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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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DEBORAH ANN PERCY and ARNOLD JOHNSTON

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(THE OLD FART PLAYS)

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.

Continuum of Care

CHARACTERS

ALBERT: 60 to 80 years old; retired English professor.

LOUISE: His wife of similar age; retired middle-school principal.

ELEANOR: Their daughter; about 40 years old; a lawyer.

TOM KENT: About 40 years old; director of admissions at Colony Village Assisted Living.

TIME: From late summer or early fall through January.

PLACE: The shabby backyard of ALBERT and LOUISE's modest downtown house in a smallish Midwest city and the lounge of Colony Village Assisted Living.

“There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning.”

—Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*

SCENE 1

(As lights rise, we see the backyard. The only set pieces are bright yellow Adirondack chairs, side-by-side with a small table between them, facing the audience, and a planter farther down front with flowers. LOUISE, dressed in cotton slacks, a blouse and sandals, is kneeling on a pad, poking at the planter with a trowel, perhaps putting in a few small plants. She's wearing garden gloves and a floppy hat that has seen better days.)

ALBERT (*calling from off*). Louise? Louise? Where are you?

LOUISE. I'm in the backyard, dear!

(*ALBERT enters, waving a magazine in one hand. He's wearing a golf shirt, flannel pajama bottoms and slippers.*)

ALBERT. I'm almost out of shaving cream.

LOUISE. Put it on the shopping list.

ALBERT. I just brought in the mail.

LOUISE. The list is on the kitchen counter. I've left a pen right beside it.

(*Realizing he's not going to respond, she sighs and resumes poking in the planter.*)

ALBERT. There was only *The New Yorker*.

LOUISE. Seriously? That was all the mail?

ALBERT. The rest was junk. I tossed it in the recycling basket on the porch.

LOUISE. Sometimes I like to look at the junk. (*A beat.*) Did you put your shaving cream on the list?

ALBERT (*lowering himself gingerly onto his chair R*). List?

LOUISE. The shopping list. On the kitchen counter.

ALBERT. I'll do it later. (*Thumbing through The New Yorker.*) We're out of biscuit treats for Ruffy, too.

LOUISE (*softly*). Are you trying to make me cry?

ALBERT. Cry about what?

LOUISE. Do you see any trace of Ruffy anywhere? Really, Albert.

ALBERT. Oh. Right. Poor Ruffy.

(*He returns to reading the magazine.*)

LOUISE (*addressing herself as much as ALBERT*). When part of the old cedar fence blew down five years ago, it took that dog weeks to realize he was free to roam, to look for adventure—and female diversion. He'd disappear for days, and you'd wander around the neighborhood whistling for him. But he'd finally come back for my kibble and table scraps. Poor Ruffy. Now he's beyond adventures.

ALBERT (*reacting to something in the magazine*). Huh. My dearly damned former colleague T. S. Bosco has an article in this issue. (*Irritated, he slaps the magazine on an arm of the chair.*) He keeps forgetting he's T. S. Bosco, not T. S. Eliot. He's also forgotten I actually knew George Harrison.

LOUISE. *We* knew him.

ALBERT. Right. We were all friends. He and I traded ukuleles. And I never traded on our friendship to get into *The New Yorker*.

LOUISE. He and I sang a duet.

ALBERT. “Here Comes the Sun,” right?

LOUISE. Nope. “Something.”

ALBERT. “In the way she moves.” Right. Sorry. (*Conciliatory.*) How are you feeling?

LOUISE. I feel good. Better. The ache in my right side's still there.

ALBERT. At least you haven't thrown up in a few days. You and Princess Di.

LOUISE. But *I'm* not having an affair with an old lover.

ALBERT. Right.

LOUISE. I throw up. You forget. We're quite a pair.

ALBERT. Right.

(He falls silent, lets the magazine slip to the ground.)

LOUISE. Albert? Albert? (*Concerned, she rises with some effort, moves to him, drops the garden gloves and touches his shoulder.*) Dear heart.

