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The Old Fart Plays

By

DEBORAH ANN PERCY
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Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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ISBN: 978-1-61959-322-0

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to acknowledge the publishers and theatre companies that brought several of these plays into print and onstage prior to the publication of this collection.

Stuck in the Middle With You appears in *Raging Thru the Dark: Drama, Poetry, Art* (Autumn 2022).

Steering Into the Skid was a semifinalist in the 2012 Minnesota Shorts Play Festival; won the 2013 MemoryCare One-Act Competition to benefit the MemoryCare Alzheimer's/dementia facility in Asheville, N.C., and was subsequently published in *The MemoryCare Plays*; and won the 2018 Town & Gown Players 5th Annual Stillwater Short Play Festival (Okla.). The play has had more than 100 readings and performances nationwide in support of dementia education and fundraising, including many by MemoryCare and The Remember Project (Minn.), and has been staged by Love Creek Productions in New York City.

A half-hour radio version of *Recalculating* was produced on WMUK-FM Kalamazoo as part of the *All Ears Theatre* radio series. A revised version was broadcast by On The Air Radio Players of Richmond, Va. A shorter stage version has been produced by Northwoods Theatre Company of Ironwood, Mich.

Continuum of Care received a staged reading by The Naples Players (Fla.) as a winner of their 2022 Readers Theatre – New Play Festival.

Come Rain or Come Shine was originally commissioned in 1999 by the Western Michigan University Alumni Association for presentation to the reunion of the class of 1949. In 2019, the play was a winner in the Heartland Theatre Company's (Ill.) New Plays from the Heartland festival.

The Old Fart Plays

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For Ed, Karen, Amy and Andy.

Come Rain or Come Shine

CHARACTERS

WOMAN/DOROTHY: A 1950 graduate of a small Midwestern college.

MAN/FRANK: A 1950 graduate of the same school.

TIME: From 1949 to 2000.

PLACE: Each character will need a separate area.

PRODUCTION NOTE: Both DOROTHY and FRANK are 21 at the beginning of the play.

(As the lights rise, WOMAN and MAN enter and move DC.)

WOMAN. We're going to read a selection of letters, notes and messages left in margins from the lives of two people who were at least friends for fifty years.

MAN. Dorothy kept her letters in a dresser drawer. No one in her family would have thought to look for anything unusual, anything hidden in her life.

WOMAN. Frank kept his locked in the desks of his various offices over the years.

MAN. These two people are beyond needing their letters anymore, but from these scraps saved over two lifetimes, we think you'll find something of the human heart worth your attention.

(Perhaps MAN quietly sings the chorus of "Come Rain or Come Shine" from St. Louis Woman. MAN and WOMAN

move to their respective areas, becoming DOROTHY and FRANK. They may sit or stand as seems appropriate.)

DOROTHY. December 1949. Dear Francis Verdet. I have a note from Professor Noble saying you would benefit from some intensive tutoring in French to help you prepare for your language exam. I am available to work with you Wednesday and Thursday evenings. I live in Spindler Hall. Sincerely, Dorothy Dean. P.S. I'm a little surprised you would need help with French, considering your name. I'm assuming it's pronounced Ver-day and not Ver-det, but I guess I'll find out soon enough.

FRANK. Note left at the desk in Spindler Hall. Dear Miss Dean. Thanks for the tutoring session. French is actually becoming clearer to me, me with my French name and very little talent for the language. *Vraiment, vous êtes une bonne maîtresse.* But, darn it, I can't meet tonight because I have to work on an English paper for Professor Nobbs. I may not be such a great writer in English (you'll know that from my notes), but at least I've been speaking it most of my life. Anyway, could we work on Saturday? Evelyn, my fiancée, is visiting her parents in Detroit (if I were French, I guess I'd pronounce it Day-twah), and I don't have to spend the night flipping burgers, so I'll have time to concentrate on classwork instead of romance. Maybe we could study in the library, then stop in at the good old Corral for a bite to eat after you finish putting me through my paces on irregular verbs. My treat. After all, I get special rates as an employee. When I open my own restaurant someday, I'll be able to treat my friends whenever I want. Meanwhile, you'll have to come to the Corral sometimes when I'm on duty, too. My burgers are actually pretty good. And I also make a pretty mean chocolate malt. Well, what else would you expect from somebody who wants his own restaurant someday? Frank Verdet.

DOROTHY. Dear Frank. I'm sorry. Your fiancée may be out of town, but Arthur and I have plans for Saturday. We're walking down the hill from the dorm, then going to the Uptown to see a movie—Jane Wyman in *Johnny Belinda*. Maybe we'll stop at the Corral afterward, though I guess you won't be there. I really am sorry we can't get together. Dorothy.

