

Magpie



By Laura Thoma



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Play Synopsis: *Magpie* is a story of identity, transformation, and sacrifice. With the support of her therapist, Maggie is beginning to claim her own story. Risking her troubled relationship with her mother, she searches to learn more about the father she doesn't know. But can she summon the strength to find the one thing she needs the most, herself?

Brief Playwright Bio: Laura Thoma is an internationally published playwright, creative non fiction writer and award winning short filmmaker originally from Tidewater, Virginia. She started her career as a dancer and choreographer. As a writer, she explores and tells stories of identity. What it is, what it means, and who defines it. She finds it compelling that labels can be debilitating or empowering, depending on whether they are being placed or claimed. She proudly claims the labels; member of the queer community, trauma survivor, and late bloomer; by doing so, she hopes to challenge the current perspective and stand as representation of what it is to be a new and emerging playwright. Laura was a playwright in residence with the Pawling Theatre Exchange in June 2019, where she expanded her play *Magpie*, from a one act to a full length. She has developed her work with Chicago Dramatists, Eden Prairie Players, Stage Door Theatre Company, Marist College, Drama Works Theatre, Cape May Stage, Chestnut Street Playhouse, the Blackstone Memorial Library and The Legacy Theatre. Laura was a playwright in residence with the Pawling Theatre Exchange in June 2019, where she expanded her play *Magpie*, from a one act to a full length. Laura is a member of AEA, The Playwrights Center, HonorRoll!, The Dramatist Guild, and The League of Professional Theatre Women, CT Chapter. She is currently enrolled as a certificate student in the The Dramatist Guilds Dramatic Writing Institute.

SETTING

MAGPIE takes place in multiple settings. Maggie's studio apartment and her Therapist's office are both in Chicago, IL. Mama's house, Maggie's childhood home, is a Cape Cod located in Virginia.

The Therapist Office is a constant. It should be located where he can observe the action. Once the small lamp in his office is turned on it does not go off until the final scene. It can dim but must remain lit. The therapist is also the wisemind. Perhaps he is blocked to sit in Maggie's chair to delineated. The set needs to be such that the actor playing Maggie can walk in and out of each location without interruption while telling the story.

CHARACTERS

Mama, Maggie, Therapist, Bill Black

TIME

The play starts in 1998 and ends in 2011. It includes two flashbacks one set in 1975 and one set in 1980.

Scene 1	Maggie's Apt/Mama's House
Scene 2	Maggie's Apt/Therapist's Office/Mama's House
Scene 3	Iowa/Therapist's Office
Scene 4	Mama's House/Therapist's Office
Scene 5	Maggie's Apt/Therapist's Office
Scene 6	Therapist's Office/Maggie's Apt
Scene 7	Mama's House/Therapist's Office

Script Sample

- *MAGPIE* -

Thoma

MALE VOICE. This is Lance Shook, but I'm sure ya'll remember me better by the nickname I got from the Candy Cane Crash. I was hit in the testicles...been called Baller ever since...

MAGGIE. *(Giggling in spite of herself.)* Baller, what a nickname... So maybe that was crash...Does anyone else mention it? *(Searches the screen)* Candy Cane...Candy Cane, Candy...there's got to be... *(As Maggie reads to herself Bill walks on stage right talking and leans against the proscenium.)*

BILL BLACK. I'm William Black, all my buddies call me Bill. I had a great experience on the Guadalcanal, some real good times down south...learned to whittle. One sad note though...the Candy Cane Crash...in addition to the other dead and wounded we lost our boss---Lieutenant Commander Morrison. *(Bill crosses to a box and sits and begins to whittle. He is in the dark.)*

MAGGIE. Oh my god, oh my god. *(She drops her laptop on the table like it's scalding hot. She gets up and starts pacing.)* He mentions him by name. I can't believe it...he was actually there...I found someone who was there. Okay, I've got to calm down. What do I do now? *(Maggie sits in the chair and picks up her laptop and with a business-like approach figures out what to do next.)* Let's see if I can even connect with him...what was his name? Mister...Mister, Black...William Black. Okay...it looks like I can send him a message through the site. *(She types the email then gets up and paces, then walks into the Therapist's office his lights rise and her apartment lights fade.)*

THERAPIST. So, how did you find Mr. Black?

MAGGIE. I found him on a message board designed to reconnect old Navy buddies.

THERAPIST. Fascinating, I had no idea there was such a thing.

MAGGIE. Me neither, not till I found it.

THERAPIST. How long did it take to hear back from him?

MAGGIE. A week, seven very long days. I was worried he didn't check the site anymore and I was starting to think I wouldn't hear from him at all. But then I got this email. *(Maggie pulls out several printed emails and begins to read as lights fade up on Bill.)* Dear Ms. Morrison,

BILL BLACK. What a surprise to hear from you. Yes, I knew your father, he was my Air Operations Officer. We were a small group and therefore pretty close. During operations, we were strictly business. But afterwards well, I'll just say we had some good times. Both aboard ship and ashore.

