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## **MAGPIE**

**By Katherine Koller**

### CHARACTERS

MAGPIE, 40, a parolee surveillance officer, a large woman who runs a halfway house for convicts doing a combination of time and community service

REGGIE, 29, convicted of sexual assault and murder, out on an early parole program after serving ten years, a good-looking opportunist

MOM, 65, Magpie's mother, a fireball of a woman who crusades all kinds of causes and who taught Magpie how to bake

JOEL, 36, a lifer in social work, a parole supervisor, nervous, has a gaunt, unhealthy look possibly from not being quite out of the closet

### SET

Magpie's space and Reggie's should have a connecting point, perhaps a few steps up and down again to Magpie's kitchen. Reggie has a bed, which could be as simple as a board. Magpie has a freezer and an oven, but these could be mere shelves, open from both sides so that MOM can access them from the back. Mom inhabits a realm in Magpie's mind, behind Reggie's space, maybe elevated a bit, on a sort of roadway to the outside world. There is an open porch space facing the street, which is where the audience sits. Magpie's house is in an old inner city neighborhood that has turned over so many times that no one really knows their next-door neighbors. The time is the present, late summer.

### MUSIC

Reggie's music is a strong dance beat, very muscular. The music surrounding Mom and Magpie is a more tuneful and melancholy melody.

## SCENE 1

MAGPIE is in her kitchen, tidying up. She hums "Sing a Song of Sixpence."

REGGIE and JOEL enter from the down stage street. MAGPIE watches REGGIE.

JOEL gives directions about the neighborhood, the bus stop, the stores, the laundromat. REGGIE is more interested in the cars and the girls on the street. He wears his Walkman.

MOM is on the upstage roadway, mixing batter in her mixing bowl.

MOM: When's the new tenant coming in?

MAGPIE: Today, Mom.

MOM: Have you put your pie in the oven yet?

Timer rings. MAGPIE tears herself from the view of REGGIE to take the pie out of the oven.

MAGPIE: It's just showing its pretty browned face to the world! There.

MOM: Nothing like the smell of pie to get you off to a good start in a new abode.

MAGPIE: Yeah. Pie makes everything alright.

MOM: Let's hope this fellow stays a little longer.

MAGPIE: They don't stay too long, do they?

MOM: Well, it's not on account of your pie.

MAGPIE: It's your recipe. It's the heavenly best there is.

MOM: So have you met him yet?

MAGPIE: No. But I can see him out there, right now.

MOM: So? What's he like? Hurry up, now. (FURIOUSLY STIRRING HER BATTER NOW) I've got a plum upsidedown cake to put in.

MAGPIE: Ladies' League tonight?

MOM: I can hardly wait to tell them about your new . . . boy. Now, you're going to have to tell me, before I go. They're going to want to know. Does he get -- a slice -- or the whole pie?

MAGPIE: Oh, Mom. This one gets it all.

MOM: Oh!

MOM exits.

MAGPIE: He's a living doll.

MUSIC.

JOEL has been fumbling with the lock until REGGIE takes the key and opens the door.

JOEL: (SURVEYING THE ROOM) Your basic basement suite. Not bad for a guy who's been away for a while, eh?

REGGIE: Anything is better than jail.

JOEL: I'm sure you'll be quite comfortable here. You've got your own bedroom, your own bathroom, a kitchenette, your own phone and your own key. Isn't that grand? Oh, and the landlady is a great gal. She, ah, does a lot of baking.

REGGIE: Baking? I never met anybody who baked.

JOEL: Just don't let the smells drive you crazy.

MAGPIE descends steps to Reggie's room.

REGGIE: What do you mean? Like that? What is that?

MAGPIE: Rhubarb pie!

REGGIE: Rhubarb! That's some back alley weed that gives you a gut ache.

MAGPIE: Not when you've got lots of sugar in it. I use brown and white.

JOEL: Ah, Reggie, this is Ruth.

MAGPIE: You can call me Magpie. It's like my code name. I tell the guys down at the station that it makes me feel a little more important, you know? After all, I'm not a baby-sitter here, am I? I think every parolee surveillance officer should have a professional name. It makes what I do here feel more official. So call me Magpie.

REGGIE: I used to throw rocks at magpies.

MAGPIE: Oh yeah? Ever seen magpies crowd a crow? But don't worry. I work alone. It's just you and me here.

JOEL: So, Reggie says he likes his new place.

REGGIE: I said it was okay.

MAGPIE: I want it to be home, Reggie. Your own little nest. Snug and warm and clean.

REGGIE: The place I had before was so ugly I punched in a wall.

REGGIE hits a wall, suddenly.

MAGPIE: Hey, that's your feature wall. It's supposed to grab your eye.

JOEL: Don't they call that color Avocado?

REGGIE: It's more like puke.

MAGPIE: You can change it. You just have to buy your own paint. You're in charge of your own space here. You just have to keep it clean. And if you don't know how, I'll show you. Scrubbing the floor, washing the toilet, whatever. I like to take my boy in the basement under my wing.

JOEL: Like I told you, you get more than just a landlady with Magpie.

REGGIE: I never had no landlady before. Just crabby dogs.

MAGPIE: Did you throw rocks at them, too?

REGGIE: Had to pick garbages to feed 'em so they wouldn't bark.

MAGPIE: So they wouldn't give away where you were staying  
-- in some abandoned garage.

REGGIE: How do you know?

MAGPIE: Hey, I read up on you!

JOEL: Then you know, Magpie, how we've been very impressed  
with this young man. He's been stellar: a good  
learner, good focus, knows what he wants. I know I  
speak for the whole program team when I say that we  
have every confidence in him.

MAGPIE: If you painted that wall, what color would you  
pick?

REGGIE: Blue.

MAGPIE: The color of freedom.

REGGIE: Blue like sky.

MAGPIE: Ever want to fly, Reggie?

REGGIE: Yeah, where nobody could tell me nothing.

