JACARANDA

by Lorna French

SAMUEL FRENCH

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JACARANDA was commissioned by Pentabus Theatre (Elle While, Artistic Director; Verity Overs Morrell, Executive Director). It was first performed at Pentabus Theatre, Bromfield, Shropshire on Thursday 7 October, 2021. The production was directed by Elle while with scenic design by Charlie Cridlan, lighting design by Tim Mascall, and sound design by Harry Linden Johnson. The Puppetry Director was Marie Fortune, and the Puppetry Designer/Maker was Jo Lakin. The Assistant Director was Garen Abel Unokan. The Engagement & Audience Development was by Melina Morris. The Technical Advisor was Benjamin Leonides-Morgan. The Production Manager was Fiona Hilton. The Stage Manager was Niamh Percy. The Casting Consultant was Karishma Balani. The cast was as follows:

OLIVIA DUDZAI ..... Mara Allen
MATTY TAYLOR ..... Stuart Laing

SPECIAL THANKS

Aston Shoot, Virginie Assal – member of Black Girls Hike, Matthew Bulgo, Ilene Chigwende, Jennifer Chigwende, Chinasa Vivian Ezugha, Rhiane Fatinikun – founder of Black Girls Hike, Charlyne Francis, Ignatios Gangaidzo, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Nell Scarlett Goddard Banks, Sarah Goddard, Mat Grenyer, Clare and John Hilton, Dr Olalekan Lee Aiyegbusi, Kevin McCurdy, Sophie Motley, Ginny Schiller.

And special thanks to the Garrick Charitable Trust, who have supported Assistant Director Garen Abel Unokan.

CHARACTERS

OLIVIA DUDZAI – Thirty, though looks much younger. Black British woman of Zimbabwean heritage. She is an equine vet. Wife of Jimmy. Mother of Rudo.

MATTY TAYLOR – Fifty-three. White British man. Gamekeeper. Father of Ste and husband of Jan.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Throughout the play, the usual rural night sounds can be heard. These rural sounds alternate at times between the sounds of rural Shropshire and the sounds of rural Zimbabwe: Lake Chivero and Lion and Cheetah Park in Harare. Whenever Lake Chivero is mentioned in stage directions, from Olivia's perspective, this also refers to Lion and Cheetah Park. While these are two separate places in reality, they are combined to create a dreamlike soundscape in the play.

All music used should alternate between Zimbabwean mbira music and European music at appropriate moments.

Particular stage spaces are designated as the location of the female curlew or curlew chicks as Matty and Olivia interact with them.

/ within dialogue indicates interruption.

Jacaranda is dedicated to the loving memory of
Amai Inno, Rupert French and Clarissa Gangaidzo.

Jacaranda would not be the play it is without the generous support of all
at Pentabus Theatre and the wonderful Juliet Gilkes Romero.

ACT ONE

(Lights up. Night. 10:30 p.m. in the imaginary, small Shropshire rural village of Anchorton Forge. A small stream on the publicly accessible land at the back of Jacaranda Farm. Jacaranda farmhouse is visible. A grazing field of twelve to fifteen sheep and several lambs is between the farmhouse and the stream. A single light is on on the second floor of the farmhouse.)

(Other typical nighttime sounds of rural Shropshire can be heard.)

*(***OLIVIA***, thirty, a Black British woman, enters. She looks much younger than her age. Her top is very thin, and so she hugs herself tightly with her right arm to keep warm. There is a large graze on one cheek. She holds her left arm at her side gingerly.)*

(A vixen barks somewhere distant. This gets **OLIVIA***'s attention. She moves a little too quickly and jolts her left arm.)*

OLIVIA. Ah!

(She stills for a few moments, letting the pain subside. **OLIVIA** *takes her walking boots and socks off carefully, doing everything with her right hand. She sits with her feet in the gently flowing water. The water's cold, and she flinches at first and withdraws her feet, but*

then plunges them back in and makes herself endure it.)

