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EXEGESIS

The Long Road to *Uncommon Sense*


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# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exegesis is to share my exploration and understanding of film genre and to illustrate the development process in creating my thesis, a screenplay titled *Uncommon Sense.* I consider the use of my chosen film genres throughout my study and compare my works to established works in those genres. I share my understanding of film genre and how it factors into a range of historical and contemporary art forms and industries.

I explore various genre and define a genre for my script. I provide examples of works from the same genre, for comparison. This approach explores key signifiers and common elements which define that genre. I test using these signifiers and argue that it belongs in the genre I have chosen. I speculate and argue for a yet to be determined genre, which my script would likely fit into.

The second part of the exegesis is about my specific learning and processes writing three different scripts, finally choosing one to develop into a second draft. I define an emotional truth which is at the heart of my story and why it is important for me to share this truth in my script. I explore my motivation through my personal history. With synopses and analysis, I chronicle the process of creating the work from a half page pitch through beat sheet outlines, then first, and second drafts and finally a polished second draft. I identify various techniques I used and considerations encountered in my story development. The techniques include defining a dramatic question, plot and relationship lines, character arcs, the clarity around the character roles and character triangulation. Attention is drawn to how escalating tension and urgency, essentially

raising the stakes, can contribute to better story. The creating of turning points in the story and providing a genuinely satisfying ending, which satisfies the dramatic question, are reflected on. I note where I use shifting points of view and other methods to increase dramatic tension. I reflect on experimentation with fluctuating character empathy in key characters. I define my desired themes of social justice and universal spiritual quandary.

The trials and errors made during the creation of my stories challenged and developed me as a screenwriter. I identify and reflect on learning from a few of the challenges I faced working on the script/thesis. An advantage of the convoluted road my writing has taken, is that it took me to some foreign crossroads where I was forced to make difficult decisions. Sometimes I had to decide to turn back to more familiar territory and get my bearings. Pursuing this endeavour has revealed that I have learned a good deal about what to write, and also, what not to write. I hope that, in time, I can implement these dramatic storytelling lessons in increasingly efficient and dynamic ways.

# ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly identified in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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# PART ONE: GENRE

## Defining Genre

Genre, originating from the ancient Greek "Genos", was first used to categorize literature and plays. It developed into French "Genre" and was eventually nativised in English from 1840. The term means "1. kind 2. sort 3. style 4. painting of a homely scene." Collins (1992). As the final definition "genre" was used earlier in France to define a certain type of painting, depicting an everyday domestic or rural subject. It has a much wider meaning today, however. The term genre is used to classify or divide types of art, written works, music and dramatic arts into categories. Screen artists and industry (the television, film and online dramatic media) rely on these definitions for creation, selection, development, promotion and marketing purposes. Audiences also rely on these categories as a utility to aid in making consumer decisions.

The term "genre fiction" is a term used to define an array of fiction which is plot driven, created and aimed at particular audiences for example: westerns, romance novels and mysteries. This group of works are distinguished apart from literary fiction and often are eschewed by literary critics. In contrast to genre fiction, general genre categorization of literature and dramatic arts are not limited by the same prejudices that genre fiction is.

In the film and television industry, categories or genres are used to group types of works together. These categories are constantly evolving and hybrids of sub genre are created and fade, in sync with public cinematic appetite. Well established (classic) film genres include Western, Musical, Science Fiction, Epic, Comedy, War, Drama, Action Crime, Gangster and Adventure. These are time tested genres which interweave into hybrid or sub-genres. Influential and innovative film makers affect these classifications with successful new combinations. On the other hand, since the film industry depends entirely on the audience, studios and investors strive to achieve the best possible accordance with audience expectations of established genre. It is a wonder there is any evolution of genre, given these considerations.

