

## Protest

*'I was always cold, but I felt only a trace of hunger.'*

— Suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst's account of being force-fed for the first time (1913)

They told me that I would be forced. How dare they?! Hot and cold shivers ran down my body. I had to find something, anything, to defend myself. Voices grew louder, but the noise of blood pumping in my ears kept me from understanding a single word. A key turned in the lock and I pressed myself against the opposite wall, preparing to throw anything within my reach. I did not, however, expect what I saw. Instead of doctors, four women entered. They seized me by the arms and legs and pinned me to my cot. At first, I was too shocked to resist, but when I felt hands grip my head, I tensed my jaw and tightly shut my mouth, pressing my lips together. Just then a group of doctors entered my cell. One of them approached, roughly grabbing my face and trying to force open my mouth. I did not surrender. So, the human fingers were substituted by a steel gag. I struggled to break free, but the grip on my gums was too strong. My mouth was wrenched open and began to fill with the ferrous taste of blood. I could feel pieces of broken teeth on my tongue. They inserted a tube into my mouth, pushing it deeper. I tried to contract the muscles of my throat in an attempt at preventing the object from intruding further. I failed. The tube scratched down my oesophagus, finally reaching my stomach. I continued struggling in pain, sobbing and choking. How I had the energy to stay conscious, I do not know. I was too weak even to register what they were saying to one another. I assume, discussing how much of the vile mixture I could take.

After what felt like hours, yet again, the tube moved inside me, this time in the opposite direction. As it left my mouth, so did most of the contents of my stomach. They were still holding my limbs against the cot, so that most of the vomit remained in my mouth and throat, choking me. I thought I must suffocate. Eventually, they let go and let me spit it out. It was all over my hair, my clothes and face. Their footsteps ebbed away, as they abandoned me – covered in sick, hyperventilating, sobbing and abused.