

# JACARANDA

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## ABSTRACT

*Jacaranda* is a feature-length screenplay, set in 1986, South Africa, during the height of the Nationalist Party's Apartheid reign. It follows the story of a young black freedom fighter, Macie Thipe, who sets out to rescue her father, Raphael, after he is wrongfully arrested for a bombing she caused. In pursuit of Raphael, Macie is pulled far from the urban sprawl of Johannesburg, to an unknown side of her country. Along the way, she comes face-to-face with the grotesque underbelly of the Apartheid regime, and, to her surprise, forms an unlikely friendship with a member of her perceived enemy. *Jacaranda* is a story about bravery in the face of insurmountable obstacles. It explores the complexities of cultural allegiance, and the degree to which compassion is possible, when in the thick of gross injustices.

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To my fiancée, Danielle, thank you for your unwavering support, and for having faith in me, not only as a writer, but also as a partner. If South Africa is my past, you are my future.

To my family - Martin, Barbara, Tony, Keri, and Ricci - you are nestled into the crevices of this story, because we are the same story. Thank you for all that you do, and have always done.

Finally, to my childhood nanny, Elsie Thipe - you raised us all with humour and care. We are forever grateful.

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## INTRODUCTION

I was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1982, during a deeply turbulent time of the nation's history. The white Apartheid regime fought to maintain dominance over an increasingly mobilized and agitated black majority. Change was in the air, and, as the pressure mounted, parties on both sides saw that extreme times called for extreme measures.

As a white South African from a middle-class family, much of this turmoil was shielded from my view, at the time. To me, life was wonderful, filled with joy, and about as "normal" as I imagined anyone's life to be around the world. Yes, I had been raised by black nannies, and my parents' large property was tended to by a black gardener, but, from my youthful perspective, this was simply the way the world worked. I was not able to perceive the abnormality of my environment, nor that was my society built upon an entirely unjust, discriminatory system. Granted, I was a child. I have no doubt that many in my midst saw all too clearly South Africa's shameful inequities. Some acted to make change. Others preferred to stay out of harm's way.

With the benefit of distance, time, and maturity, I have been drawn to reflect on the childhood I thought I understood.

I now see that the world I inhabited was far more complex than my six-year-old self could have imagined, and that the peace, prosperity, and relative calm that my family enjoyed was in many ways dependent on our tacit acceptance of gross human rights violations and a system of outright oppression.

A clash of histories exists in my mind: on the one hand, there is the personal, warm, almost utopian childhood I recall - one where I had a deeply loving relationship with my black nanny; on the other, there is the broader history of South Africa - one filled with brutal violence and deep-seated racial discrimination. How can these paradoxical histories exist simultaneously?

Coming to grips with these discrepancies has been the motivating force in the writing of my thesis screenplay, *Jacaranda*. While my screenplay is a fictionalized tale, filled with characters in far more extreme situations than I experienced, traces of my childhood and the world I knew are infused through much of this work. Some of the characters are based on the people who raised me, and some of the story is inspired by interviews I conducted in my research.

The following document provides context to my writing of *Jacaranda*. Through it, I lay out the inspiration and personal origins of the story, including the broader history on which it is based. I also dig deeper into the formal writing process of

the screenplay, paying particular attention to its structure, plot, characters, and theme. Further, I discuss some of the challenges associated with the screenplay's sensitive subject matter, and the obstacles I faced as a writer. Since this discussion is in direct reference to my screenplay, if you have not yet read *Jacaranda*, please do so before continuing forward.

## ORIGINS

I distinctly recall the moment that I was inspired with the kernel of what would become *Jacaranda*. On a warm evening in June, 2008, I was at my parents' house in Vancouver, when I heard, in the background, that "Elsie had died a week ago." This statement shocked me. Elise had died? How was I just learning this now?

Elsie Thipe, of Bophuthatawanian, Xhosa origin, is the woman who raised me for the first six years of my life. My earliest childhood memories involve Elsie just as prominently as they do the rest of my family. She was my nanny, but in many ways, she was a second mother - living within my parents' house, joining my family on summer vacations, and caring for us through the most formative years of my childhood. I am the person I am today, in part, because of the care Elsie showed me. However, as I discovered that night, eighteen years since my emigration from South Africa, that foundational force of my life had passed away.

I was heartbroken by this news. For one, I had not been back to South Africa since leaving, so, aside from the letters and postcards we would send to Elsie, I had essentially lost contact with her. For another, Elsie's passing represented a tangible end to my childhood, and, surprisingly, I was shocked

to suddenly be an adult. How had I unwittingly grown up? How had my South African roots drifted into the background of my Canadian life? How could I have let that happen, and why had I not examined my origins more closely?

Fueled by these questions, and with a distinct heartache, I dove into writing, and began exploring the potential for a story in honour of Elsie. My motives were not calculated. They were personal and honest. Driven by emotion, I sought to examine Elsie's world. I did so, at least initially, without paying much attention to the significance of what this story might mean on a social or political level. I simply wanted to try to explore the world Elsie experienced, and to tell a story that would pay respect to a woman who was so pivotal in my upbringing.

I sought to understand the life that Elsie kept hidden from my view. Sure, she was my caregiver and nanny, and while I felt that she loved me wholeheartedly, as I looked back at her history, her time with my family was only a sliver of her life story. My parents were paying her to care for my siblings and me (this was her job, more so than her life), but what about *her* children? What about her life back home? What about her political struggles, and the challenges she faced as a black woman in Apartheid South Africa? These are questions I simply did not consider as a child under her care. These are questions that I now needed to tackle. So, in writing *Jacaranda*, I sought

to see the world through Elsie's eyes, to learn through research and imagination that which I was unable to perceive in my youth.

The initial shape of the story I conceived in 2008 bears only a marginal resemblance of the screenplay I have currently developed. At the core of my first concept was the friendship between a black domestic worker and the white child for whom she cared. Given that Elsie was the inspiration for writing this story, I have always felt that this nanny/child relationship is pivotal to my screenplay. That being said, the weight granted to this relationship has shifted throughout the development process. At one point, it was the central relationship of the piece. However, currently, Elsie serves as a supporting, mentor character for the central relationship between Macie and Nikolaas. [I will discuss the various reasons for this shift, below, in the "Challenges of Subject Matter" section, where I go into more depth on the "perspective" or "point of view" I selected in telling this story.]

Over the years, I have explored many iterations of *Jacaranda* (or *Tula Baba (Hush Baby)*, or *Tokoloshe*, as it has been variously titled in the past). My screenplay's narrative has shifted dramatically from version to version, but the thematic motifs that inspired me in the beginning have remained consistent throughout. The story has always been about the real, human friendship between two members of seemingly opposing sides.

It has been about the power of love/friendship to transcend social order and injustice. Elsie represented these motifs and was a living example of dignity in the face of injustice. She loved wholeheartedly, even in a society built upon and driven by hate. This screenplay was written in her honour.



**Figure 1: Elsie, and her husband, Joe-Joe - Soweto, South Africa, 1980s.**

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH

*Jacaranda* is a work of fiction. While it is based around real historical people, places, and events, I do not claim to have created a perfectly historically accurate work. My aim in writing this screenplay has been to connect with an emotional truth. My imagination has been my guide, more so than my desire for historicity. That being stated, I have still attempted to portray the Apartheid period in an honest manner, paying attention to the historical details of the time. As such, throughout my screenplay, I have alluded to actual events, people, and places. I have based these allusions on the research I have conducted, from primary, secondary and tertiary sources.