There are also external influences that impact the establishment and popularity of sub-genre. During certain eras particular genres thrive and develop. One example is the impact of world war on the genre of women's films and women film makers. "For seven years (1916-1923), women were more powerful in cinema than any other American business — to the point that more women than men owned independent production companies in 1923." Bartyzel (2013). The first world war, which ended in 1918 was within and just before this period. "The woman's film genre was particularly popular in 1930s and 1940s, reaching its zenith during world war two. The film industry of that time had an economic interest in producing such films as women were believed to comprise a majority of movie-goers" Russell (1994). Most cinematic consumers and many creators were female. This was the only era of cinematic history where there were more women film makers than men film makers. Another example is the increase of production in future/environmental themed documentaries between 2002-2012 when public awareness focused on climate and other environmental concerns, partly due to actual experiential evidence and support for research from influential economies. Examples of these works are *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), *Chernobyl Heart* (2003), *Children of Tsunami* (2005) and *Blue Vinyl* (2002). There are *dozens* of titles in this era.

The investment of cinema consumers' disposable income, and possibly even more valuable, their disposable time, is not lightly squandered. From the industry perspective, it is understood that films that are difficult to place in a genre are often less successful. This leads to the notion that people are looking for something in particular when they choose a film. Genre is how they find it. As such, film genres are also useful in the areas of marketing, film criticism and the analysis of consumption. Astute screenwriters learn the specific codes and conventions of chosen genres and stay abreast of genre trends. They know the genre they are writing in explicitly. Each genre has common signifiers which need to be considered and included to satisfy the devoted audience of that genre. This is not to say that the genre is a template, but more a map of the terrain where one wishes to travel.

**WHICH GENRE IS *UNCOMMON SENSE*?**

While making the decisions about the genre of my screenplay, I weighed the categories of Women's genre, Food genre, Paranormal Drama genre (a subcategory of the Horror genre) and Psychological Crime thriller (considered a subcategory of Drama genre). While the list is long, eliminating potential genres was not difficult.

*Uncommon Sense* fits some of the conventions for Women's genre. Contrary to popular understanding, Women's genre is not just romance and happy endings are not guaranteed. This genre is about relationships of one or more women with others. The key to a women's film is that the main character must grow and have some sort of satisfying resolution in the end. "Woman's films usually portray "women's concerns" such as problems revolving around domestic life, the family, motherhood, self-sacrifice, and romance." Doane (1987). While this does fit the description of my story, I had difficulty finding a range of Women's Genre scripts to study. While the story is a woman's story, I wouldn't choose the Women's genre for its primary categorization.

Food genre is an even less convincing choice. The Genre of food laced cinematic narratives seems to be widely recognised by online publishers, bloggers and fanzines, but finding the category from distributors and discussion by industry professionals was much harder. There is a food film festival in New York, but it has mostly short films and a good percentage of documentaries. One helpful definition of the Food Film was as follows: "it's any film that places the preparation, consumption, or reverence of food in such high prominence that it is impossible—or at least unfair —to consider the movie without it." Bilow (2014). Imagine *Babette's Feast* without food, and there is no movie. My story could exist without food, but the theme of being hungry, metaphorically, for something other than food, like change, was important for my story. Anne, the protagonist in *Uncommon Sense,* is certainly a food lover, however, as the script developed, the theme of food receded, somewhat. This was in favour of making room for other more dramatic scenarios which did not revolve around food or feeding others. There is still strategic placing of foods and eating for

specific cinematic effect.

I ruled out the Paranormal sub-genre, a subcategory the horror genre, because the story lacked the iconographic markers of tone, setting and props. "The use of props include weapons or antiques. Paintings are a big prop used to create a dark and sinister scene. Colours used within horror films are usually reds or blacks because they suggest danger and death." Bettley (2013). Even though there are sinister forces (human traffickers and an exploitative addict) and supernatural elements, the story is not set in a world of Horror.  There are no crucifixes or demons anchoring the story in the Horror realm.   In fact, there are wholesome scenes of family, nature and wonder, lacking those Horror elements. The story is about a woman becoming an inadvertent hero, fuelled by the love and the tenacity of her maternal drive, hardly the stuff of the typical, or even atypical Horror genre.  This discovery altered my search toward Psychological Crime Drama, and a subcategory, thereof- Psychological Crime Thriller.

