

1913

*Mary Phelps Jacob*



*Disclaimer:*

The following diary entries are a creative interpretation, inspired by the life of Mary Phelps Jacob, the inventor of the modern bra. While these entries draw upon historical context and known facts, they do not purport to represent her actual words or personal experiences.

This narrative seeks to imaginatively reconstruct the emotional journey, thought processes, and life events surrounding Mary Phelps Jacob during the period of her groundbreaking invention.



September 29, 1913

Dear Diary,

There's another evening coming up, and I am already dreading the ritual of dressing. My heart is set on this beautiful gown. It's made from delicate fabric with intricate designs that emphasise my slim, streamlined silhouette.

A low-cut, backless evening gown!

Not many wear it, and not many can pull it off. However, these corsets—they're suffocating. Every time I try to move, I feel like I'm being squeezed to death.



I love my dresses!  
But this restriction ruins everything.

I wonder if other women feel the same. How do they all do it with such ease?

Surely there must be a better way to shape our bodies without this torture. I think something that is perhaps something lighter, less restrictive.

But how do I do that?  
Could it work?

We shall see.

October 3, 1913

Dear Diary,

I cracked it!  
What a revelation tonight has been!

I couldn't stand the idea of putting on that awful corset again, and to my horror, when I put my gown on, the corset was visible and it looked dreadful. I had to either completely change my outfit or figure something out quickly.

Then it struck me: I could take two silk handkerchiefs and sew them together with a bit of ribbon. I did it with a little help from my maid,



Martha. It wasn't much—just  
something to hold me in place under  
my gown.

But the freedom! Oh, the freedom!

I could breathe, dance, and even  
laugh without feeling like I'd burst.

Even Richard noticed and  
commented on how happy I seemed.  
He doesn't understand, but I do.  
I might be onto something here.





October 5, 1913

Dear Diary,

The more I think about it, the more I'm convinced that my little invention could be something more.

It's not just about comfort; it's about liberation.

I've spoken to a few friends about it, and they're curious. Some laughed, of course, but a few others seemed genuinely interested.

If I could make this work, it might change everything.



But where do I begin?

The idea of starting something like this is terrifying, but isn't that the thrill?

October 7, 1913

Dear Diary,

I spent today sketching out my idea more carefully. A material that is first precisely tailored to fit me. I want to improve the design and make it something that could be worn under any dress. I even went out and bought some more fabric and ribbons.

I can't stop thinking about it.

It's as if the idea has taken hold of me, and I have no choice but to see it through. I'm going to make a few more samples with varying sizes



and ask some of my closest friends  
to try them out.

Their opinions will be crucial.

If they think this is something worth  
working towards, I would have  
some peace of mind.

On the other hand, Richard thinks  
I'm being silly, but I don't care. I  
have struggled for far too long to  
be portrayed in a way that society  
finds appropriate.

This is fun and exciting.  
Something so new and clearly not  
thought about.





October 9, 1913

Dear Diary,

I was buzzing with excitement when I arrived home today. I was thinking of hosting a social gathering to support the arts, discuss new forms of literature, and perhaps even talk about my little invention.

I could hardly contain my excitement as I thought about telling Richard my ideas. He was sitting in his large, overstuffed armchair, reading a newspaper, and the air was thick with the smell of tobacco from his pipe.



I told him,  
"You won't believe the people I met tonight. They're doing such fascinating work! I'm thinking of hosting a gathering here next week—artists, writers, musicians. It could be the start of something wonderful, don't you think?"

Richard barely looked up from his newspaper, his expression one of distant politeness.

Then he mutters,  
"That sounds fine, Mary."  
So flatly.

I paused, hoping for more of a response. But none came. I thought

I should probably expand a bit more of my plan and said,  
"I was thinking we could redecorate the parlour—make it more vibrant, more inviting for creative discussions. Maybe even bring in some new art pieces."

Then Richard sighed, folding the newspaper slightly but still not meeting my eyes. "Do whatever you want with the parlour," he said, his voice edged with mild irritation. "Just keep it tasteful. You know how your ideas can get... extravagant."

Extravagant??



*I was so disappointed.*

*You know, I suppose I have to  
accept that he isn't really interested  
in my ambitions or dreams.*





October 10, 1913

Dear Diary,

I'm exhausted but exhilarated!

Today, I gathered a few friends  
and invited them over to the house,  
served a cup of tea, and showed  
them the samples.

They were sceptical at first, but once  
they tried it on, the reaction was  
incredible. "Mary, this is brilliant!"  
one of them said.

I've never felt so proud.  
I explained the concoction and how  
I have now decided to pursue this



endeavour. We spent the afternoon discussing how it could be improved based on stitching and understanding varying sizes. They offered their own ideas and preferences for colour, design, and lace (?)

