

PATRICIA PREWITT

Clarity

A One-Act Play

INTRODUCTION BY J. MALCOLM GARCIA

MISSOURI INMATE Patty Prewitt has been in prison for nearly forty years. She is serving a life sentence for the murder of her husband, Bill, in 1984. The conviction, however, is problematic. Investigators ignored evidence pointing to an intruder, including exculpatory evidence that was never shared with the defense or presented to the jury. The lead investigator's testimony featured a series of sexually suggestive remarks ostensibly made by Prewitt during an unrecorded, sixteen-hour interrogation. The prosecution's case relied upon slut-shaming Prewitt: her fitness as a mother was questioned, based on extramarital affairs that took place five or more years before the murder, during a time when the Prewitts were separated. The case was largely circumstantial, and the prosecutor did not share with the defense evidence that established a strange car was seen parked around the corner on the day of the murder, a significant omission. A pathologist brought on only weeks before trial was subsequently discredited in a number of trials where he served as a witness for the prosecution.

Prewitt is not eligible for parole until 2036, when she will be eighty-six years old. Maintaining her innocence, she declined a plea bargain that would have made her eligible for parole after just seven years. Had she taken the deal, she would have been released many years ago.

Former Missouri Department of Corrections Director George Lombardi, during his 41 years in corrections, has never before recommended anyone for clemency. However, in light of "the long sentence she has already served, the total support of her children and grandchildren, and her unprecedented contribution to the culture of the prison and to her fellow offenders," he recommends that "Missouri Governor Parson take the just, responsible, and compassionate action and grant Patty Prewitt clemency." Warden Brian Goeke identifies Prewitt as a woman best suited for release.

CLARITY

One male corrections officer with a Midwestern drawl, one thirtyish female prisoner. Bare stage except for one chair. She, in the chair, is looking down thoughtfully.

GUARD (*enters swaggering*)

Well, hello, honey. Ain't you a pretty thang. Welcome to prison. My job is to school you on the way things are done 'round here. Break ya in, ya know. Do you have any questions so far?

Girl slowly shakes her head no

Cat got ya tongue?

GIRL

No.

GUARD

Good, good. Afraid to talk?

GIRL

No, but I suspect that anything I say will be used against me.

GUARD (*chuckles*)

That's a good one, Girl. I like you. I have this feeling we gonna get along real good. Real good. Stand up.

She remains sitting.

I said STAND UP!

She stands warily. Him, calmly.

You see, Sweetheart, this is how it goes. You call me Boss and do exactly what I say when I say it. When I say jump, you politely ask how high. It's that simple. Piece a cake. You can make your time here really hard or we can keep the "hard" right where it belongs.

Grabbing his crotch

Get it?

Menacingly.

Now, don't get skittish on me, Missus Patricia Ann Prewitt number two six six seven, widow, Black Widow. I read your file. You're no innocent baby. You been round the block a time or two. We're not talking here bout nothin' you ain't done before.

GIRL (*softly*)

I don't want any trouble.

GUARD (*overly sincere*)

Me, either. I'm all bout no trouble. This is a "no trouble" zone, Girl. I like to keep things simple. Real simple. So how much time ya doing?

GIRL

You tell me. You read my file.

GUARD

See, like I said, you're a smart one. I like that.

Steps up to her face.

FOR-FUCKIN'-EVER. THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE DOING. FOR-FUCKIN'-EVER. LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE, YA LIFE-DOIN' BITCH! YA GOT NOTHIN' TO LOSE...

Softly.

Or so you think, but you'd be wrong. Dead wrong. There are "perks" when you follow the program, don't make waves, cooperate.

Pause, then friendly.

Ya got kids?

GIRL

I'm sure that's in my file, too.

GUARD

Yeh, Smart Girl, yeh. Five. From eight to sweet sixteen. Three pretty girls, too. Just like they momma. And I know you wanna see them. No sweet visits when you're buried in the hole for "failure to cooperate."

But smart girls don't have ta worry bout that. Smart girls know who's in charge, who's got all the cards. Like I said, you do have lots ta lose—if you don't cooperate.

Pause, steps to her.

Am I clear so far?

GIRL (*stony glare*)

GUARD (*nose to nose*)

AM! I! CLEAR!!!

GIRL

Crystal.

GUARD

Good, good. I knew you were a smart girl. My job is to show you the ropes, and I gotta thick, stiff rope right here.

Starts to laugh, but when she turns and walks away a few steps, he gets serious again.