Choosing a 'family' of similar films to use in comparison helped to tip the scale in the direction of Psychological Crime Drama. The question remains whether it should be considered a Psychological Crime *Drama* or Psychological Crime *Thriller* (many of the produced films held up for comparison during research were categorized under both). While *Uncommon Sense* could be seen to have magical events and premises built upon them, they could be more specifically defined as unverifiable psychological elements. Every person alive who has ever had intuitive notions or compelling dreams, which eventually revealed practical significance, could 'buy' the premise of the story without attributing it to magic. The specific label "psychological" can be argued and affirmed by its adherence to Tiffany Chan's assertion "Characters not reliant on physical strength, but rather on their mental resources, usually by battling wits with a formidable opponent or by battling for equilibrium in the characters own mind." Chan (2018).  Aronson's genre equation of a thriller is relevant and shoehorns *Uncommon Sense* into the Psychological Thriller category: "pattern components (normal components of the story) + Fear (relevant emotion) + Real (existing and

believable elements) +Unusual (unusual protagonist, quest, perspective, etc), Aronson (2010).

This exploration establishes that the script can be categorized in Women's Drama or Psychological Crime Drama or Psychological Thriller. Different labels and marketing approaches could and would be undertaken to appeal to a specific client, during a pitch and further marketing in the event of production.

## Exploring Choices By Comparison

Comparative Screenplays:

1) *The Sixth Sense* screenplay by M. Night Shyamalan

2) *The Green Mile* Screenplay by Frank Darabont

3) *Dirty Pretty Things* screenplay by Steven Knight

### *The Sixth Sense* comparison to *Uncommon Sense*

*The Sixth Sense* story has significant similarities with the *Uncommon Sense* story. Protagonists are both seeking to help another person, yet don't understand the world they are navigating, until the story unfolds in the final scenes. This similarity is the revelation that both of the protagonists are unreliable narrators. "Often characters misperceive the world around them, or their perceptions are altered by outside factors within the narrative -Unreliable narrator." Bunby (2011). There are supernatural forces contributing to both stories in a paramount but not overt way, at least, initially. There is hideous crime in each story: a mother who poisons her children to the point of murder bears comparison to the casino owner's secret human trafficking enterprise. The ending of both stories have shocking revelations.

### *The Green Mile* comparison to *Uncommon Sense:*

*This Green Mile* has been categorized as a Fantasy Drama by film critics. The settings of

these two stories are very different kinds of places.  Frank Darabont's death row scenario provides space for exploration of criminals and of redemption. The mother's world in *Uncommon Sense* is a more genteel realm, but the evil faced is as formidable. The characters of John Coffey, who has supernatural talents can compare with Sophie Nygard and her abilities. In both scripts these gifts are used 'for good in the end', despite the confusion along the way. "Characters often try to discover what the purpose is in their lives and the narrative's conflict often is a way for the characters to discover this purpose." Bunby (2011). There are also elements of magic realism in both of the stories, as well. The worlds of these stories are conventional, but the deeds are extraordinary. There is also comic relief in both stories, for example, the little mouse in *The Green Mile* and Sophie's eccentric clientèle in *Uncommon Sense*.

### *Dirty Pretty Things* Comparison to *Uncommon Sense*

*Dirty Pretty Things,* sometimes classified as a Social Thriller, has similarities to the *Uncommon Sense* story, while the tone of the two stories contrast considerably.  The characters in each story navigate in a different relationship to their environment. The characters in *Dirty Pretty Things* have struggles relating to being legal and illegal immigrants in a large city, while Anne and her family are from middle class origins and a rural setting.  There are invisible victims, hidden within the story of both scripts, lending suspense.  The earnest protagonists in these two stories engender empathy for their individual plights. Social issues are taken head-on, with illegal organ harvest in *Dirty Pretty Things* and human trafficking in *Uncommon Sense.*  Knowing the best choices of genre for my film is useful and the study of genre categorization, fruitful. I resist choosing one when a few seem appropriate.  The screenplays I chose for comparison have been labelled differently by various reviewers and critical sources.  This makes me realise that naming the genre for *Uncommon Sense* might not determine how it is received in the end.  Psychological Crime Drama is a serious sounding label, yet I was determined to have lighter moments embedded in it. A final note is that

my initial two scripts undertaken during my studies, which are within the Comedy Drama genre, were easier to classify and identify with certainty.

