

## **SIDES for *The Freeing of Mollie Steimer* auditions**

*Examiner, Bug, Schwartz, Abrams*

*New York, 1913, a medical screening area, Ellis Island. The EXAMINER is at his desk, which is cluttered with paper and ledgers. In between is THE BUG, watching the steamship, his back to the table. THE BUG carries a notepad and pen.*

*THE BUG (turning to the EXAMINER):* Another one on the way.

*EXAMINER (indicating the audience):* Riffraff and scum, the whole lot of ‘em! ...Sly and crafty eyes, lopsided faces, sloping brows—all unmistakably criminal types.

*THE BUG:* How many from Russia?

*EXAMINER:* Why Russia?

*THE BUG:* Why not Russia?

*EXAMINER (looking through a ledger):* Well, let’s see. In the last thirty years...*The EXAMINER calculates.* A million and a half!

*THE BUG:* Thirty more years, and we’ll be overrun with them.

*EXAMINER:* Or with their diseases. They try to hide them, but I can see them in one glance—physical ones and moral. (*THE BUG scoffs*). I’m serious.

*THE BUG:* That I need to see.

*EXAMINER:* It’s easy with practice. Watch.

The EXAMINER *scans the audience.*

*EXAMINER:* Hey, you over there. Yeah, you—come here!

*From the audience, SCHWARTZ enters timidly, hands over his papers; the EXAMINER looks them over.*

*EXAMINER (reading):* Jacob Schwartz ... (*to THE BUG*): A Russian.

*THE BUG:* Speak of the devil, and he will come.

*EXAMINER (assuming a posture):* One glance, six details! Scalp, face, neck, hands, posture and general condition—both mental and physical. (*to THE BUG*): Hm...Sickly. Now to check the usual hiding places. (*roughly doing this*): Unbutton the collar to check for goiter... No. Put aside the blanket to check for deformities... No. Remove the hat to check for ringworm...No.

Peel back the eyelid for trachoma... (SCHWARTZ *is in great pain.*). That's the sneakiest one in a way.(*disappointed*): No trachoma. ...I know there's something wrong with him. I mean...he's defective

*THE BUG*: Hm. Like a cheap automobile.

*EXAMINER* (*eyeing* SCHWARTZ): Maybe he's just stupid. I check for that too.

*THE BUG*: We certainly don't need any more morons.

*EXAMINER*: No, we don't...Tell me, Jacob. What's the difference between a house and a stable?

*THE BUG* : Good question!

*EXAMINER* (*to* THE BUG): You find out a lot this way.

*SCHWARTZ*: I don't understand.

*EXAMINER*: Just answer the question.

*SCHWARTZ*: A house is where people live...

*EXAMINER*: And the stable?

*SCHWARTZ*: Animals?

*THE BUG*: Damn.

*EXAMINER*: Wait, I know. He doesn't breathe right. (The *EXAMINER feels* SCHWARTZ'S chest, then gives it a thump, listens, and nods. *To* SCHWARTZ): Turn around. (The *EXAMINER finds* a piece of chalk and draws an H on SCHWARTZ'S back; *to* THE BUG): His heart! Bad circulation. (*to* SCHWARTZ): Well, go on! (SCHWARTZ *goes out*). They'll check him more thoroughly over there. But they rarely send them back as they should.

The *EXAMINER makes some notes*. *THE BUG scans the audience*.

*THE BUG* (*pointing*): Try that one.

*EXAMINER*: Why him?

*THE BUG*: He looks...ill.

The *EXAMINER beckons* ABRAMS who approaches and hands over his papers. *ABRAMS* and *THE BUG* size each other up.

*EXAMINER (reading):* Jacob Abrams. See? They're all Jacobs. *The EXAMINER stands and gives ABRAMS "the glance."* (*disappointed*): Generally healthy.

*THE BUG (pressing him):* But mentally?

*EXAMINER:* No, they all look like that. Like scared sheep.

*THE BUG (aggressive):* Ask him anyway.

The *EXAMINER rises and approaches ABRAMS.*

*EXAMINER:* All right, Jacob...What's the difference between a house and a stable?

*ABRAMS:* There is no difference.

*EXAMINER:* What?!

*ABRAMS:* Animals live in both. One animal works, and the other eats and gets fat. Both die.

*EXAMINER (to THE BUG):* Very good. He might have slipped by me. (*to ABRAMS*): Turn around.

*The EXAMINER chalks an X on ABRAMS' back. THE BUG eyes ABRAMS intently.*

*EXAMINER (showing THE BUG the X):* Mental Defect Suspected. (*to ABRAMS, pointing off*): Go there ...Understand? (*ABRAMS goes out; THE BUG watches him.*)

*EXAMINER (making notes):* Well, there's your feature story. Three more boatloads of vermin to dilute the gene pool. I say the country's full, go home!

*THE BUG (scanning the audience):* Any one of them could be an anarchist.

*EXAMINER:* Yes! It's spreading like a disease. They come to this country just to blow it up!

*THE BUG:* If only there were an exam for that!

*EXAMINER:* Well, the police ask them that right over there.

*THE BUG:* You're kidding. What do they say?

*EXAMINER:* I dunno, some Russian crap, I guess.

*THE BUG:* That I have to see. *THE BUG moves between the panels.*

*EXAMINER:* Hey, the press aren't allowed over there. (*THE BUG ignores him.*)

***Jacob Schwartz and 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.

***Joan, Rose, Sadie, Mollie***

*JOAN (redistributing the pieces):* It's all right, we can fix them. No one will know. (*sits down at MOLLIE'S machine.*) Sleeves! Haven't done this in a while. But you never forget.

*ROSE:* Joan, please, you must not think that any of us were the cause of this trouble.

*JOAN:* Were you talking?

*SADIE:* Only a little. I'm getting married—

*JOAN:* Talking is forbidden. Production is slipping at this table, especially yours, Sadie. Your place at the machine is worth more than you are.

*SADIE (teary, frantic):* I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

*JOAN:* There are plenty of ambitious girls out there just waiting for you to fall. Girls who will single-handedly save their families from poverty. Until they burn out. Or just burn. Girls like Mollie. *(to MOLLIE):* Go on and be the Forewoman for a while. You will be someday. *(The others are stunned, indignant.)*

*ROSE:* She was trying to get us to join a union. But we're not!

*SADIE:* And said bad things about the war, we heard her.

*ROSE:* I think she's the one planting those papers. *(ROSE reaches into a basket and produces one of the pamphlets.)*

*JOAN:* So that's what this is. *(reaches under some cloth at MOLLIE'S station, finds another pamphlet, reads.)* "Workers and the Conquest of Bread!" *(JOAN opens the pamphlet and places it on her lap as she sews.)*

*MOLLIE:* Guns without bread are worthless.

*JOAN:* Oh, I'm sure they are. She reads like this, one eye on the needle, the other on the page—*(paging through; amused):* The important parts are marked with stars! *(reading, while working; the others listen uncertainly):* "Because to be a worker now means to shut yourself up for twelve hours a day in an unhealthy workshop for wages you can barely live on, and to remain riveted to the same task for twenty or thirty years—

*MOLLIE:* —and maybe for your whole life!"

*JOAN:* Yes, exactly—word for word! *(dramatic):* "What we proclaim is THE RIGHT TO WELL-BEING: WELL-BEING FOR ALL!" *(The other women at last feel it's safe to laugh.)*

*MOLLIE (with forced patience):* I understand this mindless work has all but crushed your spirits.

*ROSE:* Speak for yourself!

*MOLLIE:* And you for yours! For just one moment raise your heads out of this stifling drudgery and let your humanity breathe!

*SADIE:* What page is she on now?

