Let Them Call it Jazz

One bright Sunday morning in July I have trouble with my Notting Hill landlord because he asks for a month's rent in advance. He tells me this after I live there since winter, settling up every week without fail. I have no job at the time, and if I give the money he wants there's not much left. So I refuse. The man drunk already at that early hour, and he abuse me—all talk, he can't frighten me. But his wife is a bad one—now she walk in my room and say she must have cash. When I tell her no, she give my suitcase one kick and it burst open. My best dress fall out, then she laugh and give another kick. She say month in advance is usual, and if I can't pay find somewhere else.

Don't talk to me about London. Plenty people there have heart like stone. Any complaint—the answer is 'prove it'. But if nobody see and bear witness for me, how to prove anything? So I pack up and leave, I think better not have dealings with that woman. She too cunning, and Satan don't lie worse.

I walk about till a place nearby is open where I can have coffee and a sandwich. There I start talking to a man at my table. He talk to me already, I know him, but I don't know his name. After a while he ask, 'What's the matter? Anything wrong?' and when I tell him my trouble he say I can use an empty flat he own till I have time to look around.

This man is not all like most English people. He see very quick, and he decide very quick. English people take long time to decide—you three quarter dead before they make up their mind about you. Too besides, he speak very matter of fact, as if it's nothing. He speak as if he realize well what it is to live like I do—that's why I accept and go.

He tell me somebody occupy the flat till last week, so I find everything all right, and he tell me how to get there—three quarters of an hour from Victoria Station, up a steep hill, turn left, and I can't mistake the house. He give me the keys and an envelope with a telephone number on the back. Underneath is written 'After 6 p.m. ask for Mr Sims'.

In the train that evening I think myself lucky, for to walk about London on a Sunday with nowhere to go—that take the heart out of you.

I find the place and the bedroom of the downstairs flat is nicely furnished—two looking glass, wardrobe, chest of drawers, sheets, everything. It smell of jasmine scent, but it smell strong of damp too.
I open the door opposite and there's a table, a couple chairs, a gas stove and a cupboard, but this room so big it look empty. When I pull the blind up I notice the paper peeling off and mushrooms growing on the walls—you never see such a thing.

The bathroom the same, all the taps rusty. I leave the two other rooms and make up the bed. Then I listen, but I can't hear one sound. Nobody come in, nobody go out of that house. I lie awake for a long time, then I decide not to stay and in the morning I start to get ready quickly before I change my mind. I want to wear my best dress, but it's a funny thing—when I take up that dress and remember how my landlady kick it I cry. I cry and I can't stop. When I stop I feel tired to my bones, tired like old woman. I don't want to move again—I have to force myself. But in the end I get out in the passage and there's a postcard for me. 'Stay as long as you like. I'll be seeing you soon—Friday probably. Not to worry.' It isn't signed, but I don't feel so sad and I think 'All right, I wait here till he come. Perhaps he know of a job for me.'

Nobody else live in the house but a couple on the top floor—quiet people and they don't trouble me. I have no word to say against them.

First time I meet the lady she's opening the front door and she give me a very inquisitive look. But next time she smile a bit and I smile back—once she talk to me. She tell me the house very old, hundred and fifty-year old, and she and her husband live there since long time. 'Valuable property,' she says, 'it could have been saved, but nothing done of course.' Then she tells me that as to the present owner—if he is the owner—well he have to deal with local authorities and she believe they make difficulties. 'These people are determined to pull down all the lovely old houses—its shameful.'

So I agree that many things shameful. But what to do? What to do? I say it have an elegant shape, it make the other houses in the street look cheap trash, and she seem pleased. That's true too. The house sad and out of place, especially at night. But it have style. The second floor shut up, and as for my flat, I go in the two empty rooms once, but never again.

Underneath was the cellar, full of old boards and broken-up furniture—I see a big rat there one day. It was no place to be alone in I tell you, and I get the habit of buying a bottle of wine most evenings, for I don't like whisky and the rum here no good. It don't even taste like rum. You wonder what they do to it.

