

A PLACE OF SHELTER



A DRAMATIC THRILLER WRITTEN BY
JASON PLETT

LOGLINE

A professional woman, blind to the fact that her life is not back together after being a victim of violence, must keep it together and protect her daughter when she is forced to face her worst fear and shelter in place with five others during an active shooter situation.



SHORT SYNOPSIS

Renata, an unhealed trauma survivor, brings her daughter, who suffers from epilepsy, to the dentist, only to be trapped there when the police give a shelter in place order due to an active shooter situation. The shooter knows how to draw out the situation, giving Renata and the other five people she is stuck with, much time to stew in their fear and lay bare their thoughts on violence in society. Making matters even more dire, Renata's daughter has a seizure, requiring medication that they cannot reach without leaving the office. Every time there is a thread of hope for escape, it is snatched away, until Renata is faced with the ultimate choice to face her fears and risk her life to save her child.

WHAT IT IS

A Place of Shelter is first and foremost a compelling drama about a woman who has undergone trauma. In this sense she represents almost everyone, though not everyone has seen a friend hacked up with a machete in front of their eyes and then been slashed themselves. The scale may be different, but the impact of trauma is often very similar - it stays with us and keeps us enslaved to a deep-seated fear that the very same thing will happen again. This is Renata's state - the only problem is that Renata is a power woman, a high-stakes lawyer, and cannot admit to herself that she remains afraid. Her inner fragility is right behind the surface awaiting to be exposed when she faces another traumatic situation.



Secondarily, A Place of Shelter is a chance to be a fly on the wall in a terrifying incident of public violence. Such acts happen in our schools, our offices, and our grocery stores, who are we to think they couldn't happen to us? We see them on the news and it stokes our morbid sense of curiosity.. What would we do if we were caught in that situation? How would we cope? Rather than being full of Hollywood action, these situations are more likely to be long periods of tense waiting with a gut-wrenching build up of terror, punctuated by very brief but extreme action. This film attempts to capture that sense of realism.

Finally, this film is a portrait of humanity, set in the context of a very pertinent social issue (violence in society), and takes an eyes-wide-open look at our lack of agreement on its causes and solutions. Movies are at their best when they are a reflection of human reality, our commonalities and differences, and Renata and the people she is trapped with are all real, authentic people - people we recognize, maybe even ourselves, and none can agree on what's behind the human tendency towards violence and what to do about it. It's a character study of humanity in our most exposed state.

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The screenplay keeps a simmering yet escalating pace punctuated by moments of terror and intense danger. Early moments establish an uneasy calm, which quickly fractures under the weight of the crisis. As hope ebbs and flows, the tension tightens like a vise, creating a relentless, heart-pounding rhythm that mirrors Renata's rising desperation. Moments of quiet introspection and sharp bursts of action are balanced to keep the audience riveted.

STYLE



The story's visual style is intimate and raw, leveraging the confined setting to enhance the feeling of entrapment. Close, handheld camera shots immerse the viewer in the claustrophobic tension of the dentist's office. Contrasts of light and shadow symbolize the characters' internal and external struggles, while specific visual motifs—such as reflections and barriers—underscore themes of isolation and resilience.

TOPE



The tone is a taut blend of suspense and human drama. It displays the grim reality of violence and the far-reaching damage that trauma can have on a person, as well as exploring the emotional depth of each of its characters. Equal parts harrowing and poignant, the narrative invites audiences to confront their own fears and moral questions, making it a thriller that is also thought-provoking, all while revolving around a deeply emotional core.

FULL SYNOPSIS

Renata, a lawyer grappling with unresolved trauma from a violent attack five years prior, takes her young daughter Ariana, who suffers from a serious form of epilepsy, to a routine dentist appointment. There they meet five others in the waiting room. They hear popping sounds outside and nervously discuss what it could mean, but Renata's ordinary day is shattered when the police call and issue a shelter-in-place order due to an active shooter in the office building.

Not long after this, fear turns to horror when gunshots echo loudly in the hallway. The group scrambles to turn off the lights and hide, holding their breaths as the shooter comes near the waiting room, tests the locked door, then leaves. The sheer terror of his presence leaves them severely shaken (the army guy has about of PTSD-induced shock), but none more than Renata who goes into full freeze mode.

Sgt. Harris calls, telling them that SWAT is working as hard as they can to rescue people from every floor of the ten-story building but it will take time to get to them. In the background, the shooter goes on to methodically orchestrates chaos, utilizing his tactical knowledge to outmaneuver the SWAT team and prolong the standoff. As the hours stretch on, the group's resolve is tested and conversations on the issue of violence trigger already sensitive nerves.