## What Makes a Psychological Crime Drama?

Various films have been labelled psychological thrillers, but it usually refers to "narratives with domesticated settings in which action is suppressed and where thrills are provided instead via investigations of the psychologies of the principal characters." Hutchings (2009).  The three most commonly referred to signifiers of Psychological Thrillers are use of plot twists, an unreliable narrator and the establishment of a 'mucguffin'. "Psychological Thrillers focus on story, character development, choice, and moral conflict; fear and anxiety drive the psychological tension in unpredictable ways." Bowie-Sell (2012).  The use of the unexpected and reversals, sometimes referred to as ' 'twists' are commonly used conventions. "In *The Sixth Sense* and *Fight Club*, we are so deftly misled that we don't mind being fooled, as the revelation of fallibility is so exhilarating." Patterson (2007).  This is called the use of an unreliable narrator.  Alfred Hitchcock pioneered the concept of the MacGuffin, a goal or item that helps to move the plot. "The MacGuffin is frequently only vaguely defined, and it can be used to increase suspense." Martin (2014).  *Uncommon Sense* does not have a MacGuffin.

Setting is important, with emphasis on using a realistic world in which the story unfolds. Another convention is that characters are known to become aware of things through their senses. Psychological dramas will often emphasize the unstable states of it's characters. While characters may be unstable, they may not necessarily be crazy or hopeless.  Characters often try to discover what the purpose is in their lives, the narrative's conflict often is a way for the characters to discover this purpose.  Many times characters will have a fear of or fascination with death.  My script has many of these conventions including an unreliable narrator, a realistic world, twists and surprises, fear of death and mentally unstable characters.

## A New Genre?

After considerable study of the history of the Psychological Crime Drama Genre, I think while it is safe to place it in that category, I feel that is not the only way of labelling of my story. In my mind's eye, I can see it in a subcategory of Mothers genre. It could be argued that romances explore relationships that are romantic. Many people have such relationships and also find them interesting, thus, validating the Romance sub-genre. Everyone needs to have a mother to get into this world and many people are mothers, so the stories of the relationships involving motherhood are vast and significant, as well. The stories of motherhood range many conventional genres, particularly Horror, Women's, Drama, Thrillers, Comedy Drama and Comedy Genre. It might be time the stories of mothers get their own shelf in the cinematic library.

# PART TWO: DEVELOPMENT

## Emotional Truth

The emotional truth in my thesis, the *Uncommon Sense* script, is: **One must believe in the correctness of ones actions to persevere and overcome adversity.**

Anne navigates repeated obstacles which test her resolve to act on what she knows is right. In the beginning when some of Anne's customers do not pay her, she continues with her baking enterprise, rather than quit or harass her customers. She later sees her own role in the equation and collects immediate payment from catering clients. Anne has differences with her husband regarding parenting. In the story, she makes decisions which contradict his wishes and opinions. Since Anne is a 'hardened pleaser', she approaches the line she will not cross, the line where she must not 'please' at the expense of her own convictions about her daughter. Anne is driven by maternal instincts-her devotion to her troubled daughter, which enables her to push past circumstances of fear of the known and unknown, financial hardship, limiting role models in her family of origin, and her self doubt. She progresses because she believes what she is doing it right, it drives her.

