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Maddie and Eleanor

By

MARTHA KING DE SILVA

Dramatic Publishing Company

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(MADDIE AND ELEANOR)

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Maddie and Eleanor received its world premiere at The Growing Stage—The Children’s Theatre of New Jersey on Feb. 3, 2023.

CAST:

Maddie Leonard Brianna Martinez
Eleanor Roosevelt Lisa G. Andreacchi
Karen Belinda Diaz-Perez
Anna / Sophia Jeorgi Smith
Young Man / Mr. Becker / Others Donald Danford
Josh / Others Davis Cameron Lemley
Chloe / Others Nicole DeLuca

PRODUCTION:

Director Stephen L. Fredericks
Costume Design Lori B. Lawrence
Set and Lighting Design Stephen L. Fredericks
Projections Design David O’Neill
Stage Management Becky Nitka

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am eternally grateful to my beloved playwriting mentor, Ernie Joselovitz, and the members of the Washington, D.C., Playwrights Forum for their valuable feedback on early drafts of this play.

Thank you to the talented team at The Growing Stage—Steve Fredericks, Lori Lawrence and Danny Campos—for believing in *Maddie and Eleanor* and to the generous and gifted cast for bringing it to life.

Finally, I extend my warmest appreciation to Jalaiah Harmon as the creator of the Renegade dance.

Maddie and Eleanor

CHARACTERS

MADDIE LEONARD: 9 years old.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT: Wife of the 32nd president of the United States.

JOSH: Maddie's classmate and torturer.

KAREN: Maddie's mom.

CHLOE: Maddie's ex-best friend.

MR. BECKER: Maddie's teacher.

YOUNG MAN: Eleanor Roosevelt's assistant.

ANNA: Eleanor's daughter.

SOPHIA: The new girl in Maddie's class.

OTHERS: Radio Announcer, Ad Women 1-4, Ad Voices 1-3, Citizen, Sponsor Man, Apple Rep 1-2, Apple Menu.

SETTING: A present-day small suburban town where Maddie Leonard lives and goes to school. Also, the White House during Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency.

CASTING/DOUBLING: All of the characters may be cast individually, but most may also be doubled with other roles. The only characters who cannot double and should be cast individually are MADDIE and ELEANOR.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the presidency of her husband, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Mrs. Roosevelt frequently took to the radio airwaves (in total nearly 300 times) to speak on a number of topics both domestic and global.

Mrs. Roosevelt's broadcasts were typically during the day, and her listeners were often women (and sometimes her topics were specifically about the responsibilities of women and girls alike). The advertisers for her broadcasts ranged from coffee companies to the makers of cold cream. Those advertisements alone provide an interesting glimpse into what life was like for women during that period.

NOTE: While the historical references in this play are truthful, *Maddie and Eleanor* is an entirely fictional work.

TECHNOLOGY REFERENCES

Producers are encouraged to update the present-day technology and social media references as needed.

Maddie and Eleanor

ACT I

Scene 1

(KAREN is home, multitasking between the computer and phone. It is three o'clock. She opens the front door.

MADDIE LEONARD enters.)

KAREN *(to MADDIE)* Hey! How was your first day of school?

(MADDIE stomps past her.)

MADDIE. Horrible.

KAREN. What happened? And where's Chloe? I thought you were walking home together—?

MADDIE. We're not speaking.

KAREN. What? Why?

MADDIE. She's friends with Emma now.

KAREN. Who's Emma?

MADDIE. Chloe's friend from her pool. She's new.

KAREN. Chloe can't have two friends?

MADDIE. It doesn't work that way.

KAREN. Oh, for heaven's sake—

MADDIE. I told you that I wanted to join Chloe's pool. I told you.

KAREN. Rose Valley is a perfectly good—

MADDIE. Nobody goes to Rose Valley. Nobody!

KAREN. OK, well next year—

MADDIE. It's too late!

KAREN (*relenting*). OK.

(*Silence.*)

KAREN (*cont'd*). There's yogurt in the fridge if you want a snack—

MADDIE. And that's the other thing. I'm going on a diet.

KAREN. A *diet*?

MADDIE. Josh Latham said I was fat—

KAREN. WHAT?! WHEN?!

MADDIE. In the lunchroom. First, he made fun of my sandwich.

(*JOSH appears.*)

JOSH. Fluffernutters?? Seriously? Who eats fluffernutters?

MADDIE. And then, when he thought I couldn't hear him, he called me "Fatty Maddie."

JOSH (*to CHLOE, who appears beside him*). Fatty Maddie should tell her mom to make her salads for lunch.

(*CHLOE laughs at this.*)

KAREN. I'm calling Mrs. Latham.

MADDIE. No, Mom. You can't. You'll just make it worse.

KAREN. Well then, I'm calling Mr. Becker. He should know what goes on in his classroom—

MADDIE. Mom, NO. PLEASE. That's even worse! You have to promise.

KAREN. He shouldn't talk to you like that!

MADDIE. PROMISE!

KAREN. OK. I promise.

(A beat.)

MADDIE. Am I fat?

(A beat.)

