

# For Josephine by RIVER WOLTON

Written for Bolsover District Council's event to celebrate the centenary of women's right to vote and the 90th anniversary of universal suffrage. July 2018.

Josephine Foote Hitch was born in Rotherham in 1872, and lived at Stainsby, Derbyshire for much of her life. She died in 1965 aged 93. Her grand-daughter Ann Newth Wood inherited her suffragette sash, and a 1910 letter from Adela Pankhurst thanking Josephine for her efforts. Ann recorded her grandma's suffragette history for the Sherwood U3A Family History Group, including the detail that Josephine used to hide under platforms to heckle renowned speakers, and was arrested, possibly imprisoned.

*Josephine waits underneath the stage  
with musty panto props, ghosts of applause,  
hears audience arrive, laced black boots tap;  
her wooden cave's a dusty silent pause,*

*she waits, injustice at her back, not knowing  
future thousands owe their freedom  
to her acts. She waits with muted breath,  
the cloud of voices swells above her head -*

*the twittering storm, the ones that wish her dead,  
the words, the words she's poised to break apart.  
She's daughter of the rage that swept her here,  
a prison cell's her fate; she gifts us*

*these seconds, this tipping point  
in which is found the strength to interrupt,  
to burst out of the tired old ways,  
to shatter inequality of gender, class and race;*

*she gifts her boldness and her bravery  
as she flings aside conventionality.  
Josephine shouts out, takes centre stage  
and makes her mark indelibly on history's page.*

