

An Incident Of Near International Proportions

A One Act Play

written between 14th and 17th December 2016
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Bob Davidson
2016

An Incident Of Near International Proportions - Bob Davidson

Cast

CHARLOTTE - the slightly senior of two middle aged, slightly eccentric sisters.

MAUDE - the slightly junior of two middle aged, slightly eccentric sisters.

Running time 30 minutes.

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The curtain opens on a fairly cluttered set. No specific theme to the junk, just a collection of all sorts of different oddball things... There is also a couple of comfy chairs or maybe a small sofa and maybe a coffee table. On closer inspection it would appear to be the inside of a railway carriage, going by the windows and the tall railway carriage style door which is upstage, centre... CHARLOTTE enters from stage right carrying a tray of tea things - teapot, cups etc...

CHARLOTTE

Maude!.. Maude? Are you there? *(she sniffs the air suspiciously and shouts a little louder)* Maude!

MAUDE
(Off stage)

I'm in the garden...

CHARLOTTE
(shouting slightly)

I've made tea, dear...

MAUDE

Good oh!

CHARLOTTE

...and there's battenburg...

MAUDE

Okay, in in a tick...

CHARLOTTE places the tray on the small coffee table and pours two cups of tea. She takes a slice of cake and sits down, quite content. After a few moments MAUDE enters through the carriage door, wearing amongst other things, huge gauntlet style gloves...

MAUDE

Ah, big sis... you look after me so well...

CHARLOTTE

Well, it was Mummy's wish... It's Earl Grey.

MAUDE

Super... *(she peels off the gauntlets)* I've been killing wasps...

CHARLOTTE

Oh, good for you, Maude, well done...

MAUDE

They've been at the plums...

CHARLOTTE

Yes, I noticed that... Groups or singletons?

MAUDE

Groups or singletons, what dear?

CHARLOTTE

Wasps?

MAUDE

Oh, thought you meant plums for a minute, sorry dear. Hadn't a clue what you were babbling on about...

CHARLOTTE

Were you killing wasps...

MAUDE

...in groups or singletons. Gotcha now. Well... groups, obviously, if poss but singletons if the opportunity arose.

CHARLOTTE

Of course, dear... less swiping.

MAUDE

Oh, I wasn't swiping... I was using Daddy's old flame thrower...

CHARLOTTE

Ah... hence the fireproof gloves and the faint scorching smell wafting in through the window?

MAUDE

It gets into all those little nooks and crannies... all those little bolt holes where swiping's not an option...

CHARLOTTE

Well done, Maude.

MAUDE

They're quite resourceful, under pressure... wasps, I mean.

CHARLOTTE

Well I daresay you would be resourceful too if someone was coming at you with a flamethrower, dear.

MAUDE

Mmm... It's quite economic on petrol...

CHARLOTTE

That's good.

MAUDE

It's the one he got from that German man...

CHARLOTTE

Oh yes, dear I remember...

MAUDE

He was in the Afrika Korps I think...

CHARLOTTE

That's right, dear. When Daddy was a desert rat... Dennis of Arabia...

MAUDE

Dennis of Arabia... Our Daddy... Dennis of Arabia... It makes me so proud, Charlotte... I often wonder what ever happened to him...

CHARLOTTE

He's dead, dear.

MAUDE

Is he?

CHARLOTTE

Yes... you remember? You know...

MAUDE

Oh, yes of course, how could I forget? Silly me... yes of course. I remember now. Fought his way out of Normandy, across France, through Belgium and across the Rhine into the very heart of Germany.

CHARLOTTE

That's right dear. Just a pity it wasn't during the war...

MAUDE

Caused a bit of a kafuffle didn't he? It was in the sixties wasn't it?

CHARLOTTE

Sixty six... just after he bought the carriage... *(she has a gaze around her surroundings)* it wasn't just the carriage that went off the rails...

MAUDE

Then there was that awful incident with the bear.

CHARLOTTE

Don't fret yourself dear...

MAUDE

Oh, how could I have forgotten? Must have been awful...

CHARLOTTE

You'll only upset yourself.

MAUDE

His guard must have been down...

CHARLOTTE

Well he probably wasn't expecting to actually come face to face with a bear.

MAUDE

No...

CHARLOTTE

Even in a zoo...

MAUDE

'Specially not in the gents... It was a grizzly.

CHARLOTTE

It was indeed, Maude. Very grizzly indeed. Poor, poor Daddy.

