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Dramatic Publishing

WAITING WOMEN

A Play in Two Acts
by
SILVIA GONZALEZ S.

Based on true stories of the West



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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Based on the life of
Pearl Hart
and the lives of her cell mates:

Elena Estrada
Manuela Frimbres
Lizzie Gallagher
Mae Woodman
Opal Eiker
Isabell Washington
Fanny King

Thanks to Dan Green for his keen director's eye
and Russ Tutterow for his encouragement.

WAITING WOMEN was developed at Chicago Dramatist's Workshop and New Dramatists. It was first produced by Mutt Repp's 28th Street Theatre, a multicultural theatre company based in Hell's Kitchen, New York City, as part of their 1996-'97 season, with the following artists:

Pearl Hart	<i>Judy Alvarez</i>
Marjorie Cunningham, Ensemble	<i>Beth Ann Charles</i>
Super, Sheriff, Ensemble	<i>Daniel Damiano</i>
Opal	<i>Elizabeth Flax</i>
Fanny	<i>Eileen Galindo</i>
Lizzie	<i>Stacey Miller</i>
Guard	<i>Gregg Mulpagano</i>
Isabel	<i>Melanee Murray</i>
Mae	<i>Emma Palzere</i>
Joe Boot, Ensemble	<i>Dan Remmes</i>
Manuela	<i>Liza Sabater-Tirado</i>
Elena	<i>Elena Soto-Raspa</i>
Piano Player	<i>Don Wilson Glenn</i>
Directed by	<i>Liz Ortiz-Mackes</i>
Set Design	<i>Shawn Lewis</i>
Light Design	<i>Aimee Schneider</i>
Costume Design	<i>Karen Rowland</i>
Hair and Make-up Design	<i>Janet Prusa</i>
Sound Design	<i>George Randall Mackes</i>

WAITING WOMEN

A Play in Two Acts

For an ensemble cast of 2 men and 8 women

CHARACTERS

PEARL HART Canadian, short, unattractive, feisty
JOE BOOT (also ensemble) lanky cowboy
MAE WOODMAN (also ensemble) . . grassroots American,
large, crusty, loud
LIZZIE GALLAGHER (also ensemble) . . . Irish-American,
heavy Irish accent, beautiful, insane
MANUELA FRIMBRES (also ensemble) Mexican-
American, fluent English (no Spanish accent), feisty
Pearl's rival
ELENA ESTRADA (also ensemble) . . . Mexican national,
tall with piercing eyes
OPAL EIKER (also ensemble) African-American,
gentle, mature, religious
ISABELL WASHINGTON (also ensemble) African-
American, very young, innocent
FANNY KING (also ensemble) Native-American
GUARD (also ensemble) . . . cowboy, with eyes for Lizzie

TIME:

1903, 1899, 1945.

PLACE:

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, Arizona Territorial Prison,
A diner on Route 66 in California.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The play is to be performed on several levels with the fourth wall broken at various times. Also, the levels can be represented physically, as in platforms, or designated areas. Understand that the physical levels help Pearl Hart's character move from reality, to her fantasy, and to her subconscious in just a step.

Pearl should always be seen by the audience, whether she is in the action or outside of it. Scenes in which she seems to be apart from, should overlap quickly to the next scene or have her presence bridge it.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

AT RISE: *Lights on area #1 where vaudeville audience await. Then vaudeville audience applaud sparingly as lights go on to begin the show. Piano music to herald PEARL's amateur entrance. Signs are printed in huge letters: BEAUTY OF THE WILD WEST and BANDIT GIRL. [The women in the poster pictures are too pretty to be PEARL.] PEARL begins to recite her poem.*

PEARL.

The sun was brightly shining
on a pleasant afternoon
My partner speaking slightly said,
"The stage will be here soon."
We saw it coming around the bend
and called them to halt
and to their pockets we attended
if they got hurt it was their fault.

VAUDEVILLE AUDIENCE MEMBER. That's the worst poem I've ever heard.

PEARL.

While the birds were sweetly singing
and the men stood up in line
And the silver softly ringing

as it touched this palm of mine
There we took away their money
but left them enough to eat
And the men looked so funny
as they vaulted to their seats.

VAUDEVILLE AUDIENCE. BOOO!

JOE BOOT (*disguised*). Will you let her talk!

VAUDEVILLE AUDIENCE. It's terrible!

PEARL.

Then up the road we galloped
quickly through a canyon we did pass
Over the mountain we went swiftly
trying to find our horses grass
Pass the station we boldly went
now along the riverside
And our horses being spent
of course we had to hide

(*More booing.*)

In the night we would travel
in the daytime, try and rest

(*More booing.*)

One more day they would not have got us
but my horse got sore and thin ...

