



SHE LOVED TO DRAW

V3

A short play by Henry Tydeman

3 Characters

MAUDE

FLORENCE

WOMAN AT THE END

SYNOPSIS

Two women, Maude and Florence, meet on a railway station platform. They politely discuss the weather and the younger woman's profession (she's a children's illustrator). They tell stories about their lives and find they both have memories of balmy late summers.

They meet again the next day in the same place and discuss the power of children's imaginations in connection with Florence's job. Maude reminisces about reading stories to her own children when they were young, and Florence in turn is reminded of her own youth. There is a vague similarity between the two women's reminiscences. Maude is momentarily shocked when Florence says the name of her favourite childhood book.

On the third day Maude approaches Florence on the platform, clearly excited, and reveals that when she was a young mother she used to imagine having a girl, and that the girl she imagined was just like Florence: the same name, a passion for art etc. Maude seems almost to suggest that she thinks Florence is the daughter she imagined, 'all grown up'. Unnerved, Florence exits. Maude is left alone on the bench, seemingly still confident that 'she'll come round [...] I'll catch her tomorrow.'

Setting: A railway platform. Occasional background sounds of trains, announcements and bustling people.

Day 1

MAUDE: Right...

She looks up at the clock

... fifteen minutes to wait. I'll sit on this bench.

MAUDE: Ah! That makes a difference. There you go Maude, sounding like an old person again. Sounding like your mother. It's pathetic. Get a hold of yourself for God's sake. There should be miles and miles left in these legs. Oh, why do they ache? They really shouldn't. I'm not old... not yet. Perhaps I should ask someone about it. A medical professional. But... what if they find nothing? 'A clean bill of health, Mrs Evans. You're just... getting on a bit. It's nothing to be ashamed of.' Bugger!

She quickly puts her hand to her mouth and chuckles at herself and sighs

Oh, it's nice to rest them all the same.

Enter Florence.

FLORENCE : Excuse me. Do you mind if I sit down?

MAUDE: No, not at all.

Florence sits.

FLORENCE : Thank you.

Pause.

MAUDE: It's a little cold today isn't it. For this time of year. You don't expect there to be a chill like this. It's very disappointing.

FLORENCE : Absolutely! It's barely autumn. What happened to that late summer heatwave? That's what I want to know.

MAUDE: A good question, my dear.

FLORENCE : It's funny, I remember late summer heatwaves from my childhood. Back to school in September and it was hotter than anything. Even in October... sometimes... the air was warm. You didn't have to wear a jacket in the park! They don't seem to happen like that anymore. Or perhaps it's just rose-tinted spectacles on my part. Nostalgia...

MAUDE: Ah, there's nothing wrong with a little nostalgia. At my age I... I find I can't help but indulge in it... I remember late summers like that too. Just as you described. Nothing rose-tinted about it, my dear! I'm Maude, by the way.

FLORENCE : Oh, I'm Florence.

MAUDE: *(a little taken aback at something)*
Florence! That's... well, that's a lovely name. I always loved that name.

FLORENCE : That's nice of you to say.

MAUDE: Where are you going, Florence?

FLORENCE : I'm working this afternoon in town.

MAUDE: What do you do?

FLORENCE : I'm an illustrator, actually. I draw pictures for children's books.

MAUDE: How lovely! You're... an artist! How wonderful!
(wistfully) Wonderful...

FLORENCE : We're working on something new. A fantasy land, I think it is.

MAUDE: And you draw for children? That must be, well, very rewarding. Young children are... very special, aren't they. I always thought.

FLORENCE : You're right.

MAUDE: With their... imaginations. You can't quite believe it, can you, the things they think up! It's a marvel.

FLORENCE : Do you have children?

MAUDE: Ah, three boys. All grown-up of course. Your sort of age I should think. They loved being read to. Their little faces as they listened. You've reminded me, actually, of all the books we had, with... beautiful pictures. A children's book should always have pictures, I remember thinking that. I even thought the artists deserved more credit than they used to get. Their names often weren't even on the cover! Yet they were easily as important as the writer. Don't you agree? Oh, you're too modest to say so, I know. But... well, the stories were nothing without the pictures, nothing. I always thought that...

MAUDE: I even thought the artists deserved more credit than they used to get. Their names often weren't even on the cover! Yet they were easily as important as the writer. Don't you agree? Oh, you're too modest to say so, I know. But... well, the stories were nothing without the pictures, nothing. I always thought that...

FLORENCE : We like to think of it as a collaboration. Between us and the writers. We try to bring their ideas to life on the page. It seems to work, at any rate. Most of the time they like what we do.

MAUDE: I'd forgotten all about it, I must say. All those things I used to think about when the boys were young. So many things. There I go getting all nostalgic again, eh Florence! I just can't help it, see?

FLORENCE : There's nothing wrong with nostalgia, Maude. You said so yourself!

MAUDE: Yes... so I did.

The sound of a train leaving the station marks the end of the scene.

Day 2:

The railway platform.

MAUDE: *(visibly in more pain than DAY 1)*
Oh, my legs! If I can just get to that bench.
Hello, do you mind if... Oh, it's you!

FLORENCE : Maude! How are you? Sit down.

MAUDE: Thank you.

She sits.

MAUDE: Ah, that's better. Good to see you again!

