

# LOVE STORIES



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# INTRODUCTION

Back in 1999, Michael Dixon, the literary manager of the Actors Theatre of Louisville, phoned me and asked if I would write a play for the next year's "Humana Festival of new American plays," which they thought should be a festival celebrating the new millennium.

I said of course, I'd love to, but then I thought: I don't think I can write a science fiction play about how life is going to be in the next millennium. But maybe I could go back to the oldest play in the western world and see if it still speaks to us today.

So, I got hold of Aeschylus's *Danaids*, a trilogy about the fifty daughters of Danaus who were pledged by their father to marry the fifty sons of Danaus's twin brother Aegyptus. It was once thought to be the oldest play in the west, but recent scholarship has decided *The Persians* is Aeschylus's first play. But I couldn't resist doing a version of the *Danaids*, set in the world today. It turns out the *Danaids* is the first play of a trilogy called *The Suppliants*, of which the second two plays are lost. So, the play I wrote is the story of those two lost plays.

Of course, the fifty sisters didn't want to marry the fifty brothers, so they got on a boat and sailed away to a foreign country to avoid marriage. And then the fifty brothers got on a boat to go and find them. It is a story about men and women, gender, refugees, whether an unknown stranger, out of a sense of compassion and social love, will give the women help, and, finally, of falling in love. When the women found no one would help them, and there was no escape, forty-nine of the brides murdered their fiancés, and one of the brides fell in love, about the same odds as today.

So, it is a play about romantic love and social love and civilization.

But, of course, it turns out this is not the only love story from the past several thousand years. The second play in this book is *True Love*, inspired by Euripides's *Hippolytus* and Racine's *Phaedra*. And then there is *First Love*, inspired by a novella by Samuel Beckett. And then *Summertime* and *Wintertime* about the same family in two different seasons, together in their summer house, inspired by *The Winter's Tale* and *The Cherry Orchard* and Moliere and Magritte and *As You Like it* and *Mid-*

*summer Night's Dream*. And then there is *Fire Island*, inspired by going to Fire Island and eavesdropping on the lives of friends.

None of the Greeks ever wrote an original play, and neither did Shakespeare. Those we think of as the greatest playwrights of the western world stole all their stories from the past and re-made them to suit life in their own times. And now when we go to school to learn playwriting, we are taught how to write original plays, which is to say, not to steal from old stories but to steal from our wives and friends and strangers on the street and do and say in our plays what we have seen them do and say. So, three of the plays here are stolen from the past, two are stolen half from the past and half from the present, and one is completely "original." The truth is, I love them all, stories that are, whether that was the original intention or not, stories of all the complications and joys and terrors of what it is to be a human being, stories of human love.