I have an important decision to make, Miss Paul,” said Doctor Fallon, sitting in a chair by the metal bed to which his patient was restrained. “The doctors and nurses on the ward here tell me you have not eaten in over two weeks.”

His patient, one Miss Alice Paul, was a small woman who took up barely half of the infirmary bed. He had seen the photos of her when she was first brought into Occoquan Workhouse, and they had shown a proud face with round cheeks, the very picture of health.

But now, those cheeks were sunken and dark, her skin waxy and pale. Her hair was unkempt and knotted, and her lips cracked. Deep hollows surround her eyes, but from within those depths they burned with a fierce spirit and unwavering determination.

According to her file, she was arrested during some sort of protest, another suffragette group clamoring for women to have the right to vote. He himself had no opinions on the subject and was unconcerned with the movement or with politics in general. Only his patients here at the prison concerned him.

Doctor Fallon continued. “I’m sure you must realize that our patients’ health is of the utmost importance to us. We simply cannot have patients harming themselves in this manner, you understand?”

Alice simply smiled politely. “Well, the doctors who have seen you want me to have you force-fed. I shall really have no choice but to do so. You see?” She remained impassive, and Doctor Fallon had begun to become uncomfortable. He did not like having to justify his actions, and it was starting to annoy him. “You do understand what I mean, correct?” She nodded to show she was listening but made no comment.

“Miss Paul, I do not think you grasp the seriousness of what I am talking about. The process is called nasogastric feeding, and it will not be very pleasant, I’m afraid. You see, they will insert—”

“I’m quite aware of the process, Doctor Fallon.”

He was taken aback and said nothing for several seconds. “You are?”

“Yes. A rubber tube is inserted through the nostril and down the back of the throat into the stomach. Liquid food, eggs I believe are standard, are then poured through a funnel into the tube and directly into the stomach itself. I was subjected to this … procedure when I was in England.”

Doctor Fallon was again silent for a few moments as he gathered his wits. “Then you will understand how unpleasant it can be. Surely you will wish to avoid this? If you will simply start eating again…”

Alice shook her head. “Do you know why I am here, Doctor?”

“You were arrested for disturbing the peace by protesting outside of
the White House. Obstructing traffic, I believe was the charge."

“No. Our protest has been going on for years, and they never bothered to arrest us. It was the same many years ago when I was with the National American Woman’s Suffrage Association. I was imprisoned for refusing to give up.”

Doctor Fallon gave a confused look, and Alice continued. “For years President Wilson and the rest turned a blind eye to us, laughed at us for fools. But no one actually bothered with us.

“But when the war broke out, everyone assumed we would just give up, that our sense of patriotism would move us to abandon our quest for equality. When we did not, they harassed us, arrested us for minor charges, locked us up in jail for brief periods of time. Anything they could to force us to quit and go away, return to our lives as non-citizens.

“But we would not surrender. Finally, they sent us here. While here, we have been beaten, deprived of sleep, placed in freezing rooms, and fed spoiled food full of worms. And do you know why they have done this?”

Doctor Fallon shifted in his seat uncomfortably and simply shook his head.

“They believe that their actions are stronger than our beliefs. They oppose a woman’s right to vote, and they are willing to use the power they have to fight against us. But we do not have any such power beyond ourselves. And in the end, our convictions will prove stronger than their authority.

“History will be the final judge of us all, Doctor, so do as your conscience dictates, and so shall I.” She put her head back down on the bed and said no more.

Doctor Fallon was silent for a few moments. Finally he stood. “I cannot speak as to your treatment here at the workhouse, Miss Paul. And it is not for me to determine a woman’s right to vote.” He opened the door and gestured to the staff waiting outside to wheel in the cart with the equipment for the nasogastric feeding. “I am merely a doctor, and I heal bodies and strive to keep them healthy. And that is what I shall do.”

“I understand, Doctor. And I will continue to strive to heal the country’s soul.”

—CHRISTOPHER CRUMPLER
John I Leonard High School

**Defining Civic Virtues: Perseverance**

To remember how many before you chose the easy path rather than the right one, and to stay the course.