Through a SSHRC research grant, I had the privilege of travelling back to Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2010. While there, I set out to interview various people who were active during Apartheid. These included multiple domestic workers, political activists, human rights lawyers, a sangoma (or witch doctor), Soweto residents, and members of the Afrikaaner community. I also toured through Soweto, visiting the Hector Pieterse Memorial Museum, which honors victims of the Soweto Uprising, and Johannesburg's Apartheid Museum. Additionally, in this time, I visited South Africa's Constitution Hill, which

involved touring the Constitutional Court, and "Number Four," the prison where Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Ghandi and other revolutionaries served time. Through these experiences, I gained a broader understanding of my own history, and the history of South Africa. The world I remembered as a child suddenly had a new face, one far more haunting.

In addition to this first-hand experience, my research through reading and examining historical documents, and accounts from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, helped infuse my screenplay with an historical basis. The following are points of history that pertain to *Jacaranda*.

As in my screenplay, the African National Congress truly did have an underground military wing, called "uMkhonto we Sizwe" (known as the "M.K."). In the mid-1980s, members of this freedom-fighting group, like the characters Macie and Sizwe, were actively involved in bombing campaigns, aimed at sabotaging the Apartheid regime. Throughout this period, M.K. underwent an ideological shift from targeted killings to more indiscriminate attacks. Around this time, they released a statement that they could no longer guarantee that civilians would not be caught in the crossfire of the armed struggle.<sup>1</sup> Relating to that statement, the bombing of the Rissik Street Wimpy Burger Bar is an

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<sup>1</sup> *Institute for Security Studies*, ed. Anton du Plessis, 17 July 2016 <<https://www.issafrica.org>>.

historical event, though the story of who was behind it is still unclear.

Additionally, Vlakplaas, the farm where Raphael is tortured, is a real place. The secret South African Police unit, C1 (or C10), operated covertly from the Vlakplaas farm, where opponents to the state were interrogated, tortured and executed.<sup>2</sup> Lastly, while Johan Du Toit is not an historical figure, he is inspired by the real commander of Vlakplaas, Eugene de Kock, a mild-manner man, nicknamed "Prime Evil," who is guilty of mass killings and leading a "death squad" at Vlakplaas Farm for the South African government.<sup>3</sup>

The following is a list of historical events that are particularly pertinent to my screenplay:

1920 - The Pass Laws formalize restrictions of the movement of black Africans within South Africa.

1948 - The Nationalist Party formalizes the rules of Apartheid as a means of governing the aboriginal peoples in South Africa.

1950 - The Group Areas Act formalizes the separation of racial groups into living areas determined by the Nationalist Party.

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<sup>2</sup> South African Government, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Vol. 3, (South Africa, 1998) 628.

<sup>3</sup> South African Government, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Vol. 3, (South Africa, 1998) 204.

- 1953 - The Bantu Education Act implements a separate education system for students living in black areas, Bantus.
- 1960 - The Sharpeville Massacre. During a peaceful black protests against the enforcement of the Pass Laws, sixty-nine black people are killed.
- 1961 - The African National Congress's underground military wing, "uMkhonto we Sizwe" ("M.K."), led by Nelson Mandela, launches its first attacks against government installations. The group is declared a terrorist organization by the state.
- 1963 - Nelson Mandela and other leaders of the M.K. are arrested in Rivonia, Johannesburg. They are put on trial, accused of conspiring to incite acts of revolution and sabotage. Mandela and others are sentenced to life in prison, and M.K. is forced to operate in exile.
- 1976 - The Soweto Uprising. In response to the Afrikaans Medium Decree of two years earlier, tensions rise within the African townships. Not only is Bantu school funding relegated to reduced funds, but now, instruction in Afrikaans is mandatory. Black school children and Black Consciousness Movement devotees march within the streets of Soweto. It grows violent as South African Police open fire upon the masses. Rioting ensues, culminating in a death toll of between two hundred and six hundred fatalities.

1980 - Dirk Coetzee becomes the first commander of the South African Secret Police, based on the Vlakplaas Farm, outside of Pretoria. The covert unit, known as C10 and C1, is a paramilitary hit squad, directed to capture, torture and or execute political opponents. The Vlakplaas Farm becomes the site of multiple executions and murders.<sup>4</sup> Around this time, M.K. begins a more aggressive campaign of sabotage, through bombing campaigns and surprise attacks. These include the 1980 Sasol Oil Refinery sabotage, the 1981 rocket attack on Voortrekkerhoogte, the 1982 Koeberg Nuclear Plant attack, and the 1983 S.A. Air Force car bomb explosion, in Pretoria. During this period, M.K. releases a statement, warning that they can no longer guarantee that civilians will not be caught in the crossfire of the struggle.<sup>5</sup>

1983 - Eugene de Kock, known as "Prime Evil" becomes the new commander of Vlakplaas and the C1/C10 death squad. Under his leadership, the unit re-doubles its efforts to hunt down and kill opponents of the government.<sup>6</sup>

1984 - The Vaal Uprising occurs, a popular revolt in the townships in response to rental increases. As a reaction,

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<sup>4</sup> South African Government, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Vol. 3*, (South Africa, 1998) 202.

<sup>5</sup> *Institute for Security Studies*, ed. Anton du Plessis, 17 July 2016 <<https://www.issafrica.org>>.

<sup>6</sup> Pumla Godobo-Madikizela. *A Human Being Died That Night* (South Africa: First Mariner Books, 2003) 4.

"Operation Palmiet"<sup>7</sup> is put into effect by the government. Police and Armed forces suppress the unrest, leading to approximately one hundred and forty-two deaths over four months. This inspires a rise in M.K. recruitment, as well as mass protests.

1986 - The government imposes a "National State of Emergency," which leads to the detention of thousands of activists, but this does not halt M.K.'s bombing campaign.<sup>8</sup> In, June, a bomb explodes at the Rissik St. Wimpy Burger Bar, severely injuring 18 people. M.K. is blamed for the attack, though no assailant is captured.<sup>9</sup> Bombing campaigns continue, as pressure mounts for the South African Police to quell the unrest.

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<sup>7</sup> South African Government, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Vol. 2*, (South Africa, 1998) 174.

<sup>8</sup> *Institute for Security Studies*, ed. Anton du Plessis, 17 July 2016  
<<https://www.issafrica.org>>.

<sup>9</sup> "Two Bombs Injure 19 in South Africa," *LA Times*, 24 June 1986, 14 July 2016  
<[http://articles.latimes.com/1986-06-24/news/mn-21191\\_1\\_bombs-injure](http://articles.latimes.com/1986-06-24/news/mn-21191_1_bombs-injure)>.

## CHALLENGES OF SUBJECT MATTER

Aside from the challenges associated with writing any screenplay, the subject matter of *Jacaranda* comes with a unique set of obstacles.

For one, there is the issue of cultural appropriation. That is, who am I, as a white writer, living in Canada, to be writing about the black struggle in South Africa?

This is a fair question, particularly given the sensitive subject matter of Apartheid. However, from my perspective, my writing of *Jacaranda* is not cultural appropriation, because I am not seeking to "appropriate" or "steal" others' rights to South Africa's story. Rather, I am seeking to tell a story that is tied to my own experience, and the experiences of those who were close to me, namely my childhood caregiver, Elsie.