The story progresses to where Anne is outwitted by Dyna, when Dyna takes Sophie away from the hospital to utilise her for her own agenda. Anne makes a decision to liquidate her return ticket and embark on finding Sophie. When Anne gets worrisome communication from New Zealand about her husband's increased involvement with the nubile neighbour, she must keep her focus, because what's most important is finding her Sophie. It's the one 'constant' she knows and is moved by. When the marriage disintegrates, Anne, who has been tempered by her challenges, has increased confidence and is not as devastated as she would likely have been earlier in the story. Anne's mission sharpens her, and she becomes more strategic and resourceful. Her exploits, and the risks she takes at each step, are with the intention to get her closer to Sophie, which then, strengthen her resolve. Her persistence builds, as if it accumulates and she is a stronger force than before. When Anne realises that, although she has uncovered a massive human trafficking operation just

before a secret auction is to take place, she has still not rescued Sophie.  In the final act, Anne ignores the advice of the detective to let the police call the shots, and instead she looks for Sophie. It pays off,  Anne finds Sophie, resolving the dramatic question and affirming the emotional truth about her persistence.

## Personal Motivation

Several years ago my own daughter went missing in similar circumstances to the Sophie character, so my personal motivation is clear.  There was a compulsive gambler involved who really got my ire. I promised myself I would use the experience creatively, someday. When my life had this jarring occurrence, it caused some changes for me. There was a mobilization of my internal and external resources, which (mostly in retrospect) was incredible.  The experience showed me something about maternal strength, which I appreciate. Meaningful coincidence and serendipity occurred on that journey. Happily, I returned with my daughter 10 days later.  Although I fictionalised the story considerably, I am still careful to respect my daughter's dignity. The equation of using the experience to make public art is a delicate one. As an example, there was an iteration of the story where the Sophie character dies and is reincarnated into the thirteenth floor baby.  I moved on from that idea for a few reasons, the first being that it just didn't feel right for that to happen, when the inspiration for the character was my own highly sensitive daughter, Nina.

I feel compelled to write stories with female protagonists. It's what is interesting to me and I think the world is waking up to female led screen arts, at this particular time.  On my path to creating this script, I created drafts of two other scripts and all three had female protagonists.  I am appalled at the statistics regarding human sex trafficking. Wanting to address the issue, while not over sensationalizing it as entertainment, is a balance I weighed. This is partly why I do not reveal the thirteenth floor scenario earlier in the story.  I think mothers are unsung heroes and I wanted to hold one in high esteem, yet, also revealing her struggles and her comedic relief.

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## Who is the Audience?

In my early drafts of comedy drama I had chosen my target audience to be women over the age of thirty-five years old. Once I chose the final story I was hoping to widen my audience to include a male audience as well. I want my audience to appreciate the quirkiness of the characters, enjoy the humour when it occurs, but also care about the drama as it unfolds. I envision my story viewed by festival and independent film consumers. I hope having Sophie as an interesting character in her twenties may intrigue younger viewers. At this time in film history, there are many pioneers in women-centered film emerging. I think this script could navigate those waters.

## Concept to First Draft

The initial idea for *Uncommon Sense* was presented was when I wrote a half page pitch along with two other story ideas. It received some interest from my peers, but not from my supervisor. I had already started telling the story with a different partial script, *Medium High*. I decided to start with a new and completely different story, so I could have the entire development experience within the program. I also knew I did not want *Uncommon Sense* to be practice fodder, since it was such an important a story to me. I embarked on a Comedy Drama called *Incredible Odds* which was about a married restaurateur who wins the lottery and keeps it a secret from everyone, including her frugal husband. The first draft was cluttered with plot devices and cliché elements including kidnappings, mistaken identity and four dogs, to name a few. After a dramatic reading and feedback from my peers and supervisor, I implemented many suggestions for a second draft. For example, the main character's age and vocation were changed and she became a housewife and mother. The story was set in Lyttleton, New Zealand and involved a middle aged woman's story of self discovery. The story was so different that it was more like another first draft. I am glad I wrote the two Comedy Dramas, because I gained from making and identifying mistakes that new

screenwriters often make.

