

*A summary of the plot to*  
**Mother Jones and the March of the Mill Children**

The story opens in the hills of West Virginia in June of 1903. Mother Jones, "*The Miner's Angel*", has come to help the coal miners strike for higher wages and better working conditions. She leads the wives on a "pots and pans" march against the mine operators and their "scabs" (workers hired to take the place of strikers) by convincing them they'll never get to heaven unless they "*Raise A Little Hell!*" Mother Jones is arrested for violating an injunction against public assembling and brought before Judge Jackson. He questions why a woman of her age and intelligence would put herself in such a position and sentences her to sixty days in jail. A reporter for the New York Evening Star (Adele Smith) covers her trial. She overhears the prosecutor call "Mother" Mary Harris Jones "*The Most Dangerous Woman in America*" and asks if she can quote him. When the Judge realizes he's created a martyr by putting a 73-year-old woman in jail, he orders her released.

Meanwhile, Mother Jones is interviewed in jail by a reporter who asks her "why she does what she does." She replies that "when you've seen what I've seen, you can't be resigned to accept things the way they are." That night she dreams of her youth and the death of her husband and four children in "*Memphis, 1867*". The next day she is released from jail and receives a telegram from John Mitchell saying she is needed in Kensington, Pennsylvania to help with a failing mill worker's strike. Telling the miners who have been keeping an all-night vigil outside the jail, she promises to return when "the job is done." (*Pennsylvania Needs Me*)

In the next scene, we are introduced to the young workers of the Kensington Mill. Jenny Markem, a would-be union organizer, is reading "Appeal to Reason," (a Socialist newspaper of the time), when she is interrupted by her friend, Mary Jo Sanders, who has other things on her mind. She tells Jenny that while she "can be a martyr," Mary Jo would "*Rather Be Rich*". News reaches them that Mother Jones will be speaking at the Commemoration meeting at the union hall that night. Nancy Wakeman, the local "goody-two-shoes," starts an argument with Jenny when she accuses Mother Jones of having run a brothel in Denver. Mr. Gander, the mill supervisor, breaks up the fight and sends Jenny home for the rest of the day as punishment. The bell rings and its time to get back to work in the factory. "Seventy-two hours and two dollars for a week barely pays for food and a roof with a leak." (*Factory Song*) The seven o'clock bell finally rings and the workers head for home.

Jenny, Mary Jo and their friends stop by Maggie Stone's house to see if she wants to attend the Commemoration Meeting with them. Jenny replies that she can barely keep her eyes open and prefers to remain at home, "*Deep In The Arms Of Sleep.*"

At the Commemoration meeting, Alexander Gottlieb, the local union organizer, recalls how his father was killed in the Massacre of 1877 when peaceful union protesters were gunned down by government troops on the railroad tracks. They are "*Gone, But Not Forgotten.*" Mother Jones speaks to the angry workers and exhorts them to stand together. They agree to strike the next day. Jenny is introduced to Thomas Krieger by Mary Jo's boyfriend, Jack Dorsey. Thomas gets her a job as a shop steward for the Kensington Mill. Jenny's first job is to tell everyone who wasn't at the meeting about the

strike. She sends Mary Jo to Maggie Stone's house, but when Mary Jo gets there, everyone is asleep. She decides to come back the next morning.

The next morning arrives, but Mary Jo has forgotten to tell the Stones, who go to work as usual. Mr. Gander realizes something is amiss when at seven o'clock, only a third of his workers are there. He pushes them to produce, even though they are woefully shorthanded. He yells at little Maggie Stone, who becomes so distracted that she slips into the machine. Her hair gets caught in the machine, and her scalp is ripped off. Her distraught mother proclaims that Maggie has finally gotten her wish; she'll sleep forever now.

All hell breaks loose when news of Maggie's death reaches the strikers. Mother Jones leads them on a march to City Hall, but the officials there turn their backs on them. Then Mother Jones has an idea. "They took the Liberty Bell on tour; we'll take the children to Washington to see the President."

"But he's not there! He's in Long Island," Adele Smith tells her.

"Then we'll march to Long Island. No more child labor!"