FRANK. Dear Dorothy. Your note about going to the movies with Arthur made me think about something that's been in the back of my mind for days. You're *Dorothy*—like Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz*. But it finally came to me: I'm *Frank*. And do you know who wrote *The Wizard of Oz*? L. Frank Baum, that's who. Dorothy went on all those adventures, but he's the one who imagined them—and her, too. Not that you need anyone to imagine adventures for you. But in some ways I do feel as if I imagined you—long before I met you. And now here you are. Well, I guess all that sounds pretty goofy. I just wanted to tell you. In friendship, Frank.

DOROTHY. Dear Frank. What a lovely note! It was better than seeing *Johnny Belinda*. I like Jane Wyman and Lew Ayres, and the story was full of suspense and had a happy ending. But I like *The Wizard of Oz* lots more. How did you know I've always pictured myself as Dorothy, being picked up by a tornado and carried over the rainbow? Maybe it's because you *are* Frank, like the author. How about Sunday afternoon? Dorothy.

FRANK. Monday morning. Dearest Dorothy. What a wonderful evening! I've never had so much to say to anyone, not even to my father when he takes me fishing. You seem to make me remember things I thought I'd forgotten, and think about the future, too. Thanks for letting me see your paintings at the art department studio. They're terrific, not that I know anything about art. I really like the one with the brick wall among the leaves and bushes. You're

very talented. And smart, too. Not to mention pretty. No—beautiful. And I remember looking into your eyes when we listened to the jukebox at the Cheerio playing “Come Rain or Come Shine.” But I seem to remember very little French. Can we do irregular verbs tonight?

DOROTHY. Dear Frank. I feel guilty, because I was supposed to spend the evening with Arthur, but I’m so glad I spent it with you, instead. And I’m glad you like the painting of the wall and the shrubbery. It’s my favorite. And I’ve been hearing that song in my head all day. Dot.

FRANK. Dear Dot. Wonderful news! I got a B-plus on my French quiz! And it’s all your doing. Thanks for everything. Or should I say *merci beaucoup*? Frank.

DOROTHY. Dear Professor Noble. My tutoring sessions with Francis Verdet are going very well. He is doing much better with his irregular verbs. And I’m learning more, myself. Thank you for suggesting Frank get in touch with me. *Merci beaucoup*! Dorothy Dean.

FRANK. Note left under Dorothy’s dorm door while she was attending a two o’clock class. Dear Dot. I’ll see you at the soda bar. I know I told you I get special rates at the Corral, but sometimes I like to go somewhere that doesn’t remind me I have to work my way through college. This is amazing. I’ve never felt like this. Dearest Dot. I like writing that. I’ll see you tonight. *Je t’aime*. And just so there’s nothing lost in translation, I love you.

DOROTHY. Note left for Frank at the desk of Vandercook Hall. Dear Frank. I’m on my way to tell Arthur. I will. I have to. *Je t’aime, aussi*. I love you, too. We’ll find a way to make this work. (*Later.*) Dearest Frank. You were right. I couldn’t do it either. Arthur has so many plans, and I’m sure Evelyn does, too. I saw her looking at you when you

were walking together between classes. It was as if she couldn't see anything else. And Arthur's like that, as well, which makes this all very difficult. They've counted on us for too long. We'll go to the dance with them and tell them this weekend. And then we'll have three weeks before you leave. *Au revoir, mon cher.*

FRANK. May 1950. Inscription in Dorothy's yearbook. Dot.
There's no reason why you can't fly beyond the rainbow. Frank.

DOROTHY. June 1950. Letter written from New York City.
Dear Frank. Father is going to be all right. Nothing was nearly as bad as my brother's phone call indicated, but Mother was beside herself and unable to understand the doctors. Father feels awful that I missed graduation. And I feel awful that I missed being with you. I still haven't had a chance to talk to Arthur. And now you're gone off to Officer Candidate School. California, there you go. (*Beat.*) All night long on the train, I kept going over and over our plans and how we could possibly salvage them. In the morning, the train runs along the Hudson River into Manhattan, a ride I have always found beautiful. I wished you were there with me to see the mist rise off the water. As my train took me away from you, I heard the sound of your voice shouting goodbye over the rattling of the wheels on the track, and I know we're right never to let go.