*JOAN (closing the pamphlet):* Her own, I think.

*MOLLIE:* You'll see—it's not hard at all. We have an instinct for freedom!

*ROSE and SADIE laugh.*



*ROSE (to JOAN):* She just won't quit. Could you please tell her to stuff it?

*JOAN:* No, I like it. It reminds me of when I was alive. Back at Triangle.

*A beat. ROSE and MOLLIE exchange a glance.*

*ROSE (gravely):* You were at the Triangle factory?

*SADIE:* What? What happened?

*ROSE:* They had a strike. Then a few months later, they had a fire. Many people were killed.

*JOAN:* Everyone was killed.

*A beat.*

*MOLLIE (undaunted):* Then you know better than anyone the need for us to take action. To meet with the other shops and call a strike—

*ROSE:* But things are better now. Thanks to them.

*JOAN:* It's true. Jumping out of burning windows was a little more effective than the strike—but not much.

*SADIE:* I don't understand!

*JOAN:* Neither did we. We were inspired with WELL-BEING FOR ALL! You're right, Mollie, it was so simple. One day, we'd just had it; we all got up from our machines, and...walked right out! And before we knew it, about 500 other shops were doing the same (*quiet awe*)—There were *thousands* of us!

*JOAN:* They just tried to break us in other ways. They started bringing the replacements in *cars*! They put in a phonograph and opened the windows at lunchtime. We could see them up there dancing, peeling oranges, sipping tea. The best ones got prizes—fancy hats, fur coats...

*SADIE:* Now *that's* cruel.

*ROSE:* Like dangling steaks over the heads of the starving.

*JOAN:* Oh, it wasn't the clothes. No, no—it was the dancing! Well, imagine dancing here, or anywhere. Who ever has time enough?

*ROSE:* Or energy enough.

*JOAN*: No, none of us! And there they were above us, dancing at *work*, laughing at all of us below. We were envious for a minute, who wouldn't be? But pretty soon we all just laughed back.

*MOLLIE*: Because they were like puppets! The owners weren't using *you* any more—you'd come alive! (*to the others*): And then it doesn't matter when the police come at you with their clubs—

*JOAN (scoffs)*: Well, what was a cracked head when we were already dying in that firetrap, with that oily air, the dim lights, and all the rats and roaches crawling in your skirts? (*a beat*).

*ROSE*: It's not so very different now.

*JOAN*: Exactly. I was beaten and arrested off the picket line by some thug just for not answering him. The judge who sentenced me gave me a lecture, said I was an immoral woman for walking the line. "You are on strike against God!" he shouted. "Then God had better sell to the Devil," I said, "because we're putting him out of business!"

*ROSE*: *You* said that?

*JOAN*: Yes, can you believe it? That alone was worth the three days in jail.

*SADIE*: So what happened? Did you win?

*JOAN (obviously)*: No! Well, most of the shops got a little shorter hours, and a little more money. But our shop remained closed to out union. We'd demanded better fire escapes and sprinklers, but they still wouldn't even remove the oil barrels blocking the stairways. Instead, thanks to us the doors were locked all day to keep out the organizers.

*MOLLIE*: Owners never care whether their factories burn to the ground; it would cost them more to make the improvements. To them the human cost is nothing!

*JOAN (to MOLLIE, a shared joke)*: The owners told one fire inspector, "Let 'em burn, they're a lot of cattle anyway." (*MOLLIE is silenced.*)

*ROSE*: We still don't have sprinklers.

*SADIE*: We've never even had a fire drill!

*JOAN*: No? Well, that won't do at all; it's against the law now, thanks to the corpses. Maybe we'll have one later, just for us. (*A beat; looks at SADIE, stops working*) Oh, poor Sadie—that's the face, girls, see it? Everyone had it when we saw that first window shattering to glitter. One moment we were laughing and singing—well, it was payday!—and the next, we were screaming. And in between, just that one soft, silent look of fear.

*ROSE*: Really...you're scaring the poor girl.

*JOAN:* Ghosts can't hurt you, dear. Well, not on purpose. Anyway, I'm not talking to Sadie.

*MOLLIE:* I'll take my seat back now.

*JOAN:* You will not. I'm fondly reminiscing. One grows to love these machines after a while, believe it or not—(Joan *places her hand on her machine.*)—once you grow out of your hatred for them. (*a beat.*) Put your hands on your machines, girls—feel that? (*they do, but recoil instantly from the heat.*) No, keep it there. (*JOAN holds hers in place.*) The air all around you felt like that, like the fire was inside you, just beneath your skin. (*gently removes her hand.*) It spread so fast! Flames started shooting up all around like fountains, right up through these machines; our work-baskets were exploding. We jumped for the exits, but the fire escapes and elevators were already crushed. The one stairwell we were allowed to use was blocked by smoke and fire, and of course, the other door was locked. Groups of us kept running back and forth, screaming like wildcats. Even me! Who had shown such poise during the strike. “We’re putting God out of business!”

*ROSE:* Anyone would have reacted the same.

*JOAN:* People were throwing the slow ones out of the way, especially the little girls we used to hide from the inspectors—girls not much younger than Sadie.

*MOLLIE:* Leave her out of it.

*JOAN:* Compassion for the weak! Why didn't we think of that? We were stepping on the ones who had fainted as if they were sacks of cloth. But you had to keep running, if only to show that you weren't like those strange women who still hadn't even gotten up from their machines. I guess they were frozen with fear, but they seemed perfectly calm, like they were just waiting patiently for the foreman to come release them for the day. Maybe they believed that somehow everything would be all right, like our parents always told us, because things were different here—

*MOLLIE:* “In America, they don't let you burn.”

*JOAN:* Right! They found them that night as charred skeletons, still bending over their machines.

*A pause.*

*SADIE:* So...how did you get out?

*JOAN:* I didn't. One time around the shop, I found myself by the windows where several people were standing like statues, except their legs were quivering. I started to get up there with them, and then something like a gust of wind blew me away from there as fast as I could go. Suddenly I came to a stop, and...I saw a bolt of lawn just sitting there on a table, all clean and white; it wasn't burning, it wasn't even hot. I grabbed it and started wrapping it around my body until only my eyes showed through a little crack. Then I ran down the narrow stairwell, right into the

teeth of the flames, peeling off the burning lawn layer by layer. By the time I got down to the sixth floor I'd left most of it in ashes behind me. And when it was gone, all went dark. (*Near or behind THE BUG, a shadow puppetry sequence begins. Music/soundscape*). I woke up down below, lying on a sidewalk. They gave me milk and I threw up smoke. I looked up and saw all these bundles of cloth falling from the building. And I thought, Why are they saving their cloth and not the people? But then one of the bundles of cloth opened and I saw a pair of legs inside, and then another opened, and another. It was raining women—sometimes three and four at a time. They'd hit the ground, and just...stop. One of the cops who had clubbed us during the strike was standing right next to me, yelling "Don't jump, you crazy females! Don't jump!" His face was wet with tears. But you could see the flames licking at their heels. And then...this one girl came out on the ledge and inched away from the window. For a while, she stood there staring straight ahead as though she were looking at herself in a mirror, then very carefully she took off her hat and sent it sailing through the air. In the same way, she slowly opened her pay envelope and scattered the bills and coins like so many dead leaves and clumps of dirt. Then she tilted her head back and gazed into the mirror, and in that mirror was me. "Jump," I said. "Jump!"

***Josef Steimer, Fannie Steimer, Mollie***

JOSEF STEIMER *is returning home after his first shift, sitting down on a beat-up couch, exhausted. The room is dim and cramped. MOLLIE is sitting across from him, eyeing him over the book.*

JOSEF (*looking at his watch; groans*): Just a little nap, then I go back. Wake me, Mollie.

