

**A GOOD CAUSE**  
**by MARSALI TAYLOR**

**CHARACTERS**

JANIE SANDISON, aged 15 - a servant  
MAG SANDISON, her mother  
SANDY SANDISON, her father  
JAMES SANDISON, her older brother  
MAISIE SANDISON, her older sister  
WILLIE SANDISON, her middle brother  
JESSIE STEPHENS, servant and militant member of the WSPU  
MRS DONALDSON, Janie's mistress  
Members of the suffrage movement - in groups of four girls  
NEWHAVEN FISHWIFE [or equivalent local female worker of the time], a Working Woman's Delegate

**In cafe:**

MRS THORNTON  
MISS CAMPBELL  
MISS FRASER  
ETHEL MOORHEAD  
MRS MACAULAY

**Waxworks:** MR ASQUITH, MR CHURCHILL, POLICEMAN, EMMELINE PANKHURST

**In prison:**

JUDGE  
WARDRESSES

**At War:**

MABEL STOBART  
DR INGLIS  
SIR FREDERICK TREVES  
KITCHENER  
GRACE ASHLEY SMITH  
CHORUS OF WOMEN

Suggested doubling for a smaller cast of nine 6F, 3M:

JANIE SANDISON  
MAG SANDISON, her mother + MRS THORNTON, MABEL STOBART  
SANDY SANDISON, her father + CHURCHILL, MR FRASER  
JAMES SANDISON, her brother + ASQUITH, SIR FREDERICK TREVES  
MAISIE SANDISON, her sister+ GIRL 2, NEWHAVEN FISHWIFE, MRS MACAULAY  
WILLIE SANDISON, her brother + POLICEMAN, JUDGE, KITCHENER  
JESSIE STEPHENS + GIRL 1, WARDRESS, GRACE ASHLEY SMITH  
MRS DONALDSON + GIRL 3,  
GIRL 4 + EMMELINE PANKHURST, MISS CAMPBELL, WARDRESS, DR INGLIS  
With a cast of only 9 some of the other named women, such as in the cafe scene, would have to have their lines allocated to Mrs Donaldson, Miss Campbell, Mrs Macaulay and Mrs Thornton.

The running time is approximately 40 minutes.

Note: though the play is set in Scotland and some incidents are from the Scottish suffragette

movement, it is not hard to set in England, with minimal changes.

The play traces the history of the suffragette movement as it affects Janie Sandison. Janie leaves home to become a maid for a woman who supports the suffragettes. Already a fervent admirer of the movement, she joins and starts by selling magazines to support the cause. Then she is persuaded into militancy, against her inclination; she is concerned that no person should be hurt. In the event, after her first really militant action she is arrested, imprisoned and force-fed. Her health is broken by this and she returns to her family. When World War One breaks out, she becomes an ambulance-driver at the front. At the end of the War, she celebrates what the women have won but ends with the understanding that there is still a long way to go - the fight has just begun.

Against the background of Janie's journey, we see how her opinions affect her family. Father and one brother - Willie - are supportive of her; James, the other brother is not, though he is shaken by the brutality of force-feeding. Mag is shocked by Janie's outspokenness and feels women should know their place, in the home and with the family. Her sister Maisie comes over to her side when the War breaks out, signing up to become a nurse at the front.

The play could be done as an exam piece - with a very busy and alert cast, doubling as suggested above. However, it would have even more impact with a larger cast.

#### EXTRACT 1

***THE GIRLS are onstage in silhouette wearing suffragette rosettes and badges, carrying hammers. Big Ben is visible in the background.***

**GIRL 1** The thought of breaking big shop windows scared me. I was trembling from head to foot as I stood at Barkers' window waiting for eleven to strike.

***Sound of Big Ben striking. The women raise their hammers, looking at each other apprehensively.***

**GIRL 2** Feeling sick, I banged a window with my hammer.

***The sound of breaking glass over continuing chimes.***

**GIRL 3** People stared.

**GIRL 1** I banged another, breaking it thoroughly.

***Sound of breaking glass.***

**GIRL 4** People fled. I was seized by two policemen and marched off.

***Blowing of police whistles, shouts, etc. Policemen arresting women - not gently. [For pared down cast version - single policeman runs on and arrests Girl 4. Other women can either behave as if they too are being manhandled - in time with Girl 4, or run off.]***

***Lights dim to blackout.***

SCENE 2: January 1910.