ALBERT. I'm not dead yet. (*He looks up at her.*) I woke up in the night and didn't know where I was. I didn't know who the old lady was sleeping next to me.

LOUISE (*touches his cheek*). Sweetheart.

ALBERT. George was my friend. You and Olivia would laugh and laugh. And yet . . . (*With a start.*) It was you, wasn't it? In bed? (*He reaches up and touches her hair.*) It was you, your silver hair? You who baked scones and laughed with Olivia.

(She kisses the top of his head, then picks up the magazine and gives it to him. She crosses back to the planter and carefully kneels again.)

LOUISE. So. T. S.' article?

ALBERT (*glancing at the magazine*). Old bloviator. Some good lines in it, but I suspect his wife wrote them.

LOUISE. George's wife?

ALBERT. Not Olivia. T. S.' wife. Janet. Tall, thin somber woman. (*A beat.*) Damn it, Louise.

LOUISE. I'm sorry. You deserve to be published everywhere. And you and George *were* real mates those last years. *His* last years.

ALBERT. I will add my—face stuff—to your shopping list. And the string you use to clean your teeth?

LOUISE. Dental floss.

ALBERT. That's it. I do deserve to be published everywhere, instead of *The Sour Grapes Review* in Northern Michigan. Or the literary journal of Cherry Pit Junior College.

(*LOUISE resumes work at the planter.*)

ALBERT (*cont'd*). What's for dinner? Should we go out? The new Belgian place? I'll call and make a reservation. (*Back to his grievance.*) Browning and His Teeny-Tiny Circle of Friends.

LOUISE. Come on, Alberto. You have an outstanding publications record.

ALBERT. There you go with that Alberto business. I hate Alberto.

LOUISE. You hate my calling you Alberto? Since when?

ALBERT. It's demeaning. Belittling. (*A beat.*) What shall we do about dinner? Shall I take you out?

LOUISE. Sweetheart. You know Eleanor's coming. She's driving us over to see—

ALBERT (*realizing*). That place.

LOUISE. Yes, dear. That place.

ALBERT. Well, if we have that before us, let's at least have a drink to fortify ourselves for the ordeal. We haven't had one yet today, have we?

LOUISE. No, dear. I made a shakerful before coming out here, but I thought we might wait until after our excursion with Eleanor. You know how she is.

ALBERT. To hell with that. I want my—what do you call them? (*He waves the magazine.*) New Yorkers?

LOUISE. Manhattans, dear. Made with Maker's Mark—your favorite.

ALBERT. Right. I'll get them. Where did you say they were?

LOUISE. In the fridge. In the metal shaker. You can pour them in there and bring them out in glasses.

ALBERT. Right.

(He drops the magazine on the table and levers himself out of the chair with some effort.)

LOUISE. I saw a gadget on Facebook designed to help old farts get up out of chairs like these.

ALBERT. Steam shovel? Forklift?

LOUISE. A blue plastic thing with handles on both ends. One person uses it to pull the other one up. Of course, someone has to be already off their butt and on their feet to make it work.

ALBERT. Or remember where somebody left it lying around.

LOUISE. That, too. *(A beat.)* We could get different chairs. Something easier for our elderly butts to get in and out of.

ALBERT. I like the Adirondacks. You're not going to fall out of them.

LOUISE. You can certainly fall into them. *(Seeing he seems at a loss.)* Drinks?

ALBERT *(a beat)*. Here I go. *(Looking around.)* The yard looks like hell. All those fallen Granny ... Granny ...

LOUISE. Smiths.

ALBERT. Right. Smiths. Rotting everywhere. Place smells like applejack.

(Without waiting for a reply, he exits.)

LOUISE *(as if answering him)*. Forty years ago, this garden was a showplace. We'd entertain colleagues out here, especially when you were department chair. We'd have college boys—and girls—rake the dead leaves out of the flower beds, cut back the daffodils when they were blown, mow and water the grass. And collect the fallen apples. Now the bees, when there are any, get drunk on the fermenting fruit. *(A beat.)* I like it wild. Except for my planter.