Ariana suffers a seizure, and Renata realizes she left her daughter's medication in the car. The group debates the risks of leaving the safety of the office, with no clear solution. Vicky ultimately volunteers to retrieve the medication and is tearfully thanked by Renata, but upon reaching the parking lot, fear overtakes her, and she abandons her mission retreating to the safety of the police barricades. Renata is beyond devastated with hope so coldly snatched away and knowing her daughter's condition will worsen without intervention.

Renata has a flashback of her original attack five years earlier and realizes that she has let go her courage ever since that moment, and seeing her daughter's life ebbing away, she finally resolves to retrieve the medication herself. Trey, recognizing her bravery, offers to assist as a distraction. In a moment of trust, he hands Renata his concealed firearm, knowing she needs it most and demonstrating that he believes she has more courage than he does.

Renata ventures into the building's deadly maze, navigating the carnage left by the shooter. She retrieves the medication from the car, ignoring the SWAT team's calls to abandon her mission and take shelter. On her return, she encounters the shooter face-to-face, he having the upper hand. Young and coldly detached, he toys with her resolve, wounding her but seemingly allowing her to proceed. Just as he prepares to kill her, Trey intervenes, tackling the shooter in a desperate struggle. Trey's bravery buys Renata the time to return to the safety of the dentist's office.

SWAT officers arrive and neutralize the shooter. Inside, Renata administers the life-saving medication to Ariana as the group watches in relief. The aftermath sees the survivors led to safety and Renata reunites with her husband, Greg.

The film closes with a glimmer of hope as Renata, Ariana, and Greg find solace in each other, and Greg acknowledges Renata's bravery and the strength she's rediscovered.



THEME

At its core, *A Place of Shelter* explores the transformative power of courage in the face of trauma. It delves into how individuals confront their deepest fears and rediscover strength they thought they had lost. Through the lens of Renata's journey, the story examines the long shadows that violence casts over its victims and the resilience needed to step out of them. It also touches on societal themes, such as the pervasive nature of fear, the ripple effects of violence, and the necessity of empathy in times of crisis. Ultimately, it's a story about finding hope and healing through acts of bravery, both big and small.

THE WORLD

The world of the film is starkly grounded, reflecting the unsettling reality of modern life where violence can erupt without warning. Set almost entirely within the confined, sterile environment of a dentist's office, the film emphasizes the unsettling juxtaposition of a mundane, everyday space turned into a crucible of fear and survival. Outside, the unseen chaos of the active shooter situation looms large, amplifying the isolation and uncertainty felt by those sheltering inside. The world is a microcosm of society, where each character brings their own fears, prejudices, and perspectives, creating a tense, claustrophobic atmosphere that mirrors the unpredictable, fragile nature of safety in the real world.



CHARACTERS

Renata (Female, late 30s, Defence Lawyer, Wife to Greg, Mother to Ariana)

Ariana (Female, 6 years old, Child of Renata and Greg)

Trey (Male, early 30s, Military member)

Judy (Female, mid-40s to 50s, Office administrator)

Herman (Male, early 60s, Retired minister)

Jonah (Male, early 20s, Physics student)

Vicky (Female, early to mid 30s, Journalist)

Greg (Male, late 30s, Prosecutor, Husband to Renata, Father to Ariana)

Shooter (Male, 18-20 years old, Delivery worker)

Sgt. Harris (Male, early 40s, Police officer)

RENATA

Deep down, Renata is a force to be reckoned with - a power lawyer and a fiercely protective mother, wife, and friend. But ever since she was brutally injured by a man with a machete in a senseless act of workplace violence, she is a shell of her former self. She attempted courage that day, and still she failed. This unresolved trauma has dissolved her inner courage and made her question whether she can ever wield it again. Now she eeks out her existence with only a façade of bravery - delicately hiding the inner wound that has stolen away several years of her life. Renata's journey is one of becoming stronger than she was before - courage is only born in adversity.





ARIANA

Ariana is a bright, empathetic child who suffers from epilepsy. Despite her condition, she demonstrates remarkable bravery. Mature beyond her years, she is astute enough to recognize Renata's psychological condition, providing her mother with support when Renata is in her freeze mode and unable to offer support herself. Her innocence and resilience become an emotional anchor for Renata and the group as they navigate their ordeal.

TREY

Trey is a pragmatic and externally composed figure shaped by his military experience but, like Renata, also hides a secret hindrance in the form of severe PTSD. Initially imprisoned to his fear and unwilling to take risks, he also rediscovers his underlying bravery and loyalty when he offers to act as a distraction to help Renata. Trey's steady demeanor and eventual sacrifice make him a quietly heroic presence in the group and a harmonic parallel to Renata's transformation.





JUDY

Judy is an idealistic and nurturing figure who often relies on new age spiritual beliefs to navigate challenges. She provides emotional support to the group and serves as a moral compass, but her esoteric views sometimes clash with the group's realism.

