

Magnolia Shoes

NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT: The work of Magnolia Shoes is based on the events that took place on May 24, 2022, when a gunman opened fire in Robb Elementary School. Nineteen students were killed. One victim, ten year-old Maite Rodriguez, was only able to be identified by their green Converse sneakers. The story has been altered for creative choice and dramatic effect. Names and places have been changed to respect victims.

PRODUCTION NOTES: For stage reading purposes, the children ensemble can be read by two actors. However, if produced, the children can be played by more than two. The number of parents and officers is open to director choice. The Magnolia shoes are a white set of shoes and designs can be added to the shoes to make them a unique pair (i.e. colorful laces, painted symbols like hearts or rainbows, stickers, glitter).

CHARACTERS:

SYLVIA - Mother to Alison Reyes, wife of BENJI. Trying to cope with the loss of her daughter, in a state of trying to move on without the means of knowing how

BENJI - Father to Alison Reyes, Husband to SYLVIA. Looks on the positive side, but internally struggling. As a husband, he does whatever he can

MERDICE - Teacher to the nineteen children that lost their lives. She sees the good in the world, and children as her light

OFFICER RUSSO - Investigative officer assisting in the tragedy of Eureka Elementary School. He's accommodated to scenarios like this, but Eureka still eats at him

ENSEMBLE:

Children (1-5) - Energetic, concerned only with their short-lived interests

Parents - Struck with varying stages of grief, some fighting to know the status of their child, others silently grim

Officers - Overworked, burdened with attempting to get as much information to parents as possible

SETTING: Present day, the town of Goldfield.

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Scene 1

(A girl's bedroom. Along the floor, there are boxes labeled "Alison's toys". The zebra print bed at center has been nicely made. The room hasn't had anyone fill it in a while. At the very end of the bed, a pair of Magnolia shoes are propped up against each other facing forward. SYLVIA sits at the center of the room. She looks around the room reminiscing, then sets her eyes on the shoes. She gently sits down on the bed next to them so as not to disturb them. There's a knock at the bedroom door.)

BENJI

Sylvia? You in there?

SYLVIA

Yeah.

(BENJI opens the door. He has a bag in his hand.)

BENJI

Thought you'd be in here. I brought you some food. I tried out a new place this time, so I just got what I thought you would like.

(SYLVIA looks in the bag.)

SYLVIA

You know fried pickles are the key to my heart.

(She ruffles in the bag some more.)

SYLVIA

Oh...no ranch.

(BENJI pulls out a cup of ranch he was carrying.)

SYLVIA

I love you.

(BENJI sits on the bed, but doesn't move the shoes. He's on the opposite side of SYLVIA, almost as if an invisible force is keeping them apart, or preventing him from moving the shoes.)

BENJI

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You remember when we painted this room for the first time?

SYLVIA

I vaguely recall you couldn't tell the difference between magenta and coral pink.

BENJI

They're the same color!

SYLVIA

They are not!

BENJI

Who comes up with the names for these things anyway? I mean-

SYLVIA

People who aren't colorblind, obviously.

BENJI

Oh come on, ballet slipper?? That's not a color, they're just pulling stuff out of their ass at that point.

SYLVIA

Benji, do you even know what shade you eventually grabbed?

BENJI

I know it was pink.

SYLVIA

Oh my god. Well, it looks nice. Alison liked it anyway and that's all that matters to me.

BENJI

Her little body couldn't contain all her excitement when she saw it. *(Beat.)* What are we going to do with this room?

SYLVIA

I don't want to think about that right now.

BENJI

That's okay. We'll figure it out together. I'm about to head to Neo Leaf and pick up some flowers, you ready to go?

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SYLVIA

Just... give me a second.

BENJI

Alright, I'll be out in the car.

(He heads to the door to leave, then stops.)

BENJI

I love you.

SYLVIA

I love you too.

(BENJI leaves. He opens the door a second later.)

BENJI

Don't eat all the pickles, I still kinda want some.

(SYLVIA laughs. BENJI leaves again. Glancing around the room one more time, she begins to leave as well, but looks back at the bed. She walks over to the shoes, laying a hand on them.)

SYLVIA

Happy birthday, sweetie.

