

A Militant

By the time they reached the Wellington Arch, the gates had been closed, and the police were massed around it, on horseback and on foot. Large crowds had gathered to watch the affray. Evelyn's stomach clenched. For the first time, she realised that Teddy might have a point. This wasn't the part of *Joan of Arc* where she gave noble speeches and everyone cheered. It was the part where the cavalry charged.

By the time Evelyn and Teddy reached the gates, the battle – and it *did* look like a battle, despite the interested spectators and the petticoats – was already in full force. As far as Evelyn could tell, the mass of women were pushing against the police cordon, while the police attempted to drive them back. The line of policemen stretched far across on either side of the Arch. Evelyn glanced at Teddy.

'Heavens,' he said. 'I had no idea the royal family were so uptight. All this fuss just so as not to read a lady's letter!'

'Rude, I call it,' said Evelyn. She felt a little shaky. The noise of the battle – she couldn't think of it as anything other than a battle – was immense. The women around the cordon

were yelling and roaring. She reached out and took Teddy's hand. He gave it a squeeze.

'Funking it, are you?' he said.

'No,' she said firmly.

'I am,' he said. 'Oh well. Into the Valley of Death and all that, eh?'

'Sometimes,' said Evelyn grimly, 'I wonder why I don't just leave you at home.'

Afterwards, they sat in the Maison Lyons at Marble Arch, and drank cup after cup of tea and ate shortbread fingers. The tea-room was full of women shoppers, and families, and parcels, and bulging shopping bags, and waitresses squeezing between the tables with plates of sandwiches, and a three-piece band playing an enthusiastic Gilbert and Sullivan medley, and the whole thing left Evelyn rather breathless.

'What just happened?' she said.

'I think,' said Teddy, 'that *that* was what they call police brutality.'

'It was frightfully brutal, whatever it was,' said Evelyn.

She wasn't sure how many women had been arrested, but it was dozens. She had watched as they'd been forcibly dragged to the police vans, kicking and yelling and thumping the policemen. She'd seen one woman grabbed by her breasts and pulled to the ground. Another had been beaten with a nightstick.

'To be fair to the policemen,' said Teddy. 'Those women of yours were dashed ferocious. I jolly well wouldn't want to meet one of them in a dark alleyway, I can tell you that.'

'One of *us*, you mean,' said Evelyn.

But she agreed with him. 'Unwomanly', the Suffragettes were called, which Evelyn had always thought something of a joke. Plump, socialist Miss Plom, unwomanly! Or little Miss Colyer, all in violet!

But after today, she wasn't so sure. She had seen one woman use what looked like a horse-whip against a policeman. Another had attacked the police sergeant with a walking-stick. You could hardly blame them for retaliating, could you?

It was the Suffragette beaten with a nightstick who had quailed her. She'd watched as the woman had crumpled, and Teddy had put his hand on her shoulder.

'Enough?' he'd said, rather white in the face, and she'd nodded.

Evelyn believed, in theory, that a woman who hit a policeman was no worse than a man who hit a policeman. And sometimes, after all, policemen *did* need to be hit. Several of today's policemen, she felt, had certainly deserved everything they'd got.

But it was one thing to hold these principles in theory, and quite another to see them enacted. Evelyn had never set much store on behaving like a lady. But to see women behaving like those women had behaved today . . . it made her feel cold.

She looked up from her shortbread, and saw that Teddy was watching her with an odd expression on his face.

'Evelyn — don't go on any more marches like that, will you?' he said.

'I don't see what business it is of yours if I do or I don't,' said Evelyn.

'I'm serious,' he said. 'Sell papers if you want, wear sand-

wich boards – I don't suppose you'll get much more than rotten fruit thrown at you. But – stay away from that sort of thing, won't you?'

'We'll see,' said Evelyn. She had been more shaken by the action than she cared to admit. This did not, however, mean she intended to let Teddy tell her what to do.

'Evelyn, you could have been killed,' he said, and she said, impatiently, 'Oh, don't be such a prig. Isn't there anything you'd risk your life for?'

'I'm blowed if I can imagine what,' said Teddy. 'Not a cause anyway. There's people I might die for.'

'Oh, people,' said Evelyn. She thought gloomily that this was probably the difference between Teddy and herself. She knew one *ought* to risk one's life to save someone like Hetty from a house on fire, but when it came down to it, she could never quite picture herself doing so. The Emancipation of Women was a much simpler thing to imagine dying for. But Teddy, who was so careful and sensible – Teddy would leap into the flames for Hetty without so much as blinking.

It was a rather depressing realisation, and to distract herself from it, she broke off a large piece of shortbread and said, 'You'd jolly well better not get any ideas about rescuing me from any burning buildings. I'll do my own rescuing, thank you very much.'

'Ah, modern woman,' said Teddy. He reached over, took the last piece of her shortbread, and popped it in his mouth. 'So romantic!'