***Lights up on a working man's house. Mag is laying the table for the evening meal. There is a letter propped up in the centre of the table. She stops as she hears footsteps, the front door shutting, and picks up the letter. Janie enters.***

**MAG** Your letter's come.

**JANIE** Oh - [*She takes it from her mother, opens and reads.*] I've got it! They're offering me the job!

**MAG** Well then.

**JANIE reads** 'Kitchen maid to the household.'

**MAG** Though what's wrong with this house, that your father and I work to make comfortable for you...

**JANIE** Ma, there's nothing wrong with home. I just want to see the world.

**MAG** Seeing the world's for men.

**JANIE** Why? Why should it be just for them?

**MAG** When you have a family of your own, you'll understand.

**Footsteps at the door. Mag immediately busies herself about the table. Sandy, James and Willie come in. They're in working clothes.**

**JANIE** Dad, Dad, I've got the job!

**SANDY** Well, well, that's good news.

**JANIE** They want me to start right away.

**WILLIE** Well done, Janie. That must've been a good letter you wrote them. [**He goes to wash.**]

**JAMES** That's fine, Janie. Ma, isn't tea ready?

**JANIE** Maisie's not home yet.

**MAG** Never mind your sister, come and help. [**To the men.**] Sit down, then.

**Willie returns, wiping his face. The men sit down. Janie and Mag serve out the food. The men are just about to sit down when Maisie comes in, flustered.**

**MAISIE** We had a customer just as we were closing. I had to get every blessed hat in the shop down for her.

**MAG** Your father's about to ask the Lord's blessing.

**Maisie is hastily silent. The women stand behind their chairs, ready to refill the men's plates, bring up cups of tea, etc. They won't sit for their meal until the tea and biscuits are on the table.**

**SANDY** Some have meat and cannot eat, and some have none that want it, But we have meat, and we can eat, and so the Lord be thanked.

**ALL** Amen.

**JAMES** So, Janie, that'll put an end to you running after those suffragettes.

**MAG** And a good thing too. You'll have more work to do than you've had here, my girl.

**JANIE** I know.

**WILLIE** Now, Ma, Janie does her share.

**MAISIE** Those suffragette women aren't for the likes of us to mix with. A lot of gentry that never did a hand's turn in their lives. Like that one that kept me waiting just now. She didn't have to worry about going home and making tea, not her.

**JANIE** Miss Brown isn't like that.

**MAISIE** That's exactly it. You call her Miss Brown, but does she call you Miss Sandison?

**JANIE** No, but -

**MAISIE** And who else is in the Society with her? No, don't tell me. The Mayor's wife and the daughter of the last Mayor, and a handful of teachers from the school, and the lawyer's sister.

**JANIE** Who else has the time to fight for rights for us all? Not you, nor Mam.

**MAG** I've more sense. Why would I want a vote? What do I know about politics? Nothing, nor do I want to. I've a house to run.

**JAMES** And Maisie wants a husband. This society of Janie's is nothing but a parcel of old maids.

**WILLIE** I think it'd be a good thing if women were to get the vote. There's a lot wrong with the way we live, and it's women bear the weight of it.

**JANIE** It's justice we should have the vote.

**JAMES** Well, you needn't look to me to bail you out of prison if you go joining the window breakers.

**MAG** Yes, my girl, you just keep your head down and attend to your work. And don't give your new mistress any of this nonsense.

**SANDY** Mag! [**She stills.**] Mag, you know full well our Janie has the brains of two, and if

we had more money than I'd have liked to see her a teacher. Her Society - well - right enough it's the posh folk that run it, but there's no reason under heaven why men in prison and fools and bankrupts should have a vote and you, Maisie and Janie not have any.

**JAMES** Women don't have the brains to organise things. How could they take part in politics?

**SANDY** Boy, your mother's organised this house for thirty years now, and it's not fallen down around us yet.

**MAG** The house is what women are fitted for. Interfering with government's a different thing entirely.

**JAMES** How could women understand the importance of the Empire? And if you give them the vote, the next thing we'll hear of is women MPs. How could you trust women to send men off to war?