(She shivers slightly, looking at the night sky. She takes out her phone and records a video, speaking to camera.)

OLIVIA. Okay, so we're up to S. Let me see, S for, S for – *(Thinks.)* S for Sky. *(Looks around.)* S for Stream. S for, for, for um, for Sheep!

(She points the camera out to the audience.)

See baby, there they are: sheep. Well lambs and sheep. See them all settled for the night? All fluffy and cozy. Mommies there protecting their babies. Hear that faint bubble of the stream. *(Turns the camera on the stream.)* I like to think it's whispering stories all through the day and all through the night for those who have the ears to hear them. Stories of before now, stories I wanted to hear with you. Stories I wanted to tell you. *(Beat.)* But here; I can record them, hope you can hear them too.

(Beat.)

*(***OLIVIA***'s voice trembles with emotion. Turning the camera skyward.)*

And that sky! Millions of years. Just there, watching.

(Crickets join the other night sounds. They are continuous; insistent and repetitive sounds that would fill a Zimbabwean night.)

*(***OLIVIA** *turns the camera out to the audience again and points to a different place.)*

See those hills over there, near where that ancient yew tree is? I snuck up there once with Babamukuru George when I was very small. The Long Mynd was ours on a summer night like this; just him and me. The summer my Baba died. Babamukuru George brought us out

here, Mum and I, so that we could just be he said; so we could breathe. Mum'd put me to bed, then when it got dark he came and got me and we snuck up there. Up to New Pool Hollow. We just looked at the stars; could see the Milky Way with all its billions of stars. Lay on our backs looking up and he told me stories. Stories I wanted to tell you. Of the most incredible sunsets that look like a sky on fire, of the Black House, of avenues of streets lined with gorgeous Jacaranda flowers that make a carpet of purple for you to walk on. Jacarandas always make me think of him.

(Beat. A jackal calls in the distance.)

(An elephant trumpets. She points her phone at a different spot in the audience and fiddles with the camera, changing from portrait to landscape. The sounds of Lake Chivero dominate during the following.)

There, got it. So you can see more, see everything. See it there my little one, if you squint a bit? A great big elephant that is sweetheart. African elephant. Loved them as a kid. Babamukuru George took me to see some once. Mum had moved us to Zimbabwe then. Boxing Day him, me and Mum; *(Laughs at the memory.)* complaining that the heat felt like a real living thing wrapping itself around her, trying to kill her. Went to Lion and Cheetah Park, then on to Lake Chivero for a day out.

*(***OLIVIA** *gestures towards the elephant and winces as the movement impacts her injured left arm.)*

Look she's seen her calf! He's right there trotting after his mum! Can live to seventy you know, elephants. Got prickles all over his trunk that little calf. Looks smooth but it's not up close. Found that out Boxing Day. When you stop imagining what an elephant would feel like

and take the time to really look, really feel. Should've had my window closed on the safari but I was so excited by all the animals. A baby elephant came up to the car. Put his trunk in the window and felt around a bit. He was still little, didn't know the danger. I did though. I tried to be brave and stroke his trunk. But I couldn't bring myself to. I wanted to…but…then Babamukuru George took my hand, guided me, you know. Felt so weird at first, feeling those prickles on my skin. *(Beat.)* I wanted to do that with you; take your tiny hand and help you to be brave like that. Help you be brave enough to really see things like that; not just imagine them but see them, feel them for yourself. *(Beat.)* Can you see them baby? They're faint, the picture's a bit unsteady sometimes but they're still there.

> *(A female curlew calls feebly.* **OLIVIA** *jumps, looks around but sees nothing. She briefly concentrates on the window with the light on at Jacaranda farmhouse and roughly wipes away a tear.)*
>
> *(The female elephant trumpets in the distance again.)*

(Speaking into the camera. Smiling broadly.) Hear that darling?