Further, I am doing the work of the writer, which is to empathize with characters outside of oneself, in order to find an emotional honesty that is common to all of humanity. My writing of *Jacaranda* is done with sincerity and respect, and it does not prevent other writers, of other cultures, from also exploring these themes in their work.

Secondly, in writing *Jacaranda*, I faced the issue of perspective or point of view. While, perhaps, as a South African, I am entitled to write a story about South Africa, but

why do I have the right to write this story from a black, female perspective?

This is also a fair question. I am not black and I do not have an internal experience of what it is to be black, particularly in South Africa. However, I do not believe that this should limit the bounds of my empathy and imagination. In fact, I believe that a primary function of writing - and the Arts, in general - is to allow for a shared human experience, gained through empathetically stretching oneself into new perspectives.

My choice to follow Macie's point of view came after great contemplation. In fact, the first few version of my narrative did not follow Macie's perspective. These iterations followed Nikolaas more closely. I even wrote a full draft of my screenplay from Nikolaas's perspective, before realizing that the more meaningful story for me to tell was from Macie's view. Macie's story is simply more interesting, to me, than Nikolaas's. She has a greater external obstacle, in the Apartheid system, and, therefore, the stakes are far higher.

In addition, at the point that I had Nikolaas as the lead, his arc was that of a young white boy coming to discover that his father was the head of South Africa's Secret Police. While this is a worthy enough story, I felt that the narrative was too centered on the white perspective. It did not delve into the

struggles of the full South Africa, struggles that were much deeper than a white boy coming to see the true nature of his father. I wanted Nikolaas' realization to be part of the story, but I sought to explore a broader perspective, one that would position Nikolaas's revelation within a larger, more complex context. Macie's point of view provided this perspective. Through her, the true struggles of Apartheid could be experienced first-hand, and the broader framework of her and Nikolaas's friendship could be explored.

## CREATIVE PROCESS

Creativity is a fickle friend. In my experience, it ebbs and flows at its own rhythm. I can never predict when a writing session will be an effortless delight, or a slow-moving struggle. That being said, I am not one to "wait for inspiration to strike" before sitting down to work. I have found that building a regular practice of writing is the best way to harness creativity when it does "choose to arrive." Some days lead to triumphs; others are filled with a series of dead-ends. Yet, regardless, there I am, seated at my computer, ready to make the best of what percolates to the surface.

When it comes to screenwriting, I tend to follow a similar process in all of my projects. The process begins with inspiration. This nugget of interest can arise in an infinite variety of ways. Sometimes, I am inspired by an image, or it might be a concept, a character, even a piece of dialogue. In the case of *Jacaranda*, I was inspired by the death of my childhood nanny.

Once I have the slightest spark of inspiration, I try to foster that energy, and expand it into a more manageable form. Generally, this involves me brainstorming in a very loose, unstructured way. I tend to open a Word document and just start typing, in a stream of consciousness manner. I try not to judge

the words I am writing, but rather to allow myself to simply express the feelings in my mind.

With *Jacaranda*, my stream of consciousness writing began with the following:

This is a kids' fantasy/historical fiction piece about Apartheid South Africa. The story revolves around a six-year-old boy and his friendship with his nanny, Elsie. There is something here that can send a message that speaks to the strength of these African women, the struggles of their people, and the intricate and complex relationship that they had with a few generations of white people. For many of us, these women were much like mothers. Elsie certainly was.<sup>10</sup>

While the above is rather vague and broad, elements of that initial brainstorming session still remain in the screenplay.

Further down in that early brainstorming document, I wrote:

[T]he beauty comes from the fact that Elsie and this boy were able to look past political differences and build a friendship - even as the collective guilt of the period is felt by each of them.<sup>11</sup>

Thematically, this motif of "friendship transcending political and social divisions" has remained central to *Jacaranda's* structure. For this reason, I believe that the initial free-flowing brainstorming period of the creative process is incredibly important. Often, within it, the very spine of the inchoate story sits hiding in plain sight.

After this free exploration period, I tend to step away from my computer and visualize potential beats of the screenplay.

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<sup>10</sup> Ryan Smith, "Personal Writing Journal," 10 June 2008

<sup>11</sup> Ryan Smith, "Personal Writing Journal," 10 June 2008

Often I will attempt to imagine the "trailer" of the finished film. This exercise allows my "rational" mind to take a backseat to my "emotional" mind. Feeling is my guide, and I simply close my eyes and let the "movie" play in my head. Generally, through this exercise, disparate images and story beats become apparent. I will not know how these various elements connect, or whether they make logical sense as a group, but I will take note of them, and eventually jot them down. Then, with these images in motion, I will dig deeper and begin shaping the Story.

By the term, "Story," I am referring to the interconnected system of Character, Plot, and Theme. In my experience, a Story is not just the external narrative, but it is the internal dynamics of the above three elements as they coalesce to form a meaningful cohesive whole. For instance, in a well-crafted Story, a shift in the plot will have an affect on the characters. Similarly, assuming the story system is working, a shift in the nature of a character will affect the plot. Furthermore, a tweak to either of these elements (Character or Plot) will alter the meaning of the story created, thereby affecting the story's theme.

With this understanding of Story in mind, I tend to review the brainstorming I have done and attempt to answer three questions before beginning the outlining process of my writing. These questions are:

- 1) Who is the protagonist of my story (i.e., who is the character whose flawed worldview will be challenged through the course of the story?);
- 2) What is that flawed character's tangible, external objective/goal; and
- 3) How does the narrative conclude, such that, in pursuit of such an objective/goal, the protagonist's flawed worldview is "challenged"?

I attempt to answer these questions, so that when I begin crafting the narrative, I am writing toward a specific end. Of course, through the development process, these decisions are flexible (in fact, I shifted protagonists multiple times throughout the writing of *Jacaranda*). However, by setting these start and end points, a narrative spine for the story starts to take shape.

With the above determined, I tend to expand my work into a beat-sheet, one of the many that I will write as I refine my story and gather more information through research. For me, the beat-sheet is a short document (roughly three pages), in which I lay out, in point-form, the major plot shifts in the narrative. These plot-points are formulated in conjunction with my development of Character and Theme, because, as I mentioned above, these three strands are the interrelated system of Story.

My conception of "Story" is based upon a wide variety of influences. These include the teachings of my professors at York, insights I have gained from viewing films and reading screenplays, and my reading of Story Theory books, by authors such as Joseph Campbell, Robert McKee, Christopher Vogler, Michael Hague, Blake Snyder, Syd Field, Amnon Buchbinder, and John Truby, to name only a selection. In general, I subscribe to a three-act structure, and the story beats I consider are roughly the following:

- 1) the Setup;
- 2) the Inciting Incident;
- 3) the First Turning Point;
- 4) the Trials of the New World;
- 5) the Mid-point;
- 6) the Rise of Antagonistic Forces;
- 7) the All is Lost/Gained;
- 8) the Internal Revelation/Second Turning Point;
- 9) the Climax; and
- 10) the Denouement.

While these points often guide me in the shaping of my story, they are not an outside-in "paint-by-numbers" recipe. In fact, they are the byproduct of an inside-out approach to Character and Theme.

As I mentioned above, I try to define my protagonist's flawed worldview and objective. This often entails stepping away

from the linear nature of the beat-sheet, toward character study and thematic explorations. This can take a while, and is often the bulk of the work at this early stage.