MAUDE

I don't think they should have had him stuffed... the bear I mean.

CHARLOTTE

No... you're probably right, Maude... I never thought that was in the best of taste... he's in a museum now... the bear I mean.

MAUDE

Poor Daddy, Charlotte. Do you think it's what he would have wanted?

CHARLOTTE

No, I don't think so, Maude. I don't think so at all... I don't think anyone would like to be mortally mauled in a public toilet, in a Berlin zoo by an berserk grizzly bear... despite it making the headlines.

MAUDE

No... his guard was down you see. (*Rallying*) I think he'd be pleased we're still living in the carriage though, don't you think?

CHARLOTTE

That he would, dear...

MAUDE

Trust Daddy to be actually on the train when Beeching closed the line. Did a deal with the owners and bought the carriage for ten pounds...

CHARLOTTE

...ten shillings, dear...

MAUDE

Really?

CHARLOTTE

Yes... ten shillings and the price of his ticket, which was one and six...

MAUDE

...a length of platform...

CHARLOTTE

... the signal box...

MAUDE

...the booking office...

CHARLOTTE

...and ten ton of coal!

They laugh together...

MAUDE

It was probably the war, you know? It messed with chap's noodles...

CHARLOTTE

Yes, dear... awful business.

MAUDE

I was in the S.O.E. you know?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, I remember, dear...

MAUDE

Parachuted into France.

CHARLOTTE

Ye-es... well, you and I both know that isn't quite true, don't we dear? I mean you didn't exactly parachute into France did you? More fall out over Kent.

MAUDE

I was going to the loo...

CHARLOTTE

...yes I know dear... so you say... they shouldn't make all those doors on aeroplanes look so alike.

MAUDE

...next I know, I'm plummeting...

CHARLOTTE

...mmm, like a stone.

MAUDE

Like a stone... till my 'chute opened of course...

CHARLOTTE

That's right dear... just as well you put the old parachute on eh? Or you would have carried on plummeting.

MAUDE

It was quite nice... the floaty bit... just dangling there...

CHARLOTTE

Dangling, dangling, dangling... till you landed on that sheep, in Romney Marsh.

MAUDE

Well it was dark, Charlotte. I couldn't see where I was going...

CHARLOTTE

You were going down, dear. It's the only way you go on a parachute...

MAUDE

...in any case, he softened the landing impact.

CHARLOTTE

Then you spent the rest of the war hiding in a shed with the sheep who was being tended to, rather confusingly, by French refugees.

MAUDE

It was a mistake anyone could have made, dear...

CHARLOTTE

It wasn't just the rest of the war though was it? You didn't show your face till the winter of '47.

MAUDE

The winter of '47... now that *was* a cold winter...

CHARLOTTE

You came staggering out of that shed, dazed, frozen, with frost on your moustache, unaware the war had ended. Like some poor Japanese chap on a Pacific island...

MAUDE

That's right dear, I was a bit dopey. I think it must have been the cold... numbing my brain.

CHARLOTTE

Then you were promptly arrested for being a Soviet spy...

MAUDE

Silly me... I think I looked a bit like Stalin by that point. I think that's what confused them. Still, it got me recruited by M.I.6.

CHARLOTTE

... to work in their canteen.

MAUDE

Ye-es, happy days... I knew them all you know... George Smiley, James Bond, the man who later went on to do the voice of Paddington.

CHARLOTTE

Not the most auspicious of war records though, Maude, was it?

MAUDE

Well, at least I'm not frightened to talk about it, unlike some people. Get it off your chest, that's what all the doctors said. Don't bottle it up... like someone I know sitting not a hundred miles away.

CHARLOTTE

I don't bottle it up, Maude. I am sworn to secrecy. I am not allowed to say anything about my war work for two hundred years. I signed the official secrets act... although when I think about it, I think that was one of the things I wasn't supposed to tell any body. I *didn't* sign the official secrets act...

MAUDE

Too late now, Charlotte, you told me... come on, it's only me...

CHARLOTTE

No, I can't. It wouldn't be right. All I'll say... is... I knew Alan Turing well... (*she winks*) very well in fact.

MAUDE

... well, not that well, dear... surely?

CHARLOTTE

Pretty well...

MAUDE

... yes, but...

CHARLOTTE

... oh, he made an exception for me dear. He said I was the Belle of Bletchley... oh bother, I think that was one of the other things I wasn't to mention...

