

Arrested

London in the early 20th century. Kitty, the narrator, has been arrested. Richard, her husband, has come to fetch her at the police station.



Richard's response was predictable - a rage he contained in front of the police but unleashed in the cab home. He shouted about the family name, about the disgrace to his mother, about the uselessness of the cause. All of this I had known to expect, from hearing of the reactions of other women's husbands. Indeed I have been lucky to go this long without Richard complaining. He has thought my activities with the WSPU a harmless hobby to be dabbled in between tea parties. It is only now he truly understands that I too am a suffragette.

"What about your daughter?" he shouted. "She needs a better example than you are setting." [...]

We were silent the rest of the way back. When we got home I took a candle from the hall table and went directly up to Maude's room. I sat on her bed and looked at her in the dim light, wondering how to tell her what I must tell her.

She opened her eyes and sat up before I had said anything. "What is it, Mummy?" she asked so clearly that I am not sure she had been asleep.

It was best to be honest and direct. "Do you know where I was today while you were at school?"

"At the WSPU headquarters?"

"I was at Caxton Hall for the Women's Parliament. But then I went to Parliament Square with some others to try to get in to the House of Commons."

"And... did you?"

"No. I was arrested. I've just come back from Cannon Row Police Station with your father. Who is furious, of course."

"But why were you arrested? What did you do?"

"I didn't do anything. We were simply pushing through the crowd when policemen grabbed us and threw us to the ground. When we got up they threw us down again and again. The bruises on my shoulders and ribs are quite spectacular. We've all got them."

I did not add that many of these bruises came from the ride in the Black Maria - how the driver took corners so sharply I was thrown about, or how the cubicles in the van were so small that I felt I had been shut in a coffin standing up. [...]

"I'll be in court early tomorrow," I continued. "They may send me straight to Holloway. I wanted to say goodbye now." "But... how long would you be in... in prison?"

"I don't know. Possibly up to three months."