After further refining my conception of Character and Theme, I finally settle on the protagonist's flawed worldview and objective. The rest of the story is then built around these notions, such that the obstacles and adventures the hero endures are designed to specifically test and challenge that belief system. By the end, if the correct mechanisms are in place, in the Third Act, the protagonist tends to face a "moment of truth," where his or her worldview is tested. Often the protagonist arcs and has a shift in perspective, but, sometimes, as is often the case in tragedies, the protagonist's worldview remains unaltered.

After multiple stabs at the beat-sheet, in combination with research and explorations of the story's theme and characters, I tend to expand my beat-sheet into a more detailed treatment. For me, this is a ten-to-twenty-page document, written in prose, in which I tell the story in its entirety.

In the writing of *Jacaranda*, I went through this "treatment" process a great many times. Primarily, this is because I had various ideas for stories around my central concept, and I wanted to explore them all. In total, I worked through four completely different stories before settling on the narrative that exists now.

The first version was an historical fantasy story, centered around a white boy's forbidden friendship with his nanny; the second version was a memory piece, in which a young white journalist travelled back to South Africa to cover the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, only to discover that, in the past, his father was a member of the South African Secret Police; the third version revolved around a white boy's unexpected friendship with a black girl, as, in attempting to rescue her freedom fighting father, they came under attack from the Tokoloshe, an African mythical beast (I actually wrote a full draft of the screenplay based on this version, before deciding to change protagonists, as was discussed in the "Challenges of Subject Matter" section); and the fourth, and current, version is centered on a black freedom fighting young woman, who reluctantly befriends a white boy, in order to free her father, who has been wrongfully imprisoned near the boy's farm. This is the version I ultimately felt compelled to write.

After notes and revisions on my treatment for this version, I expanded my work even further into a step-outline. The step-outline tends to be a thirty-to-forty-page document that is essentially a scene-by-scene, moment-by-moment outline of the screenplay. It is written within screenwriting software and includes scene headings and basically all the detail of the screenplay, minus the dialogue. For *Jacaranda*, I worked through

multiple drafts of my step-outline, in consultation with my thesis committee. We queried all of my choices within the document, and only once it seemed in complete enough shape, did I move forward to writing my drafts.

After writing my first draft, I analyzed the screenplay and reviewed it with my Thesis committee. I then made revisions, further developing character, and completed a second draft. After notes on this draft, I moved forward with more revisions and a series of final polishes. While I still intend to do more revisions on this draft, I am pleased with the screenplay's current state. It tells the story I set out to explore, and pays tribute, at least in some way, to the women of South Africa, and, above all, to my old friend and caregiver, Elsie Thipe.

## **A NOTE ON THE TITLE**

My screenplay is titled after the Jacaranda tree, which is a blossoming plant, ubiquitous in South Africa. Jacaranda trees are particularly common around the city of Pretoria, which is near the location of the Vlakplaas farm. I find this title striking, because, to me, it represents the stark contrast between the atrocities of Apartheid and South Africa's natural potential for utter beauty.

## STRUCTURAL BREAKDOWN

### LOGLINE:

In 1986, South Africa, a young black freedom fighter sets out to rescue her father, who has been wrongfully arrested for a bombing she caused. Through her pursuit, she comes face-to-face with the grotesque underbelly of the Apartheid regime, and forms an unlikely friendship with a member of her perceived enemy.

### ACT 1

#### 1) THE SETUP

The primary purpose of the Setup -- aside from introducing the world and genre of the piece -- is to introduce the protagonist in her "un-arc'd" state. Within this section, the reader gains insight into how the protagonist is stuck in a life that is unsustainable. The reader may also come to understand that the protagonist's current belief system is, in some way, harming those around her.

For *Jacaranda*, Macie's worldview is introduced. She is shown to be an emotionally wounded character, caught up within a revenge plot (specifically, a bombing campaign) against the Apartheid regime. Her worldview is epitomized by her uncle Sizwe's statement that "The white man learns *nothing* till his own child feels the sting." With this ideology, Macie believes firmly that the "ends justify the means." She wants to bring down the Apartheid regime, and she is willing to do whatever it

takes to reach this goal - even if doing so involves civilian casualties.

Counter to this perspective is Macie's father, Raphael. He, too, seeks a life without Apartheid, but he maintains the perspective that murder of the innocent is never justified, even in the face of gross injustices. Macie strongly disagrees with him on this point, to the degree that she calls him a "Coward" in these early moments. The debate between these two perspectives forms much of the thematic argument of *Jacaranda*. The Setup establishes that Macie's journey, on a thematic level, will be about determining when, if ever, the "ends justify the means."

With Macie and Sizwe's bombing campaign going awry, and with Raphael and Macie's contentious dynamic setup, the story is ready to move on to the next step of the narrative.

## **2) THE INCITING INCIDENT**

The Inciting Incident is designed to serve as a "call to adventure"<sup>12</sup> for the protagonist. Generally, it is an event that forces or inspires the protagonist to move forward into an area of the unknown, such that the protagonist's "un-arc'd" worldview can be tested and challenged. By "un-arc'd" worldview, I mean the character's perspective on life that is currently holding

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Campbell. *The Hero of a Thousand Faces* (UK: Paladin, 1988) 49

them in a place of stasis, preventing them from evolving further. This outlook will be challenged directly by the oncoming story.

In *Jacaranda*, this event is the unexpected arrest of Macie's father, Raphael, just after he and Macie return to Soweto from the bombing plot. Macie regrets the argument she has had with her father and enters her home, only to discover that Raphael is being arrested, thrown onto a police truck, by an unidentifiable police officer. Macie's instincts kick in. She grabs her father's hidden gun and races toward the police truck. She leaps onto the back of it, and is whisked out of Soweto, and into the unknown.

### **3) THE FIRST TURNING POINT**

The First Turning Point, or the "Crossing of the First Threshold,"<sup>13</sup> generally marks the shift in the narrative, such that the protagonist moves from a known world (literally or metaphorically) to an unknown world. This section of a story often follows a moment of disorientation for the protagonist, and is usually capped by a choice point for the hero, as she decides to move forward on the adventure.

For my screenplay, the First Turning Point is in and around Macie's arrival on the Du Toit farm. After falling off the

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<sup>13</sup> Campbell, 77

police truck, she wakes to discover that she is in Elsie's servant enclosure. Macie is disoriented, not understanding how she ended up in this location. Her first instinct is to run away, so she can find her father. However, after a failed attempt at escaping, Elsie informs Macie of the dangers that surround her, given that she does not have her passbook. With the pressure of potentially being caught without a passbook, in combination with Macie being introduced to Johan Du Toit as a "nanny in training," Macie sees no choice but to embrace her new environment, even if just temporarily. This decision plants the narrative firmly into Act Two.

## **ACT 2**

### **4) THE TRIALS OF THE NEW WORLD**

The first half of Act Two is a fairly lengthy part of the screenplay, generally around the length of Act One. Primarily, it functions to challenge the protagonist's established worldview by thrusting her into a world that is in some way the polar opposite of what she once knew. In this "antithetical world," the protagonist's perspective is put to the test, as she is confronted by a series of trials and obstacles. While she attempts to overcome these challenges, the true nature of her character emerges, often in surprising ways.

