

Sister Suffragette

It's a London winter evening,
Which means heavy coats and dripping faces,
Loud shouts and louder silences,
Newspapers soaked in grease and snow crumpled in ditches,
Snatches of Christmas tunes drowning in a moaning wind,
Fog swirling like a gathering storm under the silent golden haze of streetlamps.

We march like a flock of militant ravens,
Our dresses dark and stark against the trampled snow,
Our boots crunching on the sharp cracking ice,
We don't speak to each other, just move silently
Through the tattered winter cheer, clutching
The hammers hidden in our skirts.

I know it's illegal,
That prison with its grey yawning sameness awaits me,
And a tube forced down my throat to stuff me like a goose,
And a husband with a pained face and worried eyes,
And children with tear-sticky cheeks and no sympathy,
And yet if I don't do this I think I will die.

We reach the building,
A porcelain shop with large glass windows guarding its dainty wares,
An edifice to a world made to be broken,

And as we ready our hammers,
Nod to our comrades,
The sickly pale moon breaks from behind a smothering blanket of cloud.

In this moment, I'm free,
Not a wife, not a mother,
Not defined by who I am to other people,
Alive to everything—the stink of piss, the coal smoke,
The drag of my dress against the snow, the heart battering my ribs,
The united, excited breathing of my sisters next to me.

I swing the hammer at my own moon-lit reflection

And as the window cracks

I don't avert my eyes

I watch it break

All around me hammers fly

The twisted mirrors shatter

There's glass, cruelly glittering

Crushed into my clothes

Gleaming on my arms

Sparkling in my hair

And all I feel is dark bitter triumph

And all I hear are parades and trumpets and marching bands and

A chorus of damned angels

I did this

And then the windows are conquered,

Lying dead and broken on the street in a thousand shards,
And we've destroyed some porcelain too,
Delicate tea cups and painted plates,
The kind of pretty things given as consolation prizes
To the women dozing in their chains, imprisoned in their parlors.

That's the reason they don't join us,
The other women,
Because they're satisfied with their porcelain, satisfied with their stupor,
Because the ones who realize that they're trapped in a cave watching a shadow play
Would rather close their eyes and dream of living color,
Because if they can never have the light they never want to be awake.