MAUDE

So, Charlotte, you were a code breaker? How exciting...

CHARLOTTE

No, no, us gals weren't allowed to do that sort of stuff... much too dim. It was catering mostly. Very fussy eaters some of those boffin types. Brilliant minds, but very picky at their food. Churchill wanted them fed fish all the time, you know... for their brains but they all hated fish. I think it was the bones. We used to get a delivery of cod in and I would cut them all up and try and remove all the bones from them... that earned me the title "The Bletchley Cod Breaker" ... not from Alan of course, he was lovely. And he only ate sausages, and look how clever he was so it just goes to show how little Churchill knew.

MAUDE

Daddy didn't have much time for him... Churchill.

CHARLOTTE

No, he did not... called him a pompous twit, on more than one occasion... to his face once, I think... that time he was at the palace. Claimed Churchill stole one of his sandwiches. Boiled ham and mustard or something... And apparently he had done. The whole thing was witnessed by the Queen Mother, who gave Daddy a banana as compensation. A very rare commodity in those dark days... I didn't like the war much, Maude, to be honest. I'm glad it's been over these twenty five years or so...

MAUDE

Me too. It would be awful if we had bombs raining down about our ears again...

They sit quietly with their thoughts for a moment and a distant whistling can be heard. The sound a bomb makes when dropped from an aeroplane. The sound grows louder and louder until there is quite a loud "plop" from nearby, outside...

MAUDE reacts gently and has a little listen before turning to CHARLOTTE...

MAUDE

Was that you, dear?

CHARLOTTE

Was what me, Maude?

MAUDE

That noise... just then?

CHARLOTTE

What kind of noise dear?

MAUDE

Well... a sort of... you know the noises you sometimes make, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

No?

MAUDE

Oh, you do... you know?

CHARLOTTE

Oh... those noises. Em, no, wasn't me, dear... not this time.

MAUDE

I wonder what it was.

CHARLOTTE

What did it sound like?

MAUDE

Em... a sort of...

She whistles the sound and ends by blowing a raspberry...

CHARLOTTE

Oh... how odd. Mice do you think?

MAUDE

Strange mice, if it was, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps it was your wasps, dear... re-grouping, eyeing up the plum tree for another attack.

MAUDE

I blooming well hope not... *(she grabs her gloves)* we'll see about that... I'll leave you the dishes and I will return shortly...

CHARLOTTE

Tally ho, Maude... have you plenty petrol?

MAUDE

Enough for what I need to do.

MAUDE exits through the carriage door...

CHARLOTTE

She's quite, quite mad, that woman, takes after her father...

She collects the tea things and exits stage right with the tray. She is no sooner gone when MAUDE appears at the carriage door again looking a bit shocked...

MAUDE

Charlotte! Charlotte? Oh, where is she?

MAUDE exits again and is no sooner gone when CHARLOTTE enters stage right again, sits down and begins reading. A few moments later MAUDE appears, reversing towards the carriage door and is obviously dragging something along behind her, something big and heavy...

MAUDE

(grunting with the effort)

Look what I've got, Charlotte. It wasn't the wasps... or mice...

CHARLOTTE

(still reading)

No, dear?

MAUDE

No... it was... this...

She falls back into the carriage revealing a large bomb shaped object, which is in fact obviously a bomb. A big one...

... what do you think?

CHARLOTTE

(looking round and leaping to her feet)

Oh my giddy aunt, Maude, where did you get that?

MAUDE

It's a topper eh? I found it in the garden.

CHARLOTTE

Found it?

MAUDE

Mmm... in beside the carrots...

CHARLOTTE

What, just now?

MAUDE

Yes... when I went out to finish off the wasps. Just putting my goggles on when I spies it, bold as you like sticking up at a jaunty angle. I reckon it was this chap (*she gives the bomb a hearty couple of pats*) that made the noise I heard.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, the...

She whistles the sound and blows a raspberry.

Yes, well that would figure. I wonder where it came from?

MAUDE

Can we keep it, Charlotte, do you think?

CHARLOTTE

It must have fallen off some plane or other...

MAUDE

Farnborough maybe?

CHARLOTTE

Possibly... who knows? Very odd... just as well it didn't hit the carriage roof. Might have caused the damned thing to leak again... that's all we would need, water dripping about all over the place...

MAUDE

The carrot patch was the best place for it. Couldn't have landed in a better spot. Remember? Daddy put all that sand in there for the carrots. Nice sandy soil... nice and

soft for old Bertie Bomb here to stick his nose in... eh Bertie?

