



The March

Jenny Crakes

Her sister Rose was adding salt to the soup when Leah told her about the suffragist march down in London next week. She must've known what Rose's answer would be, but Leah proceeded to sew the banner anyway, pricking her fingers during late nights in Rose's shop after the dressmaking work was done.

The morning of the march she hurried down to the train station before dawn, her face pensive and her skirts too short for her long legs. The unfamiliar city was a whirlwind for Leah with its streetcars and pelting rain and policemen; unsettling though not yet menacing.

At Parliament Square there were throngs of women in lines that knit themselves together, and one of the leaders took her by the elbow and gave her wooden poles to hold the banner. In the midst of the march Leah felt a part of things, and when the uniforms descended she was full of enough nervous resolve to keep clutching the poles while two of them argued over who

should take her banner away. Finally one of them wrenched it from her, twisting her wrist and striking hard at her fingers.

"Oh," she said, very quietly despite the voices around them that were shouting. The flash of pain mixed with a blur of activity as they were rounded into wagons and then cells inside the station; the whole thing seemed like a bad dream.

No one from home knew where Leah was. It was cold in the station, but the women were singing and laughing, calling her a brave girl. She fell half asleep in a shivery haze until she woke hours later to the sound of Rose's voice, and a policeman unlocking the door and saying her sister could take her home.

Rose had brought the wagon and halfway home she was too angry to speak to Leah, sitting stiffly upright as they were jolted and bounced on the wooden seat.

Finally Rose burst out, "You don't care anything about the

suffragists, Leah, you're only doing this for a lark." "He broke two of my fingers," Leah said, and Rose pulled the reins up short.

"What?"

"Taking my banner away. A policeman broke two of my fingers."

Rose took Leah's arm and turned her hand over, surveying the damage and sucking in a sharp breath.

"Just keep still until we're home," she said. "I'll splint your hand there."

They kept on, to where the paved road turned to gravel, towards the lush, green fields and the still town and the close, quiet room where endless hemlines and the promise of enough tiny stitches to make Leah's eyes ache awaited.

At their driveway, Rose turned back to her. "We won't tell anyone what happened today. But you are not going back to London."

Leah thought of how more had happened to her on this one day than ever in her life before, and how next time, no one would take the banner from her. She started to say something, when Rose interrupted. "That's enough. That's all there is to it."

But it wasn't.