(SYLVIA exits.)

Scene 2

(An elementary school. In front, a sign reading "Eureka Elementary School", there are memorial crosses. A mass of Marigolds and other vibrant flowers have been placed on them. A willow tree nearly overshadows the memorial, covering the school sign in shade. BENJI and SYLVIA lie in front of a cross that reads "ALISON REYES". They sit there for a while before BENJI gets up.)

SYLVIA

Can I stay here for a second?

BENJI

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Take as long as you need.

(BENJI kisses SYLVIA on the forehead and exits. Shortly after, MERDICE enters in a sling.)

MERDICE
Mrs. Reyes?

SYLVIA
Mrs. Price -- are you okay?

MERDICE
I'm alright. The doctors told me it was nothing major but they still wanted to keep me for a while. In the hospital, I was more worried about my students than anything else. This is the first time after my release that I was able to see them.

SYLVIA
I'm so sorry. Mrs. Price-

MERDICE
You can call me Merdice.

SYLVIA
Right. Merdice, I appreciate all the things you did for my daughter. You were her favorite teacher. *(Beat.)* Losing a child is so hard. I still go into Alison's room and hope that she's there, that maybe by some miracle it was all a bad dream. I can't imagine what it's like to lose all-

MERDICE
You spent eight years of your life raising Alison. I taught her for one. I by no means wish to equate my heartache to yours as a parent. But I do connect heavily with my students. They're my kids for as long as I have them and even after they leave me. They deserved so much more. And I wish I could have traded my life for theirs.

SYLVIA
They're in a better place.

MERDICE
I loved watching the children play. I don't think anything in the world could compare to the bliss that they emulated then. Sometimes they would come to me and ask for different things they could play with. One day it could have been a football, the next day hula hoops.

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(Children run on stage to play around the memorial site, some even weaving in and out of the crosses. CHILD 1 gets ready to throw a football.)

CHILD 1

Go far!!

CHILD 3

Throw it! Throw it!

CHILD 2

Let me backup first!

(CHILD 1 throws the football.)

CHILD 2

You threw it too far!

CHILD 3

Aw, it went into the road.

CHILD 1

I'll get it!

MERDICE

Do not! I'll go get it.

(Looking at where the football went.)

MERDICE

Oh. It went farther than I thought. Uh... Who wants to play freeze tag?

(The children run off in different directions to play freeze tag. MERDICE smiles after them.)

SYLVIA

Children really are something.

MERDICE

The district didn't fund us enough to my liking, so I ended up bringing whatever the children asked for with my own money. It didn't matter to me.

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SYLVIA

It's a shame you have to make that sacrifice.

MERDICE

Well, happiness is what you make it. As long as they were happy, I was.

SYLVIA

Did you always want to be a teacher?

MERDICE

I don't think there was ever a time when I didn't want to be one.

SYLVIA

So what inspired you?

MERDICE

I had a high school teacher, Mrs. Hudson. To me, she was an angel. Never saw her without a smile on her face. Growing up I didn't really have...the best of parents. They were overbearing, strict, mean, loud, total pieces of--sorry, I don't mean to rant-

SYLVIA

It's okay, go on.

MERDICE

All right..well...my father was an alcoholic, but my mother didn't help. Mrs. Hudson knew and did the best she could to help me. Other than that, there wasn't much else she could do. One day, after a particularly bad night, I went to school with bruises that I covered up with a hoodie. The hoodie didn't work as planned and she saw the bruises that the sleeve was supposed to cover. Mrs. Hudson immediately caught wind of what happened. I didn't have any other family to take me in or no means of supporting myself at 16 and so...she offered me a place to stay until I could get my feet on the ground. My parents didn't care. They wanted to kick me out for as long as I could remember. When I think of a good teacher, I think of her.

SYLVIA

Sounds like she was wonderful.

MERDICE

I chose this career because I was willing to do anything for my kids. I guess I didn't truly know what anything meant.

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SYLVIA

I've never felt any form of anger in my life. Hearing that the shooter was still in custody... I wanted to kill him. I felt so guilty. No one, in my eyes, deserves to die. Yet at that point, I thought he should have.

(SYLVIA is nearly overcome with emotion. MERDICE comforts her.)