It feels like a dream.  
Could I really be on the brink of something important?

Richard remains indifferent. I didn't have the motivation to tell him about my day, not that he had bothered to ask about it either.

October 13, 1913

Dear Diary,

I had lunch with Aunt Cornelia today, and to my surprise, she was quite supportive of my idea. "The world needs more comfort, Mary, and less rigidity," she said.

I couldn't agree more. But she also warned me that women with ideas often face resistance, especially in our society. It's something I've been thinking about all evening. If I'm to pursue this, I must be prepared for challenges.

But I believe in this.

I believe it can make a difference.







October 15, 1943

Dear Diary,

Today has been an emotional day.  
I discovered that there have been  
other women who attempted to patent  
similar ideas. My heart sank.

If others have tried and failed,  
what makes me think I'll succeed?

But what also came to mind was  
how come it has not been patented  
before?

Did nobody believe in these women?  
Did they not take her seriously?  
Who was the problem?



The board of the patents committee  
or these women who didn't pitch it  
correctly?

Would the same thing happen to  
me?

I can't let that stop me. Those  
attempts may have failed because  
they were ahead of their time—or  
perhaps it wasn't meant to be.

I'm going to keep pushing forward.  
I've come this far, and I can't turn  
back now.

I just wish Richard would  
understand. I'd really like his  
support with all of this.  
He's so distant these days.

October 18, 1913

Dear Diary,

I'm making really good turns, and  
I thought before I take more  
financial decisions and source more  
materials, I need to patent this.

It's daunting, but I've reached out  
to a patent attorney who was  
recommended by Aunt Cornelia to  
me. I've gathered my sketches and  
samples and will meet with him next  
week.

Does this mean I am going to be a  
"businesswoman"? Because that is  
both thrilling and terrifying.



What will the world think?  
Will I be seen as a frivolous woman  
with silly ideas, or will they take me  
seriously?

I suppose until I do what I want  
to do, I won't know, and I'll find  
out soon enough anyway.

Richard continues to be wrapped up  
in his own world. I don't know  
how much longer I can stand this  
distance between us.

October 21, 1913

Dear Diary,

The meeting with the patent attorney  
went surprisingly well. He was  
intrigued by my invention and  
believes there's real potential here.  
There are, of course, formalities to  
be taken care of, but he sees no  
reason why I wouldn't be granted a  
patent.

I'm overjoyed!  
This could really happen.

I'll need to make a few adjustments  
to the design, but I'm more  
determined than ever. My heart is



pounding just thinking about it.

I wanted to tell Richard about this but it's been so difficult to be on the same page lately. Will he even be happy for me? I don't think he supports any of this.

Maybe it's about earning money and achieving financial stability, that doesn't sit right with him.

October 30, 1913

Dear Diary,

It's done!

The patent application has been submitted. Now all I can do is wait. The attorney said it could take some time, but I'm already thinking about the next steps.

I need to find a way to produce these on a larger scale. I've started looking into manufacturers, but the costs are overwhelming. I may need to take on a partner or find investors.