KAREN. Sweetheart. You're just in a stocky phase. I was the same way when I was nine. You'll grow out of it.

MADDIE. I knew it. I'm fat. Why didn't you tell me?

KAREN. Stop this. Look at me. LOOK AT ME. If you want to eat healthier, we can do that, OK? And if you want to get a little more exercise, we can do that too. But you're not fat, and you're not dieting. Are we clear?

(MADDIE is silent.)

KAREN *(cont'd)*. Maddie?

MADDIE. We're clear.

(Silence.)

KAREN. Maybe I should sign you up for soccer. You can meet some other kids—

MADDIE. Mom. NO. Not *soccer*.

KAREN. Well, there must be some other kids you can be friends with in class—

MADDIE. Nope. There's no one.

KAREN *(sighs; this is how it's going to go)*. OK.

MADDIE. Can I play with my iPhone?

KAREN. Don't you have homework?

MADDIE. No, Mom. I never have homework the first day of school.

KAREN. OK. But just for a half hour. I don't want you on that thing too long. It's not good for you.

(MADDIE heads to her room. She is crying.)

MADDIE. I hate my life.

(She hurls her backpack against the wall. It hits the edge of her nightstand where her iPhone sits. The iPhone flies to the floor.)

MADDIE *(cont'd)*. Oh, no! Oh, no, oh, no!

(She grabs the iPhone; it now has a giant crack in it. We may see the face of the iPhone projected on an upstage screen. It is blank.)

MADDIE *(cont'd)*. Shoot! *(Wailing.)* MOOOOOOOOOOM!

(KAREN enters.)

KAREN. Honey, I really need to get some work—

MADDIE. Lookit!

(She shoves the iPhone in KAREN's face.)

KAREN. How did that happen?

MADDIE. It fell off my nightstand. *(A beat.)* When I threw my backpack.

KAREN. Oh, Maddie.

MADDIE. It's cracked!

KAREN. This is what happens. You have to take care of your things.

MADDIE. I do take care of my things.

KAREN. Throwing your backpack is taking care of your things? Give it to me.

(MADDIE does. KAREN attempts to press the home button. No use.)

KAREN *(cont'd)*. Do you know how much these things cost?

MADDIE. A lot.

KAREN. I think it's dead.

MADDIE *(wailing)*. Mom!

KAREN. I told your father I didn't want you to get one. That you were too young—

MADDIE. Everybody has iPhones, Mom.

(A beat.)

MADDIE *(cont'd)*. Can we get it fixed do you think?

KAREN. I don't know. Let your father deal with it.

MADDIE. Great. Now I don't have anything to do!

KAREN. Why don't you read a book? One of your Nancy Drews? Or go out and play?

MADDIE. Can I just be alone please?

(KAREN exits. MADDIE curls up in her bed.

On another part of the stage, in another era, a dignified woman, ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, seats herself at a microphone. YOUNG MAN is with her.

Suddenly, a strange noise emanates from MADDIE's iPhone. She goes to retrieve it.)

MADDIE. What the—?

(Her iPhone home screen, which had been black, suddenly displays a new app icon—a picture of Eleanor Roosevelt. The screen may be projected behind MADDIE.)

MADDIE *(cont'd)*. Hey, Mom—? Can you come in here?

(KAREN enters.)

KAREN. What now?

(MADDIE shoves the iPhone in her face; KAREN looks.)

KAREN *(cont'd)*. Well, look at that.

MADDIE. Who is she?

KAREN. That's Eleanor Roosevelt.

MADDIE. Who's that??

KAREN. She was the wife of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

MADDIE. Who's *that*?

KAREN. He was president of the United States. Back in the 1930s. And the 1940s. A long time ago.

MADDIE. Why is she on my iPhone?

KAREN. I have no idea. It must a PBS icon. Or the History Channel.

MADDIE. I don't want the History Channel. I want Minecraft.

KAREN. Maybe you could learn something.

MADDIE. I don't want to learn something.

(KAREN exits.)

MADDIE *(cont'd)*. Stupid thing!

(She taps the icon and hears static coming from the phone, almost like the tuning of a radio.)

We are magically transported to the year 1934. We see a headline, "ROOSEVELT ENDORSES JOB INSURANCE ACT, March 24, 1934."

MADDIE and ELEANOR do not see each other; they only hear each other.)

YOUNG MAN (*perhaps with a touch of condescension*). Mrs. Roosevelt, in five minutes, we'll be on the air. (*He points to the "On Air" sign.*) We'll begin with a quick commercial, and then we'll introduce you. Do you have any questions?

ELEANOR. No. I don't think so.

YOUNG MAN. Do you need anything?

ELEANOR. A glass of water if you don't mind.

YOUNG MAN. Can we get Mrs. Roosevelt a glass of water, please?

MADDIE. Hello?

ELEANOR (*to YOUNG MAN*). Did you hear that?

YOUNG MAN. Hear what, Mrs. Roosevelt?

ELEANOR. I thought I heard a little girl's voice.

YOUNG MAN. I didn't hear anything. (*Very serious.*) I promise you, ma'am, I wouldn't let any intruders into this room. Not even a child.

