

Cell Mate

By: Anna Turner

Women's prison cell. MABEL is lounging on top bunk, picking at dirt under fingernails, when CAMERON is shoved in cell by guards. CAMERON struggles to get back out of cell, but guards successfully lock her in.

Cameron: No, wait! YOU CAN'T DO THIS! I'M NOT A CRIMINAL! I JUST (starts trailing off as guards walk away)...like to...have a good time... (shoulders slump as door closes offstage, signaling GUARDS' complete abandonment of CAMERON)

Mabel: (not looking up from fingernails) I used to like to have a good time, too, you know... (CAMERON ignores her, leans helplessly against cell door) Used to pretty like you, too. Wear pretty dresses, pretty heels ... My hair was that exact color, even. (CAMERON sneaks a sidelong glance at MABEL) I guess Mother Nature decided I looked better grey. (starts chuckling to self, then laugh turns into a horrible cough. CAMERON edges farther away from MABEL) What's your name, honey? (CAMERON is silent, stares straight ahead) You not have a name? Or did you just forget it?

Cameron: No. I lost it. Along with my dignity. (bows head in shame)

Mabel: Well, I'm Mabel.

Cameron: Ok.

Mabel: How long you in jail for?

Cameron: I don't know. A day, two maybe?

Mabel: I asked how long you in jail for, not how long are you gonna be in this cell. Your time behind those bars is a hell of a lot different than your time spent locked up. (CAMERON looks at bars of door in confusion) I've only been in here a couple hours myself, but I've been in jail for 32 years. (CAMERON blinks in surprise)

Cameron: 32 years? Did you murder someone? Am I in a cell with a murderer? Oh, god, GUARDS!

Mabel: Hush, child! I'm not a murderer, or a thief, or anything like that.

Cameron: Then how have you been in jail for 32 years?

Mabel: I got married. (starts her laugh again, and coughing fit ensues) Do you get it? (still coughing/laughing) I got married!

Cameron: No. Yeah, I get it. I just don't think it's funny. (MABEL's laughter subsides)

Mabel: Well, you're young. I guess we see things differently.

Cameron: (aside) I doubt think our age is why we see things differently...

Mabel: What was that? You gotta speak up, honey, I have a bad ear. I did synchronized swimming when I was younger, see, and got a real bad ear infection. (CAMERON slowly turns to look at MABEL)

Cameron: You have bad hearing in one ear? Which one?

Mabel: Left one. But it wasn't from the swimming that I got a bad ear infection. It was going home late one night after practice, wet hair flying out behind me while I rode my bike as fast as I could through the subzero temperatures.

Cameron: You had your practice at the indoor pool then?

Mabel: Yup. Over at Garret Street Aquatics.

Cameron: You're kidding.

Mabel: I'm not laughing, am I?

Cameron: No. (sits down on bottom bunk) Thank god... It's just that I used to do synchro at Garrett's when I was little. I got an ear infection the same way...like, the exact same way. I don't understand why they even let the girls leave when they have wet hair. They should make you dry it in the locker room before you go home.

Mabel: So, you deaf in your left ear, too?

Cameron: Have been for ten years now, but I wear a hearing aid. I'm not right now, I lost it in the...nevermind.

Mabel: In the what? (CAMERON sighs and lays back on bed, closes eyes)

Cameron: I'm going to try and get some sleep.

Mabel: You didn't lose it in a bar fight, did ya? That's how I lost mine. (CAMERON's eyes snap open and she sits bolt upright, hitting head on rail below top bunk) Watch out for the rail. (CAMERON, gripping forehead and grimacing in pain, lays back down) Yeah, it was a bar fight all right. Me and my fiancée at the time.

Cameron: Ok, stop talking. This is freaking me out.

Mabel: What?

Cameron: I got in a fight with my fiancée at a bar tonight. (pause)

Mabel: Why?

Cameron: (sighs, debating whether or not to actually tell MABEL) Because I saw him with some other girl. That's why I'm here, actually. I tried to punch her, but was too...um...I was kind of...

Mabel: Drunk?

Cameron: Whatever. Anyway, the bitch swung at me and her white trash fake-ass nails clawed my hearing aid right out.

Mabel: Well, I'll be damned. (wiggles off of top bunk and goes over to use toilet, right in front of Cameron) If you're not the carbon copy of myself...

Cameron: Please don't say that.

Mabel: Why not? That's exactly why I hit my fiancée. And why I ended it with him. Men are horrible creatures, aren't they? (CAMERON awkwardly looks in other direction as MABEL uses bathroom)

Cameron: Yeah. Horrible.