**Act II** opens with Jenny Markem and her cousins, Sarah and Jane Stevens, packing for the march. They are interrupted by Jack Dorsey and the boys who are forming a band for the march. Jenny learns that Mary Jo did not go home the night before and she goes to search for her. Meanwhile, Nancy Wakemen has decided to join the protest march.

Mary Jo has run away to a church where she has secretly spent the night. She blames herself for Maggie Stone's death and mentally suffers for "*Things Left Undone.*" Jenny finds Mary Jo and persuades her to join the march. Mary Jo says she's changed and vows to be unselfish. They head to the union hall where the public send-off is beginning.

It's "*Kensington to Oyster Bay!*" The 22-day march passes through Torresdale Park and down the Bristol Turnpike. At Bristol, the local police refuse to allow the "radicals" into town. Their wives have other ideas and bring food and supplies to Mother Jones's "army of children." They are forced to pay a 2 cent per person toll at the Delaware Bridge. Alternately soaked by storms, bitten by mosquitoes and suffering in 95-degree heat, the marchers reach Princeton University where Mother Jones is invited to speak to an economics class.

Unbeknownst to them, Mr. Gander has sent a telegram to the Secret Service warning that a "group of radicals was marching to Oyster Bay, Long Island. The president's life may be in danger." The Secret Service begin to follow the marchers.

On Day 15 of the march, they arrive in Passaic where Mrs. Hanley invites them to stay free of charge at her hotel. Unfortunately, when Mother Jones learns of Mrs. Hanley's ill-treatment of her workers, she organizes them into a strike. They are all kicked out of the hotel.

They finally reach New York City. Mother Jones gives a speech attended by thousands of spectators who have come to support the children. Frank Bostick, a wild animal show owner, invites the whole group to Coney Island for a day of rest and relaxation.

After her speech, Mother Jones is approached by two Secret Service agents who warn her not to go to Oyster Bay. The president will not see them. Hearing this, Alexander Gottlieb argues with Mother Jones. When she refuses to give up, he decides

to leave and take Thomas and the union officials, including Jenny, with him. Jenny does not want to leave. She's torn between wanting to keep her job with the union and supporting her idol, Mother Jones. ***"Stuck at the Crossroads."***

The marchers all have a good time at ***"Coney Island"***, where Mother Jones speaks to a crowd and the children perform skits. Mother Jones is weakening from all the strain and prays for energy to complete her task ***"Before My Final Bow."*** "Restore the younger part of me that would not let injustice be!"

Thomas is unsuccessful at persuading Gottlieb to change his mind. He tries to get Jenny to return with him by asking her to marry him. She is torn but refuses to abandon Mother Jones. "It's the principle that counts," she states.

Mother Jones and six of the marchers proceed to the estate of President Roosevelt. They are met at the gate by Secretary Barnes, who tells them that the president can do nothing for them and will not see them. "President Roosevelt does not have the authority to do anything about child labor laws," he states. "He has the *moral* authority!" retorts Mother Jones.

Mother Jones and the remaining marchers returned to Pennsylvania on August 4<sup>th</sup>, even Mary Harris Jones, aka "Mother Jones" aka, "The Most Dangerous Women in America", was a crusader for worker's rights, both for adults and children This musical play by Cheryl E. Kemeny chronicles her story. In West Virginia, she leads the wives on a "pots and pans" march against the mine operators and their scabs by convincing them, "they'll never get to heaven unless they raise a little Hell!" – her motto. When asked why she "does what she does", she reveals that she is moved to help people because of the deaths of her 4 children and union activist husband from Yellow Fever in Memphis, in 1867. In Pennsylvania, she leads mill workers to strike but when a young girl is killed, she organizes the "March of the Mill Children" to see President Teddy Roosevelt in Oyster Bay, Long Island. She is rebuffed, but the public awareness she creates results in nationwide child labor law reforms.

though they were unsuccessful at meeting with Teddy Roosevelt, they raised public awareness on the issue of child rights. Pennsylvania passed child labor laws in 1905. The nation did not follow suit until 1938. Mother Jones continued to fight for labor causes, proceeding next to Colorado then back to Virginia. She was arrested many times and often suffered great physical hardship, but she never quit, and she was never quiet. She always followed her motto: "Pray for the dead and fight like hell for the living!"