After the two drafts, my studies took a pause because of a death in my family called for an unexpected trip overseas.  I resumed my masters studies with a new supervisor.  I thived under her supervision and enjoyed the weekly meetings during the planning stages. We surveyed the three scripts and finally decided to revisit the first idea, inspired by my own life experience. Reflecting that I had won the AUT three minute thesis contest when I spoke about the *Uncommon Sense* story helped me feel more confident about this decision.  The story is interesting to people.

It was unclear whether the story would fit into a feature length film or if it was too complicated to encompass and should be a pilot for a series. Meeting with my supervisor helped me get clarity on these questions. I started by making a beat sheet story outline. The work was twelve pages and the storyline was complicated by several temporal shifts and two protagonists.  The ending was defined, and an alternative ending was also written into outline form, at this stage. Weekly meetings with my supervisor were going well and I was pleased with the direction my work was finally taking. I began to research the Psychological Drama and Crime Thriller genres (particularly with female protagonists) by reading scripts and watching films critically.  I was also researching how others wrote surreal or supernatural subject matter.  Eventually, with the advice of my supervisor, I made the decision, choosing a feature film format and picked one character from the two protagonists to be the protagonist. Having made those determinations, I was able to begin writing the first draft.

# First Draft Synopsis

Twenty-four year old Sophie becomes psychically gifted during a stress and drug induced nervous breakdown in the USA. Sophie's gift leads to a break with her boyfriend after his infidelity. Sophie's American expatriate mother, Anne Jessup, is living with husband, Gordon, and her two younger children in an artsy coastal community in New Zealand. Anne bakes goods in a wood fired oven to supplement the family income. Anne's husband temporarily loses track of their children, causing Anne great distress. Anne learns in a cryptic online message that Sophie is missing. Gordon disagrees with Anne on going to retrieve her daughter. Anne borrows money and flies to America.

Once in America, Anne is shocked by Sophie's psychosis and continues with plans to bring Sophie home, once she is stabilised. Sophie's ex-boyfriend's mother, Dyna, rivals Anne to control Sophie. While Anne works to get a new passport, Dyna devises a plan to take Sophie to Las Vegas to utilize her gift to fund her gambling habit. Anne discovers that Sophie has been discharged and is nowhere to be found. Anne inadvertently learns Sophie's whereabouts in Las Vegas from one of the other patients while collecting some of Sophie's collages in the psych ward. Sophie and Dyna fly to Las Vegas. Anne follows in a rental car, ignoring signals from home that her marriage is under threat. Anne checks into a quirky hostel in Las Vegas, while Dyna and Sophie leave their budget motel, moving their psychic reading operation to a VIP suite, after a night of winning at the El Manzano Casino. Anne prints and distributes 'missing' flyers. Sophie investigates and discovers something is hidden on one of the floors of the hotel.

Wanting Sophie to herself, Dyna removes the phone from their suite, but not before Sophie leaves a message for her mother, who she believes is in New Zealand. Dyna gambles away the money Sophie won and then steals checks from an unwitting businessman who has come to Las Vegas for a mysterious auction. Dyna gets caught and is put behind bars. Sophie sets up a reading table at the VIP Lounge. She is confronted by Casino Owner Storm Lopez and his security manager, Rowland. Storm hires Sophie to do a phoney psychic investigation, while planning to kill her, to

keep his secret.  Anne, discovers that Storm has lied about not seeing Sophie and hears the phone message. She determines that Sophie must be on the thirteenth floor. Anne call the police, who swat her away, as hysterical- noting the hotel has no thirteenth floor.  Anne calls firemen to the 'mythical floor', and waits as dozens of captives are released, but none of them are Sophie.  Anne uses the swarming media to appeal to the public. Reports begin to come in placing Sophie near a hot springs outside of Las Vegas.  Anne, joined by Lyle (who had come to help his mother) and Martin, a young police investigator, go to the ridge, where Martin finds Sophie and rushes her to the hospital, while Anne and Lyle follow, having a chat. Sophie pulls through and Sophie and Anne discover that Sophie had been communicating telepathically with an unborn baby in captivity on the thirteenth floor.