This part of the narrative tends to be characterized by "rising action," in which plans are made, friendships are formed, and the potential for future, graver danger is established. From an internal character perspective, this section also often involves the hero "trying on" new worldviews or perspectives. The possibility for change and growth tantalizes the protagonist, as toward the end of this section, she often opens herself up to vulnerability.

In *Jacaranda*, Macie arrives on the Du Toit farm, "the antithetical world," which is in stark contrast to her previously established environment. For one, it is rural and quiet, as opposed to the urban chaos of Soweto and Johannesburg. For another, she finds herself in the role of a subservient domestic worker in a white family, rather than as a defiant freedom fighter within a black community.

Further, Macie's worldview is challenged in this section. This initially arises as Elsie becomes her ally, offering Macie a less extreme perspective than her Uncle Sizwe on the struggle for freedom. Elsie questions whether the ends always justify the means. Elsie and Macie battle over these complex perspectives, while simultaneously, Macie is confronted with direct opposition to her worldview, in her forced supervision of Nikolaas.

For Macie, Nikolaas is initially the walking embodiment of white, racist rule. He is entitled, pugnacious, arrogant, and

convinced that he has a right to his self-proclaimed position as "the boss." While, at first, this further entrenches Macie into her pre-established worldview, as the two come to know one another, she evolves. They both do. Shades to Nikolaas's character become apparent. As Macie sees Nikolaas abused by his father, and comes to learn that he is the product of a murdered mother, he becomes more human to her, rather than a token. Similarly, later in the plot, once Nikolaas comes to understand Macie's plight, and that her father and people have been inhumanly brutalized by the system which his father represents, his arrogance falls away, and for the first time, he feels a sense of human compassion for Macie and the black people.

Ultimately, through the "rising action" of Macie searching for her father with Nikolaas's aid, the two come to humanize one another. The "enemy" shifts from a tokenized "other" to a human ally, with a shared internal makeup. At this point in the narrative, after the visit to Vlakplaas, in which Nikolaas witnesses his father horrifically murder a black prisoner, the two open up to one another. Their defensive masks are dropped, and they become receptive to change, and, as a result, they also become vulnerable to pain.

## 5) THE MIDPOINT

In most screenplays (at least those that follow a hero's journey shape), the Midpoint represents a highpoint for the protagonist. By "highpoint," I do not necessarily mean that the character is happy, but that, while previously she had been deeply entrenched in a static worldview, the protagonist is now open to growth and change. Furthermore, this is often the "Point of No Return" for the hero. She can no longer turn back from the journey. The wheels are fully in motion, and the only direction of movement available is forward. On a line graph, the Midpoint represents the peak of rising action, just before the forces of antagonism re-double their efforts and drive the character toward a more negative, dangerous low-point, one where growth and change may seem impossible.

Yet, for now, at the Midpoint, the protagonist generally has a slight moment to breathe. In romances, this is often the point when the lovers finally admit their affection for one another. In quest stories, this may be the point where the object of desire is found. Of course, seizing the object and bringing it home will involve a whole new set of challenges, but these obstacles are not considered at this stage. The Midpoint is a brief moment for the protagonist to feel calm - to, for a moment, reside in their more evolved self.

In *Jacaranda*, this "calm before the storm" occurs after Macie and Nikolaas have journeyed to Vlakplaas. They have found Raphael, which is positive, but they have also witnessed the brutal realities of Vlakplaas, watching as Johan mercilessly murders a black prisoner. The two sit in the Jacaranda tree, both overcome with emotion. Macie has gained a deeper understanding of Nikolaas's psychological makeup, and Nikolaas has come to see the true forces of antagonism stacked against Macie and her people.

Nikolaas finally understands that the violence of South Africa is not rooted in what he previously believed was the "savage" ways of the "uncivilized black people," but that his father, and the horrible system he represents, are the cause of South Africa's bloody state. After witnessing his father's heartless actions, he realizes that his mother's murder was a targeted reaction to Johan's cruelty.

As Macie and Nikolaas both acknowledge one another as wounded humans, with a shared internal makeup, they open themselves up to change. Macie's perspective that the ends justify the means is mitigated by her burgeoning friendship with a member of her perceived enemy. Nikolaas's entitlement and his hatred for the black people is now tempered by his empathy for Macie and her plight. From this moment on, their dynamic shifts, and, as a result, Nikolaas agrees to help Macie

achieve her objective. Together, they will rescue Macie's father from Vlakplaas.

## **6) THE RISE OF ANTAGONISTIC FORCES**

While stopping the narrative at the Midpoint might seem a "kind" gesture to the protagonist - after all, she has shown a willingness to change - Story does not let a hero "off the hook" that easily. No, the protagonist's commitment to her changing worldview must be tested and challenged to a high degree, to determine whether or not this "growth" will have a lasting effect.

This testing of the protagonist's psychology is hit hard in the second half of Act Two. On a line graph of a classically structured Story, this section of the narrative would be a downward slope, falling from the Midpoint peak, toward the lowest of lows, which is still to come. Within this segment, the forces of antagonism re-double their efforts. They close-in on the protagonist and force her into an increasingly pressurized state, where she will often be confronted with a choice: with the attainment of the hero's objective in sight, will she revert to her old worldview to gain what she wants, or will she risk losing the object of desire, in order to uphold a higher value system? Often, at this point, to the reader's disappointment, the hero

makes the "wrong" choice, reverting to her old ways, which brings the story to a shattering low.

In my screenplay, this section is marked by Macie and Nikolaas's commitment to breaking Raphael out of Vlakplaas by building a bomb and planting it outside of the Police Farmhouse. The two set out to gather supplies, bringing them directly into the inner office of their greatest antagonistic force, Johan. However, as they search for bullets and gunpowder, Johan is approached by Officer Pretorius, who has found surveillance footage from the Wimpy Burger Bar bombing. The footage appears to be of Macie, and now Johan is determined to confirm this suspicion.

Eventually, Johan confronts Macie, inviting her to join the family at the dinner table. He presses her for her passbook, which leads to a search of the servant quarters, where Macie is seemingly saved by the forged passbook, delivered by Elsie. Johan is momentarily appeased, but his men are still searching Raphael's shack in Soweto, and the threat of exposing Macie's secret looms large.

In the thick of this building pressure, Macie sneaks over to Nikolaas' bedroom, where she urges him to join her in planting the bomb earlier than they had planned. This marks the point when the protagonist's commitment to his or her changed worldview is

tested, and both Macie, and her counterpart, Nikolaas, fail their tests.

Afraid that his father will harm him if he comes to discover his involvement in this new bombing plot, Nikolaas reneges on his commitment to helping Macie. Instead, he asks her to find a more diplomatic means of rescuing her father. For Macie, this is not an option. She lies to Nikolaas, promising not to pursue the bombing plot, only to immediately thereafter race off with Nikolaas's torch to build the bomb at the Police Farmhouse.

Macie plants the bomb, but it fails to detonate and is soon confiscated by the police. This moment, in combination with Pretorius finding Macie's real passbook within Raphael's shack, brings this section of the plot to its low-point. Macie's secret is exposed, and, through her actions, she has implicated Elsie, Nikolaas, and her father, Raphael.

## **7) THE ALL IS LOST**

Many screenplay's have an "All is Lost" sequence, toward the end of Act Two. This section represents the nadir in the hero's internal journey, from their old, static worldview, to the potential for their more-evolved belief system. In terms of the protagonist's psychology, this period marks a lower point than the hero's position at the beginning of the narrative. While at

the beginning of the plot, the hero lived by this outmoded perspective; she was doing so without knowing any better. However, at this point, the protagonist should see the error of her ways. She has lived through the trials of Act Two, she has changed, and seen the potential for her more-evolved self, and yet, she has still chosen to revert to these former ways.

