

#7 - Weinberger, Mollie

MOLLIE enters the defendants' room, where WEINBERGER is sitting at a desk.

WEINBERGER: You see, that's just what I don't want you to do.

MOLLIE: What?

WEINBERGER: On the stand. I told Abrams not to bite when the judge baited him.

MOLLIE: He spoke well, I thought. There is only so much one's pride can take.

WEINBERGER: Well, yours had better take more.

MOLLIE: You are not a very good example.

WEINBERGER: My pride isn't facing twenty years.

MOLLIE: Not yet.

WEINBERGER: Not ever. I know when to speak and when not to. Like with Clayton. He expects me to tangle with him, he wouldn't respect me if I didn't. He doesn't like Ryan, because Ryan is a stupid Harvard boy and just sits there.

MOLLIE: It's a boy's game you play.

WEINBERGER: Of course it's a game.

MOLLIE: And we're losing.

WEINBERGER: Of course we're losing.

MOLLIE: So now you're mad.

WEINBERGER: I said from the start we'd probably lose.

MOLLIE: But maybe you believed a little in your greatness.

WEINBERGER: We'll lose even worse if you people don't do what I say.

MOLLIE: Instead of what we believe.

A beat.

WEINBERGER: Your father was just here. He had this idea that maybe you'd come work for me after all this was over. Or that maybe you'd take my job instead.

MOLLIE: I hope you did not play your game with him.

WEINBERGER: I said I'd see what I could do.

MOLLIE: You didn't!

WEINBERGER: He was insistent. He can't hear the truth now.

MOLLIE: He's not well. He believes in all this. I think when it's all over he expects to see the face of God.

WEINBERGER: I know. But the strange thing is, he's right—about you, I mean. You're tough—not to say obsessed. You would do well in this chair, very well. And yes, we will lose this case, and yes, there will be prison for all of you. But when you get out—

MOLLIE: In twenty years.

WEINBERGER: Less, far less. Actually, how much time you get may be up to you.

MOLLIE: What are you saying?

WEINBERGER: (*a beat*). A few days before this trial began, I visited Judge Clayton's court, just to see what I was up against. Before him stood a black woman who had been convicted of selling whiskey to a U.S. soldier—not a light offense these days. When he was passing sentence, Clayton told the woman he would call her Helen not Mrs. Johnson, because back where he came from, they did not call Negroes Mister or Misses but by their first names—not to belittle them, he said, (*sliding into imitation*) but because “We Southerners understand blacks better than Northerners—why, we'all more or less kin! You understand what I'm saying, don't you, Helen?” (*a beat; waiting for a laugh that doesn't come.*) And apparently she did, because right away she said, “Oh, yes, Your Honor! These Yankees don't even know how to look at us up here, much less what to say.” This satisfied Judge Clayton enormously. He said, “Now, Helen, I want you to promise never to break the law again.” The woman bowed her head; I really thought she overdid it. He fined her five dollars. And she walked right out the door.

MOLLIE: Why do you tell me this disgusting story?

WEINBERGER: I thought maybe you'd laugh.

MOLLIE: There is nothing at all funny in it.

WEINBERGER: But also because it shows there is a time when discretion is the better part of valor. The fact is you are a woman, a young woman—

MOLLIE: And because of that, I'm alive and Jacob isn't.

WEINBERGER: Yes, that's true—

MOLLIE: You want me to humiliate myself?

WEINBERGER: No.

MOLLIE: You want me to lie.

WEINBERGER: Not at all, tell the truth. But quietly, gently.

MOLLIE: The truth I tell is not always quiet or gentle. You want me to be meek—

WEINBERGER: I want you to be free, sooner rather than later.

MOLLIE: I want the same as the others, nothing less.

WEINBERGER: But you're not the same as the others. You've got quite a little following out there, you know.

MOLLIE: That is of no importance to me.

WEINBERGER: Oh, really? Well, the fact is if it's easier on you, it will probably go easier on your friends too. And it could help the appeal. Besides, the sooner you're out, the sooner you can continue to work for your cause. Even in the law, if you like, I mean that. I could get you a start in night school, no problem. You could fight your way up like I did.

MOLLIE: I would never work with you or anyone like you.

WEINBERGER: You'd get far more done if you did. People listen to me.

MOLLIE: Yes, and that's all you want. You want it said the great Harry Weinberger was clever enough to convince some fool of a judge to cut his clients' sentences in half.

WEINBERGER: Why can't you see that I'm on your side?

MOLLIE: Because you're not. You make compromises with hypocrites. You play tricks, you pretend. And all for personal glory. No, you may think you're with us, but you're just a part of the mob that murdered Jacob.

WEINBERGER: I resent that.

MOLLIE: You may resent it all you like, but it's the truth.

WEINBERGER: All right, all right—there's no use in us fighting. I'm giving you advice, you can do whatever you like with it. Just try to show a little restraint on the stand. Don't make any angry speeches, and whatever you do, don't turn the tables on Clayton. He'll get you for that. (*MOLLIE is shaking her head reproachfully.*) Look, you don't believe Judge Clayton is bad at heart, do you?

MOLLIE: No, it is the system that has made a fool of him.

WEINBERGER: Then speak to that side of him that is hidden even from him. That side deserves basic human courtesy and respect.

MOLLIE: That is correct, and that I will always try to do. But I can promise no more.

WEINBERGER: Good, then we're agreed.

MOLLIE: I doubt very much we are.