JOEL: I think we've all felt that from time to time.

MAGPIE: One of these days, then, I'll help you do it blue.  
Make it heaven.

JOEL: I can see that you two will get on just fine. A  
home renovating project is very good for getting to  
know one another, so they say. Also promotes  
ownership of one's own space. Good idea!

MAGPIE: We'll see.

JOEL: I'll be calling in. Call me if there's anything. I'll  
pick you up for your first day of work tomorrow,  
Reggie, and then, you're on your own, so to speak.  
We set you free.

REGGIE: Yeah, with a rope around my neck.

JOEL: Well, I mean within the parameters of the program.

MAGPIE: Don't worry! It's an invisible rope; only you  
and I know it's there.

REGGIE: I wonder how short it is.

JOEL: This doesn't mean you're having second thoughts, does it?

REGGIE: No. I can hack it.

JOEL: So long, then.

REGGIE: Yeah.

JOEL exits.

MAGPIE: I'll be upstairs.

REGGIE: Yeah. Just like my guarding angel.

MAGPIE closes the door on REGGIE, who stretches, works out some muscles, moves around his space, testing the size of it.

MOM hurries on the roadway, putting on hat and gloves while holding the upside-down cake tin.

MOM: So?

MAGPIE: He's pretty young.

MOM: Oh, that's nothing. It's better, I say.

MAGPIE: He has a lot of energy. I hope I can keep up.

MOM: Is he smart?

MAGPIE: He's got some kind of smarts.

MOM: What about charm? Charisma? Is he a gentleman?

MAGPIE: He's working on it. He's got a nickname for me. He called me Angel.

MOM: Oh, now that's just fresh! All those good-looking boys think they can just get away with murder, but then, Angel is a pretty innocent sort of name, isn't it?

MAGPIE: They all want me to think they're innocent, but I know.

MOM: I don't want to know, or I'll start to cry!

MAGPIE: Don't worry, Mom. I've got like a degree in self defense.

MOM: Oh, I know, but how can I rest knowing you are alone in that house with a man in the basement all the time? I don't know why you don't get any female tenants, Ruthie. I think it's the area you live in. Nobody wants to walk those streets alone at night.

MAGPIE: Have fun at your meeting, Mom.

MOM: I'll save you a piece of cake.

## SCENE 2

REGGIE dances to his music,  
looking at the phone, considering  
who to call. He dials.

MAGPIE: Ah, Reggie, who you gonna call?

REGGIE: Jimbo. You'll never guess who this is, out on/  
parole.

/Jimbo hangs up.

REGGIE: What?

MAGPIE: Peek-a-boo!

Reggie dials again.

REGGIE: What did you hang up for? It's Reggie. (PAUSE)  
Reggie who's been in the can. (PAUSE) They got all  
my life they're going to get. (PAUSE) They put me  
in some dive. Landlady's this fat dame who brings  
me pie. (PAUSE) Jimbo the Jumbo. Hah. Remember when  
we used to go scare chicks?

MAGPIE: Hi, Mom?

REGGIE can hear this.

Mom? I can't hear you.

REGGIE: Hey, get off my line! Jimbo, wait!

MAGPIE: Oh, Reggie. Got you on the extension! What a hoot!

REGGIE: Extension?

MAGPIE: Wait till I tell Joel from Parole.

REGGIE: There's nothing to tell. Jimbo won't talk to me.

MAGPIE: Well, that's good. 'Cause you wouldn't want to break your non-association clause.

REGGIE: How do I know if you're on the line?

MAGPIE: You hear me. If I'm talking. But, a fat dame like me, I don't get that many calls.

REGGIE pulls the phone out of the wall. He opens a window to the blue sky, finds a fork, and stands by the window. He stabs into the whole pie, eating like a wild man.

MOM appears.

MOM: The way to a man's heart is through his stomach. At least, it worked for your Dad. I just wish I knew more about cholesterol and heart disease than as I do now.

MAGPIE: When they don't have a heart, you go for the head.

REGGIE puts down the pie and gets on his Walkman. MUSIC. MAGPIE puts cream puffs on a tray as REGGIE stretches out.

### SCENE 3

REGGIE sits on steps outside MAGPIE's front door, waiting for his ride from JOEL. He whistles at girls and cars passing by. MAGPIE goes to his room.

MAGPIE: Rise and shine! C'mon, Reggie! It's Monday. That's a work day. You're lucky. You only have to work 9 to 5. I have to stay up all night watching you. Let's go! Time for me to get to bed!

MAGPIE opens the door when there's no answer, checks the bathroom. She sees out the front basement window that REGGIE is on the outside steps. She hurries back through her house, takes a plate of cream puffs and opens her front door. She sits down beside Reggie on the steps. Reggie moves away.

MAGPIE: I stayed up late making these.

REGGIE: What for?

MAGPIE: For you, Reggie. For your breakfast.

REGGIE: Okay. (TRIES ONE) Mmm.

MAGPIE: I like to lick the cream off, around the edges, first.

REGGIE: Like this?

MAGPIE: Yeah. Have another one.

REGGIE: Okay.

MAGPIE: That will give you the energy you need today. This is your first ever job, isn't it?

REGGIE: Yeah.

MAGPIE: So they taught you word processing inside, did they?

REGGIE: Yeah.

MAGPIE: Do you like it?

REGGIE: It's easy.

MAGPIE: I can't even type my own name.

REGGIE: You just peck the letters out, one after another.

MAGPIE: It's a skill.

REGGIE: Yeah. So?

MAGPIE: So let me get this right: you get a life sentence; they teach you a skill; get you a job; get you this place to live, with me; and hope that now you're a busy guy with a real home and a real job that you won't get distracted and pick off another little blonde word processor.

REGGIE: Yeah.

MAGPIE: So what are you going to do for girls?

REGGIE: I'm just looking.

MAGPIE: Scaring chicks with Jimbo is not just looking.

REGGIE: That was before. Now I'm going to try for a relationship.