MOLLIE: Papa, no—you've already done one shift. Standard Oil will not collapse just because you aren't there one night. Please, Papa, you're sick.

JOSEF: I'm not sick.

MOLLIE: You need your rest.

JOSEF: Rest doesn't pay the rent.

MOLLIE: We have enough. (*he scoffs.*) I'll work double. Or I'll do something else. (*gets up.*) I'll just go down and tell them—

JOSEF: No!

MOLLIE (*opening the door*): Just one night!

JOSEF: Mollie! Come back, or I get up right now. (*MOLLIE closes the door; FANNIE enters with a basket of clothes.*) One moment's rest I want, and you waste it with all this talk.

FANNIE: Let him rest, Mollie.

*MOLLIE*: That's what I'm trying to do.

*FANNIE*: I need you here.

*MOLLIE* *obediently goes over and sits down with her, grabs a pile of clothes to fold.*

*FANNIE*: These are for the boarders, so make them nice.

*MOLLIE*: They could do it themselves.

*FANNIE*: They pay us.

*MOLLIE*: They take advantage. You have six children and five boarders. And Papa. Twelve people to take care of all by yourself.

*FANNIE*: Little Josef helps now. (*pointed*): And you, now that you're studying at *home* again. (*MOLLIE turns away; FANNIE regrets her words.*) Whatever you can do, I'm happy.

*MOLLIE*: You're not happy. None of us are.

*JOSEF* (*a sleepy echo*): ...not happy?

*FANNIE* (*hushing her*): Mollie!

*MOLLIE* (*more softly*): Look at how thin and weary he is now. (*pointing, making her look.*) No look, Mother. Look!

*FANNIE*: I see it, Mollie, every day I see it.

*MOLLIE*: I've tried to be like you and just be quiet. But something's crying out in me, it just gets louder.

*FANNIE*: I know.

*MOLLIE* (*dropping the clothes*): Baskets of clothes! I want it all to stop!

*FANNIE*: I know.

*MOLLIE* (*a beat*): You do? (*FANNIE nods. MOLLIE resumes folding; gravely*): Then you'll understand. No matter what happens.

*FANNIE*: What? What's happened? (*A beat.*) Are you in trouble?

*MOLLIE*: No! No more babies! We've had enough misfortune in that way.

*FANNIE (scolding, but relieved):* Mollie! To talk of your brothers and sisters like that! They look up to you so—you're like their second mother!

*MOLLIE:* If only they didn't have to grow up and live like us. Already poor Josef wants to work. He's starting to understand we can't afford him.

*FANNIE:* Mollie!

*MOLLIE:* But it's the truth. You didn't want them either.

*FANNIE:* They came. It wasn't a choice.

*MOLLIE:* No! Nothing's a choice. And everything should be.

*JOSEF (half-asleep):* Was a good choice to come here...No one killing us.

*FANNIE:* Yes, Papa—now get some sleep. (*to MOLLIE, an urgent whisper*): But what do you mean "No matter what happens?" (*MOLLIE turns away.*) No, now *you* look. What are you thinking to do?

*MOLLIE (distant despair):* Nothing will stop unless I make it stop.

*FANNIE:* Mollie, you mustn't even think of that!

*MOLLIE (a beat):* No, not *that*! How terrible that you could even think it—I mean that such a thing is possible.

*FANNIE (busily working):* It isn't, it isn't.

*MOLLIE:* Well, not now. Anyway, that's not what I mean. I mean this crying out inside. Somehow it has to come out. I mean I have to really see it and feel it myself... (*frustrated.*) I don't know what I mean.

*A pause.*

*FANNIE:* You could get married. (*MOLLIE groans.*) Yes, why not? You're old enough! You need a family of your own / to take care of.

*MOLLIE:* No, no, *no*! It's all too small. I mean something else, I mean life itself... (*a beat*): Do you remember that litter of kittens that were born under our doorstep?

*FANNIE:* In Donaevsky, yes. That was a terrible place. I don't know what Papa was thinking / bringing us there.

*MOLLIE (breaking in):* There was one who was too small and couldn't get to the mother like the others.

FANNIE: You tried to nurse him yourself—with cow's milk!

MOLLIE: I didn't know what else to do. *You* wouldn't help.

FANNIE: It is the way of nature, Mollie. Even his own mother turned her back.

MOLLIE: Yes. You kept saying that.

FANNIE (*defensive*): I felt that was important, not to cry over every little thing—like I did when I was a girl. It made me foolish and silly— (*with MOLLIE, who is wearily reciting the familiar lesson*): —a head full of dreams. (FANNIE *alone*): Yes! You cut yourself, I gave you a bandage and turned away.

MOLLIE: And cried.

FANNIE (*a beat*): But it was good I did that. Look how good you work.

MOLLIE: Like a machine.

FANNIE: So I made you tough and now you are angry.

MOLLIE: No, no—that's not it at all. It was the kitten itself I was remembering. He was so tiny and frail, he looked more like a mouse. You could feel his bones poking through his skin. He'd lie there quivering, sucking my fingers; for a while he'd try to swallow some of the milk, then he'd stop and curl up as deep into my hand as he could go. But the strange part was that even after you would make me put him back with the others, even after you finally took him away—

FANNIE: I didn't want you to cry, I didn't want you to bury him!

MOLLIE: —even then I could still feel him, all day long, a tingling right in the center of my palm. I can still feel it now, if I really think about it. He was alive—that's all he was. But perfectly. (*a beat.*) That's what I want. I just want to be alive.

FANNIE: I can't help you with that.

MOLLIE: No.

*A beat.*

FANNIE: Having a family is the only way for us, Mollie. You're right—little ones are so helpless, they need you for everything.

MOLLIE: But what they really need we can't give them.

FANNIE: We give them life.

*MOLLIE*: A life in prison.

*FANNIE*: You don't know that. Maybe they have a better life. (*MOLLIE scoffs.*) Not now, but someday.

*MOLLIE*: Someday. You mean for David?

*FANNIE*: Or David's David.

*MOLLIE (groans)*: It's a trap, this hoping, I'd rather die. A life without choices is no life at all.

*FANNIE*: You do have a choice, Mollie. Just make sure you do it well. Look for a man who can give you the freedom you want.

*MOLLIE*: The freedom I'm talking about / has nothing to do with marriage.

*FANNIE*: And this I can help you with.

*MOLLIE*: I will not sell my love!

*FANNIE*: What love? I only want that you be happy. Don't be the fool I was. Forget the ones with big ideas and no money. Those Bolsheviki are no good for you, Mollie.

*MOLLIE*: They're not Bolsheviks!

*FANNIE*: Shh. Papa must not hear.

*JOSEF*: What must Papa not hear?

*MOLLIE*: The Bolsheviks, Papa.

*JOSEF*: Ach. No good.

*MOLLIE*: The ones who killed the Czar and freed Russia from slavery.

*JOSEF (scoffs)*: And now the Jews are having the Sabbath with Lenin.

*MOLLIE*: Maybe not. But it's better there now than it was.

*JOSEF*: You want to go back?

*FANNIE*: She doesn't, Papa.

*MOLLIE*: No. I want to bring Russia here!

*JOSEF*: Let it stay where it is. You don't remember Kishinev.



*MOLLIE*: Kishinev!

*FANNIE*: Josef, no. Get some rest.

*JOSEF*: What rest? Is impossible to rest with this noise. Bring Russia here! You don't remember, or you wouldn't talk so.