After I drink a glass or two I can sing and when I sing all the misery goes from my heart. Sometimes I make up songs but next morning I forget them, so other times I sing the old ones like 'Tantalizin' ' or 'Don't Trouble Me Now'.

I think I go but I don't go. Instead I wait for the evening and the wine and
that's all. Everywhere else I live—well, it doesn't matter to me, but this house is different—empty and no noise and full of shadows, so that sometimes you ask yourself what make all those shadows in an empty room.

I eat in the kitchen, then I clean up everything nice and have a bath for coolness. Afterwards I lean my elbows on the windowsill and look at the garden. Red and blue flowers mix up with the weeds and there are five—six apple trees. But the fruit drop and lie in the grass, so sour nobody want it. At the back, near the wall, is a bigger tree—this garden certainly take up a lot of room, perhaps that's why they want to pull the place down.

Not much rain all the summer, but not much sunshine either. More of a glare. The grass get brown and dry, the weeds grow tall, the leaves on the trees hang down. Only the red flowers—the poppies—stand up to that light, everything else look weary.

I don't trouble about money, but what with wine and shillings for the slat-meters, it go quickly; so I don't waste much on food. In the evening I walk outside—not by the apple trees—but near the street—it's not so lonely.

There's no wall here and I can see the woman next door looking at me over the hedge. At first I say good evening, but she turn away her head, so afterwards I don't speak. A man is often with her, he wear a straw hat with a black ribbon an gold-rim spectacles. His suit hang on him like it's too big. He's the husband it seems and he stare at me worse than his wife—he stare as if I'm wild animal let loose. Once I laugh in his face because why these people have to be like that? I don't bother them. In the end I get that I don't even give them one single glance. I have plenty other things to worry about.

To show you how I felt. I don't remember exactly. But I believe it's the second Saturday after I come that when I'm at the window just before I go for my wine I feel somebody's hand on my shoulder and it's Mr Sims. He must walk very quiet because I don't know a thing till he touch me.

He says dulls, then he tells me I've got terrible thin, do I ever eat. I say of course I eat but he goes on that it doesn't suit me at all to be so thin and he'll buy some food in the village. (That's the way he talk. There's no village here. You don't get away from London so quick.)

It don't seem to me he look very well himself, but I just say bring a drink instead, as I am not hungry.

He come back with three bottles—vermouth, gin and red wine. Then he ask if the little devil who was here last smash all the glasses and I tell him she smash some, I find the pieces. But not all. "You fight with her eh?"

He laugh, and he don't answer. He pour out the drinks then he says, "Now,
you eat up those sandwiches.'

Some men when they are there you don't worry so much. These sort of men you do all they tell you blindfold because they can take the trouble from your heart and make you think you're safe. It's nothing they say or do. It's a feeling they can give you. So I don't talk with him seriously—I don't want to spoil that evening. But I ask about the house and why it's so empty and he says:

'Has the old trout upstairs been gossiping?'
I tell him, 'She suppose they make difficulties for you.'

'It was a damn bad buy,' he says and talks about selling the lease or something. I don't listen much.

We were standing by the window then and the sun low. No more glare. He puts his hand over my eyes. 'Too big—much too big for your face' he says and kisses me like you kiss a baby. When he takes his hand away I see he's looking out at the garden and he says this—'It gets you. My God it does.'

I know very well it's not me he means, so I ask him, 'Why sell it then? If you like it, keep it.'

'Sell what?' he says. 'I'm not talking about this damned house.'
I ask what he's talking about. 'Money,' he says. 'Money. That's what I'm talking about. Ways of making it.'

'I don't think so much of money. It don't like me and what do I care?' I was joking, but he turns around, his face quite pale and he tells me I'm a fool. He tells me I'll get push around all my life and die like a dog, only worse because they'd finish off a dog, but they'll let me live till I'm a caricature of myself. That's what he say, 'Caricature of yourself.' He say I'll curse the day I was born and everything and everybody in this bloody world before I'm done.