MAGPIE: That sounds grown up.

REGGIE: I bet you've never had one, either.

MAGPIE: (PAUSE) Okay. What was your first clue?

REGGIE: Why else would you do this job?

MAGPIE: Because I like it. I like helping guys like you figure out where you belong.

REGGIE: I already know that. I'm no jailbird. And I'm not living in no magpie nest any longer than I have to. I'm getting out and I'm going all the way.

MAGPIE: That's what Joel thinks.

Car horn honks.

REGGIE: I gotta go.

REGGIE exits.

MAGPIE: Bye Reggie-pie.

MOM enters, holding a chopping board and chopping nuts as she talks.

MAGPIE: Mom?

MOM: Feeling blue, Ruthie?

MAGPIE: I don't know. Just tired.

MOM: I'm making brownies.

MAGPIE: Oh, those are the best.

MOM: When you were little, and blue or just tired, you'd ask for something to "prop you up." You loved these brownies.

MAGPIE: I still do. I can smell them this very minute.

MOM: I'll freeze a batch for you, for later. When you and I can sit down for a cup of tea.

MAGPIE: It won't be long. After I finish this project I'm working on. A week or two is all I'm going to need.

MOM: Oh, your work comes first, I understand.

MAGPIE: It's a new project, but kind of important to me.

MOM: All these new beginnings: a new man in the basement, a new project on the go . . . I would be quite exhausted.

MAGPIE: I am, a bit. And I made cream puffs.

MOM: Oh! You should let me do that for you! Oh, Ruthie! You go have a nap.

MUSIC. MAGPIE reenters the house through Reggie's door and lies down on his bed.

MOM: I wish I had the nerve to go down there and get a good look at this fellow. I would know, right away, if he was material for my Ruthie. I could tell by the way he looked at her, for example. I could tell by the way he addressed me, and shook my hand. Or didn't shake it. A hand is so important, especially in a man. A kind hand, a helping hand, a strong hand that knows when to be gentle. My husband was like that. They say daughters pick a husband who resembles their own fathers. I hope Ruthie will find that kind of man, just one who lasts

longer. I didn't realize men came with "Best Before" dates, but they do.

REGGIE can see that MAGPIE is in his space, in his bed. MOM quickly moves away.

REGGIE: Hey!

MAGPIE has gotten up and is looking around when he gets in.

REGGIE: You've got balls to be in my room.

MAGPIE: I own the place.

REGGIE: What are you looking for?

MAGPIE: Sugar.

REGGIE: Oh yeah?

MAGPIE: I had to borrow a cup of sugar.

REGGIE: Sugar.

MAGPIE: I'm making butter tarts.

REGGIE: What for? You wanna butter me up?

MAGPIE: I see you finished the pie.

REGGIE: I liked it. It had a bite to it. Not too sweet.

MAGPIE: Just wait till you taste my butter tarts.

REGGIE: Are you going to eat all those butter tarts?

MAGPIE: You knave.

REGGIE: It's my sugar.

MAGPIE: Come and have some later, then. Oh, this is for you.

MAGPIE opens the Walkman, snaps in a tape.

MAGPIE: Bye, sugar pie.

MAGPIE goes to her kitchen. REGGIE turns on the Walkman. MAGPIE sings over her voice on the tape,

dancing to the rhythm. During the song, JOEL enters off the street, knocks on Reggie's door, and when there is no answer, opens it with his key at the end of the song.

MAGPIE: (V.O.) Sing a song of penance

A pocket full of lies.

Four and twenty naughty boys

Baked in a pie.

When the pie was opened

The bird began to sing,

Now wasn't that a dainty dish

To set before the K-K-King?

REGGIE: King, huh? Reggie the King. King Reggie.

He wears his Walkman phones like  
a crown. Joel enters.

JOEL: King of your own castle, anyway.

REGGIE: Not when everybody's got the stinkin' key!

JOEL: I guess you didn't hear me knock. I just wanted to see how your first day went, all in all.

REGGIE: No problem.

JOEL: Get along with the boss okay?

REGGIE: Yeah. She looks like a bag lady, but she's cool.

JOEL: You're really doing well with authority figures. Good for you. How about the hormones? Hopping around a bit?

REGGIE: Yeah. But I'm focusing. I'm looking for a special friend, like you said.

JOEL: Any prospects at work?

REGGIE: They're all women except for me. So the numbers are good, anyway.

JOEL: How did that make you feel, being the only man?

REGGIE: Pretty good.

JOEL: We purposely went for a noncompetitive environment. You can take your time here. No rush.

REGGIE: Yeah. I got that. They'll start coming to me. I can feel that.

JOEL: That's good, Reggie. Just keep that focus. Lots of talking, lunches, coffee breaks. No dates yet. We'll give you the clearance when it's time.

REGGIE: Okay.

JOEL: Magpie is okay, too?

REGGIE: Yeah.

JOEL: Good. Some guys find her a little intimidating.

REGGIE: Not me.

JOEL: Sometimes even I find her just a little, you know, loud.

REGGIE: She's just always there.

JOEL: That's her job.

REGGIE: So, I take the bus tomorrow?

JOEL: Just like we rehearsed. Your boss will call me when you get there.

REGGIE: Okay.

JOEL: Remember to call if there's anything. You're doing great. Uh, keep up the exercise.

REGGIE: I got it.

JOEL exits, dodging MAGPIE in her window so she won't see him. But she does. She shakes her head.

MAGPIE: There goes Joel from Parole. He thinks he can coach my guy in the basement.

MOM on roadway with cookie sheet,  
raw cookie dough in her apron  
pocket, which she spoons on the  
sheet.

MOM: So what does he do?

MAGPIE: Reggie?

MOM: Your young man.

MAGPIE: Something with computers.

MOM: Oh, well, that's very up-to-date.

MAGPIE: Yes, but, you know, one thing computers can't do is  
cook, right, Mom?

MOM: Oh, absolutely.