Mabel: Where you grow up? Near Garret's, if you could bike home. I lived on the corner of Veldermere and 14th, in the big brick Victorian with lavender eyelet curtains in the windows. I loved those curtains. I begged my Mama to make them into a dress, but she said—

Cameron: That you were too nice a girl to wear curtains for a dress?

Mabel: That's almost word for word, actually. How'd you know? (gets back up on top bunk)

Cameron: Because my Mom said the same thing... This is too freaky. (stands up, rants) Are you like my stalker? (suspicious) Have you somehow found out everything about me and now are pretending like it happened to you, too? Are you... Oh my god, are you some intervention-person my parents hired? Did they hire you then plant you in jail, make you say you're exactly like me and grew up in my house, etc., so that I would think you're like my future and I'm going to end up like you if I keep drinking? Well that's not gonna work. I'm not an alcoholic, ok? So you can just stop this whole intervention thing. You can just *stop*.

Mabel: Honey, I don't even know your name. And I can tell you're not an alcoholic.

Cameron: Really? How can you tell?

Mabel: Because I wasn't one neither. (MABEL chuckles. CAMERON rolls eyes and sits back down on bottom bunk, begins picking at nails just as MABEL was doing in the beginning) I just liked to have a good time. (pause) I made those curtains into a dress, by the way. That's why one window doesn't have any. The one by the piano.

Cameron: Is that where those went?

Mabel: Yes ma'am.

Cameron: Why didn't your Mom get new ones?

Mabel: My Mama didn't replace 'em as punishment. The sun would come pouring in during my piano lessons and pretty much blind me. I'd whine and fuss 'til my face turned purple but Mama would just shake her head and say, "Maybe if someone hadn't destroyed the curtains you wouldn't be having this problem."

Cameron: You had piano lessons, too?

Mabel: Mm hm.

Cameron: Did you by any chance play Rhapsody in Blue?

Mabel: More times than I care to remember.

Cameron: (stands up again) God damn it, how do you know these things? Who are you, Mabel? Who are you, really?

Mabel: How do I know what things?

Cameron: Everything about me! Like where I lived, what I used to play the piano, where I did synchronized swimming, that I DID synchronized swimming, that I got in a bar fight—

Mabel: I'm only learning these things because you keep saying that they happened to you just like they happened to me. For all I know, you could be lying. You could be the one saying we're exactly alike even if we're not, even if you've never even seen lavender curtains.

Cameron: That's ridiculous. Why would I say that? Why would I want to be exactly like you? You're in prison.

Mabel: You're in prison, too.

Cameron: But I'm not really in prison. I'm just here for the night. You're like in prison-prison. (MABEL pauses)

Mabel: You really think they would throw an overnighter in with a permanent prisoner? Well, there's one way we're different. I'm not stupid.

Cameron: I'm not—wait, you're just here for a short time, too? What'd you do? (pause as MABEL doesn't answer) Did you get in another bar fight?

Mabel: I haven't been to a bar in years.

Cameron: Then what did you do?

Mabel: You really want to know?

Cameron: No. But we don't have anything else to talk about.

Mabel: I shoplifted. And got caught.

Cameron: They send you to jail for shoplifting?

Mabel: When it's at Tiffany's, yes. (CAMERON stands up, leans on top bunk, and stares at MABEL in awe)

Cameron: You shoplifted at Tiffany's? Like, THE Tiffany's?

Mabel: I tried.

Cameron: That's crazy! I was just at Tiffany's!

Mabel: I know.

Cameron: What?

Mabel: I know. You were there, looking at the exact necklace I tried to steal.

Cameron: Wait...what?

Mabel: The necklace. Paloma's Marrakesh—

Cameron: —Marrakesh dome pendant.

Mabel: Yep.

Cameron: But I didn't get that one because they didn't have it in white gold.

Mabel: Sterling silver was good enough for me.

Cameron: So you stole it?

Mabel: If I stole it I wouldn't be here, now would I?

Cameron: Right...but you tried. Why? Why did you want that particular necklace?

Mabel: Why did you want that particular necklace? (pause. CAMERON hoists herself up on top bunk)

Cameron: What do you do for a living, Mabel?

Mabel: I'm a cashier at Walgreen's.

Cameron: Have you done that your whole life?

Mabel: Nope. I used to work for Harper and Trenton, it's a marketing firm on Park Avenue south.

Cameron: I know. I should have figured you worked for them.

Mabel: Why?

Cameron: Because that's where I work. (MABEL grunts.) I'm Cameron. (holds out hand. MABEL shakes it) It's nice to meet you.



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