(She crosses to Bill handing the Therapist the emails.)

MAGGIE. Mr. Black, I'm thrilled that you answered my email.

BILL BLACK. Please, call me Bill. I am amazed that after all these years I'm talking to Lieutenant Commander Morrison's daughter! Your dad flew Candy Cane, that was the ship's helicopter...or what we call a helo. It was an H-2 Seasprite.

MAGGIE. I didn't know he flew helicopters.

BILL BLACK. Your Dad flew everything. He loved to fly—used to tell us stories from when he was a test pilot.

MAGGIE. He was a test pilot? Wow.

BILL BLACK. He sure was. Flew all types of helicopters and planes...many of them prototypes.

MAGGIE. What exactly does that mean?

BILL BLACK. Well, it means they're not fully developed yet. Your dad flew them to evaluate their design, electronics, and performance. It helped the company decide if they wanted to put them into full production or not. Trouble was, they didn't always fly the way they were meant to...a bit hit or miss, if you know what I mean.

MAGGIE. He was so brave.

BILL BLACK. I'd say so. He also flew search and rescue missions, saved a lot of lives your Dad. He even picked up the astronauts from Gemini 10.

MAGGIE. *(In awe.)* The astronauts?!

BILL BLACK. Now, you asked me if he talked about his family. Not to me he didn't. But I do remember him writing home an awful lot.

MAGGIE. That makes me feel good. *(Beat.)* Mr. Black will you tell me about the crash?

THERAPIST. *(Looks up from the letters.)* Maggie, this is amazing he's sharing so much information.

MAGGIE. *(She walks back towards therapist.)* I know. I'm so grateful I found him.

THERAPIST/BILL BLACK. Are you sure you want to hear about the crash?

MAGGIE. *(She looks at both men.)* Yes. I'm sure. *(Lights dim on Bill. Maggie walks back to her apartment.)* Why haven't I heard back from him? *(She checks her laptop.)* Nothing? Why isn't he sharing the information with me? *(She crosses to the Therapist's office and sits on couch.)*

THERAPIST. It hasn't been that long, has it?

MAGGIE. Over a week...I can't believe he's cut me off...

THERAPIST. Maggie, what are you feeling?

MAGGIE. Pissed.

THERAPIST. And what else?

MAGGIE. I don't know...it feels just like when Mama...Oh, *(Beat.)* it feels like it does when Mama is silent.

THERAPIST. Go on.

MAGGIE. He's just like Mama...he knows everything but doesn't think I can handle the truth.

THERAPIST. That's a big jump to make, Maggie.

MAGGIE. It's not a big jump. He offered me information and then nothing. SILENCE...it's like my feelings don't matter. Like I don't exist. I don't care anyway. I'm outta here. *(She gets up and crosses to leave.)*

THERAPIST. You don't care?

MAGGIE. No.

THERAPIST. Really? After all the hard work you've done to find someone who was there on your Father's ship the day of the crash, now you don't care?

MAGGIE. No.

THERAPIST. And you're just going walk away and let go of the opportunity to find out what really happened?

MAGGIE. Yes.

THERAPIST. Because?

MAGGIE. (*Defensive and angry.*) Because this is what always happens. I open up to people and then they just shut me out.

THERAPIST. Have you tried reaching out to him?

MAGGIE. No. If he wanted to contact me, he would.

THERAPIST. Maggie, you and I know the silence that happens with your Mother is real and has been very damaging to you. But this...this is different. And I think you know that.

MAGGIE. Yeah, but it feels the same. I've walked away from so many things in my life because of this feeling.

THERAPIST. And today?

MAGGIE. Whenever you say that I feel like you're leading the witness.

SCENE 6

The Therapist's office. Several weeks later. Maggie and Mama are sitting on the couch. Mama is extremely self-contained; she couldn't get closer to the arm of the couch if she tried. She is sitting tall and stiffly with her legs crossed and her arms folded across her chest. Maggie is in her usual spot, she looks small.

THERAPIST. Well, Mrs. Morrison, it is a pleasure to have you here with us today. I hope you'll make yourself comfortable. *(Mama gives him a tight lipped-smile.)* We're here today because Maggie wanted to talk with you about her father...

MAMA. *(She speaks in an overly polite manner.)* I don't mean to interrupt you but as I'm sure Magnolia has already told you, I don't talk about my personal private life with strangers. No offense.

THERAPIST. None taken.

MAMA. What I would like to know however, is what y'all talk about in here. From what Magnolia has told me about the amount of time she has spent with you...seems to me y'all could have talked about every year of her life at least twice by now. How much more could there be to talk about?
(Mama pats Maggie on the knee. Maggie moves her leg, but Mama keeps her hand on it. Then Mama leans in and almost whispers the information to the Therapist.)

MAMA. I mean, I know she's a little dramatic...always has been. And she's what you'd call an oversensitive child, tends to take things a little too personal, if you know what I mean. But she's been that way for forever. I don't think there's anything you're going to be able to do about that.