I tell him, 'No I'll never feel like that' and he smiles, if you can call it a smile, and says he's glad I'm content with my lot. I'm disappointed in you Selina. I thought you had more spirit.'

'If I contented that's all right,' I answer him, 'I don't see very many looking contented over here.' We're standing staring at each other when the door bell rings. 'That's a friend of mine,' he says. 'I'll let him in.'

As to the friend, he's all dressed up in stripe pants and a black jacket and he's carrying a brief case. Very ordinary looking but with a soft kind of voice.

'Maurice, this is Selina Davis,' says Mr Sims, and Maurice smiles very kind but it don't mean much, then he looks at his watch and says they ought to be getting along.

At the door Mr Sims tells me he'll see me next week and I answer straight
out 'I won't be here next week because I want a job and I won't get one in this place.'

'Just what I'm going to talk about. Give it a week longer Selina.'

'I say 'Perhaps I stay a few more days. Then I go. Perhaps I go before.'

'Oh no you won't go,' he says.

They walk to the gates quickly and drive off in a yellow car. Then I feel eyes on me and it's the woman and her husband in the next door garden watching. The man make some remark and she look at me so hateful, so hating I shut the front door quick.

I don't want more wine. I want to go to bed early because I must think. I must think about money. It's true I don't care for it. Even when somebody steal my savings—this happen soon after I get to the Notting Hill house—I forget it soon. About thirty pounds they steal. I keep it roll up in a pair of stockings, but I go to the drawer one day, and no money. In the end I have to tell the police. They ask me exact sum and I say I don't count it lately, about thirty pounds. 'You don't know how much?' they say. 'When did you count it last? Do you remember? Was it before you move or after?'

I get confuse, and I keep saying 'I don't remember' though I remember well I see it two days before. They don't believe me and when a policeman come to the house I hear the landlady tell him, 'She certainly had no money when she came here. She wasn't able to pay a month's rent in advance for her room though it's a rule in this house.' 'These people terrible liars,' she say and I think 'it's you a terrible liar, because when I come you tell me weekly or monthly as you like.' It's from that time she don't speak to me and perhaps it's she take it. All I know is I never see one penny of my savings again, all I know is they pretend I never have any, but as it's gone, no use to cry about it. Then my mind goes to my father, for my father is a white man and I think a lot about him. If I could see him only once, for I too small to remember when he was there. My mother is fair coloured woman, fairer than I am they say, and she don't stay long with me either. She have a chance to go to Venezuela when I three-four year old and she never come back. She send money instead. It's my grandmother take care of me. She's quite dark and what we call 'country-cookie' but she's the best I know.

She save up all the money my mother send, she don't keep one penny for herself—that's how I get to England. I was a bit late in going to school regular, getting on for twelve years, but I can sew very beautiful, excellent—so I think I get a good job—in London perhaps.

However here they tell me all this fine handsewing take too long. Waste of
time—too slow. They want somebody to work quick and to hell with the small stitches. Altogether it don’ t look so good for me, I must say, and I wish I could see my father. I have his name—Davis. But my grandmother tell me ‘Every word that come out of that man’s mouth a damn lie. He is certainly first class liar, though no class otherwise.’ So perhaps I have not even his real name.

Last thing I see before I put the light out is the postcard on the dressing table. ‘Not to worry.’

Not to worry! Next day is Sunday, and it’s on the Monday the people next door complain about me to the police. That evening the woman is by the hedge, and when I pass her she says in very sweet quiet voice, ‘Must you stay? Can’t you go?’ I don’t answer. I walk out in the street to get rid of her. But she run inside her house to the window, she can still see me. Then I start to sing, so she can understand I’m not afraid of her. The husband call out: ‘If you don’t stop that noise I’ll send for the police.’ I answer them quite short. I say, ‘You go to hell and take your wife with you.’ And I sing louder.

The police come pretty quick—two of them. Maybe they just round the corner. All I can say about police, and how they behave is I think it all depend who they dealing with. Of my own free will I don’t want to mix up with police. No.