**JANIE** New Zealand's not in ruins yet, and they've had women voting there for fifteen years now.

**WILLIE** If women had the vote, there'd be more said about housing conditions and why so many children die.

**JAMES to Janie** And you'll need to keep your mouth shut until you know what the other servants think of this women question.

**MAG** I think she'll keep it closed all together, and get on with her work.

**The men are now finishing eating. They rise. Sandy pauses by Janie.**

**SANDY** You'll do what you think is right, Janie.

**JANIE** I will indeed.

**SANDY** I wouldn't like to think of my girl being manhandled by the police.

**JANIE** Don't you fret about that. All the same, I'll maybe get to one or two of the rallies.

**SANDY** Write and tell us all about them.

**Lights fade to blackout.**

## EXTRACT 2

### SCENE 6 CENSUS NIGHT, 1911

**A number of women, including Jessie, are gathered in a cafe. Several are standing still as 'waxworks': Mrs Pankhurst with a WSPU placard, a Policeman, Asquith with his top hat, Winston Churchill with his cigar.**

**As each new person following arrives, there's a cheer and laughter.**

**MRS THORNTON arriving** One less for the Government to count.

**ALL ON STAGE EXCEPT 'WAXWORKS'** No vote, no census return!

**MRS MACAULAY** My husband's not happy about me staying out all night.

**ALL ON STAGE** No representation for women, no information from women!

**Janie and her mistress, Mrs Donaldson, enter**

**MRS DONALDSON** This is a good turnout. Put our coats in the the cloakroom, Janie.

**ALL** No vote, no census return!

**MRS DONALDSON** No return home till midday. Goodness knows how my better half will manage - but I left him the cook.

**Laughter. Some of the better-dressed women rise to greet Mrs Donaldson and they go to inspect the waxworks. Janie brings the coats downstage then goes to join Jessie in the servants' corner down right.**

**MRS DONALDSON** Mr Asquith, I presume.

**And the waxworks come to life.**

**MR ASQUITH deep voice** No time for Bills. No votes for women.

**MRS DONALDSON** No information from women.

**MRS PANKHURST** At him, ladies!

**Others take up mock charge tableaux.**

**MR ASQUITH** Constable, arrest that virago.  
*Mrs Pankhurst and other women give a mock-outraged 'Oooh' at 'virago.'*

**MR ASQUITH** That hyena in petticoats.  
*Louder 'Ooooh'.*

**MR ASQUITH** Do your duty, man, for the country.  
*The Policeman bops Mr Asquith. Cheers and applause.*

**WINSTON CHURCHILL** Good evening, ladies and hyenas. I am Winston Churchill, Home Secretary, in charge of the behaviour of the police.

**POLICEMAN** *very Cockney* Beg pardon, sir.

**WINSTON CHURCHILL** Yes, Constable?

**POLICEMAN** These here hyenas, sir. Is that a kind of dog?  
*Cries of 'Careful!' from the women.*

**POLICEMAN** Only, sir, I'm not very fond of dogs. Especially not when they're a set of -  
*More cries of mock outrage and 'Careful!'*

**POLICEMAN** - lady dogs, sir.

**WINSTON CHURCHILL** Do your duty, Constable. Arrest them all!  
*Policeman looks round.*

**POLICEMAN** What, all of them, sir?

**MR ASQUITH** I order you to charge these women, man.

**POLICEMAN** Ain't brought my hoss, sir. Beg leave to retire, sir.  
*Cheers, applause.*

**MISS CAMPBELL** *jumping up* Ethel Moorhead!

**MRS THORNTON** Three cheers for Miss Moorhead!

**MRS FRASER** Hip hip -  
*Cheers.*

**ETHEL MOORHEAD** Mr Churchill, I have to tell you - you're a bad egg.

**WINSTON CHURCHILL** Madam!

**ETHEL MOORHEAD** And here's another!  
*She aims and throws imaginary egg, which hits him on the forehead. He mimes wiping it off. Cheers, a court curtsey from Ethel.*

**JANIE** *awed, to Jessie* She didn't really, did she?

**JESSIE** Yes, she did.

**YOUNG WOMAN** - *the smallest cast member, sneaks up behind Churchill and says 'Boo!' Churchill faints. Young Woman does 'I killed this lion' pose, waving WFL flag.*  
*As the waxworks are getting themselves back to frozen poses as at the beginning of the scene:*

**MRS DONALDSON** Listen to this! ...

### EXTRACT 3

**KITCHENER & MEN** Men of Britain, your country needs you.

**SOME WOMEN** Pit lasses.

**OTHER WOMEN** Shipbuilders.

**MEN** *horrified* What?

**WOMEN** Shipbuilders, riveters, painters, welders.

**ASQUITH** This session of Parliament, in recognition of their work for the nation, the Government will introduce a Bill enfranchising women over the age of thirty-five.