THERAPIST. We believe that everyone's feelings are valid and valuable Mrs. Morrison. And therapy doesn't often work in a chronological manner or with specific timelines. Part of our process is to...well, it's not for me to explain. Maggie, do you want to share with your mother what we do in our sessions?

MAGGIE. Mama, I've told you. I come here so I can be heard and talk about how I feel...it helps me sort out what I'm thinking.

MAMA. You have a whole family that will hear you, Magpie, and you don't need to pay for that. *(To the Therapist.)* No Offense.

THERAPIST. None taken. Now, Mrs. Morrison, Maggie wanted to ask you some specific questions about her father...Maggie.

MAGGIE. *(Cautious.)* I just want to know why you hardly ever talked about Daddy. Why is it so hard for you to share him with me?

MAMA. *(She is angry and will not be forced into this conversation. She speaks in a cold, precise manner.)* Magnolia, have you been telling lies to this nice man? You know for a fact that I did talk to you about your Daddy. I've told you things over the years and even shared some of my most personal mementos with you. I gave you your Daddy's dog tags, didn't I?

MAGGIE. Yes, Ma'am.

MAMA. It was my life with him, not yours. As I've already said, I'm not gonna talk about my personal, private life, especially in front of a stranger...no offense. *(Sweetness covering anger.)* I'm only here because I love you and this therapy seems to be important to you for some reason. But I'm not going talk about my life with your Daddy.

MAGGIE. But Mama, it was my life too, and you won't talk about it when it's just the two of us...so, I thought...

MAMA. Magnolia, this is not the time or the place...

THERAPIST. Now, I don't mean to interrupt you Mrs. Morrison, but this is the time and place. We're here to support Maggie...

MAMA. I have supported Magnolia Lynn her entire life...BY MYSELF.

THERAPIST. Of course, you have...I didn't mean to imply differently. What I meant was...

MAMA. What you meant was, you want me to share my personal, private life with you and with her...And I won't do it. It's mine. *(She leans down to get her purse from the floor and stands up. The Therapist stands automatically.)* It's been a pleasure to meet you. *(Whispered, patronizing tone.)* I'm glad Maggie has found some who will help her overcome her sensitive nature and let go of being so dramatic. *(Turns to Maggie.)* Now, Magpie, we discussed going to the museum this afternoon, but I think we should have lunch first. I'm just going to go powder my nose. I'll meet you by the elevators. *(Mama turns sharply and exits the office.)*

MAGGIE. Still think I was avoiding conflict? You can't have a conflict with someone if you and your feelings don't exist to them.

THERAPIST. Maggie, I'm sorry we didn't get the answers you wanted today. But you did great work. You asked for what you needed and that's all you can do. I'm proud of you.

MAGGIE. She's never going to change, is she?

THERAPIST. The only person you can change...

MAGGIE. Is myself. I'll see you next week. (*Maggie walks out into the hall.*)

MAMA. So, Magpie...where would you like to go for lunch? What do ya have a taste for?

MAGGIE. Please stop calling me Magpie and I'm not hungry. I don't want to go to lunch.

MAMA. Well, I'm hungry. And besides, we said we were doing this thing for you, then going to lunch and the museum. I've been looking forward to it all day.

MAGGIE. Well, I'm sorry to ruin your day with my therapy!

MAMA. (*Exasperated.*) Don't be so over-sensitive Maggie. I just meant...

MAGGIE. I know what you meant. You made it very clear in there that you think my therapy and all the hard work I've done is a joke.

MAMA. Now, Magpie...

MAGGIE. Mama, stop! I know you don't get it.

MAMA. No, I don't. I don't understand what you need to "work on." You're fine. I...

MAGGIE. The thing is Mama, I'm not fine. And I haven't been fine for a long time. Do you know that? Do you know I have trouble sleeping? Do you know that I struggle with depression and anxiety? Do you know what that's like?

MAMA. *(Silence.)*

MAGGIE. *(Raising her voice.)* And that, right there, that is why I don't trust people emotionally!

MAMA. I don't even know what that means. And why are you raising your voice at me? We . are . in . public.

MAGGIE. *(Yelling.)* I'm talking about you shutting me out. Making me feel like I don't exist.

MAMA. *(Angry whisper.)* That is not true. I can't make you feel anything. And I won't have this conversation here.

MAGGIE. Of course, you won't. Let's go home. *(She walks to her apartment and enters.)* I don't even know why you bothered coming to therapy with me.

MAMA. Because I love you and you asked me to.

MAGGIE. You're so confusing! Who says yes and then comes all this way to say *(Imitating Mama.)* "I'm not sharing any of my personal, private life with you." Why say yes, just to say no? I don't understand you, Mama! And I am tired of everything being on your terms.

MAMA. *(Silence.)*

MAGGIE. Ah, silence. Of course. Classic Mama. If you don't like what I'm saying, then it doesn't exist to you.