

Match Girls Strike

The sun was shining over the hilltops and the leaves whistled in the frosty winter air.

Annie looks up and sees all the voting signs vandalized with moustaches and stink lines.

Talk about immaturity. She smiles half-heartedly and shrugs. No-one could vote anyway because it was 1888 in London and women weren't allowed to vote because of silly... discrimination.

The bell suddenly rang! Annie was late for duty. She ran as fast as she could to the Bryant & May match factory, where women boxed matches.

Out of virtually nowhere, William Bryant appeared.

"You are late!" he bellowed. He smacked a cane sharply down on Annie's hand leaving a red mark with faint blood trickling from it. "You are not getting your 8 shillings this week."

"Sorry sir," she muttered.

"Sir, in my defense, I sent her to pick up some new rags." Annie gasped. Next to her was Sarah Chapman and here she was protecting Annie from Mr. Bryant. He sniffed at her, turned away, and ran to a girl who had dropped a box of matches. "Thanks!" Annie smiles, clenching her sore hand tightly.

"Here." Sarah ushes Annie to sit down and she dresses the wound with a bandage. It was old but clean. "Why aren't you a nurse or doctor?" Annie asked.

Sarah shrugged and responded with, 'Never got the opportunity.' Annie gave her a hug, just as the bell rang for the 2min lunch break which the match girls could not even afford with their poor wages. "Lunch is on me!"

"No Sarah, you have given me enough, honestly!" Annie replied. She shakes her head and buys two hot fresh meat pies. Annie took a bite. The pastry practically melted in her mouth. "Sarah, how did you....." The bell rang to say lunch was over and to get back to work. Annie and Sarah walked back to their desk to start boxing the matches. "Ahh!" A scream pierced the air and the same girl who dropped her matches before, collapsed on the ground. Francis May walked down the rusty stairs and roared "Stay put."

Regardless, Sarah ran towards her and so did I.

"Her pupils are blown!" Sarah cries. She feels for a pulse, sadly it was non-existent.

"She died." Sarah whispered sadly, tears quickly forming.

A nurse arrived and swept the girl into her arms, carrying her out the door. Everyone started to cry, pools and pools of tears. The girl's name was Mary Little. "She gave me all her shillings to buy food for my baby sister as she is the only family member I have got left alive!" Lizzie replied. She had worked with Mary for only a month, and Annie wished she had gotten to know her a lot better. "Back to work!" thunders Ms May.

"Mrs, we need to pay our respects!" Sarah cried. Everyone gasped.

"Well, your fingerprints are all over her, so you are going to be in jail next for murder!"

She whispered. Sarah's eyes opened wide, and she returned to her desk. "Well pipsqueaks, keep working!"

Annie grabbed the matches and boxed them quickly. The bell rang loudly to say that the day was over. Everyone rushed out the door and hurried to the cemetery. “What did she say to you?” Annie asked Sarah. She looked Annie in the eyes and rushed to the cemetery. Annie followed her and the other groups of match girls to the cemetery. There was a little girl about the age of six wandering around. “Have you seen Mary Little?” she asked. “My **sister** was meant to meet me here after her work at the matchy factory.” Everyone stood back and Annie took a breath and stood forward.

“What is your name?” Annie asked.

“Molly!” she smiled, hugging her little doll.

“Molly..” Annie took a sad sigh. “Your sister has died!” Molly dropped her doll in surprise and rushed into Annie’s arms crying. Sarah picked up the doll and hugged little Molly. The other girls rushed forward and hugged Molly in silence.

“Do you want to stay with me?” Lizzie asked her.

She nodded. “Did you know Mary?” Molly sobbed.

Lizzie sadly nodded. “She was amazing!” Lizzie held her hand out and Molly squeezed her hand tight. Sarah handed Molly her doll, and marched back to the match factory.

“Where are you going?” Annie asked. Sarah stopped and turned to face Annie with her finger on her lips. She tip-toed in quietly through the unlocked door. She grabbed some matches and turned to leave. “Sarah, that’s stealing!” Thump! The match boxes slipped out of her grasp. Despite Annie’s warning, she grabbed the matches rushed out the door, ran to a cardboard poster, and tore it off the gate. It was a picture of Benjamin

Harrison, the favourite to win the election. Sarah turned it upside down and brought two flowers that were thriving in a plant pot. She picked up a cup and separated the flowers into two different pots. "What are you doing!" Annie asked. She shushed her and sprinkled some white powder off the matches into one plant and some red powder onto the other. "Now what!" Annie questioned.

"Wait for a moment." She poured some water on both, and the pair took a walk around town for around 30 minutes. The girls looked at the beautiful flowers and trees. When the walk finished, Sarah ran back to her 'experiment' and Annie stood their dumbfounded. The first plant with red powder was normal it had not changed. The second flower with white powder was dead. Sarah smiled and Annie hugged her. "This white is phosphorous." She explains. "It causes bone diseases, and phossy jaw, it causes tooth ache, teeth falling out and one out of five cases results in death."

Annie started to panic. "Do you know where Lizzie lives?"

Sarah points to Lyer St, house 1. Annie knocked on the door, and Molly answered.