ELEANOR. No, no, I didn't mean that. I just. Never mind. (*She laughs uncertainly.*) I must be hearing things, that's all.

YOUNG MAN. Yes, ma'am!

(He exits.)

MADDIE (*repeats*). Hello? Who's there?

ELEANOR (*uncertain, hearing MADDIE's voice, speaks into the microphone*). Hello?

(*A beat.*)

ELEANOR (*cont'd*). Who is this?

MADDIE. This is Maddie Leonard. Is this the History Channel?

ELEANOR. I don't know what that is, my dear. (*Clarifying.*)

This is Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

MADDIE. Seriously?

ELEANOR. Very seriously.

MADDIE. You're alive?

ELEANOR (*laughing*). Yes. I'm quite alive.

MADDIE. Where are you?

ELEANOR. I'm in the White House. Where are you??

MADDIE. I'm in *my* house.

(*Silence, as they both try to figure this out.*)

ELEANOR. Maddie. Short for Madeline?

MADDIE. Short for Madison.

ELEANOR. Like James Madison?

MADDIE. Who's that?

ELEANOR. He was a president of the United States.

MADDIE (*to herself*). Figures!

ELEANOR. How old are you, Maddie?

MADDIE. Nine. How old are *you*?

ELEANOR (*taken aback*). Fifty. Do you always talk this way to adults?

MADDIE. Yeah, pretty much. Sorry.

ELEANOR (*thinking*). Nine, hm?

MADDIE (*nodding to the phone*). Yeah.

ELEANOR. Fourth grade?

MADDIE. Uh-huh.

ELEANOR (*groaning*). What an awful year.

MADDIE (*finally interested*). It is! The worst.

ELEANOR. I have a hard time remembering a year as bad as when I was nine.

YOUNG MAN (*re-entering*). One minute, Mrs. Roosevelt!

ELEANOR (*to YOUNG MAN*). Thank you.

(*A RADIO ANNOUNCER appears.*)

RADIO ANNOUNCER. Do you feel flabby?

(*MADDIE looks self-consciously at her stomach.*)

RADIO ANNOUNCER (*cont'd*). Do you wish you could magically turn your body back to what it was ten years ago? With the Perfolastic perforated rubber reducing girdle, you can lose up to three inches from your waist in just ten days, or your money back! Just ask Mrs. David Richardson from New York City, New York.

(*AD WOMAN 1, a young and attractive woman, appears.*)

AD WOMAN 1. My Perfolastic perforated rubber reducing girdle is the perfect addition to my wardrobe. I feel pretty and slender again! And my husband could not be happier with my transformation.

ELEANOR. I'm afraid I have to go. It was nice speaking with you, Maddie.

YOUNG MAN (*counting*). And five, four—

MADDIE. Wait a minute. What about—

RADIO ANNOUNCER. And now, from the White House, we bring you Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt.

(The “On Air” sign lights up and simultaneously disconnects their talking.)

ELEANOR. Good afternoon. Word comes to us that the women scientists are not finding it any too easy to get jobs. Some employers say they would rather have a second-rate man, than a first-rate woman ...

(ELEANOR’s speech fades out. MADDIE is confused.)

MADDIE. Hello?

(But the connection is lost. Resigned, she presses the icon on her home screen and the connection stops. ELEANOR’s picture disappears from the screen behind.)

Scene 2

(The next morning.

The door to MADDIE’s house opens just as CHLOE walks up the street.)

KAREN. Good morning, Chloe! How was your summer?

CHLOE *(guiltily)*. Morning, Mrs. Leonard. It was good.

KAREN *(to MADDIE)*. Look who it is!

(She pushes MADDIE toward CHLOE.)

MADDIE *(giving her mother a dark look, under her breath)*.

Did you call Chloe’s mom?

KAREN *(ignoring her)*. Have a good day, girls! Learn lots!

(She shuts the door. CHLOE reluctantly slows down and walks silently with MADDIE.)

CHLOE. Hi.

MADDIE. Hi.

CHLOE. I'm meeting Emma at the corner.

MADDIE. OK.

CHLOE. I'm just telling you.

MADDIE. OK. Whatever. *(Beat. She tries to connect.)* You know what? I broke my iPhone yesterday and the weirdest thing happened. This picture of Eleanor Roosevelt popped up. She was a first lady a long time ago.

CHLOE *(half-listening)*. Uh-huh.

MADDIE. At first, Mom thought it was an app from the History Channel or PBS or—

CHLOE *(spots Emma in the distance offstage)*. Emma!

(She runs ahead, leaving MADDIE behind.)

MADDIE. Wait up—

(They ignore her. She sighs. The school is in the distance. Maybe we hear a school bell. And then JOSH comes up behind MADDIE, nearly knocking her over with his Razor scooter. He sticks his tongue out.)

MADDIE *(cont'd)*. Hey! Watch it!

(MR. BECKER comes out.)

JOSH. You watch it, Fatty Maddie—

MR. BECKER. Hey!

JOSH *(all formal)*. Good morning, Mr. Becker.

MR. BECKER. Glad you have a great new Razor, Josh, but if you can't drive it properly, you can't bring it to school.