Robert McKee describes an element of this dark antagonistic turn as "the negation of the negation."<sup>14</sup> It represents a doubling down of the negative forces. In some screenplays, this takes the shape of the protagonist internalizing the psychology that he or she once battled. The hero becomes the very thing she once despised. As such, the protagonist is often isolated and in deep despair at this point. The potential for "growth" seems impossible, and the object of desire is completely out of reach.

For Macie, in *Jacaranda*, the "All is Lost" section begins with her bomb being confiscated by the police. She comes to learn that her actions have implicated Nikolaas (whose fingerprints are all over the bomb materials). She has also led the police to press even harder against her father, beating him, in retaliation for Macie's actions. Further, she has put her consistent ally, Elsie, in the line of fire. After Johan abuses and fires Elsie, Macie and Elsie have a verbal argument, in which Elsie confronts Macie about the nature of her actions. Elsie

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<sup>14</sup> Robert McKee. *Story* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997) 320

admits that she knows that Macie's mother was the revolutionary hero, Connie Thiipe, who died in battle. She also tells Macie that while Macie may idolize her mother's heroic efforts, she is nothing like her mother. Her mother refused to harm indiscriminately, while Macie seems to care little for those who are caught in the crossfire of her mission. Stung by this information, Macie and Elsie part ways, and Macie goes into hiding, alone and in despair.

#### **8) THE INTERNAL REVELATION/SECOND TURNING POINT**

John Truby refers to this moment as the "Self-revelation."<sup>15</sup> It is the moment when the hero finally sees the error of her old ways. She now understands how she needs to change, and she jumps into action. A final test of this realization is still to come in Act Three, but, at this point, the hero realizes that her old worldview is not serving her anymore, and that the only way forward is through change. Sometimes this revelation comes in a moment, and sometimes it trickles in through a sequence of events.

In *Jacaranda*, Macie's "Self-revelation" arises through a number of events. First, when she is in hiding up in the Jacaranda tree, after her confrontation with Elsie, she has a moment to reflect on the consequences of her old worldview (i.e.,

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<sup>15</sup> John Truby. *The Anatomy of Story*. (New York: Faber and Faber, Inc., 2007) 40

through this belief system, she caused the following: Nikolaas's arrest, Elsie's clash with Johan, Raphael's beating, and the deaths of various people at the Wimpy Burger Bar). Second, Macie reflects on Elsie's comment, that Macie is nothing like her mother, "Not even close." Considering this, Macie examines the Jacaranda petals on the tree around her. She reflects on how her mother encouraged her to never pluck these flowers, but to experience their beauty without harming them. This non-violent ideology is at odds with Macie's old worldview, and, for the first time, she sees a clearer image of her mother's heroic nature. Then, when Macie hears the cry of her father ring out from Vlakplaas, she knows she has to act. She climbs down from the tree, and heads off to the detention center.

### **ACT 3**

#### **9) THE CLIMAX**

In the climactic final beats of a screenplay, the hero is driven whole-heartedly to achieve her objective, but, often, in order to do so, she is faced with a final challenge. In a well-crafted story, this ultimate confrontation will arise in the form of a personal dilemma. Stuck between two challenging options, the hero will have the choice to follow through with his or her old worldview, or to act on the internal changes they have

experienced, and forge, in action, a new belief system. This is the moment that defines the narrative's effect on the hero's internal psychology, putting on display the protagonist's personal growth and evolution.

In *Jacaranda*, Macie's final challenge comes in the form of Nikolaas's surprise return to the Du Toit home. At this point, Macie and Sizwe have laid bombs along the perimeter of the Du Toit house, setting up a diversion that will allow them to enter Vlakplaas. Macie is committed to this mission, but when she realizes that Nikolaas will be in the line of fire, as he heads toward where the first bomb will explode, she chooses to pull him out of harm's way. Macie displays the complexity of her character in this moment. She and Nikolaas have come to see one another as more than just the tokens they represent in the struggle. Macie is unwilling to live by the ruthless ideology of the Apartheid regime. Unlike her oppressor, she sees the value in human life, even if doing so puts her mission at risk.

While this moment is the personal climax for Macie's character shift, *Jacaranda* also has a second, larger climax, which is the final confrontation with Johan. This showdown with Johan serves less to depict Macie's character shift (since the reader has already experienced this, as mentioned above). This climax serves to provide an opportunity for growth to the antagonist, Johan.

With his gun aimed at Macie and Raphael, Johan refuses to believe that the two are acting alone. After hearing rustling in the bushes, he acts through his "ends justifying the means" mindset, and shoots, unwittingly killing his own son. With the discovery of his tragic actions, Johan turns back to Macie. He has seen first-hand the effects of his own wrong-headed worldview. It has led to him killing his own son. With this realization, Johan becomes a living example of Sizwe's statement in the beginning of the narrative: "The white man learns *nothing* till his own child feels the sting." In this moment, with Nikolaas bleeding out, Johan has a moment to prove that he has learned from this tragedy. He has a beat in which he can let Macie and Raphael run free. However, given that this story mirrors the Apartheid regime's stubborn refusal to change, Johan fails this test. In an act of vengeance, he shoots at Macie, deeply injuring her. He is about to shoot her to death, when, from behind, Elsie appears, and shoots Johan dead.

By the end of the screenplay, Macie has changed, and thus survived. Johan has refused to change, and thus died. The tragedy of Johan's refusal to change comes to light through Nikolaas. Even though Nikolaas has arced from being a petulant, racist child to becoming a compassionate young adult, the stubbornness of Apartheid refuses to honor this shift. Nikolaas becomes a casualty of his father's outmoded worldview.

## 10) THE DENOUEMENT

The Denouement of a narrative generally involves a release of tension. It is a moment to breathe. The plot has resolved itself, and all loose ends can be tied. In most stories, where the hero triumphs, this is a point of celebration. With the antagonistic forces quelled, the hero can return to a new equilibrium and share his or her boon with the community.<sup>16</sup> In tragedies, the Denouement is similar, but different. Even though the narrative's tension has unraveled, often the forces of antagonism have triumphed. This still leads to a calming end, however, the stillness is not marked by celebration, but by contemplation and mourning.

In my screenplay, the Denouement is very short. It is only a few beats, in fact. With Elsie having shot Johan and granted Macie and Raphael a moment to escape, Macie and Elsie share a small moment of reflection. In a look, Elsie acknowledges the change in Macie. Macie, similarly, recognizes the shift in Elsie - after all, Elsie has acted to save Macie. While one might argue that Elsie exemplified an "ends justifying the means" worldview in this action, I believe Elsie's shooting of Johan represents a middle-ground within the thematic argument of the screenplay. Elsie did not kill indiscriminately. Her shooting of Johan was

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<sup>16</sup> Campbell, 172

targeted, and Johan had proven himself to be "unwilling to change." Therefore, from a Story perspective, his character was stagnant, and, in that sense, already dead. Regardless, with the antagonistic forces momentarily quelled, Macie and Raphael hobble toward a freer life. Macie is deeply injured, and Nikolaas is dead, but the character shifts that they have embraced mirror the ingredients for South Africa's progress.