MAGPIE: So I was thinking of sending down a meal one of these  
evenings. It's starting to get cooler at night.  
Maybe a stew, huh?

MOM: Oh, yes. And to go with it, a warm peach cobbler.

MAGPIE: He'd like that.

MOM backs away on the roadway.

REGGIE knocks at Magpie's door.

REGGIE: Hey!

MAGPIE: Who is it?

REGGIE: The King.

MAGPIE: So?

REGGIE: You're strange. Just like your name. Magpie.

MAGPIE: Got it from one of my first tenants.

REGGIE: What happened to him?

MAGPIE: He didn't last long.

REGGIE: What do you mean?

MAGPIE: He broke parole. I'm not sure of the details.

REGGIE: Like hell.

REGGIE taps door frame, fidgets.  
MAGPIE arranges tarts on a plate.

MAGPIE: On edge, Reg?

REGGIE: Cripes.

MAGPIE: Edgy Reggie puddin' 'n pie--

REGGIE: What's with you?

MAGPIE blocks REGGIE.

MAGPIE: Kissed the girls and made them cry -- (BLOWS HIM  
KISSES)

REGGIE: I'm outta here.

MAGPIE: When the boys came out to play

REGGIE: Outta my way!

MAGPIE: Edgy Reggie ran away.

REGGIE: Move!

MAGPIE: But they caught him.

REGGIE: Don't try to spook me.

MAGPIE: Have a butter tart.

He takes the whole plate, and she  
lets him go. Before long, he  
devours one.

MOM: A man is . . . a comfort, you know? If he's the right man. I mean, we have to eat so often, and to do it alone all of the time is dehumanizing. Cooking for one is no fun, either. I do my Meals on Wheels three days a week. I have my ladies' groups, my bridge and yoga clubs, my volunteer baking for the Girl Guides and the church bazaars, but it's only to keep me busy and not alone so much, I mean, since my husband died of heart disease. Cooking for him was saying "I love you" three times a day!

MUSIC.

## SCENE 4

REGGIE is on the street, coming home. MAGPIE follows him.

MAGPIE: Two little dicky birds sitting on the wall  
One named Magpie and the other Reginal(d)!

REGGIE: I hate it when you follow me. Why do you do that?

MAGPIE: Oh, come on. It happens all the time to cute little word processor types like yourself.

REGGIE stops and sits on stairs;  
so does MAGPIE.

REGGIE: Yeah, I heard all about it today. Got a half-hour off for a talk on self-protection.

MAGPIE: It's the new millennium.

REGGIE: It's stupid. I mean, they're not always going to be safe, all of the time, no matter what!

MAGPIE: Gee, I feel safe all the time, and I live with men convicted of sexual assault and murder.

REGGIE: You're not normal.

MAGPIE: You noticed. How flattering.

REGGIE: I didn't know chicks spent so much time being scared, that's all.

MAGPIE: Oh, that's good. Be sure to let Joel know about that. He'll give you a gold star.

REGGIE: I don't need nothing from no one.

REGGIE goes to the mailbox.

MAGPIE: Who's going to send you mail?

REGGIE: I dunno. Never had an address before.

MAGPIE: You could get a magazine subscription for the weekends when you're stuck here like a house fly.

REGGIE: Don't like reading.

MAGPIE: Where's your Walkman?

REGGIE: Busted it.

MAGPIE: On purpose?

REGGIE: Yeah. I crushed it.

MAGPIE: I thought you won it in jail for the fastest typing speed or something.

REGGIE: Yeah, well, I didn't like your surprise tapes.

MAGPIE follows REGGIE to his suite.

MAGPIE: I noticed that you disconnected your phone.

REGGIE: So what? No one ever calls except "Joel from Parole."

MAGPIE: I'd call you. I like talking on the phone.

REGGIE: Yeah, that way no one has to look at you.

MAGPIE: (PAUSE) Not nice, Reggie.

REGGIE: Get out of my face!

MAGPIE: Hey, how about we go out and get you some blue paint for your wall? It would cheer you up.

REGGIE: Not now.

MAGPIE: Just let me go powder my nose.

REGGIE: A lot of good that will do.

MAGPIE: You're having a bad mouth day.

REGGIE: One of these girls in my office, she likes me, I know she does. So I ask her for lunch and she says no because she's got to go buy something at some special sale. She buys stuff almost every noon hour and saves it in a hope chest. What the hell for?

MAGPIE: For the future. To make a home with someone someday.

REGGIE: So have you got a hope chest, too? Or don't they make them in your size?

MAGPIE turns to go.

REGGIE: Bye, Maggot-pie.

MUSIC.

SCENE 5

MAGPIE meets JOEL on the street.

MAGPIE: I've never asked for this before.

JOEL: I know, but the thing is, in the best of all possible worlds, I just don't have another place to put him.

MAGPIE: You could send him back to jail.

JOEL: Between you and me, that would not make the program look very successful.

MAGPIE: I don't like him.

JOEL: That's not sufficient grounds for removing him. You don't have any complaints, not like the other, uh, candidates you've had in here.

MAGPIE: Well, nothing worth mentioning.

JOEL: No weapons, no stealing, no drugs?

MAGPIE: No.

JOEL: You know, Magpie, we have yet to get one come through clean under your surveillance.

MAGPIE: That's because they were all dirty to begin with.

JOEL: Not Reggie. He's gonna make it. He's the one in ten. He's smart; he tries hard. I like him.

MAGPIE: I don't like guys who rape and murder.

JOEL: I'm speaking relatively here.

MAGPIE: He thinks he knows the game.

JOEL: What game?

MAGPIE: The system. He thinks he can beat it.

JOEL: Well, he got in to the program.

MAGPIE: It doesn't make his crime go away.

JOEL: No, but we're talking about rehabilitation.

MAGPIE: Right. Every one of the other guys you sent me reoffended.

JOEL: So, this guy could be the one who doesn't.

MAGPIE: You're pretty hopeful.

