lights the snow aflame, bright and beaming. Hungry. She watches as it leaps up and swallows her father.

(Fighting the emotion.)

Twenty-five people are rescued from the snow, the daughter included. Only two men are killed. One of their bodies is never found. Because the "All-American Way" is the safe route. The easy route. The route that swallows everything whole. Tents. Supplies. An old man who had no business being up there. An old man who never finds gold! Never finds adventure! Only finds the glacier.

JOSEPHINE (Continued)

(Swallowing the emotion.)

But the daughter remains. She staggers off the glacier but never leaves Valdez. Opens up a photo studio. And every night, she dreams of that glacier, writhing, crawling toward her. Hungry to finish what it started with her father. And that's when she starts hearing stories. Stories about ghostly voices on the glacier.

(Controlled.)

So, she comes back to the glacier. To take pictures of the truth. Hoping to make a difference. Hoping to hear those voices. Hoping that one of those voices will be her... her...

(Control teetering.)

But she gets caught in a storm. Her camera breaks. And all she ever hears is the wind and snow. No voices. No ghosts. Just the glacier, slowly crawling toward her again.

(Resigned.)

I don't tell ghost stories anymore. Ghost stories are a lie.

(The storm presses down harder outside, testing for weaknesses.)

STEWART

I know what you are. You ain't a photographer. You're a glacier strider.

EDWIN

Stewart, this is not the time.

STEWART

You heard her story. It's what she is.

EDWIN

You know I don't approve of that name.

STEWART

But you're the one that-

JOSEPHINE

What is a glacier strider?

STEWART

You are, darlin'.

JOSEPHINE

I am?

STEWART

One of them failed prospectors we see comin' down off the glacier.

EDWIN

That name is not what it sounds like. It's-

STEWART

But the name's catchin' on all over camp. "Here comes another glacier strider," we'll say. "Look at the eyes on that one."

EDWIN

Miss Michaels, don't listen to him.

JOSEPHINE

No. I want to know. What about their eyes?

STEWART

Got a wild light in them. From all they've seen.

EDWIN

Okay, that's enough.

STEWART

If you're lookin' for a ghost ON the glacier, you'll never find it. You gotta look inside. A glacier's nothin' but one big hungry mouth. Chews everything up. Digests it for thousands of years. How many stories could it tell? How many ghost stories?

EDWIN

No more ghost stories. It's a night for celebration.

STEWART

Hey, you told her to tell one.

EDWIN

I didn't mean to-

JOSEPHINE

Portraits.

EDWIN

What?

JOSEPHINE

My father said ghost stories are like portraits of the past. You tell them to remember who you are. The things you left behind. The things you take with you.

EDWIN

My family did nothing of the sort.

STEWART

Lemme guess, ya'll sat up straight in the grand dinin' room, elbows off the table, and spoon fed each other caviar.

EDWIN

We had a healthful meal and civilized conversation.

STEWART

You gettin' this, Josephine? We ain't civilized enough for him.

EDWIN

That is not what I meant.

STEWART

Joinin' the army. Was that the civilized thing to do?

EDWIN

Shut up.

STEWART

How much of that have you found out here?

EDWIN

I said, shut up!

STEWART

Was wolfin' down horse meat civilized?

EDWIN

Goddammit! I said-

(A voice whispers with the wind. An airy voice, almost human. It seems to say "Joeeeeey..." The wind grasps at the door, searching for a way in.)

EDWIN

What was that?

JOSEPHINE

The wind. It was just the wind.

STEWART

(To JOSEPHINE.)

It said your name.

JOSEPHINE

No, it didn't.

STEWART

Get off it. It said "Joey."

JOSEPHINE

No one calls me Joey. No one except...

STEWART

Your pa?

JOSEPHINE

...

STEWART

(Giggling.)

Well, Joey! Looks like you got yourself a ghost!

EDWIN

It must be someone lost in the storm.

STEWART

(Cackling.)

A glacier strider come to tell us what they saw!

EDWIN

Stewart, sit down. Your leg-

STEWART

Whatcha waitin' for, Joey! Go meet your pa!

