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## The Days Pass Quickly Here

by Marion Umney

Holloway Prison - June 1909

My Dear Emma

Thank you so much for your concern for me. I am well, at least in body. I am no longer on hunger strike. I believe I have done my bit on that score. I am more use to the movement alive than dead and I do want to live. I'm not made of martyr material and, in all honesty, I'm not sure the death of an unknown tailoress hailing from a Yorkshire mining village would cause much of a stir. Perhaps that's an excuse for cowardice, but if it is, I've made my peace with it.

It is in my mind that I am restless. The days pass quickly, and yet one is so bored here. Repetition is soothing they say, but it is also soul destroying. They keep us busy as, unlike in the men's prisons we care for ourselves. We cook and clean and wash and sew; all very familiar to me, but as a suffragette I am watched to see that I don't interact with others and that's lonely.

I do get some alleviation from the boredom though. The antics of some of the other suffragettes (although we are supposed to be separated from each other) and the mismatch of them with the common criminals can be quite entertaining. The more genteel of the women clearly find the work hard, being used to servants and such like. They also think as "political prisoners" they should be treated differently, and in truth some are, as there is class distinction here same as everywhere. You see them struggling to know one end of a mangle from another, then when they find out, doing their best to break it as a protest – Lord knows how they think we're going to wash our clothes and bedding, but I fancy they assume clean stuff will just materialise.

As to coping with the language and conversations of some of the regular prisoners, those in for prostitution, thieving, or worse, well I have to chuckle sometimes at their faces. They're not used to seeing women tearing each other's hair out, cussing and swearing and you can see their distaste. Woe betide if a man shows his face as the conversation can be even lewd by our standards, and I thought you and I had seen and heard most things in our time. How the other half live, eh?

I must just grin and bear it I suppose. Not long now.

Your sister  
Josie