She gives the bomb another couple of thumps...

CHARLOTTE

Gently does it, Maude, dear... don't want to break it...

MAUDE

Well I think we should keep it... possession is nine tenths of the law.

CHARLOTTE

Lets have a closer look...

They drag the bomb further downstage...

MAUDE

Oh, Charlotte, look... some chump has written "A - Bomb" on the side. As if we couldn't see it was "a" bomb.

CHARLOTTE

Oh yes... You don't suppose it's not actually "a" bomb, but is in fact an A Bomb? As in an Atomic Bomb?

MAUDE

(giving it a kick)

What this old thing?

CHARLOTTE

Don't kick the bomb, Maude, please, you might upset it or something... Well... it could be... it does say so on the side.

MAUDE

Well it's not very big is it?

CHARLOTTE

Well they don't have to be all that big, dear. That's the whole point. But they do still make a heck of a bang when they go off.

MAUDE

(reading from the upstage side of the bomb)

Does kiloton mean anything? Look one hundred kiloton... ring any bells?

CHARLOTTE

I think it could be an atom bomb you've got there, Maude. Well who would have thought that... in our carrot patch!

MAUDE

Should I take it back out into the garden in that case? Just to be on the safe side?

CHARLOTTE

Well, I don't suppose it would make a lot of odds, Maude. I think if it went off in the garden, or in here, you and I would still come croppers.

MAUDE

Perhaps I should try and disarm it... Oh, I remember...

She leaps up and from behind the sofa she fetches a large sledge hammer...

I remember reading about this...

CHARLOTTE

Careful, Maude, try not do anything you might regret...

MAUDE

If, you are attacked by an atomic bomb *(she swings the hammer back in line with the bomb's nose cone)* give it a short, sharp tap on the nose...

CHARLOTTE
SHARKS, MAUDE!!

MAUDE
(paused in mid swing)
Sharks? What are you on about?

CHARLOTTE
I'm pretty sure it's sharks, Maude...

MAUDE
There are no sharks here, Charlotte, only wasps and this big fella...

CHARLOTTE
I *think* it's - if you are attacked by a shark then you're supposed to give it a short, sharp biff on the hooter...

MAUDE
Sure about that?

CHARLOTTE
Pretty sure, Maude... put the hammer down, there's a dear.

MAUDE
I don't think I'd like to hit a shark... Anyway, who's going to have a hammer with them when they're swimming? You'd have to be pretty prepared... Pretty weirdly prepared if you ask me... then again, if you knew there were sharks you'd maybe take a small hammer with you... I see what you're saying... Are you sure it wasn't bombs, dear?

CHARLOTTE
Pretty sure. In any case it's not actually doing much harm at the moment is it? I don't think there's much point in thumping it one.

CHARLOTTE takes the hammer from MAUDE and is placing back behind the sofa when MAUDE leaps on the bomb and begins sawing the casing with a small hacksaw she has whipped from her pocket...

CHARLOTTE

Enough, Maude! Honestly... give me the hacksaw!

MAUDE shakes her head.

The hacksaw?

MAUDE

Shant!

CHARLOTTE out stares her and she eventually hands it over...

CHARLOTTE

I don't know what's got into you. I might have to keep you off the battenburg for a week or two. I think it could be the colouring making you a bit hyper. No more eating the pink squares, okay? What were you thinking about?

MAUDE

I just wanted to see what was underneath the outside, Charlotte... Take the casing off, see if there were any wires or stuff...

CHARLOTTE

Best not to I think, dear. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, as they say. No, I think the best plan would be to report it to the local constabulary.

MAUDE

Any excuse.

CHARLOTTE

And just what is that supposed to mean?

MAUDE

You just want to speak to Sgt Mackintosh.

CHARLOTTE

I do not want to speak to Sgt Mackintosh. My highland fling with Sgt Mackintosh is long since over as well you know.

MAUDE

You did go snorkelling with him in Loch Ness.

CHARLOTTE

I did indeed, but that was, thankfully, many years ago. I don't know which was worse, swimming about in that very cold, murky stretch of water, which was not the Caribbean at any stretch of the imagination, or having to sleep in his granny's smelly cottage on the shore. The weekend did however prove our incompatibility once and for all so that was at least something. I am not a woman of the water, Maude, and I didn't like that rubbery smell and the big flippery things.