FRANK. Dearest Dot. I missed you like hell at graduation—and not only at graduation. And then to be worrying about your father, too, and you with nobody but Arthur to comfort you, for you to depend on. It was hard to sort out my feelings. Part of me felt angry at your father, your mother, at Arthur, even at you, for being off in New York with me shut out of everything, not even knowing the people you care so much about. And part of me wanted to kick myself for being such

a jerk, for putting my own stupid feelings on the same level with the life or death situation you were facing. It's really confusing. And here I am, of course, with a whole new bunch of stuff to worry about—about whether or not I'm going to be able to lead what amounts to a bunch of other kids like me into our own life or death situations. Me—a leader of men. And I barely managed to scrape through my French final. *Quel dommage*, eh? Anyway, I'm glad your father is feeling fine now, and I'm sure Arthur was what you call "his usual solid self" during the crisis. One way or another we'll get by all this. I'll get through this damned war—"police action" is what they keep calling it—whether I'm able to lead men or not, and I'll find my way back to you. I'll take that train ride along the Hudson and find you waiting on the platform. And then I'll be seeing you in all your old familiar places. And then they'll be mine, too. I love you, Dottie. And now I'm the one who's being blown away by the tornado, but not to Oz. Hang in there. I'll be back. *Je t'aime, ma cherie*. Your Frankie.

DOROTHY. Dearest Frank. What will we do? All I know is I feel as if I've jumped in a river and been swept away. "High as a mountain and deep as a river." There's no going back. I *will* tell my parents and Arthur. Then I'll find a way to get to California. I love you. Isn't that wonderful? This is what I always hoped love would be, but I was afraid it existed only in books and movies. How lucky we are to have found each other in time. Your Dot.

FRANK. Dear Dorothy. After getting your beautiful letter, I knew we were right not to care about anything else, just about the way we feel for each other. And then I got my orders, and now I'm here in Korea—I can't tell you exactly where, if I did they'd just censor it. I can't tell you what it's like here, either, anything about the fighting, but—well, no

point in finishing that sentence. It's not like in the movies, that's all I can say. Maybe you could read *The Naked and the Dead* if you want to know some of it. Someday I'll tell you, or maybe not. Anyway, it's us I want to write about. I love you. Swept away like a river. I've never met any girl who thinks the way you do. Not that I ever got to know any girls very well except for Evelyn. But you're what I always hoped might exist in the world. And now you do. I even find myself thinking about opening my own restaurant when I get back to the real world, with your paintings hanging on the walls. Well, things are happening here, so I better quit and get this off while I can. I love you. Think of me as somewhere over the rainbow. And remember, I'm with you, rain or shine. Love, Frank.

DOROTHY. September 1950. Dear Francis. Thanks so much for the lovely letter. It was so beautiful it made me cry to read it. Especially since I had no one to show it to. And now that I have to write this letter I'm finding it harder than I could have ever imagined. You were right about Arthur—and his family. They all rallied round us during the crisis. Then, after finding out that Father was going to be all right, I learned that Arthur's parents had bought us an apartment on Fifty-Seventh Street. And Mother was already at work on luncheon and engagement plans. Looking back, it's as if a train was already thundering down the tracks, already gaining too much speed, already going too fast for me to jump off. Perhaps I should have. But I was here all alone, without you, surrounded by everyone who wanted something else, who would have been so disappointed in me if I'd demolished all their plans. And the fact that I couldn't say no seemed more and more to be a sign that I shouldn't. Was my hesitation weakness?—oh, I was so weak—or was it something inside me recognizing I was

right to marry Arthur? Now there you are in the cold and the mud on the other side of the world, in awful danger, while I'm here, warm and safe. I'm including my new address, but I'll understand if you don't feel like answering me anymore. Love, Dorothy.

FRANK. Dorothy. Well, I got your letter yesterday. I'm lucky I didn't have any firearms nearby when I opened the envelope and saw what you had to say. But first I have to tell you something I haven't told you till now. Before I left Kalamazoo I was able to break up with Evelyn because I believed you and I were so right for each other. Evelyn didn't even cry. She sensed how determined I was. How happy I was. How happy I *was*. But I guess I didn't realize how much you need to live in Oz, where everything is in color, where you can paint everything the way you want it, where everyone is depending on you and caring about you. I should have known. Dorothy just needed to fit in with all those adoring relatives and farmhands and little people, charming them all and making them feel good. There's no place like home, all right. Well, I won't be going home, not for a long time. And like I said before, I'm sure not going to Oz. Oh, the hell with it. There's no point in my trying to hurt you. You have everything you want. And I'm well out of the picture. So have a good life, you and Arthur and your apartment on Fifty-Seventh Street. I thought people rented apartments, but I guess not in your world. *Your* world. Not mine. And now it won't ever be mine. Well, I love you. And you're the one who's losing something. Your paintings won't ever hang on the walls of my stupid little restaurant, if I live to open one. You're the one who threw it all away. Not me. All I have to worry about now is the enemy. At least I know they hate me and want me dead.