

THE PLOT
A One-act Play by Patricia Prewitt

(5.15.13)

CAST: One female prisoner, one female caseworker

SETTING: Office of prison caseworker. When scene opens, caseworker is sitting at desk riffling through papers. One chair on other side of desk is for the inmate. Inmate talks to audience and caseworker, but caseworker only addresses inmate.

INMATE: *[enters talking to audience]* As a prisoner I can tell you that it's extremely stressful to be called to the caseworker's office when you have no idea why. Out of the blue. You're minding your own business when over the loudspeaker, the rotunda officer announces, "Prewitt. To the back. In full grays. Your caseworker wants you."

First your mind races through what prison sins you may have recently committed. What might not seem like an infraction to you, can be a big deal to them. Then you worry about who in the family might be dead. (Yes, they sometimes give you news from home.) I start my worry list with Daddy, the oldest, and work my way down to the littlest grandkids. Seriously, you could be called for any reason. There's never a heads-up. We forge blindly into each situation. Like a summons to the principal's office. It's rarely ever good news. The only thing worse is to be called to see the investigator. That's never good. *[breath]* Well, here goes.... *[to caseworker cordially]* Hello, Ms. Simmons. You called for me? Prewitt?

CASEWORKER: Yes, yes. Of course I know who you are, Ms. Prewitt. Have a seat. *[Inmate sits on the edge of the chair tensely while CW shuffles papers. Inmate glances at audience as if looking for support. CW finds Chadwick's catalog, leafs through it while inmate glances back at audience.]* Here. Here it is. Which of these do you like best for the bridesmaids?

INMATE: *[to audience]* Yikes. Nobody ever really wants to know what I think. They want me to co-sign their opinion. So, which one would she like?

CASEWORKER: *[interrupts]* I like that one, the green with the puffy sleeves, but in lavender. *[points]* Our wedding colors are lilac and buttercup. That's a very pale yellow. Won't that be beautiful?

INMATE: *[smiling to Caseworker]* Oh, yes, lovely. *[to audience]* Thank God she pointed out her pick, because I felt the sand shift under my feet. *[back to Caseworker]* I can see the wedding party now. Lovely. So springy.

CASEWORKER: I'm glad you agree. Some people think it's awful to pick the dresses out of a catalog, but I don't have time to travel to the city and shop. I wouldn't even know where to begin! And this is my only daughter. I want to make sure her wedding is spectacular. *[pauses dreamily]* Every young woman should have the wedding that she's always dreamed of since she was a little girl. A fairy tale wedding to remember forever... *[sadly]* We eloped, and I'll regret that to the day I die. *[sad pause, then light bulb and sharp inhale]* Which reminds me.... Listen, I didn't call you back here for your fashion opinion. I called you 'cause I want to run this great idea past you. I've been thinking about this for quite a while. And I want your unbiased opinion. Be honest now.

INMATE: *[to audience]* There's that quicksand again. Do ya feel it?

CASEWORKER: Tell me exactly what you think of this.

INMATE: Of course.

CASEWORKER: *[leans in and announces her idea proudly]* We should put a cemetery out behind this housing unit. *[CW pauses in anticipation, but the inmate just sits mum.]* We could have flowers and maybe even tombstones. The flat kind that maintenance can mow right over. Did they have those when you were free? The flat ones? *[Inmate nods slowly]* We can't plant trees or bushes, ya know. For security reasons. Wouldn't want anyone hiding out in the cemetery, now would we? That would never do.

INMATE: Of course not. *[still looking befuddled]* But, Ms. Simmons, exactly who will you bury in this flat cemetery?

CASEWORKER: Oh, I guess I didn't make myself clear. I brought this idea to you, because it would be for you--and all ladies who will die in here. You know. Like Carlene, Miss Ruby, uh, Connie Flowers, Miss Verna, Ms. Copeland, Mrs. Tidwell.... You know, poor Mrs. Tidwell is in her 80's and not in good health. Doesn't she have diabetes and a heart condition? I noticed she's in a wheelchair now. Is Ms. Copeland in her 80's, too? *[inmate nods]* I thought so. We need to think ahead. And with Henrietta Tidwell and Faye Copeland, this will not be in the unforeseeable future.

INMATE: *[stupefied]* I never thought...

CASEWORKER: *[interrupts]* Exactly! No one thinks about it but everybody dies. You need to make plans. *[pause]* And you old lifers could get the area prepared and all dolled up in anticipation. It

would be yours! Ms. Prewitt, you're so creative. I wanted to bounce this off you, especially since you will benefit from it!

INMATE: *[to audience--gets up to pace]* I never saw this coming. Did you? She wants to bury me out back--behind this building. In the rick-racked shadow of the razor-wire perimeter fence. Talk about digging your own grave! She wants to bury all of us serving life with no parole.

The only difference between life without parole and the death penalty is that the state must wait us out. No cheating and hurrying along the process with lethal injection, hanging, electrocution, firing squad or whatever other tricks they hide in their murderous state execution bag.

In the 70's my sentence was called "natural life", meaning that your life "creeps in its petty pace from day to day" behind bars, removed from society until you die naturally, "of natural causes". Like lack of both adequate medical care and proper nutrition are perfectly natural. But there's nothing at all natural about the slow decay of your heartbroken flesh as prison officials wait patiently (or impatiently in this case)--as they bide their time, and yours, in hopes that you will give up your ghost, much sooner than later. Prison rot is inevitable and terminal.

