

#2 - Schwartz, Mollie

MOLLIE and SCHWARTZ are alone in the back room of the Frayhayt apartment in East Harlem on a sweltering summer night in August 1918 in a passionate embrace.

MOLLIE (*suddenly pulling away*): It isn't fair!

SCHWARTZ: What, what?

MOLLIE: It isn't fair that I always have to think of it.

SCHWARTZ: Think of what?

MOLLIE: About stopping, before it's too late!

SCHWARTZ: I think of it.

MOLLIE: Not very hard. Every month, it's like I'm dodging a bullet!

SCHWARTZ: It's not *that* bad.

MOLLIE: To me, it is! You wouldn't say such ignorant things if you'd have come with me to hear Emma Goldman.

SCHWARTZ (*frustrated*): I've heard her before.

MOLLIE: Emma says, "No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body—forever!"

SCHWARTZ: I'm not interested in controlling anyone's body—certainly not Emma's.

MOLLIE: It isn't at all funny. We need birth control—it has to be a priority!

SCHWARTZ: Write an article for *The Storm*.

MOLLIE: I already have.

SCHWARTZ: Write another one. But in the meantime, come here.

MOLLIE: I told you I don't *want* to!

SCHWARTZ: You think I do any more?

MOLLIE: Yes!

SCHWARTZ (a beat; light): Please, Mollie, just come here. Nothing but this arm, I promise. (*MOLLIE looks at the space he's made, then just sits down where she is.*) All right. I'll just love you from afar. I'll pretend I'm in jail, withering away, wondering if my Mollie still loves me / as much as she did when we were young—

MOLLIE (groans, breaking in at the /): Stop it. I never said any / such thing.

SCHWARTZ: —and the world was no bigger / than a mattress on the floor.

MOLLIE (avoiding him; making a speech): How can you feel love is even possible, when millions of people are being slaughtered in a war that is all for money? And when anyone who speaks out against it or tries to organize the workers is being thrown in jail, or massacred?

SCHWARTZ (applauding): Very good! Goldman has nothing on you.

MOLLIE (ignoring him): To survive at all these days, you have to either shut your eyes to the truth or be a hypocrite. (*holding up a book.*) It's just like Kropotkin says (*reading, speechy*): "All of civilized life has become one huge lie grotesquely distorting our human nature—

SCHWARTZ: Even better!

MOLLIE: --which in its truest form is like an unbounded field of grass, not one blade of which ever gives up trying to reach its soft perfection."

SCHWARTZ (takes the book; re-reading, to her, gently, poetic): "...like an unbounded field of grass, not one blade of which ever gives up trying to reach its soft perfection."

A beat. SCHWARTZ looks at her tenderly. MOLLIE turns away.

SCHWARTZ: Nothing satisfies you. You have to enjoy life too, Mollie. Maybe one tiny bit of it is fun. (*a beat.*) What about our English class today? You laughed at that. (*standing as though he were teaching a class.*) "Repeat after me: I am from Russia. I have many useful skills."

MOLLIE (holding back a smile): Don't!

SCHWARTZ (imitating his class, struggling with the language): "I am from Russia. I have many / useful skills."

MOLLIE: You were terrible with them. You take advantage.

SCHWARTZ: But they're so funny—they're right off the boat! (*to the class*): Louder, please. The Czar is dead, hooray! (*with MOLLIE, faintly here and then louder as they go*): "The Czar is dead, hooray!" Better. But now you're in prison and about to be shot. Long live the Revolution! "Long live the Revolution!" Louder! Your comrades are just outside, but they can't hear you unless you shout! "LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTION!" (*They laugh.*)

MOLLIE: You shouldn't laugh. You were the same five years ago.

SCHWARTZ: Worse! I was so scared.

MOLLIE: So many of us just get used up and die in a few years. Probably half the people in that class today...

A beat. *SCHWARTZ* *sighs and moves away.*

MOLLIE: I'm sorry. You're right, I'm no fun at all. I should go home now.

SCHWARTZ: Wait, no. You have to stay.

MOLLIE: Why?

SCHWARTZ: It's a surprise.

MOLLIE: What is it?

SCHWARTZ: We have a very important new member. Abrams and Lipman went to pick him up.

MOLLIE: Really? Why didn't we go with them?

SCHWARTZ: They said... we could stay.

MOLLIE (smirks): Men are disgusting beasts. But it's getting late. They had better come back soon, or I'll miss them.

SCHWARTZ: Mollie—

MOLLIE: I have to go back home.

SCHWARTZ: You don't. It's ridiculous to go back and forth like this. It wears you out.

MOLLIE: My family needs me.

SCHWARTZ: I know. But so do we here.

MOLLIE: It's different. They count on me to survive.

SCHWARTZ: You can still give them your pay.

MOLLIE: Not just for money. It's like they *believe* in me—like I'm the future, the life they've given

up theirs for. Part of me says, if I just work and study very hard, if I can somehow make a life where I don't need to fear going hungry...

SCHWARTZ: There's no such life for us—not unless we're lucky.

MOLLIE: I know. But they don't.

SCHWARTZ: Yes, they do, they just can't face it.

MOLLIE: I don't want to hurt them.

SCHWARTZ: You are describing the life of every revolutionary who ever lived. I broke with my family.

MOLLIE: You're the last of ten children. Your parents probably still don't know you're gone. Mine are so much like me. My father believes in America as much as we believe in Anarchism; and my mother is just as bitter about her life as I am—and just as silent.

SCHWARTZ (with great feeling): Silent? I have never heard a voice as strong as yours. I think I love that most of all.

MOLLIE (a beat; she gets in his arm): I really wish you wouldn't say things like that.

SCHWARTZ: Why not? It's the truth.

MOLLIE: You don't understand. It's so nice here.

SCHWARTZ: And that's a problem?

MOLLIE: So peaceful—you feel you could stand just about anything. If I stayed here for too long, I might never get up. And the whole rotten world would stay just as it is.

SCHWARTZ: The world is turning, even so.

MOLLIE: It needs help.