## Development: First Draft to Second Draft

With the first draft completed at 138 pages, I was looking to edit it down to a smaller work. I reflected on what worked and utilised feedback I obtained from supervision sessions.   Pondering the dramatic question, w*ill Anne find her daughter,* I needed to make sure that my protagonist had more to do with the climax. New developments with the arc of the antagonist needed work to be convincing and satisfying.  I determined that the audience needed to see more of the abilities of Sophie, who was quite passive in the first draft and lacked personality distinction.  There were remnants of my own experience which contributed unnecessary details to the story. I determined which of these issues belonged more to me, than my characters.  I removed one of Anne's sisters, and the idea that she was a black sheep in her family, coping with familial shame. There were many scenes and other minor characters that were cut, because they did not pull their weight, and slowed the pace of the story.

The inimical characters, Rowland and Storm, needed more differentiation in their roles. Storm, who becomes the antagonist in the second half of the script, needed further development. To

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develop Storm, I pondered what could make a person operate a human trafficking ring. I thought about abuse and how it is often passed along by people who have experienced abuse. Implying that Storm had his own victimization added complexity to his character. I removed a scene where Sophie and Rowland had a sexual encounter, as it did not mesh with the parallel action of the rescue. I decided to leave Dyna in jail, retiring her from her antagonist role, which Storm would pick up. I think this unusual move will be a twist that will captivate the audience. I altered the length of scenes and alternated them to increase tension in critical places, particularly, in the third act when the trafficking operation is discovered and Anne rescues Sophie.

## Second Drafts Synopsis:

Expatriate American Anne Jessup is enjoying a rural family life in New Zealand when her adult daughter Sophie goes missing in the United States. With little support from her family, Anne heads home to America to solve the mystery of Sophie's disappearance and help her return to New Zealand. Sophie disappears from the hospital while Anne scrambles to replace her passport. Sophie's trail leads Anne to Las Vegas where Sophie, who has the newly discovered gift of psychic powers, is being exploited by her boyfriend's mother, Dyna, a gambling addict. Dyna's greed puts herself and Sophie in danger as they attract the attention of casino security, but close on their trail, Anne discovers there are bigger predators after Sophie, whose gift has revealed a dark secret within the casino itself. Dyna and Sophie have a winning streak which ignites Dyna's addiction, eventually landing her in jail. Sophie continues without Dyna as a manager until she becomes entangled in an illegal operation within the casino. Anne is torn between her children and husband back in New Zealand and her determination to save her daughter. Ultimately she must risk everything to outwit the casino owner and save Sophie and others caught in the web of the Las

Vegas underbelly.

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# Polishing the Second Draft to Industry Standards

After finishing the second draft, I began to refine formatting and check for spelling and capitalization inconsistencies. I utilised my family for dramatic readings to determine which parts worked (or not). I removed dialogue fragments that were unnatural as well as removing more extraneous action and dialogue. I created a check list of editing priorities and began to work and proof read repeatedly in an effort to make the script concise and easy to read. I worked carefully to emphasize crucial actions, which may have initially been too subtle in the second draft. For example, I made the auction participants' exit more obvious. I removed any mention or showing of auction catalogues and replaced them with dialogue, noting such an operation wouldn't leave such easily discoverable evidence. I began to identify priorities for the next draft.

Most of the characters need further development to make them more riveting and appealing as characters for actors to want to portray and for audiences to watch. Finding ways to show how Anne makes sense of things and how that translates into her dramatic action will be a focus for further development. There is potential to develop Sophie's character and her character arc. Character development in general is high on the list for future development.

I am thinking about the next steps for the script as far as exposure. I plan to apply for New Zealand Writers Guild Seed Grant and the Writer's Lab in United States. "The Writers Lab was launched in 2015 to provide script development for women writers over the age of 40. It creates a springboard for scripts to reach the next stage of production and expands the diversity of narrative film." Black Talent Team (2018)

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