JOEL: Just don't do him in before he has a chance to play the game, as you say.

MAGPIE: They do themselves in.

JOEL: I wonder if sometimes there's a little external pressure.

MAGPIE: Just what are you saying? The other guys cracked because, what, I picked their brains out?

JOEL: I'm just saying give Reggie a little support. Let's have a success, here, because, frankly, if we don't, I'm not sure management will be able to justify the program next year.

MAGPIE: I didn't realize this was a job security issue with you, Joel.

JOEL: For you, too.

MAGPIE: But I'm specialized! I'm front line! Rapists who kill. Who else wants to do it?

JOEL: Well, that's just it. No one seems to want to work with these guys but us. And as I've said in the past, if we can come up with a winning formula here, well, it would draw a lot of attention.

JOEL sees REGGIE loaded down with bags, on the street, has a private talk with him.

MAGPIE: Oh, Joel. As if anybody cares.

MUSIC. MOM appears with a purse, and removes her apron, stuffs it in the purse, and puts on a scarf, knots it.

MOM: Ruthie has never really shown an interest in men until she started taking in tenants in her basement apartment. Trouble is, they're very unsavory, and they're transients. Not Sunday dinner guests. This new one's probably no different.

REGGIE: (KNOCKS) Magpie?

MAGPIE: What.

REGGIE: I didn't mean it.

MAGPIE: Really.

REGGIE: Yeah. I'm sorry.

MAGPIE: Are you?

REGGIE: I don't want any trouble.

MAGPIE: Smart boy.

REGGIE: I asked around at work about what I should do, and everybody said I should invite you over for supper.

MAGPIE: You told them what you said?

REGGIE: No. I just said I screwed up.

MAGPIE: Nobody asks me out for supper.

REGGIE: It's not exactly out. It's in your basement.

MAGPIE: Can you cook?

REGGIE: I can read. They're all lending me stuff. (READING LIST) Wineglasses, candles. . .

MAGPIE: Candles?

REGGIE: Yeah. (READING) Napkins, flowers, special coffee, potpourri. . . what is that?

MAGPIE: It spices up the air.

REGGIE: So?

MAGPIE: Okay.

REGGIE: Tonight. Seven o'clock.

REGGIE goes to his room.

MAGPIE: So who's fattening up who, Reginald?

REGGIE sets up for the dinner.

MOM: Did you say dinner, honey?

MAGPIE: Yes. He's cooking.

MOM: Oh, dear. Can he cook?

MAGPIE: He says so.

MOM: Candlelight dinner?

MAGPIE: Yes.

MOM: Are you going to bring something, just in case?

MAGPIE: Definitely. I'm trying to decide. Cookies, maybe.

MOM: What kind?

MAGPIE: He's sort of a health nut. Oatmeal raisin?

MOM: Your dad's favorite! Good. Well, this is a first, isn't it?

MAGPIE: I guess it is.

MOM: Now, be careful, dear.

MAGPIE: I live with him.

MOM: Under the same roof, yes, but normally there's a whole floor between you. I know you'll be fine. I want to know all about it. Oh, and . . . have fun, dear.

MUSIC. MAGPIE wraps up some cookies from her freezer and gets ready to go out.

## SCENE 6

REGGIE is in the kitchen,  
preparing. JOEL knocks at his  
door. When he gets no answer, he  
lets himself in with the key.  
Reggie comes in with appetizers.

REGGIE: When no one has my key anymore, that's when I'm  
going to be free.

JOEL: Let me warn you: with a relationship, you have to  
give away your key. This is good training. REGGIE:  
Right.

JOEL: So. This is awesome.

REGGIE: She likes food, so food she gets.

MAGPIE knocks, enters  
REGGIE's space.

MAGPIE: Joel?

JOEL: I think I'm here, you know, so you aren't, uh,  
uncomfortable with just Reggie.

MAGPIE: No, he invited you so you can mark his report card.  
Reggie is trying to say he's sorry to me.

JOEL: For what?

MAGPIE: You don't have to know everything.

JOEL: No. I don't.

REGGIE: Magpie.

MAGPIE: Hi.

REGGIE: I got Joel to come so you could talk to him while I cook.

REGGIE: I don't want you to help. I want to do this myself.

JOEL: Very commendable, Reggie. You're showing real  
independence of spirit.

REGGIE: How about an appetizer?

JOEL: Ah, not for me. Those are a bit crunchy for me.

REGGIE: Crudités, Magpie?

MAGPIE: Veggie scraps. Very . . . bite-sized, Reggie. A bit of a challenge without a proper knife.

REGGIE: I just picked stuff that just pulls apart.

MAGPIE: You just have to eat more to get anywhere with these little delicacies.

REGGIE: You'll want to save room.

MAGPIE: What are we having?

REGGIE: (READING) Fish in Foil with Baby Cinnamon Carrots and Toasted Multigrain Ricecakes.

MAGPIE: What book is that from?

REGGIE: It's all Weight Watchers. Just in case.

MAGPIE: Just in case what?

REGGIE: Just in case you were trying to lose.

MAGPIE: Not me. Were you trying to lose, Joel?

JOEL: Er, most of us could afford to trim a little here and there. . .

MAGPIE: I've never been an average-sized person.

REGGIE: I'm just trying to help.

MAGPIE: Who asked you?

JOEL: Helpful is good.

MAGPIE: Humiliating is not.

REGGIE: Hey, I'm just being honest.

MAGPIE: What would you know? You've got a body out of a magazine.

REGGIE: Yeah, well, I work on it.

JOEL: Uh, maybe we should eat now?

MAGPIE: Are you eating, Joel?

JOEL: Well, you know me and my sweet tooth. I like to start my meal with dessert.

MAGPIE: What is dessert, Reggie?

REGGIE: Apricot Fluff.

MAGPIE: Don't worry, Joel. I brought cookies. Just in case.

REGGIE: Just in case what?

MAGPIE: Just in case your dessert is not quite satisfying enough.