One man says, you can’t cause this disturbance here. But the other asks a lot of questions. What is my name? Am I tenant of a flat in No. 17? How long have I lived there? Last address and so on. I get vexed the way he speak and I tell him, ’I come here because somebody steal my savings. Why you don’t look for my money instead of bawling at me? I work hard for my money. All-you don’t do one single thing to find it.’

’What’s she talking about?’ the first one says, and the other one tells me ’You can’t make that noise here. Get along home. You’ve been drinking.’

I see that woman looking at me and smiling, and other people at their windows, and I’m so angry I bawl at them too. I say, ’I have absolute and perfect right to be in the street same as anybody else, and I have absolute and perfect right to ask the police why they don’t even look for my money when it disappear. It’s because a dam English thief take it you don’t look,’ I say. The end of all this is that I have to go before a magistrate, and he fine me five pounds for drunk and disorderly, and he give me two weeks to pay.

When I get back from the court I walk up and down the kitchen, up and down, waiting for six o’clock because I have no five pounds left, and I don’t know what to do. I telephone at six and a woman answers me very short and sharp, then Mr Sims comes along and he don’t sound too pleased either when I
tell him what happen. 'Oh Lord I' he says, and I say I'm sorry. 'Well don't panic,' he says, 'I'll pay the fine. But look, I don't think.' Then he breaks off and talk to some other person in the room. He goes on, 'Perhaps better not stay at No. 17. I think I can arrange something else. I'll call for you Wednesday—Saturday latest. Now behave till then.' And he hang up before I can answer that I don't want to wait till Wednesday, much less Saturday. I want to get out of that house double quick and with no delay. First I think I ring back, then I think better not as he sound so vex.

I get ready, but Wednesday he don't come, and Saturday he don't come. All the week I stay in the flat. Only once I go out and arrange for bread, milk and eggs to be left at the door, and seems to me I meet up with a lot of policemen. They don’t look at me, but they see me all right. I don't want to drink—I'm all the time listening, listening and thinking, how can I leave before I know if my fine is paid? I tell myself the police let me know, that's certain. But I don't trust them. What they care? The answer is Nothing. Nobody care. One afternoon I knock at the old lady's flat upstairs, because I get the idea she give me good advice. I can hear her moving about and talking, but she don’t answer and I never try again.

Nearly two weeks pass like that, then I telephone. It's the woman speaking and she say, 'Mr Sims is not in London at present.' I ask, 'When will he be back—it's urgent' and she hang up. I'm not surprised. Not at all. I knew that would happen. All the same I feel heavy like lead. Near the phone box is a chemist's shop, so I ask him for something to make me sleep, the day is bad enough, but to lie awake all night—Ah no! He gives me a little bottle marked 'One or two tablets only' and I take three when I go to bed because more and more I think that sleeping is better than no matter what else. However, I lie there, eyes wide open as usual, so I take three more. Next thing I know the room is full of sunlight, so it must be late afternoon, but the lamp is still on. My head turn around and I can't think well at all. At first I ask myself how I get to the place. Then it comes to me, but in pictures—like the landlady kicking my dress, and when I take my ticket at Victoria Station, and Mr Sims telling me to eat the sandwiches, but I can't remember everything clear, and I feel very giddy and sick. I take in the milk and eggs at the door, go in the kitchen, and try to eat but the food hard to swallow.

It's when I'm putting the things away that I see the bottles—pushed back on the lowest shelf in the cupboard.

There's a lot of drink left, and I'm glad I tell you. Because I can't bear the way I feel. Not any more. I mix a gin and vermouth and I drink it quick, then
I mix another and drink it slow by the window. The garden looks different, like I never see it before. I know quite well what I must do, but it's late now—tomorrow. I have one more drink, of wine this time, and then a song come in my head, I sing it and I dance it, and more I sing, more I am sure this is the best tune that has ever come to me in all my life.

The sunset light from the window is gold colour. My shoes sound loud on the boards. So I take them off, my stockings too and go on dancing but the room feel shut in, I can't breathe, and I go outside still singing. Maybe I dance a bit too. I forget all about that woman till I hear her saying, 'Henry, look at this.' I turn around and I see her at the window. 'Oh yes, I wanted to speak with you,' I say, 'Why bring the police and get me in bad trouble? Tell me that.'