Don't turn your back on me, Smart Girl. That's a direct order. Ya hear, Fresh Meat? You *must* obey a direct order. It's a rule. Sure would hate to hafta write ya up for "failure to obey a direct order." Got it, Smart Girl? GOT IT?!!!!

GIRL (*turns to him*)

Got it, Boss.

GUARD (*friendly*)

Aw, Smart Girl. You knew prison was gonna suck. Guess ya didn't know you would, too.

Mean, short chuckle, then moves close.

Ya got such pretty hair.

Touches hair.

Soft. No girly hair shit in the hole. I bet ya like ta read, too. Smart girls like ta read. No library privileges when you're buried deep in the hole.

In her face, speaking rapidly.

No canteen, no coffee, no visits, no phone calls home. No shit.

Girls tell me the worst part of being in the hole is the once-a-week showers and once-a-week change a clothes. Pretty girls like you like ta clean up every day—especially in this heat. In another month, this place is gonna be a hot box, and the hole is fuckin' hotter.

Chuckles this line.

Hotter than a fresh-fucked fox.

All alone in there . . . cookin' in your own juices—like a turkey at Thanksgiving.

Merrily snorts at his own analogy.

But you're a smart girl. You know what side your bread is buttered on, don't ya? You *want* to cooperate. You *want* to be a model inmate. Your big city lawyer told you to be a good girl, didn't he? Keep your nose clean. Stay outta trouble, if ya *ever* wanna get back home to your lovin' family.

You need to take advantage of all the things that make your time go by easy. I know you really want easy. "You can do the time or let the time do you." Smart girls learn that fast.

Listen, Babe, I gotta special private place to show you. Only my special girls, my smart girls, get to see it. You're a smart girl, and we gonna get along just fine. We got *years* together. Years and years.

Pause, smiles.

You may turn out to be my favorite. Come on.

He freezes while she addresses the audience.

GIRL (*to God and to the audience, pleading, panicked, pacing*)

Dear God, what can I do? What would *you* do? What would *you* do?

He's right. I'm fresh meat. I've been in prison a matter of days and don't know what he'll do to me if I resist.

And I *am* all alone in here. There's no one to help me. Not Daddy, not my brother. . .

That big city attorney warned me that "innocence is the worst possible defense," which means I'm defenseless. Completely defenseless. Again. Still.

Loud and crazy.

I wanna scream like a banshee and tear my hair out while slamming my head into the concrete wall. . . or the steel bars. Somebody! God! Jesus! Somebody, help me!!!!

Begins a hysterical scream but cuts it off by slapping her hand over her own mouth, then wrestling with herself a moment.

Would he leave me alone if he thought I was a raving lunatic? I *feel* like a lunatic. It wouldn't be a stretch.

Rationally.

But he already thinks I'm homicidal and that doesn't bother him. If I tell anyone, it's my word against his. I know how that worked in court.

Liars with badges have all the credibility.

Dear God . . .

Drops to knees, looks up pleading with arms raised.

Are you even here in this forsaken place?

Fights back sobs, then stands, shakes it off, takes a deep breath, squares her shoulders.

Get a grip. Get a friggin' grip. You cannot lose your head in this asylum. You cannot lose it now.

GUARD *(unfreezes, turns to leave and motions for her to follow)*

Come on.

GIRL *(quietly)*

I don't think so, Boss.

GUARD *(incredulously)*

WHAT?

GIRL

I don't think we're gonna get along at all.

GUARD *(steps to her, yelling)*

DON'T MAKE A BIG MISTAKE HERE!

GIRL *(one step forward to him, defiantly, with her arms pressed against her sides for support)*

Let me make this clear, Boss.

(another step to him)

I'm good, real good, at making big mistakes. But I'm bad, real bad, at getting along with slime balls like you.

Pause, glaring, then puts wrist together for handcuffs.

Do what you have to do.

GUARD *(though clenched teeth and fists balled)*

You'll be sorry. I promise. Real fuckin' sorry, ya piece-a-shit, life-doin' bitch.

Inhales, steps back, regroup.

But this is your goddamn lucky day.

GIRL *(sarcastically)*

Yeh. I'm the luckiest girl in the world.

GUARD *(nose to nose)*

I'm *not* gonna take you down *today*. But I *will* take you down. You can count on that. You can guaran-damn-tee that! I will make your miserable life more miserable than you ever thought possible. Is that clear?

GIRL *(quietly)*

Yes, Boss.

He exits fuming, while she sits warily watching. She sits because her legs are apt to give out on her.

GIRL *(quivering slightly, she announces to herself)*

Crystal clear.