"Molly, did your sister start losing her teeth or having toothaches?" Sarah questioned.

"Yes, she started losing adult toothies and she had a lot of toothies achies." Molly replied.

"Molly," Sarah said. "Your sister died by working in the match factory!" Molly grabbed her knees and started crying.

We suddenly see a figure on the ground. "Lizzie!" we yelled. Lizzie's face was white and pale. Sarah ran in and felt for a pulse. Sarah shook her head and muttered, "She died!"

“No!” Sarah punched the floor and looked inside her mouth. Four adult teeth had fallen out. We sigh and Annie peered at the door. A shadowy figure was smoking in the corner. Sarah sees his face. She takes a step back. It was John Walker, the match factory supplier. She ran to follow him, and he sunk away into the shadows. Two people have died thanks to this factory.

The bell rang and Annie realised that she and Sarah had stayed up all night. The pair raced to the match factory and when the girls walked in, there were so many empty seats. Before 2,000 match people worked here and now there was a lot of missing match girls due to phosphorus poisoning there. Annie Bessent stands up on the desk with a sign. ‘Strike for Change!’

“This factory is poisoning you!” Annie screamed. “The matches are made of phosphorous which is causing all these deaths! Stand up if you know someone who is dead or missing who worked at this factory.”

Everyone stood up.

“It starts as a toothache and then teeth fall out and one out of five cases cause death! Strike for....”

“What is going on?!” Yells Mr Walker. “Francis and William, get out here!”

The deadly duo step out of their office and look at Annie as though she is mouldy fish. Sarah stood up on her desk holding a sign. ‘They only care about business, not about your health! Strike for better life.’

“Whoever joins in with this shenanigans, must leave the match factory and is not allowed to ever come back! Annie Besant and Sarah Chapman, get down if you want to live another day at this factory!” Ms May growled.

“Come on girls, do not be afraid. A little girl has lost her sister to this factory. Imagine if that was you!” Sarah exclaimed.

One by one, girls stood up, until eventually all of them were standing.

“Strike for change!” The group protested. Annie jumped off the desk and kicked open the door.

“Strike for change! Give us our freedom!” Sarah yelled. The group marched out the doors and marched up and down the streets, all day and night. Finally, after three weeks of fighting, the factory was closed. Everyone cheered. “Thank you, Sarah and Annie!” Everyone lifted them up on their shoulders. Annie and Sarah hugged each other. The pair held hands as they were paraded around the streets. “WE DID IT!” Every girl threw their rags in the air, free from the evil duo.

Three Months later *This bit is not true.

“Are you ready for work Annie?” Sarah asked. “We can’t miss Sister Jones’s meat stew!”

“I am coming!” Replied Annie. “Molly is coming too, isn’t she?”

“Yes! Sister Jones set up a toy corner. It is so good having someone so friendly and caring for a change.”

“Agreed!” smiled Molly. The trio walked into the match factory now called, ‘Match centre’

An unexpected smell wafted the air. The girl stood frozen in their tracks. It smelled so dainty and elegant.

“Come, sit down girls!” gestured Sister Jones. There, in front of the girls was a meat and potato stew. Annie took a sip. Her eyes sparkled like the stars at night. Sarah took a sip. Her tastebuds jumped up and down happily. Lastly, Molly took a sip and started crying. It was just like her sister used to make. Molly wiped her tears and moved to the toy area named ‘Mary’s abode.’

“Good morning!” Sister Jones chirped.

“Good morning, Sister Jones!” The girls replied.

“Today, we pray for our food and for the life in which we live.”

“Amen!” The girls said.

“Our schedule for the day is, live your life! Then, you rest for a wonderful day tomorrow!”

“Yes, Sister Jones!” answered the girls. Sarah and Annie fixed up their aprons and got out the match boxes. Annie carefully placed the red matches in each box, while Sarah engraved the boxes with the names of each girl who had died working at Bryant and Mays Factory. The bell rang for their lunch break. The two boxes that both girls managed to finish were engraved with the names Lizzie and Mary. For the first break, Sister Jones let the girls spend half of their twenty-five shillings for food. Sarah, Annie, and the rest of the match girls (including Molly,) lined up to receive their shillings. Sister Jones’s friends, Sister Paul and Sister Rose opened the door to let the girls explore. “The girls are loving what we have done to this place!” Sister Paul smiled. Sister Jones stared at the book of

all the names of the people who had died. “Amen to the girls who rest in heaven as God is now your protector.” Sister Paul continued,

“Guard them with your heart and watch out for the rest of the match girls here, especially little Molly!”

“Let each girl be a star in the sky to watch over the people they care about. We take pride in knowing you are doing everything you can to guide, help, nurture, and care for the girls who are in your arms.” Sister Rose grinned.

“Each girl is special at heart. Let each girl live a long, healthy life full of the joy and fascination. Let there be peace.”

Amen.

- This story is based on friendship, history, truth, and family.
- Sarah Chapman built up the trade union.
- Annie Besant led the Match Girl Strike for three weeks at the Bryant and Mays factory until justice was served.
- Seventeen people are said to have died of phosphorous poisoning there.

The end