

CHARACTERS

- JEANNETTE RANKIN      Well-known Montanan politician, first woman elected to the U.S. Congress
- WELLINGTON RANKIN    Jeannette's brother and kingmaker, a savvy but eccentric businessman

SETTING

A Harvard dorm room. A bed, chair and desk, piled high with law books

TIME

January 1908

ACT I

SCENE 1

WELLINGTON is deep in study. There's a knock at the door

WELLINGTON

It's open.

(Jeannette enters, carrying an armful of books and a small velvet drawstring purse that she places on his desk.)

JEANNETTE

Burning the midnight oil, I see.

WELLINGTON

I can't wait to get out of here. One more tort final and I'm done. Get back to the fresh air and mountains. I've finished with this cramped lifestyle.

JEANNETTE

Well, I hope we can have some fun while I'm here.

WELLINGTON

Why'd you bring all that then?

JEANNETTE

Just a little reading.

(He impatiently moves the books and the purse falls on the ground with a thud.)

WELLINGTON

What's that?

(He picks up the purse, feels its weight, pulls a billy club out of it.)

JEANNETTE

Oh yes, I got that for protection.

WELLINGTON

You need a billy club for protection at the New York School of Philanthropy?

JEANNETTE

Oh no, not at the school. When I make my calls.

(He just looks at her, perplexed, hands her the club.)

You know, on the lower Eastside. I'm studying deaf children in the Jewish-Italian district.

WELLINGTON

You have to hit them with that to get their attention?

JEANNETTE

Not the children, silly, but there are holligans everywhere. The poverty is enormous..

(slaps the billy club in her hand)

This is for when I work in the night police court. You never know what you're going to find there.

WELLINGTON

Night court! You're out at night with a bunch of criminals! You call this school? Does Mother know?

JEANNETTE

I guess you never hear what I tell you. Our school is in the thick of things. We're going up against the established order, Wellington. For one thing, our teachers have shown that social Darwinism – you know the survival of the fittest theory – is just another mechanism by which the rich retain their power over the poor.

WELLINGTON

Oh, brother!

JEANNETTE

You really need to read more.

(He motions to his stack of books, with disgust)

JEANNETTE (CONT)

This is the twentieth century, after all. It's 1908! Once you get out of law school you'll have time to read other things. Meanwhile I will keep you informed as best I can.

WELLINGTON

That's what I'm afraid of!

JEANNETTE

First let me tell you about the lecture I heard this week. It was simply incredible. It was titled, let me think ... Misery and Its Causes ... the speaker was so .

(He interrupts, waving her off)

WELLINGTON

I'm miserable enough. Thank you!

JEANNETTE

Oh, Wellington, we were so ... taken care of and there are so many with nothing. Mainly I worry about the women and children.

WELLINGTON

Well, tell me about them, then. Theories are just that.

JEANNETTE

Last week there was this one little boy – just so full of joy and life. If I had been at home, I think I would have taken him. Just three years old. His mother has two younger. The father is off somewhere and the mother couldn't handle all three children and still do her sewing in that sweatshop they call and factory and try to feed them all. So I took him to a home. The mother didn't mind losing him. She just waved her hand and said, 'bye, bye.'

(While vaguely listening he straightens his collar, goes to view himself in a mirror)

WELLINGTON

(catching different views of himself in the mirror)

This is all very sad, Jeannette, but what do you plan to do with this so-called education?

JEANNETTE

You look fine ... handsome as always, Wellington. My goodness!

WELLINGTON

I know. Just checking.

(tries on a new topcoat)

What do you think of this? I just bought it.

JEANNETTE

You have wonderful taste, Wellington.

(tone shift)

There is just so much that needs to be done!

WELLINGTON

(checking his nails, jokingly)

So where will you start? I mean, once you're out of the 'ivy walls' of the School of Philanthropy?

JEANNETTE

I will probably return to Montana for a time.

(he shed the topcoat, catches another glimpse of himself in the mirror, plops back down in his chair)

WELLINGTON

And start a social revolution from Montana! Really, Jeannette, you are something!

JEANNETTE

There is poverty and injustice there, just as there is here. We weren't likely to see it, living in our big house on Madison Street.

WELLINGTON

Well, I plan to have another big house, once I get my law practice established, so do me a favor and only ask for money once I've had a chance to make some! I have a feel this revolution of yours is going to be expensive!

ACT I

SCENE 2

A luxury Montana hotel room. Two years have passed. Jeannette and Wellington enter, quite excited. Both are dressed to indicate they've been at an important event.

WELLINGTON

You did it!

JEANNETTE

Did I? You really think so?

(they both are pacing the room, nearly bumping into each other in their enthusiasm)

WELLINGTON

They didn't laugh you off the podium, did they?

JEANNETTE

I was so afraid of that. All some of them have done is laugh at us when Suffrage comes up.

WELLINGTON

They're not laughing now, are they?

JEANNETTE

The hall was full of violets! What was that all about?

WELLINGTON

They took up a collection and ordered them up from San Francisco. They've never had a woman speak in the Legislature and wanted to point out how

ridiculous it was, or maybe they were just being gallant, the old retrobates. But you turned them around old girl, you surely did!

JEANNETTE

Well, your coaching in public speaking did help, little brother.

WELLINGTON

You did fairly well, but while we're on it, here, give me the speech.

(she pulls a piece of paper from her drawstring purse)

You've got to have a little more inflection in your delivery, change your tone some, go from loud to quieter, get a little drama up with the whole thing. Now listen up.

(positions himself to get a view of himself in a mirror, reads in an overly dramatic manner)

It is not for myself that I am making this appeal, but for the six million women who are suffering for better conditions, women who should be working amid more sanitary conditions, under better moral conditions, at equal wages with men for equal work performed. For those women and their children, I ask that you support this measure.

(Jeannette has enjoyed this immensely. She claps, laughing.)

JEANNETTE

Well done, boy, well done.

WELLINGTON

Don't do that. Only mother is allowed to call me that.

JEANNETTE

The BOY she says. You'd think she was calling you the KING.

WELLINGTON

Well, six daughters and one son. What can you expect?