**WOMEN** *firmly* Thirty.

**ASQUITH** Over the age of thirty.

**ALL** *announce* 1917.

***Janie and Maisie lying on different parts of the stage, writing.***

**JANIE** Dear Mum, The Lord knows if this'll ever get to you. We've just been caught up in a retreat. Now we're back at Galatz and I've been on duty for four weeks solid -no time for horse rides with handsome Russian officers now!

**MAISIE** I'm not going even to try to describe the injuries we've seen. Men with missing limbs. Men with their faces half blown off. Gas injuries. We've run out of penicillin. We have to pick maggots out of the wounds with tweezers.

**JANIE** Roads? There are no roads. I take fifteen men each run, bumping them over fields and between trees, knowing how much each jolt hurts. I unload them at the hospital, then go back for another load.

**MAISIE & JANIE** Are Dad and the boys still safe?

**JANIE** Is there any sign of it all ending?

**KITCHENER** Women must take the place of men on the land so that the men can be spared to fight.

**GROUP OF WOMEN** Women's Land Army. Women's Forestry Corps.

**KITCHENER** Women will be substituted for men wherever possible, both in France and in England, to release men now employed in clerical and other departments.

**GROUP OF WOMEN** Women's Royal Navy Service. WRNS.

**GROUP OF WOMEN** WRAF.

**GROUP OF WOMEN** WAAC.

**WOMEN** In the Services, not civilians. With the troops.

**GIRL 1** Cooking.

**GIRL 2** Cleaning.

**GIRL 3** Clerking.

**GIRL 4** Technical skills training.

**WOMEN** Absolutely no mixing with the men.

**KITCHENER** They must stay three miles behind the lines. Women could not possibly stand the strain of front-line life.

**WOMEN** Night raids behind the lines.

***Explosion.***

***We see women being blown up, slow motion. They pull themselves out of where they have landed with groans and mutters, struggle up, line up and salute audience with military precision.***

**WOMEN** Reporting for duty, sir.

EXCERPT FROM PRODUCTION NOTES for A GOOD CAUSE by Marsali Taylor

## **PRODUCTION NOTES + TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.**

N.B. These notes are suggestions only. You may find them helpful; or they may act as a springboard for your own ideas; or you can choose to ignore them entirely!

### **INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTION.**

Note: though the play is set in Scotland and many incidents are from the Scottish suffragette movement, it is not hard to set in England, with minimal changes.

The play traces the history of the suffragette movement as it affects Janie Sandison. Janie leaves home to become a maid for a woman who supports the suffragettes. Already a fervent admirer of the movement, she joins and starts by selling magazines to support the cause. Then she is persuaded into militancy, against her inclination; she is concerned that no person should be hurt. In the event, after her first really militant action she is arrested, imprisoned and force-fed. Her health is broken by this and she returns to her family. When World War One breaks out, she becomes an ambulance-driver at the front. At the end of the War, she celebrates what the women have won but ends with the understanding that there is still a long way to go - the fight has just begun.

Against the background of Janie's journey, we see how her opinions affect her family. Father and one brother - Willie - are supportive of her; James, the other brother is not, though he is shaken by the brutality of force-feeding. Mag is shocked by Janie's outspokenness and feels women should know their place, in the home and with the family. Her sister Maisie comes over to her side when the War breaks out, signing up to become a nurse at the front.

The play is not in any way naturalistic - except arguably in the family scenes. It is political drama, with character doubling and characters who are ciphers. Often these are actual historical characters, such as Asquith, using viewpoints about suffrage and so on that were current at the time. There is no real character development, though there are changes in viewpoint. In a Brechtian way, scenes span a large number of years and many places.