*JOSEF speaks the following wearily, as though talking in his sleep—a story he's told many times. Meanwhile, he slowly rises, puts on his shoes, gathers up his little bundle for work. FANNIE continues to fold, emotionless. MOLLIE pities him, but turns away.*

*JOSEF*: Bad enough the way they moved us from place to place like animals, but they had also to spread rumors about us, lies—said Jews killed Christian boys and used their blood for matzoh! Then they found that one boy stabbed, but it wasn't Jews who did it. It was only the excuse to beat and rob us. It was the end of Passover, the beginning of their Easter. Their Christ is supposed to be risen, but all they celebrate was more death. They came in the night like wolves. People dragged from their beds, butchered with knives—some have the spikes driven through their hands and feet, like to crucify them! Three days and nights it went on. The police did nothing to stop them, they even helped in the looting. When it was all over, their official report said *we* were to blame! More lies, and again they all believed! Because there is no justice in Russia. And after, there were many more such times; I saw the bodies piled, even girls like you. For nothing they all died. For nothing. (*End of Music and shadow puppetry sequence. JOSEF looks at his watch, groans.*) I go now. (*gets up.*) You don't remember. It's good we came.

### ***Hoover, Tunney, Woods, Bug***

*Inspector TUNNEY is at his desk, flanked by former Police Commissioner WOODS, greeting J. EDGAR HOOVER and THE BUG.*

*TUNNEY*: It's fortunate you're here, Mr. Hoover. Something very serious has fallen into our laps—

*WOODS*: Oh, hardly.

*HOOVER looks askance at WOODS.*

*TUNNEY (awkward)*: Oh, this is Commissioner Woods.

*WOODS*: Ex-Commissioner.

*TUNNEY (apologetic)*: Arthur resigned the day Tammany Hall took over the Mayor's office.

*WOODS (scoffs, beginning a tirade)*: I couldn't be a part of that game for one minute. It's all / influence and connections!

*TUNNEY (breaking in, embarrassed):* He still drops by to advise us from time to time.

*WOODS (nostalgic):* Well, the Bomb Squad is an elite corps I take great pride in—

*TUNNEY (to HOOVER, abrupt, indicating THE BUG):* And this is . . .

*HOOVER:* One of my men. Under cover, you understand.

*TUNNEY:* Of course...

*HOOVER (impatient):* What can I do for you, Inspector Tunney?

*TUNNEY:* Yes, right ... Have you seen any of these? (*handing over the leaflets; HOOVER has THE BUG receive them.*)

*THE BUG (nodding, showing them to HOOVER):* I picked up one of these today.

*WOODS:* The usual cant—nothing that serious / as I see it.

*HOOVER:* I beg to differ, Mr. Woods. All radical effusions are gravely serious. In fact, they are sedition.

*TUNNEY:* And can be punished under the new law.

*WOODS:* The law is vague.

*HOOVER:* The Sedition Act is as clear as we allow it to be. It's a crime to say or write anything disloyal or abusive about the United States, or to hinder the war effort in any way.

*WOODS:* But they're upset with the business in Russia, not the war with Germany.

*TUNNEY:* The leaflets were found this morning by four workmen in East Harlem. We managed to trace them to a man by the name of Rosansky.

*WOODS:* He was scared! He's just a boy—about your age, Mr. Hoover.

*HOOVER:* Boys my age can do a lot of damage, Mr. Woods.

*TUNNEY:* He gave out five names. (*reading.*) Abrams, Lipman, Schwartz, Lachowsky, Steimer. The last one's a girl. Know any of them?

*THE BUG:* Oh, that's Frayhayt. (*translating*): "Freedom."

*TUNNEY (anxious):* Are they important?

*HOOVER:* They are all important.

*THE BUG* (*shrugs*): They come up. (*begins searching his notepad.*)

*TUNNEY*: I've heard that you have created an impressive number of files.

*HOOVER*: We're making a little library, yes.

*TUNNEY*: We could use whatever you have. We're picking them up tonight. Apparently there's a rendezvous to get more leaflets.

*THE BUG*: Tonight? There's a meeting tonight at the Opera House. Many well-known radicals are supposed to speak.

*TUNNEY* (*anxious*): That's why we think this matter here might be connected to someone high up in the anarchist circles.

*WOODS*: Nonsense. One is just the usual blather, and the other is just some kids.

*TUNNEY*: What do you think, Mr. Hoover?

*HOOVER*: It's not what I think, but what I know. Gentlemen, since I have come to the Bureau, it has become increasingly clear to me that civilization is now facing its most terrible menace since the barbarian hordes overran Western Europe.

*A beat.*

*WOODS*: Surely you exaggerate, Mr. Hoover.

*HOOVER*: I do not.

*WOODS*: I just don't see—

*HOOVER*: Maybe you don't know where to look, Mr. Woods. Have you heard of the epidemic of Spanish influenza that is presently ravaging Europe?

*TUNNEY*: It's rumored to be a German plot.

*HOOVER*: It may very well be. The illness strikes without warning; a man seems perfectly well, but then within one or two hours he becomes delirious, running a fever of up to 105 degrees. He begins to cough and spit blood, every muscle and joint in his body aches; he feels as though he'd been beaten all over with a club. Death comes swiftly, often the result of choking, while large quantities of bloody froth exude from his mouth and nostrils. Some predict it will come here, that even now the germ may be on its way, incubating in the bowels of another steamship teeming with alien filth.

*TUNNEY*: Let us pray that it doesn't make it here.

*HOOVER:* Ah, but it already has, Inspector Tunney. Our intentions were good, opening our doors to the outcasts of other lands to man our machines and plow our earth. But they have betrayed us. Pry open the walls, and you'll find them in their secret dens, eating away at the fabric of our institutions.

*THE BUG (holding up his notepad):* Frayhayt gives free English lessons that turn into Anarchist rallies. *(reading):* "At the end of the hour they led us into a crowded hall, which had a distinctly foreign atmosphere, to say nothing of the odor, which was like a cross between a garlic garden and gefilte fish."

*HOOVER:* You see? Even something that seems benign on the surface is rotten black inside.

*THE BUG (reading):* "The speaker whined on and on about the evil capitalists. 'Wake up!' he shouted. 'You live like rats four and five in a room, while they spread out their fat in thirty or forty, maybe even one for their dog. A landlord buys some ground and we build him a house. But what right has he to buy the land? Did he create it?'"

*TUNNEY:* A flagrant attack on property.

*HOOVER:* Precisely. Our most sacred right.

*WOODS:* Come on! No one's denying that they talk big. But most working people don't agree with all this rot. And when they do, maybe it's because they've been laid off and don't know where else to turn. Hey, Thomas, remember that one winter, there were no jobs anywhere—you should have heard the talk then! Well, we got the whole force together and in a few weeks we raised thousands of dollars for the jobless, a lot of it from our own pockets. Oh, there was good feeling on all sides—

*HOOVER:* And see how unappreciative they are.

*TUNNEY:* The times have changed, Arthur.

*HOOVER:* Yes! The times are a gathering storm.

*THE BUG:* He went on to call for Revolution. *(reading):* "It's marching East and West, it's right at our door. Not in a thousand years, but right now!"

*TUNNEY:* And he gets away with it!

*HOOVER:* Because we let him.

*THE BUG (fueling them):* I'm for hanging them, no sunrise about it.

*WOODS:* Whatever are you saying?

*HOOVER:* We're saying such men are good talkers and ought to have their mouths stuffed.

WOODS: But it's all talk! They don't have any weapons.

TUNNEY: Some have bombs.

WOODS: A few crackpots, yes. But we easily take care of those.

TUNNEY: Rosansky had a gun.