FLORENCE : Yes, you too.

MAUDE: More drawing today, is it? The fantasy world?

FLORENCE : That's right!

MAUDE: What is it, witches and wizards? That sort of thing?

FLORENCE : More or less! There's often some magic... thing, isn't there, in children's stories? Almost always, in fact. They just love magic, don't they!

MAUDE: It's their imaginations, my dear. Far more... powerful than any grown-up's.

FLORENCE : *(reflective)* Yes... that's it.

MAUDE: As we grow up we gain knowledge, and skills, and... experience. But what we lose is our power of imagination. Don't you think? Our knack for creating people, and whole worlds, in our heads, out of nothing, pure... imagination. Though perhaps... someone like you, in your line of work, perhaps you've retained something of that... spark. What a wonderful thing to be, a children's illustrator! Wonderful...

Pause

FLORENCE : What you said the other day, about reading books to your little boys... it was beautiful.

MAUDE: Ah, happy days!

FLORENCE : To be honest... I've thought about it a lot. It's like a painting, in my head. The colours are so... clear.

MAUDE: You really are an artist, aren't you!

FLORENCE : My mother read to me. Just the same as you and your boys. And she'd stop at all the pictures and show me because she knew I loved them so much... She'd always wait for me to finish looking before reading on. Often it was minutes at a time, in silence, me just... looking. At a single picture.

MAUDE: *(remembering)* Yes... yes that's the way I did it. Without the pictures, the story's nothing. *Nothing.*

FLORENCE : It's funny, I don't tend to think about the past that much. I'm too busy. But talking to you, Maude... well, it brings it all back. *I'm all... nostalgic as well now!*

MAUDE: You see... it's inevitable!
(pause) I'm so glad we met, Florence. It feels... like we're on the same page, somehow.

FLORENCE : *(remembering)* We're Going on a Bear Hunt...

MAUDE: *(gasps)* What?

FLORENCE : We're Going on a Bear Hunt. That was always my favourite book. When I was little. Do you know it?

MAUDE: *(flustered)* But... that was... *(regains composure) (to herself)* No, it doesn't matter. It means nothing.
(to Florence) Er, that's nice. Yes, I've heard that's a good one.

FLORENCE : It was brilliant. I always asked for the one about the bear hunt. Again and again.

MAUDE: Again and again...

End scene.

Day 3:

The platform. Maude approaches the bench, clearly in more pain than the day before.

FLORENCE : Maude!

MAUDE: *(a little out of breath)* Florence... I-

FLORENCE : Sit down! Rest your legs.

She sits.

MAUDE: *(flustered)* Florence, I... I've been thinking about you.

FLORENCE : What?

MAUDE: I can't help it. There's something I want to say. I have to.

FLORENCE : Maude, is something wrong?

MAUDE: No, no. It's just... Oh, it'll sound strange though...

FLORENCE : Don't be ridiculous. Just... try to calm down. Now, what is it?

MAUDE: It's... silly, really. Perhaps I shouldn't-

FLORENCE: For goodness' sake, just say it!

MAUDE: Just say it, yes. Yes, of course. Alright. Florence...
I loved my boys. I still love them, naturally.
They mean... everything to me.
(pause) And yet... I always wanted a little girl.
I hoped... for a little girl.

She puts her hand on Florence's knee

FLORENCE: *(uneasy)* Maude, I'm not sure-

MAUDE: And sometimes I would... imagine what she'd be like.
I would daydream and... picture her. I knew everything
about her, of course. And... *(pause)* and who she'd
grow up to be. She loved... to draw.

*Maude touches Florence's hair. Florence backs away, disturbed.
Maude continues speaking, undaunted.*

MAUDE: She dreamed of becoming an artist, from the moment she laid eyes on those books with all the pictures. The one about the cave... and the bear. And... I would have named her... Florence. I always loved that name.
(pause) And now look at you! All grown up...

FLORENCE: *(agitated)* Please, Maude. Stop it. You're being strange. Please, just... stop.

MAUDE: Oh, I knew you'd say that. I know how it seems my dear. But think about it... The book, the pictures, the... bear hunt. And all the things I used to... imagine. About my daughter. I sat up at night and pictured it all for years and years... And now you're here! My very own.
(pause) It's you, Florence. Isn't it. It's you.

FLORENCE: I've got to go. I'm sorry Maude. Honestly, I am. You're such a... lovely person. It's just... I can't... I need to go.

Exit Florence.

MAUDE: *(calling out)* No, please. Stay! Florence! Florence!
(pause) Oh, there she goes.
(pause) Ah, she'll come round. They always do. I'll catch her tomorrow.
(pause) I didn't know you had it in you, Maude. What... imagination! What... powers of visualisation! I didn't know it was possible.
(pause) Yes, my legs might ache like an old person's. But my mind... Oh, I am thankful for my mind.
(quietly) My darling... My little darling...

Maude sits alone for a moment (ten seconds?), apparently daydreaming.

Enter another woman who is a little flustered, looking for somewhere to sit.

WOMAN: Excuse me. Is there anyone sitting here?

MAUDE: No, no. Please...

Maude motions to the woman to sit. She sits.

Pause.

MAUDE: It is cold, isn't it! For the time of year. Wouldn't you say...?

Maude looks directly at the woman. They look at each other?

END