The messages of the play are mainly to show the horrors women were prepared to go through to win suffrage. A secondary theme, though it is not dwelled upon, is the waste of the War. None of the male members of Janie's family survive it. It is the role of the women that the War years concentrates on; we do not see the fate of the men.

### **CHARACTERS**

As stated above, the characters are mainly non-naturalistic and on for only a very brief time. Often they are called indicators only such as Policeman, Wardress, or just Girl 1. Or they are historical characters quoting words or viewpoints they made at the time.

The fictional characters are Janie, her family and Jessie.

JANIE is bright but from a poor background, so has to work. Her father wants her to be a teacher, but they cannot afford to send her to college for training. She goes to work for a lady who happens also to be a suffragette. This lady takes Janie with her to the suffrage meetings. Janie meets the militant Jessie and becomes involved in breaking windows and other criminal activities for the furtherance of the cause. She is anxious that no lives are lost. Janie is arrested and imprisoned. Like other suffragettes she refuses to eat and is force-fed. This breaks her health and she is finally released to her home. World War I breaks out and Janie frets about going to the front to help. For a while, all

she is able to do is knit for the war effort, but eventually she goes to the Front to drive ambulances. After the War, she decides not to become a teacher but a lawyer, to continue to fight for women's rights.

MAG is Janie's mother. She is a traditional working class woman, sure that her place is to create a comfortable home for her working menfolk. Her life revolves round the cleaning of the house, the washing and mending of clothes and the preparation of food in time for the return of the men. She and her daughters wait on the men and do not eat until they are fed. She is against all the ideas that fill Janie's head, but is supportive up to a point when her daughter's health has been affected. Really, even at the end, she would rather her daughters simply returned to the traditional female roles, 'finding a man' and settling down to look after him.

SANDY is Janie's father and very proud of her. Very much head of the family, he can silence his wife or his sons with a single authoritative word. He is pro women having the vote, though with his busy working life he does not take an active part in their fight. He does support Janie's aims throughout, however, and writes to the authorities about her case and that of force-fed women in general, when this occurs. He dies before the end, perhaps in the War, though it is not stated.

JAMES -[JAMIE] is Janie's brother. He is angry and disapproving of the suffrage stance. It is unfeminine and should be stopped. His father controls worse outbursts, but James is against throughout, though angry at the prison service over the force-feeding - like the rest of the family. His attitude, though, is that she has brought trouble on herself. He is killed in the War.

WILLIE is Janie's other brother. Unlike James, Willie supports suffrage and is proud of his sister. He is close to Janie. He too is killed in the War.

MAISIE is Janie's sister and works in a hatshop. She begins the play as a clone of her mother's opinions, disapproving of Janie putting herself forward. In fact, she makes quite a strong political point at the start, stating quite correctly that the mainstays of the women's suffrage movement are rich society women who have the time to do it, since they don't work. In her own way, she is as outspoken as Janie herself. By the end of the play, though, Maisie has changed. She does not state she is pro- women's suffrage, but she does want to help the War effort in an active way. She joins Janie at the Front, becoming a nurse. When she returns from the War, her activities have turned her into a practical suffragette. It is not the ideas - which fired Janie up - but the fact that women had to do the men's work, and did it well, that fires her. As she says - no one will be able to say that women 'can't' again.

JESSIE is another servant who befriends Janie at one of the meetings. Tired of the length of time taken through persuasion and speechifying, which are getting no results, Jessie supports the Pankhursts who are carrying suffrage to a more active level. Violent actions, such as breaking the windows of prominent buildings or setting fires in public places, will bring attention more quickly to the cause, she believes. She is persuasive and manages to enlist Janey's help, providing no lives are threatened.

## **SETTING**

Best done with the majority of the stage left open, to allow for changes of place and for large numbers. Even using a small cast means that all 9 actors will often be onstage at once. One part of the stage could be permanently set up as the family dining-room, with table and chairs, perhaps a lamp and so on - as much detail as you would like, since this setting remains throughout. I would suggest that it is on a raised level, taking up a large part of one side, though set slightly back. If you have an apron or can build out a thrust,



for instance, it could take up most of one side, right to the curtain-line, but still allow action to happen in front of it.

I suggest that a front curtain of a gauze is used, so that the girls can be backlit for silhouettes in the first scene. This could be used again during the fire scene, for instance...