(STEWART starts pushing JOSEPHINE toward the door. She fights back.)

JOSEPHINE

No! I can't! Please!

STEWART

He's waitin' for you!

EDWIN

Let her go!

(EDWIN wrestles STEWART away from JOSEPHINE.  
STEWART stumbles to the ground, laughing.)

STEWART

(Close to hysterics.)

Don't you understand, Edwin? It's us. We're the glacier striders now!

EDWIN

I think you need to lay down and—

STEWART

Whadayasay? My eyes got a wild light in 'em?

(Distant voices waft in with the wind, singing  
Christmas music ["Silent Night"].)

JOSEPHINE

Voices...

EDWIN

Christmas music.

STEWART

We always sang that song 'for Christmas supper.

(Singing along with the music.)

"...all is bright.

Round yon virgin mother and child,

Holy infant, so tender and mild,

Sleep in heavenly peace,

Sleep in heavenly peace."

(Smiling.)

Never could remember the second verse.

(The music continues. They listen in silence.)

EDWIN

Perhaps, we should—

STEWART

Hey... You smell that?

JOSEPHINE

Bacon.

STEWART

(To JOSEPHINE.)

You know what that means, don'tcha?

(JOSEPHINE goes back to her camera, ignoring his question.)

EDWIN

It means I was right. We must be close to 12-Mile Camp.

STEWART

That ain't no camp out there.

EDWIN

Stay here, I'll go investigate.

STEWART

It should be me.

EDWIN

You can't go out there in your condition.

STEWART

It's callin' to me.

EDWIN

Stewart, you are ill and need rest.

STEWART

I'm getting me some of that bacon!

(STEWART goes for the door and EDWIN stops him.)

EDWIN

Stewart, you can't go out there.

STEWART

It's me they want.

EDWIN

It's medicine you need.

STEWART

I ain't makin' it off this glacier. You know it. I know it. If you go out there, you're just gonna end up like Doc Logan.

EDWIN

That's not going to happen.

STEWART

I'm tryin' to save your life, goddammit!

EDWIN

That is my job!

STEWART

You can't save me, Edwin. Couldn't save the horses! Couldn't save the mission!

EDWIN

I will not let you die out there!

STEWART

I ain't dyin'. I'm goin' home!

(STEWART lunges for the door. EDWIN tries to stop him and the two fight with fevered intensity. Targeting STEWART's leg, EDWIN takes him down, knocking him unconscious. The Christmas carols continue, peppered with laughter and conversation.)

EDWIN

I'm sorry, Stewart. This is for your own good.

(EDWIN starts bundling up to leave.)

JOSEPHINE

Who is Doc Logan?

EDWIN

I shouldn't be long.

JOSEPHINE

Edwin.

EDWIN

(Conceding.)

He was one of the expedition doctors. Back in February, he came up the glacier to help some men sick with scurvy. But he never came back... We sent out a search party. Found the men. Dead. But never found the doctor.

JOSEPHINE

What if Stewart is right?

EDWIN

I am not Doc Logan.

JOSEPHINE

I'm not talking about that. What if something's trying to lure us out.

EDWIN

This isn't a ghost story, Miss Michaels. Those are the voices of 12-Mile Camp. There is medicine over there. Medicine that Stewart desperately needs. I need to get them. I can't fail him again.

JOSEPHINE

You haven't failed anyone.

EDWIN

All I have ever done since arriving in Valdez is fail. I'm not strong like you.

JOSEPHINE

What are you talking about? You heard Stewart, I'm nothing but a glacier strider.

EDWIN

I hate that name. I hate what it's become. The way the men shout it like an insult or judgement. That's not what it meant at the beginning. That's not what I intended when I... when I...

JOSEPHINE

You came up with the name?

EDWIN

Glacier Striders made this town what it is today. They took their failures and found strength. They found hope.

JOSEPHINE

And if you're walking to your death?

EDWIN

Then I will be walking towards hope. Keep Stewart safe, Miss Michaels. I will be right back.