#### **A NOTE ON GENRE**

*Jacaranda* contains a blend of genres. From a broad perspective, it is a work of Historical Fiction, or an Historical Drama, in that it fuses an historical period with a fictionalized dramatic storyline. However, as the narrative progresses, it utilizes some elements of the Thriller genre, namely, that the plot often revolves around anticipation and suspense. The Thriller elements become more prominent as the narrative descends into the darkness of the screenplay's second half, however, even the bombing plot of the first scene has some suspense built in.

From a writing perspective, I approached the screenplay as a straight Drama, without focusing directly on the Thriller elements. However, eventually the suspenseful beats emerged, because they felt appropriate for the story that was unfolding. The other genre element that is in play is the Romance genre.

While *Jacaranda* is far from a "Love Story," it does involve two characters, from opposing sides, coming to know one another through conflict, and ultimately forming a friendship.

## WEB OF CHARACTERS

As mentioned above, Story is the interrelated system of Plot, Character, and Theme. As such, the characters I created are informed by the other elements of my story. All is centered around my protagonist, Macie, and her worldview. In building what John Truby calls a "Character Web,"<sup>17</sup> I designed each character to represent a different "shade" of Macie's belief system. This way, through Macie's interaction with these various characters, a deeper breadth of the story's theme can be examined.

### **MACIE THIBE - Protagonist**

Macie is a complex character, filled with contradictory traits. On the one hand, she is deeply committed to her people, her mother's honour, and those who are close to her culture. On the other, she starts the story out having basically disowned the man closest to her -- her father, whom she has deemed a coward. She is a character with a strong, defensive outer shell, and yet, just beneath the surface, she is vulnerable and soft.

At the core of these complexities is Macie's wounded psyche. Her mother, a freedom fighter, died in the thick of the struggle. Macie blames the Apartheid regime for this tragedy, and, as such, is driven through vengeance, to take down the government through

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<sup>17</sup> Truby, 56

whatever means are necessary. Goaded her in this direction is her mother's brother, Sizwe, who believes that the only way to freedom is through violence - regardless of who gets caught in the crossfire. While Macie's father is against this perspective, Macie comes to believe that it is the only way to move forward.

After Raphael is arrested, Macie's "want" and "need" become clear: she "wants" to rescue her father and is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve this end. However, through the mechanisms of the narrative - specifically, through engaging with Nikolaas and Elsie - Macie is forced to drop what Amnon Buchbinder refers to as her "Mask."<sup>18</sup> She must ultimately embrace her internal "need," which is to see that blind violence robs her of the very value for which she is fighting: compassion. Through this shift, Macie transcends her morally stunted oppressors, who are willing to go to any length, no matter how brutal, to achieve their ends.

### **NIKOLAAS DU TOIT - Primary Antagonist**

In many ways, Nikolaas mirrors Macie. They have both lost their mothers through the Apartheid system. They are both under the watchful gaze of Johan. They are both judgmental and tokenizing of their perceived opposites. However, they differ

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<sup>18</sup> Amnon Buchbinder. *The Way of the Screenwriter* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 2005) 144

in one specific way - Nikolaas is fearfully obedient to his father, while Macie is fearlessly defiant of hers. Through their meeting and journey, they help one another overcome their limitations of defiance and obedience, and they do so because these two mindsets share a similar structure.

That is, obedience involves a lack of personal evaluation. An obedient person simply follows a rule blindly. Similarly, true defiance also involves a lack of personal evaluation. A defiant person will automatically do the opposite of the rule, so that, in effect, the rule is still dictating the actions this person takes. As Macie's direct antagonist, Nikolaas forces Macie to change. He is the abrasive edge, grinding against her old worldview. Through their relationship, Macie starts to evaluate the world for herself. She comes to de-tokenize her enemy. Similarly, Nikolaas begins evaluating the rules his father has handed down to him. Through Macie, he realizes that blindly following his father is tacitly allowing for the oppression and murder of countless innocent black people.

In the end, from a structural perspective, Nikolaas becomes the symbolic consequence of Johan's refusal to evolve. While Nikolaas arcs as a character, becoming compassionate to Macie's plight, he is killed by Johan's ignorance. His death represents the self-perpetuating tragedy of Johan's outmoded worldview. By refusing to have compassion for their perceived opponents, the

Apartheid government doomed itself to a never-ending cycle of violence. By retaining control of an oppressed black majority, and refusing to see their humanity, they were designing their own tragedy and demise.

### **JOHAN DU TOIT - Secondary Antagonist**

Johan is designed as Macie's large-scale opposing force. From a broad perspective, he controls all the things that Macie is trying to overcome: he is the face of the oppressor, he is brutal and inhuman in his methods, and he is practically all-powerful. In contrast, Macie is the oppressed, she is wracked with guilt over her father's arrest, and she is seemingly powerless as a black woman in a white male world.

However, Macie and Johan share some similarities. He, in fact, represents the darkest side of Macie's psyche. Like Macie, he is deeply devoted to a cause - so much so, that he is willing to do whatever it takes to reach his goal. He lives his life believing that the ends justify the means. If he has to kill the innocent in order to retain control of South Africa, he will do so. Macie, in the beginning of the narrative shares glimmers of this worldview, although, importantly, hers is a much lighter shade of this perspective.

Further, it is important to note that while, on a structural level, these two share similar ideologies, the circumstances around their social standings differentiate them greatly. Macie is a vulnerable member of a systematically oppressed and demeaned people. Johan is a leader within a State that is so powerful that its reach is practically omnipotent. Their circumstances could not be more different, and this is a crucial point to highlight, because, in no way am I suggesting that Macie's actions should be judged on an equal footing with Johan's.

Johan, in his privileged position, must be judged far more harshly for choosing the oppressive tactics he uses. Macie, in her desperate fight for survival, is limited in her options. However, since Macie is the Protagonist of the narrative, her psyche is put to the test. Johan's is challenged, too, but, as mentioned above, he fails his test, while Macie passes hers.

### **ELSIE GATYENI**

Elsie serves as the mother-figure Macie is missing. In the disorienting moment when Macie wakes up in Elsie's enclosure, Macie even thinks that she sees the shape of her mother in Elsie's face. From a structural perspective, Elsie's character is closely tied to the theme. She pushes against Macie's static

worldview, challenging her to rise above it. This becomes most apparent when Elsie confronts Macie at the end of Act Two, telling her that she knows that Macie is Connie Thipe's daughter. She accuses Macie of selfishly subscribing to an "ends justify the means" worldview. She states that Macie is not honouring her mother's legacy, implying that Macie's mother had a stronger moral backbone than Macie possesses. This allegation will ultimately spur Macie toward changing her belief system, and becoming more like her mother.

Similarly, Macie catalyzes change within Elsie. In that same scene, toward the end of Act Two, Macie accuses Elsie of being spineless: while Elsie knowingly lived within the home of South Africa's darkest secret police officer, she did nothing to put a stop to him. Macie feels this is cowardly. For Elsie, this accusation hits a nerve, because it ties to Elsie's backstory with her deceased daughter, Jackie. Jackie died in the Soweto Riots of 1976, and Elsie has long carried guilt that she did not do enough to fight against the system and protect her daughter. In fact, this guilt is the motivating drive that pushes Elsie to help Macie. She seeks redemption for the loss of her daughter.