REGGIE: Just you wait.

MOM appears, this time with a broom. She sweeps up the roadway.

MOM: I like a clean house. I always have. It's easier keeping house for one than two or three. I don't make much mess. I just think of Ruthie with that big old house downtown. And those scruffy young men! Sometimes I think she does it just to turn my hair white. That one she has right now -- I hope he washed his hands before he made that dinner.

MOM marches off.

JOEL: Well, I think is a very satisfying event. You've really gone out of your way, Reggie.

REGGIE: I just wanted to show you I could be, you know, normal.

MAGPIE: But I'm not normal, remember? My name is Magpie and this is what I look like.

REGGIE: You've got nice eyes. Blue.

MAGPIE: Yeah? My Mom used to say the same thing.

JOEL: Maybe we should just have dessert.

MAGPIE: Blow me away with the Apricot Fluff some other time.

MAGPIE and JOEL go to the street. REGGIE starts to strip down.

JOEL: It was process. The product was maybe not perfect, but we have to recognize the effort.

MAGPIE: He thinks he can stick me.

JOEL: Well, I've been considerably impressed. I've never had one of these guys ask me to dinner before.

MAGPIE: Watch out. Reggie could eat you right up.

MUSIC. MAGPIE leaves JOEL, who looks back to see REGGIE, shirt off now, come out to give him the package of cookies. JOEL exits in a hurry.

#### SCENE 7

MAGPIE goes down to open Reggie's door. REGGIE is painting the feature wall in his underwear.

REGGIE: You don't knock, do you?

MAGPIE: Sorry. I just . . . smelled something.

REGGIE: Just paint.

MAGPIE: I see.

REGGIE: Well, are you gonna help or what?

MAGPIE: But, you don't have your clothes on.

REGGIE: I didn't want to get paint on 'em.

MAGPIE: Oh.

REGGIE: Want something to eat?

REGGIE: All I've got is carrots.

MAGPIE: Rabbit food. But . . . I've been known to eat almost anything.

REGGIE: How about cereal off the floor?

MAGPIE: Kid food.

REGGIE: They'd toss it down at me. I had to pick it up fast before they stepped on it.

MAGPIE: Sort of like me and eggs. I love recipes with eggs. I love that cracking sound when you break the eggshell. Sometimes I throw the shells on the floor so I can step on them.

REGGIE: I liked the chips better than the cereal. You'd chew on those, and you couldn't hear the yelling so bad.

MAGPIE: (PAUSE) It's going to be a good blue.

REGGIE: Have to wait until it dries. Might need another coat.

MAGPIE: Wait for the light in the morning.

REGGIE: Don't get that much light down here.

REGGIE puts down his roller, and does a few push-ups.

MAGPIE: What are you doing?

REGGIE: Got a kink in my back. Want to work it out.

MAGPIE: Looks like it hurts.

REGGIE: Yeah.

MAGPIE: Is it okay if I watch?

REGGIE: You're the one who busted in here. If you don't like it, you can leave.

MAGPIE: But I like it.

REGGIE: Don't you feel a little at risk with guys like me?

MAGPIE: Nobody makes a move for me.

REGGIE: That's what you said about supper. Ugh.

REGGIE collapses.

MAGPIE: What's the matter?

REGGIE: Just a little dizzy.

MAGPIE: I'll get you some water.

MAGPIE goes off to kitchen.

REGGIE: I'm alright.

MAGPIE: Your fridge is empty.

REGGIE: There's carrots.

MAGPIE returns with water and cloth.

MAGPIE: You haven't been eating.

REGGIE: It was a big dinner the other night.

MAGPIE: Yeah, if you're an ant. Drink this, slowly.

MAGPIE wipes him with a wet cloth.

REGGIE: How do you know this isn't an act? I could grab you, like this.

They struggle, but REGGIE is easily flipped over on to his face by MAGPIE.

MAGPIE: Don't ever do that again.

REGGIE: Where'd you learn that?

MAGPIE: When I was a kid, I loved playing baseball. I was a great catcher. No ball ever got past me. And then my Mom, she got attacked one day by some creep. I found her on my way home from the ball field. She was hiding under a hedge. She made me promise not to tell my father what had happened. And the next week she put me in self-defense classes. I had to teach her all the moves when I got home. And because the route I walked to the field was where she got attacked, it was off limits and I never got to play baseball again. It's too bad, isn't it?

REGGIE: Yeah.

REGGIE frees an arm, slowly, and gently reaches up to stroke Magpie's cheek, then down her neck. She closes her eyes. Suddenly, REGGIE frees himself and laughs. MAGPIE gets up.

REGGIE: Hey, come on. We were just getting started. You haven't even asked me up for a piece of cake.

MAGPIE: You're cut off.

MAGPIE leaves. REGGIE gets dressed.

SCENE 8

MOM appears, this time with potatoes in her apron pocket and a potato peeler. She works as she talks, letting the peelings fall to the ground.

MOM: I wonder if I warped her when I made Ruthie take all those self-defense classes. A mother knows what's best for her child but Ruthie was never the same after that. Neither was I, for that matter. My husband never did find out. At least I spared him that, poor man. But Ruthie, she took the weight of it.

MAGPIE: Mom?

MOM: Yes, dear?

MAGPIE: I wish you were here.

MOM: Well, I know. But I'm just so busy.

MAGPIE: I'm feeling a little blue. Black and blue.

MOM: Are you hurt?

MAGPIE: Just mooshy inside, you know? Like I need . . . something.

MOM: A hug.

MAGPIE: Yeah, maybe. Could you come? Just this once? Mom?

MOM: Well, you know, it's a little tricky for me.

MAGPIE: I know, but I've never asked you this before.

MOM: You haven't. You're a big strong girl.

MAGPIE: I miss you, Mom.

MOM: I miss you, too.

MAGPIE: I don't know. This job is getting to me.

MOM: It's wearing you out. You hardly have time for me anymore.