WOODS: A gun. And maybe tonight you'll find *a*-nother. But this is all nonsense, Thomas. Have you forgotten your sworn duty as an officer? People in this country have a constitutional right of free speech and assembly, and it is your duty not merely to permit this but to protect them while they exercise it. We handled all kinds of rallies my first year, some of them were pretty stormy; you'd have thought a revolution was going to erupt any second! And sometimes people on the streets would complain to my men, they'd say, "Hey, how can you let those bastards say those things against the government?" Naturally my men felt exactly the same way—we *all* do—but they always said just the right thing back: "If you want to hold a meeting, go over to the other side of the street and we'll protect you too." Now that's America, my friends, that's what I believe in. This isn't Russia; we don't want a reign of terror here, a secret police like the Cheka, do we?

*A pause.*

HOOVER: There is only one way to deal with anarchy and that is to crush it. Not with a slap on the wrist, but a broad-axe on the neck.

TUNNEY (to WOODS): You forget a war is on.

WOODS: But we have to respect the delicacy of the situation. We're fighting the Germans, not our own people.

TUNNEY: These are not our own people.

HOOVER (*rising*): Is there anything more, Inspector Tunney?

TUNNEY: No, thank you, you've been more than helpful. We'll have full confessions by dawn.

WOODS: Oh, Thomas, really. At least leave the girl out of it.

HOOVER: Spare the girl? No, sir, that's the mistake they count on. They hide behind their womanhood, preying on the deference we show them out of respect for our mothers and sisters.

TUNNEY: She'll crack like the rest of them. You know your way, Mr. Hoover.

WOODS: Thomas, wait—think a minute. (*They go out.*)

*HOOVER (more to himself):* Such women are the most dangerous of all. The dark poison goes straight to their blood, congealing it, coiling in their wombs like a dirty snake.

*THE BUG:* Are you finished with me, Mr. Hoover?

*HOOVER:* Yes. Stay with Inspector Tunney and wire me tomorrow.

*THE BUG:* Yes, sir.

*HOOVER:* Oh, and one more thing. Start a file on Mr. Arthur Woods. (*THE BUG nods and makes a note*). It pains me to see a man begin to drift.

### ***Weinberger, Press 1 and 2, Bug***

*WEINBERGER leaves the hall, pursued by two members of the PRESS and, after a moment, THE BUG, carrying a camera.*

*PRESS 1:* You sure laid it on thick, Harry.

*WEINBERGER:* Meant every word, boys. (*the PRESS scoff.*)

*PRESS 1:* We heard that Schwartz died from the Spanish flu. (*WEINBERGER scoffs.*)

*PRESS 2:* Would be ironic, though. A guy who tried to help the Germans ends up dying from the disease that may be a German plot.

*WEINBERGER:* What?! One, my clients' leaflets did not say one word in support of Germany. And two, the first cases of the Spanish flu in America appeared in Boston among U.S. *sailors*.

*PRESS 2:* But maybe the Germans gave it to them. (*Weinberger groans.*)

*PRESS 1:* The Huns have started epidemics over there. Why would they be gentle on America?

*THE BUG:* Are you saying our own troops are responsible for half a million American deaths?

*WEINBERGER:* I'm saying get your heads out of the cloud of hysteria and use your common sense. The Board of Health has rightly suggested we limit large gatherings of people in order to reduce the danger of infection. Yet no one even considers canceling patriotic parades or Liberty Bond rallies.

*PRESS 2:* Are you saying the Bond rallies spread the disease?

*THE BUG:* He's too smart to say it outright.

*WEINBERGER:* You don't have to. I'd be facing twenty years already if I were a poor Jew like my clients.

*PRESS 1:* Well, you'll be poor soon enough if you keep taking cases like this.

*PRESS 2:* Yeah, Harry, why do you even bother? (*ready to write.*) On the record.

*WEINBERGER (incredulous):* Because I *believe* what I'm fighting for.

*THE BUG:* And what's that?

*WEINBERGER (stops, faces them):* Justice. (*a beat; they stare at him.*) Yes, justice! And to me justice means liberty, and liberty the rights of the individual, and the rights of the individual, limits on the power of the state—

*PRESS 2:* Come on, Harry!

*WEINBERGER:* —which by its nature seeks absolute control over its people / by repressing free, honest thought.

*PRESS 2:* I'm not writing this. Seriously, Harry, I need something a little less technical.

*WEINBERGER:* All right, say it like this. Say Harry Weinberger does what he does because he loves to fight. A Jew growing up in an Irish neighborhood had better be able to throw a punch.

*PRESS 2 (scribbling):* That's more like it.

*WEINBERGER (somewhat to himself):* Sometimes I think I would rather fight than eat. That's one thing you get at night school that you don't get at Harvard. Even in this case, as stacked as everything is against me, I guarantee you I will win *something*.

*PRESS 1:* Hold on, what's stacked against you?

*WEINBERGER:* The jury for one.

*PRESS 2:* Seems a fair jury to me.

*WEINBERGER:* Are you blind? They're all in business. Not a single laborer among them. Maybe if that happened once, fine, but every single sedition case gets juries like this. If you guys would do your jobs you'd find out why this is.

*PRESS 1:* What, investigate the US Attorney's office?

*PRESS 2:* No thanks. I like my job and plan to keep it.

*WEINBERGER:* My mistake. I thought the press was free.

*PRESS 1:* We are! We just don't choose to waste our time following every wild idea that comes along.

*THE BUG:* Are you suggesting the prosecutors have a crystal ball that tells them who to challenge during selection?

*WEINBERGER:* They have something.

*PRESS 1:* You're going off the deep end, Harry. I suppose you think Judge Clayton is against you too— (*Weinberger scoffs incredulously.*) —but he isn't!

*PRESS 2 (imitating Clayton, with delight):* “If we have got to meet the puny, sickly, distorted views of anarchy, let us meet them right here and now.”

*WEINBERGER:* And you guys find nothing wrong with a judge saying that?

*PRESS 2:* Your clients *are* puny and sickly.

*THE BUG:* I like the girl though.

*MOLLIE appears wearing a red silk Russian tunic and a black armband. She is sitting in a chair at the defense table, staring straight ahead, like an icon of herself. THE BUG takes a photograph of her, then shows it to the others as they speak.*

*PRESS 2:* Oh, the girl is great copy. She looks like the daughter of Czar Nicholas.

*PRESS 1:* She's something different all right. When the Bailiff says “All rise!” she just sits there like a rock. The marshals behind her could lift her up with one of their little fingers, but they just stand there staring at her back, holding their breath until everyone sits down again.

*PRESS 2:* It's like they're scared of her.

*WEINBERGER:* Maybe they are. Maybe they should be.

*THE BUG:* Are you scared of her?

*WEINBERGER:* No. But I've never met anyone like her. She objects to everything I try to do for her and the others. I explain the reasons why, and she understands perfectly, maybe better than any client I've ever had. But still she objects. (*MOLLIE slowly turns and looks at him.*) The way she looks at me, she makes me feel almost...*unclean.* (*MOLLIE turns away.*)

*PRESS 2:* That's cause you're a slob, Harry. The next time I have dinner with you I'm bringing a bib.

*WEINBERGER (snapping out of his reverie, moving away):* Why don't you bring some money instead? Now go away, all of you, so I can turn my brain back on.

*PRESS 1:* You'd have a better chance if you just left it off.



*WEINBERGER*: I probably would.

***Weinberger and 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.

***Judge Clayton, Weinberger, Ryan, Mollie***

*WEINBERGER*: One moment please. If I want you to say something, Miss Steimer, I will ask it. Now, I want to know what you and Jacob and the others had in mind when writing these leaflets. What kind of society did you and Jacob favor?

*RYAN*: Objection.

*CLAYTON*: Overruled. I want to hear the lady's point of view on all this.