> *(***OLIVIA** *lays on her back, looking at the stars, with her feet in the stream. After a few moments she sits up and uses one of her socks to dry off her feet. It's difficult with one hand.)*
>
> *(A box of tablets falls out of* **OLIVIA***'s jeans pocket. She looks at it, takes out one of the blister packs, and examines it. She holds them to her and rocks. She's emotional. She gets up to put the box back in her pocket and steps on a pile of curlew feathers by mistake. She picks up a couple from the large pile of feathers. There's nothing there. She is about to*

leave when a single Jacaranda flower blows in and lands in the pile of feathers. **OLIVIA** *notices it and picks up the flower, confused. She examines it carefully. She treats the Jacaranda flower delicately and carefully tucks it into the box of tablets.* **OLIVIA** *puts the box of tablets back in her pocket.)*

(She uses a stick to scrape mud out of the tread of her boots. While she works, a few more Jacaranda flowers land at her feet. She looks up in wonder, unsure where the flowers are coming from. She takes a picture of the Jacaranda flowers among the curlew feathers.)

(She is collecting the flowers together as **MATTY**, *fifty-three, enters. He is dressed as a typical gamekeeper. He is carrying a side-by-side shotgun and a torch that is off.)*

*(***MATTY** *creeps up behind* **OLIVIA** *and aims his gun at her.)*

MATTY. Private land this is!

*(***OLIVIA** *jumps, sees* **MATTY** *and the gun. She cowers and covers her head.)*

S'pose they around; yer friends? Cuttin' the pens are they?

OLIVIA. *(Scrambles backwards.)* Woah! I…I…

MATTY. Clump me on the head, then let 'em all go; is that it?

*(***MATTY** *tries to appear utterly confident, but the hand holding the shotgun shakes slightly.)*

*(***OLIVIA** *notices and puts a hand up to shield herself.)*

*(***MATTY** *holds the gun steady with both hands.)*

OLIVIA. *(Whispers.)* Don't.

MATTY. If yer don't get yer shit together and leave now. With all yer friends! I'm calling the police.

OLIVIA. Please.

*(***MATTY** *stands over her.)*

(Openly crying and terrified now, **OLIVIA** *hastily collects her boots and socks at the barrel of the shotgun.)*

MATTY. I know yer game. Not so big when yer friends ain't with yer are yer?

*(***OLIVIA** *remains silent.)*

Nearly wiped me out last year your lot! And I ain't havin' it again!

(Still barefoot, **OLIVIA** *backs away from him slowly and carefully.)*

Bloody Antis! Think yer can just let my birds out, do yer? Keeps food on my table this, and yer pissin' about like it don't matter!

*(***MATTY** *takes a couple of steps towards* **OLIVIA** *with the shotgun.* **OLIVIA** *stops.)*

OLIVIA. Please! I'm not… /

*(***MATTY** *takes out his phone and starts dialling the police. He also turns on the torch and shines it at* **OLIVIA**.*)*

MATTY. Tell that to the poli– *(Stops dead as his torch illuminates* **OLIVIA***'s face.)*

*(***MATTY** *takes a step backwards.)*

*(***OLIVIA** *scrambles away from him immediately and cowers.)*

I…

OLIVIA. *(Desperate.)* Don't hurt me, don't hurt me, don't hurt me.

(He realises he is still holding his gun and puts it down.)

(Beat.)

*(***MATTY** *goes to approach* **OLIVIA** *but thinks better of it.)*

*(***OLIVIA***, still terrified, risks a look at* **MATTY***.)*

Let me go?

MATTY. *(Approaching* **OLIVIA***.)* I didn't mean…

*(***OLIVIA** *desperately moves away.)*

No, yer don't have to do th… I /

OLIVIA. Don't know what's happ– /

MATTY. Yeah, I know and /

OLIVIA. Didn't know it's private land.

MATTY. It's not.

*(***OLIVIA** *gives him a look.)*

Got it wrong. Got you wrong.

*(***OLIVIA***'s eyes are on the shotgun.* **MATTY** *notices and moves it farther away with his foot.)*

(Beat.)