MAGPIE: I need you now. Please. Come.

MOM: I'll see. I was just going to put up a few loaves for later.

MAGPIE: I'll make some for you. A big batch. You can have it all. Tell you what, Mom. I'm just going to keep baking until you get here.

MUSIC.

SCENE 9

REGGIE comes up to MAGPIE's kitchen door.

REGGIE: Hey, Magpie.

MAGPIE: Hey yourself.

REGGIE: Are you doing anything?

MAGPIE: I'm baking.

REGGIE: Can I help?

MAGPIE: No.

REGGIE: Why not?

MAGPIE: I bake by myself.

REGGIE: How come?

MAGPIE: It's safer than hanging out with a grabber.

REGGIE: Come on. I'm half-dead anyway.

MAGPIE: Half-starved, you mean.

REGGIE: I haven't eaten all weekend.

MAGPIE: You're just light-headed from the paint fumes.

REGGIE: Are you kidding? All I can smell is whatever you're making.

MAGPIE: It's not for you.

REGGIE: Come on, I'm hungry.

MAGPIE: Not as hungry as I am.

REGGIE: Maybe some of your baking. . .

MAGPIE: I told you, no more treats.

REGGIE: Please, let me in.

MAGPIE: Not by the hairs of my chinny-chin chin.

REGGIE: What?

MAGPIE: I don't want any bad vibrations around my bread. It won't work unless you want it, unless you can hardly wait to eat it, maybe eat part of the raw dough to get your taste buds started, let the smell drive you crazy, burn your hand knocking it out of the pan, not waiting for it to cool, not taking time to find a knife, just pulling a piece off, steaming, too hot to eat, so dunk it in the butter dish first, then . . .

REGGIE: I'll help you eat it. Save you from yourself.

MAGPIE: (PAUSE) Get in here, you wolf.

REGGIE: Oh, yeah. It smells good.

MAGPIE: That's the yeast. It's a form of fungus.

REGGIE: Gross. What's it doing?

MAGPIE: Growing.

REGGIE: It looks like it's alive.

MAGPIE: Multiplies in minutes, like terror.

REGGIE: It's fast.

MAGPIE: It's magic. It helps me stomach people like you.

REGGIE: Hey, I'm different from the other guys. Joel said.

MAGPIE: Joel said. Then let's see if you have any imagination. Now. Flour.

She mixes with a wooden spoon in a crockery bowl.

REGGIE: Did the other guys ever help you bake?

MAGGIE: Oh yeah. Every one.

REGGIE: You know what happened to them after they left here?

MAGPIE: Yeah.

REGGIE: Well, what?

MAGPIE: They asked to go back to jail.

REGGIE: Why?

MAGPIE: It's safer there, that's why.

REGGIE: I'd rather die.

MAGPIE: I think maybe, but I'm not sure, that it had something to do with me.

REGGIE: What?

MAGPIE: I think I was too large for them.

REGGIE: That doesn't bother me. Really. I was just playing, before.

MAGPIE: Ever make bread before?

REGGIE: They wouldn't let me work in the kitchens. You know.

MAGPIE: Well, yes. The knives. And then there's that raw fungus. Look at it go. Beyond our control. It's stronger than both of us.

REGGIE: Like a turn-on.

MAGPIE: Wash your hands.

REGGIE: Then what?

MAGPIE: Flour all over.

MAGPIE dumps a heavy ball of dough on the counter.

MAGPIE: And knead. Like this.

REGGIE: Yeah?

REGGIE: Easy.

MAGPIE: Two hundred and fifty times.

REGGIE: Good for the triceps. Pecs, too.

MAGPIE: Yeah. Substantial.

REGGIE: Elastic.

MAGPIE: Use more flour.

REGGIE: Like skin.

MAGPIE: Smooth.

REGGIE: Soft.

MAGPIE: Keep kneading.

REGGIE: Feels good in your hands.

MAGPIE: Pump it.

REGGIE: I am.

MAGPIE: Get a rhythm.

REGGIE: Like this?

MAGPIE: Like that, that, that, then fold the edges over, turn and start again.

REGGIE: I get it.

MAGPIE: Get on top of it now.

REGGIE: Like that?

MAGPIE: Yeah.

REGGIE: It's getting warm.

MAGPIE: Don't let it go wild on you.

REGGIE: It feels like it's getting bigger.

MAGPIE: Fold it! Don't let it flap around.

REGGIE: It's not growing, is it?

MAGPIE: Push it down.

REGGIE: I'm getting up a sweat.

MAGPIE: You have to.

REGGIE: This is work!

MAGPIE: Squeeze it hard.

REGGIE: I'm getting tired.

MAGPIE: You're weak because you're starving, but you're committed. You can't stop now!

REGGIE: Can't you take over?

MAGPIE: This is not CPR here, it's kneading dough!

REGGIE: Come on, Magpie!

MAGPIE: Put your guts into it!

REGGIE: Okay!

MAGPIE: Let me see your muscle!

REGGIE: I'm doin' it!

MAGPIE: Stop!

REGGIE: What? Why? What are you doing?

MAGPIE: I'm going to gently, very gently, put this in a warming oven.

REGGIE: I feel like I'm going to pass out.

REGGIE slides down the wall to sit.

MAGPIE puts the dough in, and then, just like in a TV cooking show, takes out a bowl with the dough already risen.

MAGPIE: Ta da! Reggie! Wake up! It's time!

REGGIE: What is that?

MAGPIE: It's your dough. It's a part of you now. You made it.

REGGIE: It's huge.

MAGPIE: Almost triple size. The trick is in the kneading.  
Good job.

REGGIE: Can I touch it?

MAGPIE: Nope. It's my turn.

MAGPIE punches down the dough.

REGGIE: Hey! That's my dough! You're wrecking it.

MAGPIE: I'm pretending it's you.

She does it again.

REGGIE: Whoa! You're flattening it out.

MAGPIE: The yeast, it's gotten into your pores, it's puffed  
you all up.