*MOLLIE*: We believed in the establishment of a new social order where no group of people would be in power over any other. Private ownership would be abolished, and law replaced by mutual agreement. Instead of struggling simply to survive, every man and woman would strive to develop themselves to their fullest potential. To the fulfillment of this idea I shall devote all my energy, and, if necessary, to render my life for it.

*CLAYTON (a broad grin, applauding)*: Well, now—that was something, wasn't it? More than worthy of your pretty uniform. But just one thing troubles me about all this, young lady. Is there any such place as you described?

*MOLLIE*: I said I shall work for it.

*CLAYTON*: But is there any such country now that you know of?

*MOLLIE*: At present, the workers of Russia are trying to establish something like it.

*CLAYTON*: They are only trying to?

*MOLLIE*: If your military should not crush them, they might succeed.

CLAYTON: But there isn't any other such country, at present?

MOLLIE (*a beat*): No.

CLAYTON: I didn't think so. All the other countries have governments, and laws.

MOLLIE: They do, to our sorrow.

CLAYTON: So you don't believe in any laws at all?

MOLLIE: Depends on what you mean by law.

CLAYTON: Well, do you believe people ought not kill each other? Or if somebody breaks into your house and steals all of your belongings, do you believe that person should give them back?

MOLLIE: You're not listening. If things were as I described, such crimes would not be committed.

CLAYTON: But since at present they are committed, then we need the laws?

MOLLIE: Because your system is rotten.

WEINBERGER: Miss Steimer, regarding the *leaflets*—

CLAYTON: Just a moment, Mr. Weinberger. (*to MOLLIE, lightly*): Well, how about the rotten laws we rotten people have for the protection of public morality? (*laughter in the courtroom.*)

MOLLIE: I don't think your laws do protect morality, just the opposite.

CLAYTON: How about the laws regulating marriage? Do you believe that whenever love grows cold in a marriage, the parties involved should be able to just pick up and wander off, like the beasts of the field? (*laughter.*)

MOLLIE: What is the use of the marriage relation, if the people's hearts are not related?

CLAYTON: So then you believe in the doctrine of free love? (*laughter.*) Or in polygamy? Actually for you it would be polyandry, where the woman has more than one husband— (*laughter.*) Or maybe you say "comrade." (*uproar.*)

MOLLIE: Is it not so that despite all your marriage laws, there are thousands and thousands of cases of infidelity anyway?

CLAYTON: People do sometimes violate their vows—

MOLLIE: Have you ever violated your vows?

CLAYTON: —and society is only trying to protect itself.

MOLLIE: Can you honestly say it succeeds?

CLAYTON: As much as it can it does; at least it tries.

MOLLIE: It tries in vain. (*a beat.*) *Have you?*

CLAYTON (*embarrassed*): Well, I don't think this has anything to do with this trial. (*suppressed laughter in gallery.*)

MOLLIE: Neither do I.

WEINBERGER: Your Honor, if Miss Steimer has finished her interrogation, I'd like to ask her a few questions myself. (*nervous laughter in gallery.*)

CLAYTON: I'd appreciate that, Brother Weinberger.

WEINBERGER: Miss Steimer, why did you distribute these leaflets?

MOLLIE: To call upon the workers to protest the fact that the Allies who claimed to be fighting for democracy were acting like the Germans by invading a neutral country and attacking the Russian Revolution.

WEINBERGER: You did not have any intention to uphold German militarism?

MOLLIE: I despise militarism wherever it exists. It is an unnecessary evil.

CLAYTON: Those are strong words, young lady.

MOLLIE: I speak them from the heart.

CLAYTON: I see you are wearing an armband. May I ask for what reason?

MOLLIE: I wear this in memory of Jacob Schwartz, who was killed by the police. (RYAN *gets up.*)

CLAYTON: Strike that last part.

MOLLIE: Which is precisely why I wear it.

CLAYTON: Schwartz was sort of a special friend of yours, wasn't he? A "comrade"?

MOLLIE (*a beat*): Yes. I think he was.

*CLAYTON:* I understand, you know. Grief over a loved one is a very hard thing. Maybe you've noticed that I myself am wearing a similar armband, and a gold star here. Would you like to know why I wear these tokens?

*MOLLIE:* I think you are about to say in any case.

*CLAYTON:* Yes, I am, because I'm proud of it! On May 30<sup>th</sup> of this year, an officer of the United States Army was killed by a bomb in France. He was a graduate of West Point, a brilliant man—everyone who knew him was in his shadow. As a career officer, when war was declared he could have easily remained at home, but instead he immediately decided that the only thing worthwhile was to be with the troops, right in the thick of things. How sweet it would have been for him to tread on German soil and annihilate the enemy as they deserve, but unfortunately, like all great patriots, the man was called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice. His name was Colonel Bertram Tracy Clayton, he was and remains the highest ranking officer slain in the War, and yes, I am proud to be his older brother.

*WEINBERGER:* All of us in the court offer you the most heartfelt condolences, Your Honor.

*CLAYTON:* I thank you, Counsel.

*WEINBERGER:* But may I just stress again here that in the leaflets my clients are not at all opposed to the war against Germany.

*CLAYTON:* She is, she just said she was against the military.

*WEINBERGER:* Militarism, Your Honor. Like the Kaiser—

*CLAYTON:* And that we were as bad as the Germans, she said that.

*MOLLIE:* Yes, I did.

*CLAYTON:* There! Now, this is just what I wanted to ask you straight out, Mollie, because I see you are grieving too and maybe you aren't thinking straight. But I just told you about my brother losing his life there on Flanders field, his body lying cold in the first warmth of spring. And what I want to know is, do you believe my brother died in vain?

*MOLLIE (a beat):* It depends. Did he die helping to extend the exploitation of workers around the world?

*WEINBERGER:* Your Honor—

*CLAYTON:* Bertram Clayton died for the sake of freedom!

*MOLLIE (grave):* Then yes, I am afraid he died in vain. *(a gasp in the courtroom; sorrowfully):* The war is a great black trap, and he fell right in.

CLAYTON (*a beat; seething*): Mr. Weinberger, I presume you are finished with this witness.

***Mary Lilly and Mollie***

*After a moment, he goes out; MOLLIE hears someone approaching and tries to hide the book. The Superintendent MARY LILLY enters, swiftly goes right to where MOLLIE has hidden the book, and picks it up.*

LILLY: Where did you get this? You know very well you've given up all your privileges. (MOLLIE *turns away in disgust.*) Outside the walls of this Workhouse educating yourself is not just a privilege, but a basic right. But, by breaking the law, you have sacrificed your rights. Now you must earn them back, one by one. (*baiting her.*) Maybe then you will appreciate them.

MOLLIE (*turning, unable to remain silent*): I appreciate my rights as I do my heartbeat!

LILLY (*pouncing*): You mean then that you take them for granted. (*a beat; mirthful.*) How strange to hear such big talk from such a little girl.

MOLLIE: The size of the woman apparently has nothing to do with the size of her mind.

LILLY: I didn't come here to fight.

MOLLIE: Then leave.

*A beat. MOLLIE turns away. LILLY reads the cover of the book, makes a sound of disgust.*

LILLY: Theories! Pie in the sky. Here. (LILLY *tosses the book on the bed. MOLLIE looks at it hungrily, but leaves it.*) Go on, take it. I'm extending the privilege, gratis. (MOLLIE *doesn't move. LILLY takes the book.*) All right, it's gone. My God, you're stubborn! You could have all the books you want; in fact, I'd even go to the public library for you.

MOLLIE: The books I want you would be afraid even to touch.

