**Newgate Gaol – Anonymous**

Strong and stony as the prison seems to passers-by, it looks much stonier and stronger to the men who enter it. The multiplicity of heavy walls, of iron gates and doorways; of huge locks, of bolts, spikes and bars of every imaginable shape and size, make of the place a very nightmare dungeon. I followed the gruff under- warden, through some dark and chilly vaulted passages, now turning to the right, now to the left. We crossed a large hall, in the centre of which is a glass room for the use of prisoners when they are giving instructions to their lawyers […].

Still following; I was led into another large recess or chamber, on one side of which was a huge boiler with a furnace glowing under it, and on another side a large stone bath. On the third wall there were a couple of round towels on a roller, with a wooden bench beneath them.

"Stop," cried the warden, "take your clothes off." I hesitated. "Take off your clothes, do you hear?" My clothes were soon laid on the bench, and a hot bath filled, and I went in. The officer had then his opportunity of taking up my garments one by one, searching their pockets and their linings, feeling them about and holding them against the light. My boots appeared to be especially suspicious. After he had put his hands into them, he thumped them violently on the stone floor; but there rolled nothing out.

Having bathed, I was led down another passage, at the end of which were two gratings of iron bars, closely woven over with wire-work, distant about two feet from each other. Unlocking both he pushed me through, and started me up two or three steps into a square court-yard, where there was a man walking to and fro very violently. After shouting "One in!" he locked the two gratings, and retreated rapidly in the direction of his dinner. Another warden with a bunch of keys came from a gloomy building that formed one side of the court. "Go up," he said to the pedestrian; who disappeared up a staircase instantly.

"Where from?" the jailor asked me, and "What are you here for?" Being replied to on these points, he said shortly, “Come this way.” He led up the dark stone staircase to a corridor with cells on one side, having iron doors to them a foot or more in thickness. One of these cells was to be mine. Venturing as I went in to ask "Whether I might be allowed to walk in the yard when I pleased?” he answered sharply, “You'll just please to walk where and when you're told." He slammed the door, bolted it, locked and padlocked it.

The cell was about eight feet by four, lighted by a Ioophole above eye-level. It contained, besides an iron bedstead with a straw mattress and two coarse rugs upon it, an uncomfortable stool and a slanting reading-desk fastened to the wall, on which were a Bible, a prayer-book, and hymn-book. Alone for the first time since my apprehension, I stretched myself upon the bed; and, with my hands over my eyes endeavoured to collect my thoughts.

I was soon aroused by the undoing of bolts and bars below, while a stentorian\* voice shouted from the yard, "All — down!" I heard the cell doors being opened in the corridor; and, in due turn mine was flung open, and the jailor looked in. The impression my body had left upon the rugs enraged him dreadfully. "What," he cried, almost in a scream, "you've been a lying on that 'ere bed, have you! You just let me catch you on it again till night, that's all!"

"Oh," I said soothingly, "I didn't know. Now that I do know, I will not lie down again."

"If I find you on it again I'll have you up before the governor or stop your supper. That's all. Go down."

\* **stentorian** – loud, powerful, booming (describing a voice)

**Diary of a modern prisoner**

*Monday 11th March*

Many people think that prison must be a terrifying place with lots of violent women locked behind bars. It isn’t. My arrival at Holloway was smooth, humane and expertly carried out, involving quick fingerprinting and the BOSS chair (Body Orifice Security Scanner), essentially a metal detector.

There was no strip search but there are rules. It was clear I had brought in far too many clothes. I was allowed to keep just 12 tops (shirts, T-shirts and jumpers) and six bottoms (trousers, tracksuit bottoms and pyjamas).

No toiletries were allowed but I was given an emergency bag with prison issue and I bought a ‘welcome’ bag for £2.99, which would be subtracted from the cash I brought in with me.

It contained a bottle of orange squash, biscuits, a bar of milk chocolate, deodorant, toothbrush and toothpaste, a comb and some tea bags and sugar. I had the choice of that or a smoker’s bag. But I could take in my books, all 18 of them and many given to me by my children, as well as my writing pads and a couple of pens.

The welcome group and prison guards helped me and some other new inmates move our personal belongings, which had been transferred into transparent prison plastic bags, to landing A3, the reception landing, which ended up being my home for the next few days.

The lovely girl who had secured the food for me told me on the way that she had two more years to do but enjoyed doing the reception work because it kept her out of her cell until quite late in the evening.

That night was bitterly cold and I soon realised that the windows in Holloway cells do little to keep the chill out.

At first I was shown a cell with no curtains and my helpers tried to fasten an orange blanket on to the railings, without much success. Fortunately there was another single cell available with curtains, this time near the guards’ office, but the TV was not working so there was another quick changeover.

Then it was obvious that one thin orange blanket on the bed was not enough. Soon the girls were at my cell door with extra blankets even though that was apparently not normally allowed; within a few minutes I ended up with five and had to turn down the offer of a sixth.

And then extra fruit and sandwiches that the girls must have had in their own cells started arriving, and shampoo for the shower and extra toilet roll for the loo in my cell. I couldn’t believe the kindness of them all.

Many have commented about the solidarity in women’s prisons – yes, there is bitching and some bullying but there is also a lot more demonstrable empathy among the women prisoners than in a men’s prison.

They say that when that first lock-up happens and you are left alone in your room, reality finally takes its toll; when they finally lie in bed most new prisoners turn their heads towards the wall and start crying.

I watched the coverage of my case on TV and fell promptly asleep.

*Thursday 14th March*

In the morning, a female guard from a different floor told me that there had been discussion for me to move to D0, the enhanced wing on the ground floor.

I told her I was happy to stay where I was for the time being. Frankly, I had already become friendly with the girls on my landing and had no wish to move.

And I had learned quite a lot of things from them – for example, how to put a pin on the latch door and pull it shut, or almost shut, from the inside if someone had left the hatch open and the lights on in the corridor through the night. This also cut out noise. Strangely, it gave you a feeling of being in control, which was welcome.

At the same time the girls showed me what to do if an overzealous guard had locked the latch door and there was no one there to unlock it – the back of the plastic spoon worked very well as a key.

A morning spent outside my cell, given the horror stories of very long lock-ups endured by many prisoners, was a relief.

I went to see the lovely nurse, and an instant friendship developed. She filled in my personal medical history details, checked my blood pressure (which had gone down sharply after a couple of nights in Holloway) and suggested I should have a hepatitis B injection.

I at first refused as I don’t much like needles but she explained it was for my protection in case an inmate were to bite me.

There are a lot of drug addicts in prison who may be carrying the virus from infected needles. After her explanation, I did not hesitate for an instant.

My children came that Thursday afternoon for an hour. It was a tightly supervised setting, but it was brilliant. We had to sit opposite each other after we kissed and I reassured them that I was OK.

There were strict rules about moving around so we had to stay in our seats except when they got me a much-needed cup of coffee. I wasn’t allowed to do it myself.

It was the first I’d had since I went into Holloway, so quite a treat for a coffee addict.