'And you tell me what you're doing here at all,' she says. 'This is a respectable neighbourhood.'

Then the man come along. 'Now young woman, take yourself off. You ought to be ashamed of this behaviour.'

'It's disgraceful,' he says, talking to his wife, but loud so I can hear, and she speaks loud too—for once. 'At least the other tarts that crook installed here were white girls,' she says.

'You a dam founi liar,' I say. 'Plenty of those girls in your country already. Numberless as the sands on the shore. You don't need me for that.'

'You're not a howling success at it certainly.' Her voice sweet sugar again. 'And you won't be seeing much more of your friend Mr Sims. He's in trouble too. Try somewhere else. Find somebody else. If you can, of course.' When she say that my arm moves of itself. I pick up a stone and bam! through the window. Not the one they are standing at but the next, which is of coloured glass, green and purple and yellow.

I never see a woman look so surprise. Her mouth fall open she so full of surprise. I start to laugh, louder and louder—I laugh like my grandmother, with my hands on my hips and my head back. (When she laugh like that you can hear her to the end of our street.) At last I say, 'Well, I'm sorry. An accident. I get it fixed tomorrow early.' 'That glass is irreplaceable,' the man says. 'Irreplaceable.' 'Good thing,' I say, 'those colours look like they sea-sick to me. I buy you a better windowglass.'

He shake his fist at me. 'You won't be let off with a fine this time,' he says. Then they draw the curtains. I call out at them. 'You run away. Always you run away. Ever since I come here you hunt me down because I don't answer back. Its you shameless,' I try to sing 'Dont trouble me now'.
Don't trouble me now
You without honour.
Don't walk in my footstep
You without shame.

But my voice don't sound right, so I get back indoors and drink one more glass
of wine—still wanting to laugh, and still thinking of my grandmother for that
is one of her songs.

It's about a man whose doudou give him the go-by when she find somebody
rich and he sail away to Panama. Plenty people die there of fever when they
make that Panama canal so long ago. But he don't die. He come back with
dollars and the girl meet him on the jetty, all dressed up and smiling. Then he
sing to her, 'You without honour, you without shame.' It sound good in
Martinique patois too 'Sans honte'.

Afterwards I ask myself, 'Why I do that? It's not like me. But if they treat
you wrong over and over again the hour strike when you burst out that's what.'

Too besides, Mr Sims can't tell me now I have no spirit. I don't care, I sleep
quickly and I'm glad I break the woman's ugly window. But as to my own song
it go right away and it never come back. A pity.

Next morning the doorbell ringing wake me up. The people upstairs don't
come down, and the bell keeps on like fury self. So I go to look, and there is a
policeman and a policewoman outside. As soon as I open the door the woman
put her foot in it. She wear sandals and thick stockings and I never see a foot
so big or so bad. It look like it want to mash up the whole world. Then she
come in after the foot, and her face not so pretty either. The policeman tell me
my fine is not paid and people make serious complaints about me, so they're
taking me back to the magistrate. He show me a paper and I look at it, but I
don't read it. The woman push me in the bedroom, and tell me to get dress
quickly, but I just stare at her, because I think perhaps I wake up soon. Then I
ask her what I must wear. She say she suppose I had some clothes on yesterday.
Or not? 'What's it matter, wear anything,' she says. But I find clean under-
clothes and stockings and my shoes with high heels and I comb my hair. I
start to file my nails, because I think they too long for magistrate's court but
she get angry. 'Are you coming quietly or aren't you?' she says. So I go with
them and we get in a car outside.

I wait for a long time in a room full of policemen. They come in, they go
out, they telephone, they talk in low voices. Then it's my turn, and first thing
I notice in the court room is a man with frowning black eyebrows. He sit be-
low the magistrate, he dressed in black and he so handsome I can't take my eyes off him. When he see that he frown worse than before.

