

# **JAIL BIRDS**

**BY KATHY PETRAKIS**

**A 10 MINUTE PLAY**

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**Setting:**

*Women's prison cell room consisting of two beds, one above the other, a metal toilet and a basin. Blankets are thin and grey. The mattresses are thin. Noises of chatter and screaming. Some clanging against the bars.*

*Leila lies across the top bunk reading a book.*

**Leila** is early 20's, clear skin, slim body, well-spoken

**Magda** is her roommate – 50's, wrinkled, skinny, haggard, brown hair roughly tied back in a low pony tail, chain smoker.

**Sonia** – prisoner in another cell – older woman – very small role

LEILA: Must you smoke in here? It really is a nasty habit.

MAGDA: Watch gonna do? Arrest me?

LEILA: It doesn't really calm you down you know

MAGDA: Neither does this conversation

*(Pause)*

LEILA: Maybe you should try reading.

MAGDA: Like I want to know about people's bleedin' problems. Got enough of me own.

LEILA: It might inspire you.

MAGDA: Inspire me to what? Escape? Change careers? Make new friends?

LEILA: The book collection in here isn't too bad.

MAGDA: Well glad ya found yourself somethin' to be happy 'bout in here.

LEILA: I won't be in here long, might as well make the most of it.

MAGDA: Darlin' ya kiddin' yourself. By the time you get out, you'll be lookin' like me.

LEILA: Don't be ridiculous. I'm innocent.

MAGDA: *(Crackling with laughter)* Ain't we all?

LEILA: No really I didn't do anything. It's all a misunderstanding.

MAGDA: Aha.

LEILA: Besides, I'm rich. They don't put rich people in jail.

MAGDA: Hmm, yeah they do. They just spend more on lawyers 'fore they get here!

*(Silence)*

*LEILA focuses on her book again. Another prisoner calls out from adjacent cell.*

SONIA: Psst. Mags. Mags!

MAGDA: I hear ya Sonia. What's up?

SONIA: I'm on laundry tomorrow. Ya need anythin'?

*MAGDA pulls a small piece paper out of her pocket and passes it through the cell door.*

SONIA: *(reading the note)* You shittin' me?

MAGDA: Came into some money today. *(she eyes Leila who pretends she's not listening)*

SONIA: Seriously? Fuck. I knew I should've picked yours!

MAGDA: Your roommate awright?

SONIA: Chewin' her fucken nails off already.

MAGDA: Mine thinks she's in some fucken resort.

SONIA: Them were the days.

MAGDA: Yep. Still young and naiive

SONIA: When we thought justice would prevail *(they both start laughing)*

MAGDA: Idiots weren't we?

SONIA: Ah well. *(waving note)* Let me see what I can do with this.

MAGDA: Thanks luv. Catch ya later.

SONIA: Sure thing – ain't goin' anywhere.

*Magda pulls out another cigarette.*

LEILA: How long have you been residing ..here?

MAGDA: It ain't a fucken nursing home ya know.

LEILA: I don't see the need to disrespect your home.

MAGDA: *Our* home. And fifteen years. Fifteen to go

LEILA: (*gasps*) You murdered someone?

MAGDA: Yep. For talking too much.

LEILA: You did not.

MAGDA: How do you know what I done?

LEILA: Was it an ex-lover who betrayed you?

MAGDA: You askin' too many questions you don't wanna know the answers to.

*LEILA slumps back onto the bed.*

LEILA: *I* killed someone.

MAGDA: Is that so? Ya seem more the 'hire to kill' type.

LEILA: I'm quite independent I'll have you know.

MAGDA: Yeah.

LEILA: But it was an accident.

MAGDA: Hmmmm

LEILA: I was defending myself.

MAGDA: Against what? Foul language?

LEILA: *He* was trying to kill *me*.

MAGDA: How'd ya figure?

LEILA: He kept saying it. '*I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill you, you ....*

*(whispers) whore.* I mean, what else was I to do?

MAGDA: Shoot him of course!

LEILA: Fine! I won't tell you anymore if you're going to make fun of me.

MAGDA: Suit yourself. I didn't ask for ya fucken bullshit. Read it all in the newspaper.

*LEILA stares at her.*

MAGDA: Yeah I can fucken read.

LEILA: They were all lies!

MAGDA: Aha.

*MAGDA walks around restlessly and then starts doing push-ups.*

*LEILA slams her book shut and sits upright. She climbs down and starts doing push-ups also, but only on her knees. MAGDA looks at her annoyed and keeps going. MAGDA turns over onto her back and starts on sit-ups. Leila copies though doing an easier version.*

MAGDA: What the fuck are ya doin'?

LEILA: *(trying to imitate her speech)* What the fuck are ya doin'?

MAGDA: You gonna be a sore bird soon, if you don't quit.