(*Hurrying to the end of the poem.*)

...so Billy Truman roped us in
Thirty years my partner got
I was given five
He seemed contented with his lot
and I am still alive.

(Some of the AUDIENCE MEMBERS clap, while others get up to leave. Lights go out.)

PEARL. Turn on the lights! *(Lights go back on.)* Where's everyone going?

JOE BOOT *(disguised)*. They're going home.

PEARL. Why?

AUDIENCE MEMBER *(while exiting)*. 'Cause you're not a beauty like it says! Hell, you're ugly.

ANOTHER AUDIENCE MEMBER *(also exiting)*. And you're boring.

JOE BOOT *(disguised)*. She's not boring!

PEARL. Thank you, sir.

JOE BOOT *(disguised)*. Go on with your story.

PEARL. That's all right. This show isn't doing so well. They're going to tear up my contract anyway. Thank you kindly, anyhow.

JOE BOOT *(disguised, trying to be encouraging)*. Some are staying.

PEARL. I don't know why.

JOE BOOT *(disguised)*. 'Cause you're the Bandit Girl.

PEARL. Yes, I was... *(Deciding.)* Well, then. I could play to the few of you. After all, you paid your money. *(Some hesitant responses.)*

JOE BOOT *(disguised)*. I'll sit in the back.

PEARL. Anywhere you like. Sound of stagecoach please! *(Sound of a stagecoach.)* All right. Forget the poem. It started like this.

(Lights switch to PEARL's memory. Sound of horses. A group of dusty people walk by, carting luggage. Dust flies up. [Note to director: You are at liberty to select

where memory begins, and what is on the vaudeville stage.].)

MAN (*approaching*). Just off the stagecoach?

PEARL. Yes, sir.

MAN. No place for a lady.

PEARL. Then what are the men supposed to do?

MAN (*stunned*). Good day, ma'am.

PEARL. What's your problem, mister?

MAN. Good day.

(More people walk by.)

PEARL. It was 1899. I went west like the rest of them. (*An old woman waves from the darkness.*) Said good-bye to my mamie, (*Sound of a covered wagon.*) and took a covered wagon down, then over. (*Sound of horses.*) Then the stagecoach. (*Sound of a stagecoach.*) "The further away the better," I said. I really did say that. (*Sound of a stagecoach.*) Sat across from these so-called men staring at me, (*A man on each side of her.*) and SQUEEZING the living daylights out of me. (*Silence as they stare at each other uncomfortably.*) And staring. (*More staring.*) Like I was going the wrong place ... I was. Then I said, "Who you looking at? The man in the black hat said,

MALE TRAVELER. A fine lady—

PEARL (*slightly overlapping, blushing*). Thank you—

MALE TRAVELER (*enjoying his joke*). —for these parts.

(The OTHER MAN laughs.)

PEARL (*pause*). Where you little men going?

MALE TRAVELER. To find gold.

PEARL. And you?

OTHER MALE TRAVELER. To find gold.

PEARL (*imitates him*). To find gold. Well, so am I. I decided that gold would end my troubles. Only problem, very few conceived of a lady doing any digging. I can dig. I've dug all my life. And like many, I found nothin'. Then my money ran out. As was common during those days, folks were willing to take you in. (*MORMONS go beside her and smile too much.*) Why did they have to be Mormons? Seemed to be in the mood to convert me to this new religion of theirs. Never heard of it until I came to these parts. (*Pause. MORMONS smile wide.*) I had to leave quick. (*They exit.*) I couldn't sing. That seemed important to them and I couldn't stand failing in that area, 'cause I failed in a lot of areas. That's why I came here. Then, there was this lonely old miner with an even older burro coming my way.

(*They appear.*)

PEARL. Didn't say much, and that was good. So, I decided to join em. Their quest?

OLD MINER and PEARL. To find gold.

PEARL. Not having my own supplies, the old gommer lent me some. It takes a lot of supplies to mine. And if you didn't bring your own, you need lots of money to buy it here. In other words, some shopowners took advantage of you. And what else could you do? We worked the rivers searching for shining pieces of glittering stone. Kept running into pyrite.

OLD MINER. Damn.