First comes a policeman to testify I cause disturbance, and then comes the old gentleman from next door. He repeat that bit about nothing but the truth so help me God. Then he says I make dreadful noise at night and use abominable language, and dance in obscene fashion. He says when they try to shut the curtains because his wife so terrify of me, I throw stones and break a valuable stain-glass window. He say his wife get serious injury if she'd been hit, and as it is she in terrible nervous condition and the doctor is with her. I think, 'Believe me, if I aim at your wife I hit your wife—that's certain.' 'There was no provocation,' he says. 'None at all.' Then another lady from across the street says this is true. She heard no provocation whatsoever, and she swear that they shut the curtains but I go on insulting them and using filthy language and she saw all this and heard it.

The magistrate is a little gentleman with a quiet voice, but I'm very suspicious of these quiet voices now. He ask me why I don't pay my fine, and I say because I haven't the money. I get the idea they want to find out all about Mr Sims—they listen so very attentive. But they'll find out nothing from me. He ask how long I have the flat and I say I don't remember. I know they want to trip me up like they trip me up about my savings so I won't answer. At last he ask if I have anything to say as I can't be allowed to go on being a nuisance. I think, 'I'm nuisance to you because I have no money that's all.' I want to speak up and tell him how they steal all my savings, so when my landlord asks for month's rent I haven't got it to give. I want to tell him the woman next door provoke me since long time and call me bad names but she have a soft sugar voice and nobody hear—that's why I broke her window, but I'm ready to buy another after all. I want to say all I do is sing in that old garden, and I want to say this in decent quiet voice. But I hear myself talking loud and I see my hands wave in the air. Too besides it's no use, they won't believe me, so I don't finish. I stop, and I feel the tears on my face. 'Prove it.' That's all they will say. They whisper, they whisper. They nod, they nod.

Next thing I'm in a car again with a different policewoman, dressed very smart. Not in uniform. I ask her where she's taking me and she says 'Holloway' just that 'Holloway'.

I catch hold of her hand because I'm afraid. But she takes it away. Cold and smooth her hand slide away and her face is china face—smooth like a doll and I think, 'This is the last time I ask anything from anybody. So help me God.'

The car come up to a black castle and little mean streets are all round it. A
lorry was blocking up the castle gates. When it get by we pass through and I
am in jail. First I stand in a line with others who are waiting to give up hand-
bags and all belongings to a woman behind bars like in a post office. The girl
in front bring out a nice compact, look like gold to me, lipstick to match and
a wallet full of notes. The woman keep the money, but she give back the powder
and lipstick and she half-smile. I have two pounds seven shillings and sixpence
in pennies. She take my purse, then she throw me my compact (which is cheap)
my comb and my handkerchief like everythin’ in my bag is dirty. So I think,
‘Here too, here too.’ But I tell myself, ‘Girl, what you expect eh? They all like
that. All.’

Some of what happen afterwards I forget, or perhaps better not remember.
Seems to me they start by trying to frighten you. But they don’t succeed with
me for I don’t care for nothing now, it’s as if my heart hard like a rock and I
can’t feel.

Then I’m standing at the top of a staircase with a lot of women and girls. As
we are going down I notice the railing very low on one side, very easy to jump,
and a long way below there’s the grey stone passage like it’s waiting for you.

As I’m thinking this a uniform woman step up alongside quick and grab
my arm. She say, ‘Oh no you don’t.’

I was just noticing the railing very low that’s all—but what’s the use of
saying so.

Another long line waits for the doctor. It move forward slowly and my legs
terrible tired. The girl in front is very young and she cry and cry. ‘I’m scared,’
she keeps saying. She’s lucky in a way—as for me I never will cry again. It all
dry up and hard in me now. That, and a lot besides. In the end I tell her to
stop, because she doing just what these people want her to do.

She stop crying and start a long story, but while she is speaking her voice
get very far away, and I find I can’t see her face clear at all.

Then I’m in a chair, and one of those uniform women is pushing my head
down between my knees, but let her push—everything go away from me just
the same.