(EDWIN exits. Snow blows in through the open door as JOSEPHINE stares out into the storm, into the glacier. She closes the door, driving away the singing voices, and goes back to her camera. Struggling for consciousness, STEWART lurches to his feet but falls back, dazed.)

STEWART

Dammit, Edwin! They were callin' for me... They were...

JOSEPHINE

He's gone to get medicine.

STEWART

Help me up. I need to get out there.

JOSEPHINE

I am helping. If I can save this film, if I can get it into the right hands, then people will understand. They'll stop coming here. Stop going over the glacier. Building roads. Your expedition leader. He'll understand.

STEWART

Oh, darlin', haven't you figured it out? The human misery in your photographs; the whole expedition has already seen it firsthand. But the road keeps comin'. They're already plannin' for next year. Maybe even buildin' train tracks.

JOSEPHINE

No, but the photos will-

STEWART

Like I said, danger makes everything beautiful. You can't change that. I'm goin' out there. You should too.

JOSEPHINE

I... I can't.

STEWART

There's a voice callin' your name.

JOSEPHINE

But... but what if it's my father?

STEWART

Ain't that why you're here?

JOSEPHINE

I thought so. But now... I have nothing to show him. All I have are 13 pictures of human misery. And even that, the glacier is trying to take them away from me.

STEWART

Maybe it's not a ghost.

JOSEPHINE

Then what is it?

STEWART

Ghost stories. All them that got swallowed by the glacier. And the glacier is playin' them back to us. Sendin' us snapshots.

JOSEPHINE

Portraits of the past... To remember who you are. The things you left behind. The things you take with you.

STEWART

12-Mile Camp could be just over that rise and the glacier is leading us home.

(STEWART opens the door to the dancing snow outside. The wind growls, ice crackles.)

JOSEPHINE

I can't let you go out there.

STEWART

I ain't your father.

JOSEPHINE

I should've stopped him. I should've stopped Edwin. I should stop you.

STEWART

You should come with me.

(STEWART snatches the camera.)

JOSEPHINE

Give that back!

STEWART

Come with me, Josephine. Instead of stayin' in here, clutchin' to something you can't fix.

JOSEPHINE

I can fix the camera.

STEWART

Weren't talkin' 'bout the camera.

JOSEPHINE

...

STEWART

Thirteen horses. Thirteen pictures. We're all the same. We're all failures.

JOSEPHINE

No... NO!

(JOSEPHINE lunges for the camera. They wrestle it back and forth and it ends up slipping from their grip. The camera crashes to the floor. JOSEPHINE scrambles to its side, gasping back tears. STEWART turns back to the glacier.)

STEWART

It really is beautiful out here. I wonder if a camera could ever capture it.

(STEWART exits into the storm. JOSEPHINE hunches over the camera, inspecting it with light touches; it is still intact but badly dented.)

JOSEPHINE

The film... I think... it's okay. It's okay.

(A voice seeps in between the seams of the canvas walls, clearly saying "*Josephine.*" She speaks to it without thinking.)

JOSEPHINE

I can fix it, Father. I know I can. I know...

(The voice speaks again. "*Josephiine.*" Finally realizing it, she turns to the door.)

JOSEPHINE

Father?

(A Christmas carol ["What Child Is This?"] floats in on the howling wind and swirling snow.)

JOSEPHINE

It's my fault. I brought us out here. I was supposed to protect you. But I couldn't save you.

(Within the music, a voice calls. "Joey... *Let it go.*")

JOSEPHINE

Are you a ghost? A glacier? A... portrait?

(The snow softens; the wind dies. Silence settles upon the tented cabin. JOSEPHINE picks up the broken camera.)

JOSEPHINE

Father, I don't know if I'm strong enough. I've had only my failures, my anger, for so long. I don't know what I am anymore.

(A voice echoes around her, twirling the fallen snow. "...A *Glacier Strider*..." Something breaks within JOSEPHINE. Something falls into place. She looks down at the mangled camera in her hands and lets it fall to the ground. Leaving it behind, she strides forward into the arms of the welcoming snow. Blackout.)

END OF PLAY