MERDICE

It's okay.

Scene 3

(SYLVIA inhales and exhales. She's now at the city's civic center reliving the past. Families surround her, strangled by the silence of grief. BENJI enters as MERDICE leaves. SYLVIA continues to try and slow her breathing. He puts his hand on her shoulder.)

BENJI

They opened a table for verification. They say they have photos available for victim identification.

SYLVIA

You don't think she's going to be in any of them, do you?

BENJI

No, she'll be okay. We have to check, though.

SYLVIA

I don't want to.

BENJI

Neither do I. But we have to.

(SYLVIA reluctantly agrees and goes with BENJI. They arrive at a table with multiple officers speaking with parents. Some are crying for the loss of their child.)

OFFICER RUSSO

Name?

SYLVIA

Sylvia and Benji Reyes.

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OFFICER RUSSO

Okay. I'm Officer Russo. Our team is unfortunately limited on our normal methods of DNA sampling or dental records. While proceeding with records, the department cannot identify any victims at this time. Right here, I have photos taken inside the school of the nineteen victims. I need you to tell me if you recognize your child.

(OFFICER RUSSO presents the photos. SYLVIA and BENJI react to the photos of the different children, but don't see Alison in any of them.)

SYLVIA

No, not that one.

OFFICER RUSSO

There's also a victim who was unrecognizable in the face due to their wounds. Do you recognize anything about this victim?

(OFFICER RUSSO presents the photo. SYLVIA recoils.)

SYLVIA

No--

BENJI

Those are her shoes.

SYLVIA

Oh my god.

Scene 4

(SYLVIA sobs into BENJI's shoulder. After a moment, the lights dim on the two as MERDICE enters.)

MERDICE

338,000. The number of children that experienced gun violence after Columbine.

(BENJI and SYLVIA gather beside MERDICE.)

BENJI

338,000. Our daughter, Alison, is now a part of that number.

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SYLVIA

But I don't care about that number. Because our daughter should not be another fucking statistic.
Our children are not your statistic.

MERDICE

When I heard about Sandy Hook, I threw up in the sink. Doesn't that sound like such an absurd
reaction to have today?

SYLVIA

Do people even know how much their fathers and mothers loved them? If they did, then why are
we still here? Why are we still reliving a generational trauma?

BENJI

Alison Reyes was eight years old when she was shot and killed in Eureka Elementary School.

MERDICE

She wanted to be a teacher to help the lives of others because she thought her teachers were the
best people in the world. I'd like to say that they were, but I can't help but think that if her
teachers were the best people in the world, then wouldn't she still be alive?

SYLVIA

Alison on family movie nights constantly suggested we watched Rango. By the third time, her
father and I said she should pick something else, and yet we still ended up watching Rango. She
was a stubborn girl, but that stubbornness was always accompanied by her contagious smile. I
loved her so much.

BENJI

Whenever I dropped her off at school, a fear was constantly evoked inside of me. Because every
parent unfortunately knows there is a risk that something could happen to their child, especially
in an American school. And every parent also tries to reassure themselves that it could never
happen to their child.

SYLVIA AND BENJI

But then it happened to ours.

MERDICE

(Holding up Alison's shoes) Alison was identified by her favorite pair of shoes. Magnolia
Cloudwalkers. The shoes she wore to school everyday.

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SYLVIA

And yet nothing has been done! I just want to tell someone, anyone -- please, do something!

MERDICE

In class, I'd love to ask the question "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Then, I'd see their faces light up. Any child, if they put their minds to it, can achieve anything.

(MERDICE gives the shoes to SYLVIA.)

BENJI

We've made sure our daughter's story is heard. I've accompanied Sylvia to nearly every level of government. At this point, I'm not sure there's a government that hasn't seen us.

SYLVIA

And I've repeated the same thing to all of them: "Walk a mile in these shoes. Realize what it's like to be a child in America. I want you to know what these children wanted to be."

(Children gather around various parts of the stage. They exuberate.)

CHILD 1

A scientist!

CHILD 2

A vet!

CHILD 3

A teacher!

CHILD 4

A marine biologist!

CHILD 5

An adult.

ALL CHILDREN

Alive.