They put me in the hospital because the doctor say I’m sick. I have a cell by
myself and it’s all right except I don’t sleep. The things they say you mind I
don’t mind.

When they clang the door on me I think, ‘You shut me in, but you shut all
those other dam devils out. They can’t reach me now.’

At first it bothers me when they keep on looking at me all through the night.
They open a little window in the doorway to do this. But I get used to it and I
get used to the night chemise they give me. It very thick, and to my mind it not
very clean either—but what’s that matter to me? Only the food I can’t swallow
—especially the porridge. The woman ask me sarcastic, ‘Hunger striking?’
But afterwards I can leave most of it, and she don’t say nothing.

One day a nice girl comes around with books and she give me two, but I don’t
want to read so much. Beside one is about a murder, and the other is about
a ghost and I don’t think it’s at all like those books tell you.

There is nothing I want now. It’s no use. If they leave me in peace and quiet
that’s all I ask. The window is barred but not small, so I can see a little thin
tree through the bars, and I like watching it.

After a week they tell me I’m better and I can go out with the others for
exercise. We walk round and round one of the yards in that castle—it is fine
weather and the sky is a kind of pale blue, but the yard is a terrible sad place.
The sunlight fall down and die there. I get tired walking in high heels and I’m
glad when that’s over.

We can talk, and one day an old woman come up and ask me for dog-ends.
I don’t understand, and she start muttering at me like she very vexed. Another
woman tell she she mean cigarette-ends, so I say I don’t smoke. But the old
woman still look angry, and when we’re going in she give me one push and I
nearly fall down. I’m glad to get away from these people, and hear the door
clang and take my shoes off.

Sometimes I think, I’m here because I wanted to sing’ and I have to laugh.
But there’s a small looking glass in my cell and I see myself and I’m like some-
body else. Like some strange new person. Mr Sims tell me I too thin, but what
he say now to this person in the looking glass? So I don’t laugh again.

Usually I don’t think at all. Everything and everybody seem small and far
away, that is the only trouble.

Twice the doctor come to see me. He don’t say much and I don’t say any-
ting, because a uniform woman is always there. She look like she thinking,
‘Now the lies start.’ So I prefer not to speak. Then I’m sure they can’t trip me
up. Perhaps I there still, or in a worse place. But one day this happen.

We were walking round and round in the yard and I hear a woman singing—
the voice come from high up, from one of the small barred windows. At first I
don’t believe it. Why should anybody sing here? Nobody want to sing in jail,
nobody want to do anything. There’s no reason, and you have no hope. I think
I must be asleep, dreaming, but I’m awake all right and I see all the others are
listening too. A nurse is with us that afternoon, not a policewoman. She stop
and look up at the window.
It's a smoky kind of voice, and a bit rough sometimes, as if those old dark walls themselves are complaining, because they see too much misery—too much. But it don't fall down and die in the courtyard; seems to me it could jump the gates of the jail easy and travel far, and nobody could stop it. I don't hear the words—only the music. She sing one verse and she begin another, then she break off sudden. Everybody starts walking again, and nobody says one word. But as we go in I ask the woman in front who was singing. 'That's the Holloway song,' she says. 'Don't you know it yet? She was singing from the punishment cells, and she tell the girls cheerio and never say die.' Then I have to go one way to the hospital block and she goes another so we don't speak again.

When I'm back in my cell I can't just wait for bed. I walk up and down and I think. 'One day I hear that song on trumpets and these walls will fall and rest.' I want to get out so bad I could hammer on the door, for I know now that anything can happen, and I don't want to stay lock up here and miss it.

Then I'm hungry. I eat everything they bring and in the morning I'm still so hungry I eat the porridge. Next time the doctor come he tells me I seem much better. Then I say a little of what really happen in that house. Not much. Very careful.

He look at me hard and kind of surprised. At the door he shake his finger and says, 'Now don't let me see you here again.'