PEARL. That was actually the most peaceful time of my life. (*Lights off on MINER.*) Until the old fool died. I

rode his old burro around. No, it rode me! Got on my nerves. Wouldn't mind me. Wanted to go back to his master. "NO! You dang burro! He's dead! He's dead. Weren't you watching? I buried him with my bare hands, you large-hoofed dog!" (*Slowly.*) And you know something? Between one of my cussing spells, it soon died, too. (*Pause.*) See, it was reluctant to leave the spot his master was buried. Wouldn't eat. Wouldn't drink. Just stood there above the mound with the blue sky behind it. Then fell dead next to his master's grave. I cried. Sometimes I'm sentimental, but not that often. Then I screamed when I realized I had to bury the dang burro next to his master. I had to. 'Cause the old miner would've liked that. I dug up his grave, and pushed in the burro. At least they were together. Laying next to each other with the old man's arm around the burro's neck, touching. (*Shift.*) It smelled like hell! I covered them up with wet soil. It had started to rain. (*Sound of rain.*) It took me a day and a half. Then, I found myself attached to a caravan with disrespectful miners. Who smelled worse than the dead man and his donkey.

(*The MEN surround her lustfully.*)

PEARL (*proudly*). I'm a miner. (*The MEN laugh and begin to walk off with her mining equipment.*) Those are mine!

MEAN MINER #1. They're miners now.

MEAN MINER #2 (*laughs*). Miners? Yep, they're miners, too. All mine!

MEAN MINER #1. Ours!

MEAN MINER #2. All right. Ours. But you said miners.

PEARL. HEY! You can't take my equipment. I inherited them.

MEAN MINER #2. So did we. *(They walk off with the rest of her stuff. She starts to walk behind them, slowly.)*

PEARL. Well, I had to do anything to stay well-fed. I'll tell you more about that after the trial. *(Announcing.)* My trial broke tradition.

(She is grabbed by a SHERIFF and tossed towards a JUDGE in area #2.)

JUDGE *(grunts.)*

PEARL. Well, you heard my story.

JUDGE *(grunts.)*

PEARL. I don't understand.

JUDGE *(grunts.)*

PEARL. A jury? Okay, let me have them. *(She smiles at MALE JURORS who enjoy her obvious flirtation. The JURORS watch her prance around. Sound of a gabble. Then a nervous JUROR stands.)*

MALE JUROR *(clears his throat)*. We give her one year.

PEARL Yahoo! *(The JURORS shake each other's hands.)*

JUDGE *(grunts. He directs the SHERIFF to grab PEARL. SHERIFF takes PEARL away.)*

PEARL. What's going on here?

SHERIFF. You're flirting with the jury.

PEARL. And they didn't like that?

SHERIFF. They gave you one year.

PEARL. You're right. Should have been less.

SHERIFF. It's too little. The judge wants another jury to hear your story.

PEARL. One year is too much for a lady.

SHERIFF. You're not a lady. Judge thinks you should get more.

PEARL. The jury spoke!

SHERIFF. The judge spoke, too. Getting you a female jury!

PEARL. What!?

SHERIFF. Breaks tradition, but should be interesting.

(PEARL is thrown to a corner and is being guarded by the SHERIFF. She then tries to flirt with him.)

PEARL *(to audience)*. Hey, I don't want to go to prison for the rest of my life.

(SHERIFF tries to resist, but then they have a long kiss. Suddenly, she's in front of the JUDGE again. Female JURORS sit straight up, feeling quite important.)

JUDGE *(grunts.)*

PEARL. Am I supposed to go through my whole story again?

JUDGE *(grunts.)*

PEARL *(putting on an act)*. Well, it wasn't my fault. Joe Boot, my partner—

SHERIFF *(overlapping)*. Joe Boot has already been tried!

LADY #1. Give her thirty years, like Joe Boot. Let's see equality for women.

PEARL. Not that kind of equality.

SHERIFF. Keep your mouth shut.

PEARL. I'm here to say my side of the story, and I haven't started.

LADY #2. Yes, thirty years would be fair for the crimes she committed.

LADY #3. How can a lady do what you did?

PEARL. Has there ever been a female jury in this land?

JUDGE (*grunts.*)

PEARL. You did this to me, Judge.

LADY #4. We were called to a duty.

PEARL. The male jury were sympathetic to me.

LADY #5 (*could be a male in drag*). We are a jury of your peers.

PEARL. You had the kind of life I had?

LADY #5. We could see your tricks, being women ourselves.

PEARL. You're not a woman. You're wearing a costume.

LADY #6. The judge saw how you played to the emotions of men. Talking about your mamie, and how you were forced to lead an unclean life. My, my. You could do better than that.

PEARL. A woman has no chance out there unless she tries what she can.

LADY #7. We'll give you five years in prison for your crime.

PEARL. Five years? The male jury gave me one year!

LADY #8. And Joe Boot got thirty. When will women be treated on equal terms if it doesn't begin in the judicial system.

PEARL. I can tell you where to put your judicial system.

LADY #9. Women's suffrage calls for equality.

PEARL. Why is my timing always wrong?

JUDGE (*grunts for a long time.*)

PEARL. You'll pay for this! You broke the laws of this land by trying me again. You will pay! You will pay!