*LEILA hesitates and is about to imitate before a glare from MAGDA*

LEILA: Method acting. I was studying acting at college. I thought I might as well make the most of my experience here and learn to be a real prisoner like you.

MAGDA: You are a fucken real prisoner. Imitate yourself.

LEILA: It's not authentic enough.

*Magda rolls her eyes and pulls out a pocket knife.*

LEILA: *(panicky)* We don't have to get that real about it all.

*MAGDA comes in close to her and then sits on her bed. She pulls out a wooden piece and starts sculpting it.*

LEILA: *(admiring her work)* Oh. That's really good.

MAGDA: Gotta do something to keep me mind from goin' crazy.

*(Pause)*

MAGDA: I used to do me lots of these things once.

LEILA: You were a sculptor?

MAGDA: Actually I made furniture for rich folk like you. I fucken loved me job. I was good at it too.

LEILA: Till you killed someone.

MAGDA: People ain't too keen on murderers making their furniture.

LEILA: Was it an accident for you too?

*MAGDA sits in silence and LEILA shuffles.*

LEILA: Alright I admit I was sleeping with the guy

MAGDA: Lawyer?

LEILA: Banker. Old guy but classy.

MAGDA: Aha.

LEILA: And my dad's friend *(giggles)*

*MAGDA looks at her like she's strange.*

MAGDA: Couldn't ya find yourself more trouble?

LEILA: He was married to the state prosecutor.

MAGDA: That's trouble awright.

LEILA: It was just for fun! He was great in bed! And rich.

MAGDA: I thought you were already rich?

LEILA: Oh yeah. Of course, but it helps if he is too. So anyway. I needed money for college.

MAGDA: Where was ya parents?

LEILA: Oh, you know..around....so I asked him for the money, seeing as I was his mistress.

MAGDA: And he gave it to ya?

LEILA: Of course. Look at me! I'm hot! He didn't want to make me mad!

MAGDA: Let me guess, ya kept goin' back for more.....

LEILA: Well yeah. See it was all a misunderstanding. They said I was a prostitute trying to blackmail him but all I did was ask for some money and he gave it to me. I mean, men give money to their girlfriends and wives all the time and no one's calling them prostitutes.

MAGDA: I see. But the court found ya guilty.

LEILA: Crazy isn't it?

*Silence*

MAGDA: Ya know, ya play the poor little rich gal, real good. (*applauding*) Fine performance.

LEILA: I don't know what you're talking about.

MAGDA: So why'd ya kill him?

LEILA: I didn't. He was angry, he came at me and as I fought him off, he rolled over and hit his head on something and that was it.

MAGDA: Aha.

LEILA: See, misunderstanding. They say I hit him with a baseball bat but really, if they've seen me play sports that would not make sense.

MAGDA: Aha.

LEILA: Anyway. I'm sure it will all be sorted at the appeal.

MAGDA: Aha. (*Pause*) Say, you still got that money he gave you.

LEILA: Sure.

MAGDA: Ya know, maybe we got better things to do with that money there. Start us up a little business in 'ere or somethin'. I'm good with business.

LEILA: I won't be in here for long.

MAGDA: Make our life a bit more comfortable ya know what I mean.

LEILA: Like silk sheets and things?

MAGDA: Yeah. Like that. I can get just about anything in here.

LEILA: I need that money for my appeal.

MAGDA: Honey, I hate to tell 'ya but you ain't getting out of 'ere for a long time.

LEILA: No need to be bitter.

MAGDA: That story ya told me. Load of shit. Ya nailed the bastard when 'e stopped paying.

LEILA: No!

MAGDA: You got your Academy Award now so let's start talkin' business.

*(Silence) Leila huffs, frustrated with Magda and then relents.*

LEILA: It was believable wasn't it?

MAGDA: To most people yeah. I've been round too long

LEILA: They didn't believe me in court.

MAGDA: I'm sure you were wonderful though.

LEILA: I do have the money though. My lawyer is taking care of it for me. *(Pause)*  
I was sleeping with him too.

MAGDA: That's what I like to see – a woman with a plan.

*LEILA sits closer to MAGDA who pushes her back to her own personal space and continues with her sculpture.*

LEILA: So, what are *you* in here for?

MAGDA: *shrugs*

LEILA: Murder right?

MAGDA: I'm afraid so.

LEILA: Did you, did you do it?

MAGDA: 'fraid so. A woman's gotta do what a woman's gotta do.

LEILA: Why'd you do it?

MAGDA: Me partner. We had us a little business we did. He sold me out to the  
cops.

LEILA: No way.

MAGDA: I wouldn't have none of that so I done him in.

LEILA: Shot him?

MAGDA: Nah. Too nice that way. I tied him up and carved him up slowly.

*LEILA gasps.*

MAGDA: I can take most shit but not betrayal. Got it?

*LEILA nods.*

MAGDA: Now let's talk business luv.

*Lights out*