REGGIE: I'm dizzy. I think I'm going to . . .

MAGPIE: Feeling faint? Let's do it again.

REGGIE: No! Please!

MAGPIE: I want to get all the air out.

REGGIE: That's my dough! Stop!

MAGPIE: How does it feel to see something of yours, something  
you've worked hard on, punched up?

REGGIE: My stomach feels weird. Like you punched me.

MAGPIE: Like that?

REGGIE: Yes! Now, stop!

MAGPIE: It's different than smashing up a Walkman, Reg. This  
is a living thing here, this dough. And the  
difference is, you made it.

REGGIE: Are you finished?

MAGPIE: Almost.

REGGIE: Thank God. Oh, my gut.

MAGPIE: Your stomach is probably digesting itself by now.

REGGIE: It's shrunk right up.

MAGPIE: The good news is, it's going to grow back up. Your dough, I mean. Like a little inflatable doll.

REGGIE: It will?

MAGPIE: It will puff right back up again. It's the yeast. Now for the knife.

REGGIE: What? You're going to cut it?

MAGPIE: One loaf for you and one for me.

REGGIE: I haven't seen a knife like that in a long time.

MAGPIE: Well, I suppose I could just rip this old doughball apart, but I thought the knife was just a little more reminiscent.

MOM appears on the street, with a  
Tupperware container of squares.

REGGIE: I didn't mean to do it!

MAGPIE: Oh, I know. "I just wanted to have some fun." Isn't that what you said to the judge?

REGGIE: Hey, I did my time.

MAGPIE: Oh, no, Reg. Just a fraction of it. Less than half of half.

MAGPIE marks the dough in half  
and half again with the knife.

MAGPIE: Isn't this just like what you did? The knife about right here, right in the belly?

REGGIE: It was a mistake. I didn't want to kill her. It just happened.

MAGPIE: Take the knife, Reggie. Cut the dough.

MOM enters the kitchen, sees  
REGGIE with the knife, shields

herself with the Tupperware,  
pounces on him.

MAGPIE: Mom!

MAGPIE hugs her from behind, and  
their four arms outmaneuver  
REGGIE and shove the knife in his  
belly.

REGGIE: Agh! Get off me! No! What are you doing? Aagh!

Before he falls, REGGIE takes the  
dough and hugs it to his chest over  
the wound.

MOM: (TO MAGPIE) Are you alright, dear?

MAGPIE: Is it really you?

MOM: Well, it's not Little Red Riding Hood! I came just in  
time! That man would have killed you!

MAGPIE: Poor Reggie. He never got to taste my bread.

MOM: Well, no one's going to eat it now. He's got the dough  
all bloody.

MAGPIE: Don't worry, Mom. I've got another one rising in the  
oven.

MOM: This is not the man for you.

MAGPIE: Well. Not anymore. I don't think there is a man for  
me. That's what I wanted to tell you. I don't want  
to do this.

MOM: It doesn't make you happy.

MAGPIE: I didn't think they could hurt me.

MOM: Oh, Ruthie.

MOM hugs MAGPIE.

MAGPIE: Don't go, Mom. Stay.

MOM: I'll help you clean up.

JOEL comes to MAGPIE's door and  
in.

JOEL: Okay. I'm listening.

MOM helps REGGIE gets off the floor to act out MAGPIE's version to JOEL. Magpie dumps the dough back in the bowl. MOM goes down to Reggie's space and packs up his things.

MAGPIE: So. Reggie's got the knife, he's ready to cut the dough. (TO REGGIE) Give me the knife.

REGGIE: Now you're finally going to get the point.

MAGPIE: Reggie!

REGGIE: The King!

Using the dough bowl as a shield, MAGPIE grapples with REGGIE for the knife.

MAGPIE: Let go!

REGGIE: I'm going to stick you, you fat pig!

MAGPIE hits REGGIE over the head with the bowl, and pulls the knife, which she points at Reggie, toward herself. Suddenly, she lets go, and the knife goes in Reggie's gut. He picks up the dough off floor and puts it around the wound.

MAGPIE: (TO JOEL) And so the King is dead.

JOEL: Not your normal household accident.

The oven timer goes off. MAGPIE takes a loaf out of the oven, cuts it open.

MAGPIE: I know you had high hopes.

JOEL: Yeah. This is a shock.

MAGPIE: Tell me about it. I learned my lesson. Keep these guys away from my kitchen.

JOEL: Well, uh, I better get back to the office. To see if I still have a job. Maybe this was meant to be. Maybe I should just get a desk job. I mean, I'm a social worker, but people make me nervous, you know?

MAGPIE: Bite of fresh bread before you go?

JOEL: Uh, no thanks.

MAGPIE: More for me.

JOEL: They should be here any minute. Do you mind if I leave you, uh, alone?

MAGPIE looks at MOM and they smile.

MAGPIE: No.

JOEL: Well, I'll be going then. I'm feeling a bit queasy.

MAGPIE: What do you think of making this into a little tea house? You know, fresh baked cakes, pies, pastries?

MOM claps her hands.

JOEL: Pastries? That would be a good direction for you. I mean, you're good at dough.

MAGPIE: Is this a good location or what? Joel, you'd come, wouldn't you? You and your sweet tooth?

JOEL: As long as I wasn't, you know, chained to my desk.

MAGPIE: Good. Spread the word, okay?

JOEL exits.

MOM comes back upstairs.

MOM: Smells good.

MAGPIE: Umm.

MOM points to the paint on Reggie's shirt.

MOM: That's a nice blue, by the way.

MAGPIE: Oh? You like it? We could do the whole house over in the same blue.

MOM: A little blue teahouse.

MAGPIE: We could call it "Heaven."

MOM: It's very tempting.

MAGPIE waits in suspense as MOM  
bites the bread.

MOM: Umm. Good bread.

MAGPIE: Just like always.

MUSIC.

BLACKOUT.

THE END.

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