It's only that…

(Beat.)

MATTY. I just…

OLIVIA. Should get going.

*(**MATTY** fully takes in the scared, barefoot woman in front of him.)*

MATTY. At least put yer boots on.

OLIVIA. It's fine.

MATTY. It's not.

(Because of her injured arm, **OLIVIA** *awkwardly puts down her boots and socks.* **MATTY** *notices* **OLIVIA***'s arm.)*

*(**OLIVIA** starts putting on her boots. One of the laces is undone and she struggles to do it up with one hand.)*

(Moving towards **OLIVIA***.)* Need help? *(Stops dead as* **OLIVIA** *moves away.)*

(Beat. The two contemplate each other.)

Could give yer a hand. Only if yer want?

(Beat. **MATTY** *waits.)*

OLIVIA. Okay.

*(**MATTY** moves towards* **OLIVIA** *carefully, so as not to scare her. He ties the laces of her boot and then moves to sit a distance away from her.)*

MATTY. I'll sit here okay?

*(**OLIVIA** goes to leave.)*

Seen both of yer in the village last few months. You and him. Know you've moved in over at Jacaranda Farm… Old George's place.

OLIVIA. *(Turning back to* **MATTY***.)* Then why?

MATTY. Someone said there's lights up near the woods, could be Antis releasing my birds. Only had the chicks

delivered yesterday. Keep my pheasants up this way. Didn't know it was you at first.

OLIVIA. Probably shouldn't be wandering around at night.

MATTY. Best not.

OLIVIA. I should – *(Goes to leave again.)*

MATTY. Sorry again.

(The call of an injured female curlew is heard. Both **MATTY** *and* **OLIVIA** *register the sound.)*

*(***MATTY** *picks up his shotgun and looks over to where the curlew call came from.)*

*(***MATTY** *searches the area near the stream carefully and thoroughly. He suddenly finds an injured female curlew.)*

(Talking to the curlew.) Bloody hell. There she is. A curlew. What a beauty. Come on girl.

*(***OLIVIA** *can't help but look back to see what* **MATTY** *has found.)*

(The female curlew calls again.)

*(***MATTY** *carefully tries to lift the curlew from the stream's edge.)*

(Softly to the female curlew.) Come on girl.

(The curlew struggles and cries out in distress.)

OLIVIA. Don't hurt her!

MATTY. Never do that. Fox or somethin' must've got to her. She's stuck in the mud. Give me a hand?

OLIVIA. *(Shaking her head.)* Um, I've got to /

MATTY. Talk in the village is you're a vet.

OLIVIA. For horses.

MATTY. Come on. This here's a curlew. Endangered, not that many left now.

OLIVIA. *(Looks at her watch.)* Got to go. Going up Long Mynd.

MATTY. This time of night?

OLIVIA. Just up to New Pool Hollow.

*(***OLIVIA** *starts turning to go. More Jacaranda flowers blow in on the wind.* **OLIVIA** *briefly notices them.)*

MATTY. She can't wait. *(Beat.)* Please.

*(***OLIVIA** *stands undecided for a moment. She unconsciously feels the outline of the box of tablets in her trouser pocket. Looks at the fresh Jacaranda petals on the ground.)*

*(***OLIVIA** *is reluctant to stay, but eventually moves towards* **MATTY** *and the curlew.)*

OLIVIA. You lift her.

MATTY. *(To the curlew.)* There girl. It's okay.

*(***MATTY** *takes off his coat.)*

*(***OLIVIA** *and* **MATTY** *carry the curlew from the stream to their position next to the wood. Actors are to improvise dialogue directed to the curlew during this action. The calm curlew is placed between* **OLIVIA** *and* **MATTY.** *Throughout the following, the curlew is mainly unresponsive, but very occasionally there are weak cries from it.)*

(The mixed-up sounds of rural Shropshire and rural Lake Chivero are heard throughout the following.)