That evening the woman tells me I'm going, but she's so upset about it I don't ask questions. Very early, before it's light she bangs the door open and shouts at me to hurry up. As we're going along the passages I see the girl who gave me the books. She's in a row with others doing exercises. Up Down. Up. Down Up. We pass quite close and I notice she's looking very pale and tired. It's crazy, it's all crazy. This up down business and everything else too. When they give me my money I remember I leave my compact in the cell, so I ask if I can go back for it. You should see that policewoman's face as she shoo me on.

There's no car, there's a van and you can't see through the windows. The third time it stop I get out with one other, a young girl, and it's the same magistrates' court as before.

The two of us wait in a small room, nobody else there, and after a while the girl say, 'What the hell are they doing? I don't want to spend all day here.' She go to the bell and she keep her finger press on it. When I look at her she say, 'Well what are they for?' That girl's face is hard like a board—she could change faces with many and you wouldn't know the difference. But she get results certainly. A policeman come in, all smiling, and we go in the court.
same magistrate, the same frowning man sits below, and when I hear my fine
is paid I want to ask who paid it, but he yells at me. ‘Silence’

I think I will never understand the half of what happen, but they tell me I
can go. and I understand that. The magistrate ask if I'm leaving the neighbour-
hood and I say yes, then I'm out in the streets again, and it's the same fine
weather, same feeling I'm dreaming.

When I get to the house I see two men talking in the garden. The front door
and the door of the flat are both open. I go in, and the bedroom is empty, noth-
ing but the glare streaming inside because they take the Venetian blinds away.
As I'm wondering where my suitcase is, and the clothes I leave in the ward-
robe, there's a knock and it's the old lady from upstairs carrying my case
packed, and my coat is over her arm. She says she sees me come in. 'I kept your
things for you.' I start to thank her but she turn her back and walk away. They
like that here, and better not expect too much. Too besides, I bet they tell her
I'm terrible person.

I go in the kitchen, but when I see they are cutting down the big tree at the
back I don't stay to watch.

At the station I'm waiting for the train and a woman asks if I feel well. 'You
look so tired,' she says. 'Have you come a long way?' I want to answer, 'I come
so far I lose myself on that journey.' But I tell her, 'Yes, I am quite well. But I
can't stand the heat.' She says she can't stand it either, and we talk about the
weather till the train come in.

I'm not frightened of them any more—after all what else can they do? I
know what to say and everything go like a clock works.

I get a room near Victoria where the landlady accept one pound in advance,
and next day I find a job in the kitchen of a private hotel close by. But I don't
stay there long. I hear of another job going in a big store—altering ladies'
dresses and I get that. I lie and tell them I work in very expensive New York
shop. I speak bold and smooth faced, and they never check up on me. I make a
friend there—Clarice—very light coloured, very smart, she have a lot to do
with the customers and she laugh at some of them behind their backs. But I
say it's not their fault if the dress don't fit. Special dress for one person only—
that's very expensive in London. So it's take in, or let out all the time. Clarice
have two rooms not far from the store. She furnish them herself gradual and
she give parties sometimes Saturday nights. It's there I start whistling the
Holloway Song. A man comes up to me and says, 'Let's hear that again.' So I
whistle it again (I never sing now) and he tells me 'Not bad'. Clarice have an old
piano somebody give her to store and he plays the tune, jazzing it up. I say,
'No, not like that,' but everybody else say the way he do it is first class. Well I think no more of this tell I get a letter from him telling me he has sold the song and as I was quite a help he encloses five pounds with thanks.

I read the letter and I could cry. For after all, that song was all I had. I don't belong nowhere really, and I haven't money to buy my way to belonging. I don't want to either.

But when that girl sing, she sing to me, and she sing for me. I was there because I was meant to be there. It was meant I should hear it—this I know.

Now I've let them play it wrong, and it will go from me like all the other songs—like everything. Nothing left for me at all.

But then I tell myself all this is foolishness. Even if they played it on trumpets, even if they played it just right, like I wanted—no walls would fall so soon. 'So let them call it jazz,' I think, and let them play it wrong. That won't make no difference to the song I heard.

I buy myself a dusty pink dress with the money.