MAUDE

He was heartbroken.

CHARLOTTE

Well that's as may be, Maude, but you know me and porridge. There's only so much of the stuff I can stand, and he was a fanatic. It was un-natural... and his granny was as bad. I can't tell you how relieved I was to get back to the sanity of this carriage.

MAUDE

But, now you want to phone him again...

CHARLOTTE

Not him. Not him in particular... I just think it's our duty, having found a small bomb...

MAUDE

...Atom bomb...

CHARLOTTE

... atom bomb, in the garden...

MAUDE

...in amongst the carrots...

CHARLOTTE

... where ever... to report it to the local Police.

MAUDE

Well, I think it's our duty to keep it!

CHARLOTTE

Why ever would you want to keep it, Maude?

MAUDE

I just do.

CHARLOTTE

Well, you've had some pretty hair brained ideas in the past, Maude, but this really takes the biscuit.

MAUDE

Look at it, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

What? Look at what?

MAUDE

It...

CHARLOTTE

What about it? Don't tell me you're feeling sorry for it?

MAUDE

No, no of course not... but it is a weird thing... just lying there on our carpet. In our house, quite the thing... It's like it's asleep...

CHARLOTTE

...and, we don't want it waking up.

MAUDE

Just asleep, like some old Labrador curled up in front of the fire. It looks quite innocent.

CHARLOTTE

It looks rather horrible, Maude...

MAUDE

... no, it only looks horrible because you know what it is and what it can do. It looks no different to a bit of farm machinery, or a ventilator duct in a hotel kitchen or something. It's only when you know what it is, that's when it becomes horrible. Those poor people, Charlotte...

CHARLOTTE

I know...

MAUDE

Those poor people in Japan...

CHARLOTTE

I know, Maude... horrible.

MAUDE

Can you imagine?

CHARLOTTE

No, no I can't.

MAUDE

Whole cities...

CHARLOTTE

I know, dear...

MAUDE

People just going about their chores, finishing off their breakfasts, wandering along the road to school or whatever and then something like this appears in the sky above you. A thing the size of a couple of dustbins, dropping gracefully through the air while you're sweeping the floor or having a glass of water. Until, boom... it goes off and seconds later... you're gone. Along with a hundred thousand other people. Gone in a flash.

CHARLOTTE

It was all a bit crazy...

MAUDE

...but this is just one bomb. I know more folk died in other raids but this is just one bomb... that makes it worse does it not? A thing that would fit in a van or on a rowing boat or something causing all that suffering.

CHARLOTTE

As, you said, dear... war messes with chap's noodles.

MAUDE

Who thought that (*pointing at the bomb*) was a good idea, Charlotte? Who thought it was a good idea to make it in the first place? I mean whoever made that, could not have been stupid.

CHARLOTTE

Geniuses most like.

MAUDE

Geniuses, yes... but on the other hand just what were they thinking about? It just doesn't add up. I mean you and I are pretty dim, old girl, aren't we?

CHARLOTTE

Oh, goodness me, yes... couldn't even build a rabbit hutch...

MAUDE

But we'd never be stupid enough to make something like that...

CHARLOTTE

No... I can't even make a paper aeroplane, though I have tried...

MAUDE

Charlotte, I think we should keep it.

CHARLOTTE

I don't think so, Maude...

MAUDE

You must not call Sgt Mackintosh of the local constabulary under any circumstances. We'll keep it here, maybe hide it in the duck pond...

CHARLOTTE

But why, Maude?

MAUDE

They can't have it back, Charlotte. If they get it back, they'll end up dropping it on some town or city somewhere. I couldn't have that on my conscience...

CHARLOTTE

But, Maude, they'll have hundreds of them, thousands maybe... what difference will it make?

MAUDE

It'll make a difference to me and to whoever was lined up to be underneath it when it went off.

CHARLOTTE

You're an odd bod, Maude. But you're a good person. I've always thought that of you... you know that, don't you? Good, but slightly crackers...

MAUDE

Thanks, old girl... you're a good sort yourself... slightly loopy of course. I think the parents would be proud, don't you?

CHARLOTTE

Right... get your wellies... we'll bury it in the duck pond!

The telephone rings and they stare at it in disbelief... Eventually CHARLOTTE edges over towards it and lifts the receiver while MAUDE watches open mouthed...

If you like what you've read so far and would like to buy a copy of the complete script or would like to perform the play, please get in touch.

Thanks for reading,

Bob Davidson