(She resumes tinkering with the flowers. ALBERT re-enters, carrying two juice glasses full of brown liquid.)

ALBERT. Your drink, madam. *(He sets the drinks on the table, then moves to her.)* Up you come.

(He helps her to rise and walks her to her chair. They both sit.)

LOUISE. You didn't use Manhattan glasses.

ALBERT. I didn't want to spill any.

LOUISE. And no cherries.

ALBERT. I had enough trouble finding the—what do you call it? *(Motioning with his hand.)* The rattler.

LOUISE. Shaker.

ALBERT. Right.

LOUISE *(raising her glass)*. To you, sweetheart.

ALBERT *(raising his)*. To you, love.

(They sip their drinks. He sets his glass back on the table and rises with effort.)

ALBERT *(cont'd)*. I'll get the cherries.

LOUISE. They're in a little jar in the refrigerator door.

ALBERT. Right. *(He starts off.)*

ELEANOR *(from off)*. Mother? Daddy?

(ALBERT turns on a dime and resumes his seat.)

LOUISE. She's arrived. *(Calling off.)* We're out back, dear!

ALBERT. Did we know she was coming?

LOUISE. We did. *(A beat.)* Let me do the talking. *(Realizing he's not listening.)* Albert, I mean this. For once, let me talk. This is important.

(ELEANOR bursts through the screen door, letting it bang behind her. She's in her forties, attractive, slender and taller than her parents. She's wearing a professional-looking suit accessorized with jewelry.)

ELEANOR *(looking around)*. What a mess this yard is. All those Granny Smiths rotting on the ground. What's happened to the boys you hire to keep this place looking respectable?

ALBERT. Went to college, got married. Had a daughter.

(He takes a sip of his drink, ignoring LOUISE's warning look.)

ELEANOR. You're not ready. Don't tell me you forgot, too, Mother.

ALBERT. Your mother? Forget?

LOUISE *(raising a warning finger at him)*. Of course we didn't. *(A beat.)* I see you're wearing your grandmother's garnet necklace. It looks very nice.

ELEANOR. Appropriate to the occasion. *(Registering ALBERT's clothing.)* You can't go dressed like that. And you're drinking.

LOUISE. We do plan to drink Manhattans when we're installed there. This isn't a Methodist place we're looking at, is it?

ALBERT. And recycle. We'll be able to do that, too. Right?

ELEANOR. Please, Mother. Daddy. Freshen up a bit. Are those pajama pants you're wearing? And slippers?

LOUISE. Flannel pants, dear. I believe they expect us at three.

ALBERT. I'll strain out the ice. Put the ... drinks ... in the fridge.

(He rocks back and forth until he can rise from the chair. Then he holds out a hand and helps LOUISE to her feet.)

ELEANOR. Dear God. What have you done to those chairs?
Daddy, did you pick out that hideous color?

(The lights snap to black.)

SCENE 2

(As the lights rise, we see the lounge of Colony Village Assisted Living, which may have a chair and table or two. LOUISE, ALBERT and ELEANOR are standing, obviously waiting. ELEANOR is glancing at a brochure. ALBERT is still wearing his golf shirt, but has now opted for cargo pants and loafers.)

LOUISE. I thought this guy—

ALBERT. Clark Kent?

ELEANOR. Tom Kent. He's the director of admissions.

ALBERT. So where is he? Changing costumes in a phone booth?

ELEANOR. He'll be here shortly. I'm sure he's busy.

ALBERT. Right.

LOUISE. I thought Mr. Kent was showing us their ...
(Reading from the brochure.) "signature semi-detached homes at the beginning of their continuum of care."

ALBERT. This place looks more like a nineteen-seventies campus dorm.

ELEANOR. He's just meeting us here. You'll have to pass a few tests to qualify for an individual home.

ALBERT. Tests?

ELEANOR. To see if you're still capable of living on your own.

ALBERT *(voice rising)*. Living on our own?

LOUISE *(touching his arm)*. Albert, dear. They'll probably check our blood pressure.