HERMAN

Cynical and world-weary, Herman has turned away from his faith following personal tragedies. His dark humor and biting commentary reveal a man grappling with existential despair. Though externally cold and abrasive, Herman's depth and vulnerability make him a complex, thought-provoking character.





JONAH

Jonah is a laid-back, often irreverent character who uses humor to mask his fears. A science-minded free spirit with moments of insight, he oscillates between disengagement and sharp critiques of societal structures. Jonah's youthful perspective provides contrast to the more serious, older members of the group.

VICKY

Vicky is justice-minded and compassionate, and it is her strong moral framework that drew her to the journalistic profession. She has it within her to step up and risk herself despite her own fears, however her internal conflict showcases the ongoing battle between her courage and her humanity, highlighting the human fragility of idealistic notions being put under immense pressure.





GREG

Greg is Renata's weakly supportive and often distant husband. Though his heart is to care for his wife, he has long given up trying to resolve her deep-seated issues related to her unhealed trauma. While he struggles with his own fears and shortcomings, glimpses of his genuine care for his family remain. His eventual recognition of Renata's strength and his acknowledgement of his own failings add a layer of redemption to his character.



SGT. HARRIS

A dedicated and courageous officer, Sgt. Harris exudes professionalism and resolve. His willingness to break protocol to help those in danger, even at great personal risk, underscores his heroism. His death is a poignant reminder of the high stakes and sacrifices inherent in the story.



SHOOTER

The shooter is a cold, calculating antagonist whose youth contrasts starkly with the brutality of his actions. While his motivations remain intentionally opaque, his systematic approach to violence and emotional detachment make him a chilling, enigmatic presence and a symbol of the often unknown influences that bring about violence right under our noses.

THE HOOK

A black and white photograph showing the silhouettes of a woman and a young girl standing in a doorway. The woman is on the left, leaning slightly forward, and the girl is on the right, looking up at her. They are holding hands. The background is bright, suggesting an outdoor setting, while the foreground is dark, creating a dramatic contrast.

In the midst of her worst nightmare, a mother must confront her unresolved trauma and discover whether she can make the ultimate sacrifice to save her daughter. It is a choice that some would say shouldn't be difficult - for unhealed Renata, it is. We get to be a fly-on-the-wall and feel the same sense of confinement and approaching danger as Renata shelters in place with five strangers, each with their own fears and motivations. The group's survival depends on their ability to avoid fracture, but Ariana's survival hinges on whether Renata can take the risk that could mean facing something even worse than her own death: facing the fear that has kept her enslaved for years. *A Place of Shelter* is a pulse-pounding thriller that combines heart-stopping suspense with a deeply emotional journey of courage, motherhood, social unity, and overcoming trauma through personal transformation.

THE CASE



At a time when overcoming personal trauma and the ever-present threat of violence in society are growing concerns, *A Place of Shelter* is a film that offers a raw and emotional narrative that delves into the personal and societal impact of such crises, and is wrapped in a gripping, character-driven thriller. It is less a prescriptive pill and more a helpful affirmation that differences exist and reminder that we must navigate our path forward despite these. The story's focus on resilience in the face of trauma and the lengths a mother will go to for her child taps into universal human experiences that will be deeply relatable for audiences worldwide.

The confined, high-stakes setting intensifies the drama, transforming a typical “active shooter” thriller into a rich, character-focused exploration of fear, moral choices, and human connection under pressure. The dynamic between the diverse group of people trapped together not only heightens the tension but also serves as a microcosm for the larger societal debates we face, from mental health to gun violence, to personal responsibility. The conversations between characters bring sharp, authentic commentary on the complexity of these issues, blending suspense with meaningful dialogue.

Moreover, the film's central theme—overcoming trauma through courage—resonates deeply in an age where many are facing personal struggles. Renata's journey of self-reclamation offers a narrative of hope and empowerment, making it a film with both dramatic impact and emotional catharsis.



THE FINANCIALS

A Place of Shelter is designed to be a highly cost-effective production while delivering maximum emotional and visual impact. The film takes place primarily within a single location—a dentist’s office—minimizing the need for extensive set builds or location changes. With a small ensemble cast and a contained setting, production logistics are streamlined, allowing the focus to remain on the performances and storytelling. The compact scale also reduces costs for set design, transportation, and extras, making this an ideal project for producers looking to achieve high returns on a modest investment. Despite its lean budget, the film’s intense narrative and strong character-driven drama ensure it will captivate audiences, offering significant potential for critical acclaim and market appeal across theatrical, streaming, and international distribution.

MEET THE WRITER



JASON PLETT
WRITER

Jason is a graduate of Vancouver Film School where he refined his personal brand of enigmatic storytelling.

A writer of five screenplays, and several short film scripts, Jason's feature-length screenplay Nomad's Spawn garnered the Best Fantasy Script award in the Oniros Film Awards in August 2023.

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