LILLY: You underestimate me. I'm not an anarchist, but I am a liberal. I supported Wilson. (MOLLIE *scoffs.*) He would give us women the vote, if the Republicans would let him! (MOLLIE *laughs at her.*) Oh, never mind. It's clear you and I will never agree on politics. The point is, I *would* get the books for you. Perhaps this will come as a surprise to you, but no matter how much they grumble, the girls here respect me a great deal. Some of them have never had someone to care for them the way we do. They come in like ragged strays, in desperate need of both discipline and encouragement. By the time they leave, they're meek as lambs.

MOLLIE: And how many lambs come running right back to the pen?

LILLY: Far too many, it's true. The more they take to the mothering, the harder it is to wean them when they come to the end of their term. That's why I try to seem so callous at times.



*MOLLIE*: You don't need to try.

*LILLY*: But it doesn't always work. Imagine! They would actually rather stay here in prison than go back out into the world. A few very special ones we allow to stay on as supervisors in the workrooms—the matrons you all despise so much. Well, they were once no better off than you. We have a little ceremony in which we hand them the very keys that have locked them in.

*MOLLIE*: How sad that must be.

*LILLY (taking the bait)*: Oh, yes, it's very moving! But it's happy too.

*MOLLIE*: To see minds so beaten. One might as well be dead.

*LILLY (turning on her)*: No! Dead is what you are, sitting here in this tomb! (*a beat; regaining composure.*) I admit in some ways I'm very impressed with you, Mollie. Every girl who comes here at first refuses to work, but after two or three days and nights alone in her locked cell... Well, one morning, long before anyone else is up, the cell matron brings them to my desk—sullen, glaring, sobbing, it doesn't matter. I hand them a broom—

*MOLLIE*: And they hand you their soul.

*LILLY*: Yes. And then they can be healed. You can't heal yourself alone, Mollie; your social illness will just consume you, like a fever.

*MOLLIE*: I am not sick!

*LILLY*: The really sick ones have to be sent to the isolation cells in the basement.

*THE BUG*: No one lasts more than a day in one of those.

*LILLY*: But we rarely have to use them. I suppose it's enough that they're there.

*MOLLIE (a beat; stares at THE BUG; somewhat hollow)*: They don't scare me. (*rubbing her eyes; sorrowful, agitated*): Maybe you should just take me there right now.

*THE BUG*: Are you sure that's what you want?

*MOLLIE turns away.*

*LILLY*: Nonsense. There's no need for that, yet. I say I'm impressed with you, Mollie, and I mean that. *Two weeks* you've been here, and still you refuse to budge! In fact, I dare say in many ways you remind me of myself.

*MOLLIE*: Then you know that I really wish you'd leave me alone now.

*LILLY*: Yes. And I also know that you're flattered by the special attention I'm giving you.

*MOLLIE*: I don't want special attention.

*LILLY*: No. You don't want to *want* special attention. (*MOLLIE is silent; LILLY is smug.*) You think I don't understand you; you think I have a small mind, like the matrons. Well, young lady, I was one of the first women ever admitted to the state bar before you were even born! I wonder if you can even conceive of what that means. You'd think the constant ridicule would stop after a while, but it doesn't, not ever! A year ago I was one of the first women elected to the State Assembly. I would be there still but that just before the last election my jealous rivals went to the papers and made a fuss that the position I had also taken here violated the state codes against holding two public offices at once. I should have seen the trap! (*a beat; regaining composure.*) The point is I have succeeded even so. I have overcome every obstacle—

*MOLLIE*: No. You have succeeded because you have become an obstacle.

*LILLY*: I'm trying to help you! I'm talking about real life struggles—

*MOLLIE*: You talk of struggles like one whose belly has always been full.

*LILLY*: So that's the source of your bitterness. Well, granted, the Lillys are well off, but there are plenty from my class who make nothing of their lives and plenty from yours who do. It's all a matter of hard work and determination. (*MOLLIE laughs in disdain*): I know all about the tenements and sweatshops—

*MOLLIE*: Maybe you read about them in a book.

*LILLY (caught)*: Well, even supposing that only a few manage to pull themselves *completely* out of the tenements, my point is you can be one of those few.

*MOLLIE*: I don't want to be one of the few.

*LILLY*: You can't help it, you already are. My God! (*picks up the book.*) Most of the girls here couldn't even read the title of this book, much less understand the contents.

*MOLLIE*: They don't need to read it; they live it every day.

*LILLY*: But they don't understand even so. I look in their eyes, and I see lost sheep. It's unbearably sad. They need a shepherd.

*MOLLIE*: We are all of us our own shepherds.

*LILLY*: No. You want to believe that, but deep down you know it's not so. (*a beat.*) We are the shepherds, you and I. And better us than the wolves who would simply devour them.

*MOLLIE*: Worst of all is the wolf who pretends to be a shepherd.

*LILLY*: Well, the path you've chosen, you would lead them off a cliff.

*MOLLIE*: I'm not leading anyone. We work together. That's our strength. (*hollow.*)

*LILLY (scoffs)*: If the others are so important to you then why haven't you agreed to work like they do and share their burden? You can't do anything for them inside this cell.

*MOLLIE*: Maybe they know why I am doing it.

*LILLY*: I'm sure they haven't the slightest idea. They probably think you're out of your mind. I admit I don't understand it either, except that you're just stubborn. And it's eating you up inside, Mollie, I know it is. You need human contact like you need these books. Admit at least that to me.

*A beat. MOLLIE is silent.*

*LILLY (gently advancing)*: Mollie. Why don't you give up this pose? Try to influence them against me if you like, I don't care. I think they'll side with me.

*MOLLIE*: Of course. You have the police standing just behind you, ready to beat them down.

*LILLY*: Really! You're so dramatic. You act like this were Mother Russia.

*MOLLIE (gloomy)*: What's the difference?

*LILLY*: I think they don't make deals in Russia, for one. Which brings me to the real reason I came here, Mollie.

*MOLLIE*: I make no deals with the devil.

*LILLY*: Neither do I normally, but there are times when you just have to give him his due. My goal is to reach every single girl who comes here, and like Our Savior, I don't like to lose even one. In short, I'm ready to concede.

*MOLLIE*: Concede? I don't believe that.

*LILLY*: Neither do I; the word sounds so foreign on my tongue. But, since we need to build a bridge between us, as a start I'm willing to allow you to have visitors. All you have to do is *promise* to work.

*MOLLIE (struggling to steel herself)*: I don't want any visitors. I will not work for you!

*LILLY*: You can break the promise if you like, but I'm willing to take that risk. (*MOLLIE is rubbing her eyes, shaking her head insistently; LILLY is frustrated, vexed.*) Why not, Mollie? Why won't you meet me halfway?!

*MOLLIE*: If for one moment I let you treat me like a prisoner, then I will begin to think like one!

LILLY (*baffled*): You *are* a prisoner.

MOLLIE: No! I'm a human being.

LILLY: Which is precisely why you need visitors—we all do, or else we shrivel up inside. In fact...you have one now, right outside.

MOLLIE: What? Who?

LILLY (*moving toward the door*): A friend. (*calling offstage*): You can bring her in now. (*to MOLLIE*): Your best friend, I should think.

### **Weinberger and Mollie**

WEINBERGER: But you should be prepared to see that social change requires patience and timing. If you come out swinging a club, they'll bring out theirs, and they always have more of them than you do. But if you chip away at them with the same laws they use to hem you in, then in time they'll get complacent or confused—you'll sneak in and make a significant change without them even realizing it!

MOLLIE: Maybe you are the one changed without realizing it.

WEINBERGER (*a beat; frustrated*): If you'd have taken my advice a year ago, you might have already begun to see the truth in what I'm saying.

MOLLIE: Yes. And become the next Mary Lilly.