In the final moments of the screenplay, when Elsie saves Macie by killing Johan, she finally gains what she has been seeking. By taking direct action, Elsie feels redeemed for her daughter's death at the hands of the Apartheid regime. She has

acquired some of the grit that Macie holds in abundance. As mentioned above, while Elsie's violent act, in killing Johan, might be viewed as conforming to an "ends justify the means" ideology, from my point of view, her killing of Johan is more complex than that implication. When she shoots Johan, she is not shooting indiscriminately. She is targeting a guilty leader of a system, and she is doing so in defense of innocent lives.

### **RAPHAEL THIPE**

Raphael is Macie's father, and the widowed husband of deceased revolutionary Connie Thipe. In his backstory, Raphael once fought alongside Sizwe and Connie, in the A.N.C.'s militant wing. However, after Connie's death, and Sizwe's rise into a position of power within the organization, Raphael feared the freedom fighting group's turn to indiscriminate violence. He stepped aside from the organization, a move that his daughter came to see as cowardly.

With his differing perspective on how best to reach freedom from Apartheid, Raphael begins the narrative at odds with Macie. He is the first to verbalize his disapproval of her worldview, which makes him seem like an opponent to Macie, but, in truth, he is her unconditional ally. Through Raphael's arrest and imprisonment, Macie is thrust into her journey. In this sense,

he is the catalyst to her arc. In the end, Macie's reunion with Raphael is the reward for her character growth.

## **SIZWE NOZULU**

As the narrative begins, Sizwe seems to be Macie's strongest ally. The two are close, he defends her actions, and they share a focused determination to fight for freedom. However, as the narrative progresses, Sizwe and Macie's perspectives move farther and farther apart. Sizwe represents an extreme of how best to achieve freedom. From his vantage point, he is justified to use any means necessary to achieve his aim, even if doing so involves the killing of civilians and children.

Macie's father is opposed to this mindset, as is Elsie. Macie may subconsciously perceive that this worldview is not sustainable for her, but she only outwardly feels a need to change through her journey with Nikolaas and Elsie. When she sees Nikolaas abused by his father, her natural inclination toward compassion is triggered. This leads to her humanizing him as a peer (and vice versa), which ultimately leads to her change in worldview. While Sizwe's perspective on the struggle may be harsh, ultimately, Johan (and the system he represents) is shown to have the most extreme view of all the characters. In Act Three, Johan promises to release Sizwe if he reveals

Macie's location. Sizwe does so (under duress), but then Johan does not keep up his end of the bargain. Johan shoots Sizwe, displaying his cruelty and the awful extent of his non-compassion.

## THEME

Humans are meaning-making machines. When we see a collection of events, we tend to interpret them and find meaning. In a narrative, this "meaning" can be described as the story's Theme, or as Robert McKee terms it, the story's "Controlling Idea." According to McKee the "Controlling Idea may be expressed in a single sentence describing how and why life undergoes change from one condition of existence at the beginning to another at the end."<sup>19</sup> John Truby refers to Theme as the "Moral Argument." To him, it represents the author's view of how best to act in the world.<sup>20</sup> Both views on the subject imply that Theme is not a single value or thematic motif, such as "Justice" or "Freedom," but it is a statement about how that value is achieved. This thematic assertion does not arise externally from the story, but it is the sum of what the story's conclusion says about how the world works.

In *Jacaranda*, a number of thematic motifs and values are at play. The screenplay explores the dichotomies of "Justice and Injustice," "Freedom and Imprisonment," "Obedience and Defiance," "Self and Other," and "Violence and Non-violence," among others. With these binaries infused in the various characters and their

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<sup>19</sup> McKee, 115

<sup>20</sup> Truby, 108

worldviews, the narrative is woven around a moral question relating to how best to attain a prosperous life.

For Macie, this life of prosperity necessitates freedom from the Apartheid regime. For Johan, this requires control of the black majority. In a sense, the protagonist and the antagonist are seeking the same outcome - they want control of their environment, in order to feel safe and free. With the two vying for essentially the same value, the means by which they go about reaching this outcome becomes the key differentiator, and this is where the screenplay's Moral Argument or Controlling Idea comes into play.

For much of the narrative, both Macie and Johan live by an "ends justify the means" worldview. They will each do whatever it takes in order to reach their goal, even if doing so upends all of their other values, and involves the killing of innocent people. However, by the end of the narrative, with Macie having undergone change through her journey, Macie is no longer willing to live by her old belief system. In her climax, Macie pulls Nikolaas from harm's way, even though doing so puts her objective of rescuing her father in jeopardy. As a result of this "growth," Macie achieves her objective and soon thereafter escapes the farm. She is badly injured, but she is still alive, and, with her father, she limps toward a freer world.

In contrast, Johan fails to grow. Even after seeing the error of his ways, when his "ends justify the means" mindset leads him to unwittingly shoot his own son, he refuses to relent and feel compassion for Macie. Even with the opportunity to let Macie walk free, his hatred takes hold, and he shoots at her. For this failure to change, this failure to feel compassion, I felt that Johan needed to die. This is why, as Johan is about to fire a fatal shot at Macie, Elsie shoots him from behind, killing him. This act redeems Elsie, in terms of her backstory, and her failure to act against Johan in the past, but, more so, it cements the Moral Argument or Controlling Idea of the screenplay.

Given the above, the screenplay's theme is as follows:

**Freedom is gained when one has compassion for one's perceived enemy.** Or, to flip the theme and view it from the negative perspective, as it relates to Johan, the theme is the following:  
**Tragedy befalls those who refuse to have compassion for their perceived enemy.**

## PRODUCTION PLANS

While I am happy with the current state of my screenplay, I do have plans for further revisions of *Jacaranda*. Like with all creative endeavours, there is always room to refine and hone. Alongside this continued refinement, another crucial step for me will be finding a home for the project, from a producing standpoint. I am fortunate to have a Literary Agent, who will help me set up meetings with various production companies. I know of one company in Toronto, Blue Ice Group, who specialize in South African/Canadian co-productions. When the time is right, I will approach them and see if they have any interest in the project. I am also aware of a few producers in Los Angeles, who have ties to South Africa. I will reach out to them, through my agent, and set up meetings to gauge their interest.

Alternatively, my brother and I have produced a number of short films together. He is a director, and the two of us are currently in the process of raising funds for an ultra-low-budget feature. We hope to shoot that film as our first feature project. If that film goes well, we may consider trying to produce *Jacaranda* ourselves. While this will not be easy to accomplish, we are up for the challenge.

Truly, there are so many ways to take a screenplay to market. My hope is that *Jacaranda* finds the right home, such that this

story can be brought to life with care. I am willing to be patient with that process, understanding full well that getting a "green light" on a project is incredibly rare.

## SUMMARY

The process of writing *Jacaranda* has been life-altering for me. I started this journey fairly ignorant of my own history. As a child, I had experienced South Africa from a very limited perspective: I had hardly understood my political surroundings; I had known little of the struggles of those who interacted with me; and I had known even less about the horrific actions of those who led my country. Given the research I have conducted, and the experiences I have undergone in writing *Jacaranda*, I now feel less ignorant. Of course, there is much more to learn, but, through writing my Thesis, I have gained a broader understanding of the world and the history of my birthplace. This story was inspired by the passing of an important person from my childhood, Elsie Thiye. Elsie lives vibrantly in my memory. I can only hope that my writing of this screenplay has honoured her in some way.

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