This is all happening so fast, and

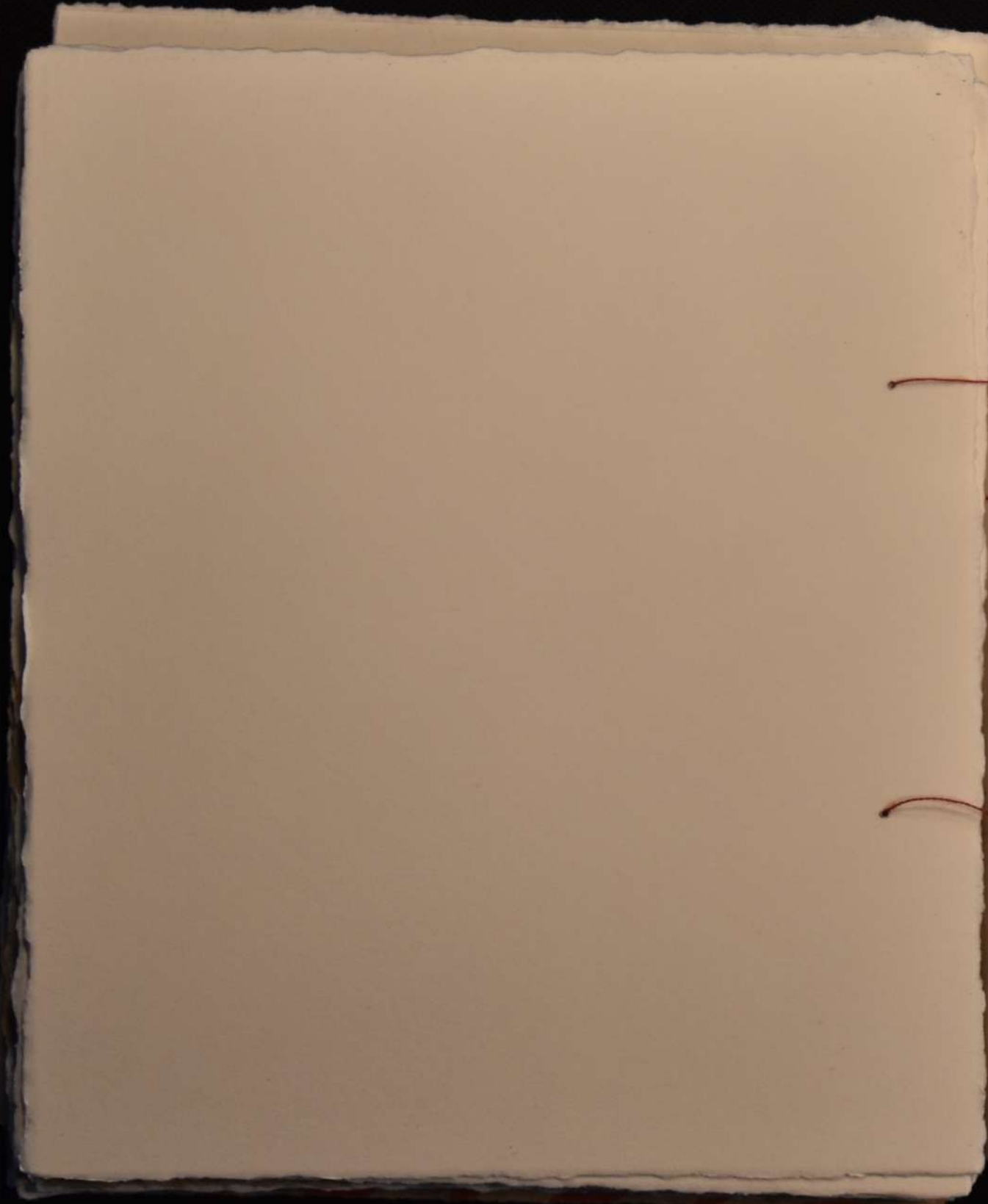


*it's hard to keep up. But I'm  
excited—more than I've ever been.*

*Richard didn't even ask about the  
meeting today. I'm starting to  
wonder if this marriage is worth  
saving.*









November 13, 1913

Dear Diary,

I've been so consumed by my work that I've hardly had time to write.

I've found a small manufacturer willing to produce a limited run of my bras, as I've started calling them.

It's a modest start, but it's something. I've also reached out to a few department stores, and they've agreed to carry them on a trial basis.

Can you imagine?



My creation is on display for women to buy! It feels unreal.

Richard and I had a fight tonight. He accused me of neglecting our marriage, but does following my dream and doing different things now mean I'm neglecting it?

How can I focus on anything—this marriage or this business—without his support?

I'm torn.

November 20, 1913

Dear Diary,

The first batch is ready, and they're beautiful! I can't believe how far I've come in such a short time. The department stores will start selling them next week, and I'm both nervous and excited.

What if no one buys them?

What if they're a flop?

But what if they're a success?

The thought is exhausting. I've poured so much of myself into



this—my time, my energy, my  
passion. I can only hope it will be  
worth it.

Richard and I are barely speaking.  
I don't know what to do anymore.

November 28, 1913

Dear Diary,

The bras are selling!  
The stores have already placed more  
orders, and I've been receiving letters  
from women thanking me for  
creating something comfortable and  
practical.

It's a dream come true. But with  
success comes more work. I've been  
running myself ragged trying to  
keep up with demand, but I  
wouldn't have it any other way.

This is what I was meant to do.



On the other hand, Richard is  
talking about a separation. I'm  
devastated, but I know I need to  
give this some more attention.





December 10, 1913

Dear Diary,

My patent has received approval!  
I'm officially an inventor!

The thought makes me giddy. To think that something I created out of frustration would become something so significant. I've been approached by a few investors who want to help me expand the business.

It's all happening so quickly, and it's overwhelming, but I'm determined to see this through. I want every woman to experience the freedom I felt that first night.



December 18, 1913

Dear Diary,

My invention is the talk of the town! The orders are pouring in, and I've been invited to speak at a women's club to share my journey.

It's incredible to see how quickly this dream has become a reality. Women everywhere are embracing this newfound freedom, and my heart swells with pride and joy.

Knowing that I've made a difference in their lives fills me with a sense of purpose and excitement for what's to come.



*This is just the beginning, and I  
can't wait to see where this path  
leads next!*