Personally, I'm not near ready for *[hesitation--looking for words]* permanent placement in a prisoner's plot. *[pause, breath]* OK. At least I'm not in trouble and no one in the family has died. But I sure never guessed this subject would rise from the grave.

CASEWORKER: *[interrupts so inmate sits back down]* Ms. Prewitt, I see your wheels turning and can tell you're already plotting on this. *[giggles]* Plotting! Get it? As in burial plots? That's funny and I didn't even know I said it. *[giggles at own pun]*

INMATE: *[attempts to chuckle]* Yeh, you crack me up, Ms Simmons.

CASEWORKER: Hey, it just hit me! Why can't the students in the Building Trades class construct the pine coffins? That would be a good trade for them to learn. I imagine there's a serious need for coffin carpenters in the free world. It would be rehabilitation for them! The Department of Corrections is all about rehabilitation.

INMATE: *[subtly sarcastic to caseworker]* Yeh, that's a great idea. The Department of Corrections is famous for saving lives.

CASEWORKER: *[hit by idea]* And this just hit me! Fabric Tech could

line the coffins and make the little pillows!

INMATE: *[to audience, stands]* Do you remember that old 50's sci-fi movie where the alien warns us in his robotic monotone, "Resistance is fu-tile." That alien must have worked for the Intergalactic Department of Universal Corrections. But aliens are known for their superior intelligence. So beam me up, Scotty. I'm gonna ride her crazy UFO...

[turns to caseworker excitedly] Ms. Simmons, we could even invent a whole new class to make the headstones. People die every day and must be immortalized! You should speak to the vo-tech lady and see if she'd look into offering a "master stone cutting class".

CASEWORKER: I never thought of that! I bet that's a lucrative career opportunity.

INMATE: *[to caseworker]* Prisoners used to break rocks all the time. Somehow we've gotten away from tradition. You could lead us back in the right direction.

CASEWORKER: Let me take some notes. *[grabs paper and scribbles]* This is why I called you, Ms. Prewitt. I knew you'd see my vision, and we'd be able to brainstorm.

INMATE: *[to caseworker]* AND, get this, the cosmo class can style our hair and do the makeup! Hair and makeup on corpses is a real career.

CASEWORKER: Aren't you afraid they'd be kinda squeamish about working on you women after you're dead?

INMATE: *[to caseworker]* Shoot, no. Many of these girls are in here for murder. I certainly won't be the first corpse they've ever seen, and everyone knows all the old lifers. *[to audience]* We're collectively lumped as "life-doin-bitches" while some affectionately call us "toe-taggers".

CASEWORKER: You have a good point there. I guess it wouldn't have to be mandatory for all the cosmo students to participate. It could be an "extracurricular option".

INMATE: *[to caseworker]* Yes. Extracurricular option. Perfect.

CASEWORKER: Thank you, Ms. Prewitt. You've been a great help. I'm going to take all these ideas and write up a proposal.

INMATE: *[rousingly to caseworker]* Don't give up! Don't let them

shoot you down. If this administration doesn't go for it, take it to Central Office or to the governor. *[pause thinking]* Of course, the chaplain would conduct the funerals. He does memorial services all the time for the hapless who croak in here. The only difference for him is that we will have the dead bodies right here for viewing!

CASEWORKER: Yes, yes, that's in his job description.

INMATE: *[light bulb]* Oh, My gosh. Get this: What if we added an embalming class, too! We could take care of the entire process right here on grounds! Our own morgue! We wouldn't even have to transport the cadavers off the prison grounds and back again. We have refrigeration! Right in the food warehouse.

CASEWORKER: *[scribbling]* Yes, refrigeration. Thanks. Thanks so much. This is great.

INMATE: *[rising from chair]* Well, Ms. Simmons, glad to be of service. And thank you so much for thinking of us. I feel all warm and fuzzy. We usually feel forgotten, ya know. Let me know how this goes.

CASEWORKER: *[scribbling, distracted]* Yes, yes, of course. *[grabs some papers and exits quickly while inmate talks to audience]*

INMATE: *[to audience]* All in all, this was not a bad caseworker experience. I'm not in trouble. No one died. *[pause]* Yet. She's finally getting the princess wedding she always dreamed about, and she thinks I'm chock full of great ideas. On top of all that, I feel a renewed vigor aimed toward my efforts to get free before I do die in here. *[pause]* I'd better warn my old lifers that there's a "plot" against us, and that this is a "grave" situation. *[laughs]* Get it? *[laughs]* Oooo, I gotta stop. *[to herself]* Nobody's going to believe this. I haven't got a "ghost" of a chance. *[exits shaking head chuckling]*

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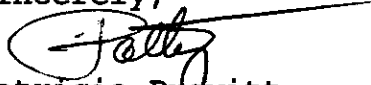
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Dear Dennis and Susan W.W,

Enclosed is another play for you. This is a one-act comedy that takes only two actors. It's also the gospel, even if it seems unbelievable. The whole conversation is true!

I heard from Betty May, who is GREAT! I love CLOWNS and directors!

Sincerely,



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Enclosure: "The Plot", a one-act play