WEINBERGER: No—the first Mollie Steimer. Now the best I can do for you is to get you on a boat to Russia. (*taking out another set of papers and offering them to her.*) Here. I need your signature on this.

MOLLIE (*not taking them*): What is it?

WEINBERGER: The petition for your release. Along with the others.

MOLLIE: What petition?

WEINBERGER: Look, it's the only way. (*forcibly showing it to her; rapidly*): The first part is just the usual nonsense—you admit you were wrong, you say you're sorry, you concede the government's right to judge you, and you promise to conduct yourselves lawfully in the future.

MOLLIE: What is the matter with you?!

WEINBERGER: Just ignore it, Mollie! The words don't mean a thing. It's only a formality—a compromise which seems well worth making given the alternative.

MOLLIE: But—

WEINBERGER: *But* I knew you'd object, so look here—instead of “A Request for Pardon,” I've called it “A Demand for Amnesty.” And down here, look, it ends with the statement: “My sentiments are the same now as they were at the trial and at the time of the issuance of the leaflets.” Which pretty much cancels out everything that came before. But they never read that far down—

MOLLIE (*scornful laughter*): You don't understand the slightest thing! My objection isn't to the *wording* but simply to what it is. I've constantly told people that they should never petition the government for *anything*. I can't go back on that *now* just because it's in my interest. By acknowledging their power over us in any way whatsoever—

WEINBERGER: You already admit defeat. Yes, I know the *theory*. But look at the *facts*, Mollie. Right now you are completely in the power of the state for the next *fifteen* years. I assume you're not exactly fond of your lodgings here.

MOLLIE: Don't play games with me.

WEINBERGER: Well, like it or not, this ridiculous little piece of paper is the only way for you to get free of this place. And Jefferson City, which is far worse, believe me.

MOLLIE: I don't care. Besides, what makes my case so special? I have no intention of asking for my release when thousands of others are still in jail.

WEINBERGER: That's just it. Your release can serve as the opening wedge to gain amnesty for all the rest. By refusing to sign, you simply stop having anything done for the others who *want* it done.

MOLLIE: Why don't you demand that *all* political prisoners be released?

WEINBERGER: I just told you, it doesn't work like that.

MOLLIE: But it has to work like that, or it's no good.

WEINBERGER: If the other people's lawyers want to follow my lead, that's fine.

MOLLIE: Oh, I see. You want to be the first. That's why you're in such a hurry.

WEINBERGER: I'm trying to strike while the iron is hot.

MOLLIE: Maybe then you will be invited to tea with Brandeis.

WEINBERGER: Abrams and Lipman have already agreed to sign.

MOLLIE: Fine. Act on their behalf if you like, but leave me out of it.

WEINBERGER: Mollie, just look at where you are.

MOLLIE: I know exactly where I am! And I will not move one inch until my basic human rights are respected. Especially by my own lawyer.

WEINBERGER: How can you say that to me? How? Sometimes I don't know why I even bother. I've worked myself to death for you people, and for nothing—no, it's actually cost me. Abrams and Lipman try some foolish escape that doesn't have a prayer of succeeding, and guess who has to pay for their return, as well as their guards'. Five hundred dollars! Far worse / is the damage it does to my appeals.

*Both overlapping at the /.*

MOLLIE: Well, I'm sorry our foolishness has cost / you so much money.

WEINBERGER: And meanwhile here you are, / making such a fuss over nothing.

MOLLIE: I doubt we will ever be able / to repay you every dollar—

WEINBERGER: Look, I don't care if you're ungrateful. / Just don't get in the way.

MOLLIE: —but perhaps the *personal glory* you've earned (WEINBERGER *scoffs.*) from our case will more than make up for the loss.

WEINBERGER: Personal glory! You know, you've always enjoyed mocking my ambitions, but what about your own? Maybe you don't want to be in the newspapers, but you're on a private mission just the same. It's like you're waiting for someone to come along with a club and beat you to death, just so you can prove to yourself how perfect you are. And what a waste of life that is, because we don't need your perfection, Mollie. If you think it's otherwise, then you're only deluding yourself.

MOLLIE: If you think that, then why do you need my approval so badly?

*A beat. Both of them are deeply wounded.*

WEINBERGER: I don't know, I really don't. I've been asking myself that question for some time now.

MOLLIE: Well, keep asking.

***Mollie, Marie, Kate***

*Suddenly the voices stop, and a fight erupts. Soon it's bedlam; tin cups and plates are flying, glass bulbs are breaking; women are screaming, fighting, calling for help. A young inmate, MARIE, comes reeling by MOLLIE'S cell, hysterical, bleeding from the forehead.*

MARIE: Help me! Somebody! I can't see!

MOLLIE (*grabbing her*): Hey, hold on—

MARIE (*falling into MOLLIE'S arms*): Help me!

MOLLIE: It's all right; you just got a bad cut. (*sets MARIE on the cot, grabs a piece of linen.*) Here, let me clean you up. (*wipes some blood from her eyes.*)

MARIE: Is it time? Are they here?

MOLLIE: Hold still. (*MOLLIE makes a compress and, cradling MARIE, applies it to her forehead.*) What's happening out there?

MARIE: There was salt on the raisins instead of sugar. Kate called the Matron an idiot, and she said Kate was an ungrateful bitch and to shut up and eat. Kate threw her food, and then everybody did.

MOLLIE (*disturbed*): They're smashing everything up!

MARIE: Someone opened the fire extinguishers—the whole dining room is flooded. A window shattered, and I got hit by the glass. (*looks at the blood; shrieks.*) I'm dying!

MOLLIE: Shh. No, it's just a cut. It'll heal.

MARIE: Is it time? Are they here?

MOLLIE: Who?

MARIE: If it is, take me with you.

MOLLIE: Take you where?

MARIE: To the anarchist place. Kate always said they'd probably come for you someday, and that we should be ready just in case. And then that man came making a fuss over you and took Mrs. Lilly away. So we thought maybe the revolution might be now.

*A series of loud noises; the screaming and cursing intensifies.*

MOLLIE (*getting up and looking out; disturbed*): They're ripping the beds off the walls!

MARIE (*hysterical*): Take me with you! Please! I know you normally don't take girls like me, Kate already told me. But it was only for a month—we needed the money! Mrs. Lilly says I can still be saved.

MOLLIE (*going back to her*): Relax. Sit back

MARIE: Promise you won't leave me behind!

MOLLIE: All right, I promise. You'll go when I go.

KATE *enters, also cut*. MOLLIE *gives her a bandage*.

KATE (*to MOLLIE, aggressive*): Well, where are your friends? The gates are still locked. Are they blasting through the walls?

MOLLIE (*sharp*): No. They're already inside!

KATE: Where? I don't see them.

MOLLIE: Right here! They're all of you—and me.

KATE: What?

MOLLIE: Don't you hate this place? Don't you hate being treated like an animal?

KATE: Of course we do!

MOLLIE: Then don't act like one! Ripping the place apart, running around like lunatics—it's all a waste of strength. Instead, join ranks, stay together. Call a prison-wide hunger strike and hold on. Then the matter is clear—either they give in, or you die.

LILLY *approaches with matrons and THE BUG*.

KATE: When are they coming with the bombs? We helped create a diversion. If you're going, so are we.

LILLY: So this is the result of the freedom I gave you.

KATE (*pointing to MOLLIE*): She started it. She egged us on.

MARIE: She didn't! It was Kate who threw the food. Ask the Matron.

LILLY (*to the matrons and THE BUG*): Take them down to the holes.

MARIE (*clutching MOLLIE*): No!

KATE *is bound and carried away*.

KATE: I didn't do anything! (*to MARIE*): I'll get you.

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