

A GREAT MOLLIE

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Mollie Schumacher drove into the yard of the Bell farm. At first she thought there was no one about, it was so quiet. The garage doors were closed, however, and Frank always left them standing open when he took out the car.

She shut off the engine. But she kept on sitting in the car with her hands on the worn steering wheel, so comfortable that she hated to get out. She noticed how dry the September sunshine made everything look. The heavy pale grain of the grindstone was warm in the sun. Milk had been spilled at the corner of the corn crib where the cats were fed. It made a whitish stain on the bare ground and flies were thick above it. There was a look of country peace about the old red barn. The loft window was open, and shaggy, dusty hay stuck out. In the open wooded pasture behind the barn, the oaks had that dry look, too, in the sunshine.

Summer was almost over again! Mollie felt a thrust of fear. Summer, no matter how hard any one worked, was an interlude. It didn't really matter. But just as soon as that first crispness came into the air, it was different. The handle of the pump burned with cold when she went out to the vine-covered stoop to get the water before breakfast . . . again she was impatient because they kept on living in that old-fashioned house at the edge of town where they couldn't even have city water or a furnace—things everybody had nowadays! In the summer, it was pleasant enough, with the flowers, and the birds for which Charlie had made a dozen queer little houses of bark and boards. But the cold spurred her ambition. When frost came,

you had to decide things. It might come any time, now. It would get harder and harder to start the Ford. It would be too cold to drive in an open car. Her summer work would be over.

Nearly over . . . These days when she started out early, eager to get away from the puttering routine of home; packed her bag of samples; called back impatiently that they could expect her when they saw her; and then, after long dallying with the starter and heated attempts at cranking, heard joyously the loud steady noise of the engine, sprang in quickly before it had a chance to die down, and at last was out on the open road. . . .

She had been grumbling all summer about the annoyances—having to fool with this old car; getting caught in the rain somewhere out in the country and driving home over slippery roads; her goods not coming on time. But she had an affection for the Ford, which she had bought second hand at a sale in the country—although she got so furious at it sometimes that she called it every name she could think of. “You damned hell-fired old SKATE!” once she had sobbed at it.

But when it was running well, when the road stretched long and smooth, when the fields were fresh and the sky was blue, when the engine hummed noisily and the fenders rattled, she squeezed the steering wheel with both hands and felt that she loved the old rattletrap. She was so happy that she sang. She drove on and on and on, trying new roads, pretending that it was because she was enterprising and was looking for new customers. When she came to a patch of woods where it was shady, she stopped the car, took out from her handbag the sandwich of homemade bread and summer sausage she had stolen into the kitchen to make when Luisa wasn’t around, and ate it luxuriously. She liked to sell things and to dicker.

“Hoo hoo!” Mollie called.

Mate came to the door at last in an old bungalow apron.

"Well, look who's here!"

"I thought you folks must be all asleep."

"I was lying down. I don't know, I've felt kind of bum ever since I had those teeth out. I ought to get my ironing done today, there's some pieces I need, but—come on in, Mollie, what you standing outside for?"

"Wait. I want to get some things out of the car."

Mollie ran out and opened the back of the car.

"Land, you do pick up the most things! Where'd you get all that junk?" Mate demanded, in amusement.

"Oh, I don't know," Mollie said, laughing and blushing, half sheepish and half proud, like a child caught in some game of its own. "I see things when I'm driving around, and folks give me things. Gosh, Mate, I don't know where it all does come from! But I always seem to come home with the old bus loaded."

She had some seed corn that Henry Fuchs had given her to try out, and a bag of crab apples, a jackknife she had found in the road, a few hazelnuts she had picked to see whether they were ripe, a pail of honey, a spray of sumach, and half a dozen melons.

"Where'd you get the melons?" Mate demanded.

"Oh, some girls back here on the road had a stand and were selling them. I always like to take something home to Lu and Charlie. Here, I want you and Frank to try one of these."

"Oh, no; we'll have melons of our own before long."

"Oh, take this one—it's supposed to be a new kind. Go ahead, Mate."

"Well, but I hate to."

Mollie followed Mate into the parlor and sat down with a luxurious sigh, in the cool room shaded by pine trees. She took off her hat and wiped her face and neck until they were red. Her hair felt stiff with dust.

"You're sweating like a man," Mate observed.

"I have to work like a man, I can tell you."

"Ain't it awful hard work for you, going around with that Ford?"

"Oh, well, I can do it!" Mollie boasted. She laughed, and her eyes sparkled. "I came across a fellow in the road—couldn't get his car started, so I got out and tinkered around with it a while—and I don't know just what I'd done to it, but the darn thing started up the minute I turned on the gas! You ought to have seen that fellow's face!"

"You ought to have been a man," Mate said, admiring, yet disapproving.

She looked at Mollie.

Mollie was big all over, and Frank always said, when she helped him lift anything, that her arms were as strong as his. Her reddish brown hair grew rough and thick and slightly curling, and below the dusty roots was a tiny gleam of perspiration. There were dark hairs on her upper lip and chin. Her lips were full and vital, and her nose had a bold outline. But her brown eyes were childlike. They had an ingenuous glow in the coarse vigor of her tanned face. There was something defenseless in their warm darkness. When she was pleased, or touched, they misted over.

"I expect I look like thunder by now," Mollie said, uncomfortably. "Well, who could keep fixed up, running around the country, and doing the things I do?"

"You're all right," Mate lied politely. Really, she was disapproving of Mollie's dusty shoes and her blue gingham dress with big hoops of perspiration under the arms and the hem of a dark brown slip showing at the back. "You've got a smudge, though, on your neck."

"Oh, well, when I get home I'll have a good scrubbing. I start out clean, Mate, but gosh, I can't keep that way! Who

can, that runs a Ford? Anyway, I caught an old biddie for Lena Toogood, when I was there, that she couldn't catch, and I had to chase that female devil all over the landscape."

Mate did not answer. She had always disapproved of Mollie for not thinking more about her clothes, although—when they were off together after nuts or elderberries—she depended upon Mollie to shake the trees and find a way of getting over fences. Mate herself had never learned to drive their car and had to wait to go to town until Frank could take her. She regarded the car as beyond both her management and her comprehension, just as she did some of the farm implements—and this although she had been brought up on a farm, had known how to milk since she was an infant, and would have no help with either her stove or her washing machine.

Mollie opened her sample bag.

"I brought along that underwear I thought'd be nice for Frank," she said. "And then I got your corselette, in the other bag. I think this is the nicest thing yet I've struck for men. Look here."

She held up a winter weight union suit, eying it with proud satisfaction and discussing all its good points in detail, while its pathetic legs dangled.

"I don't know," Mate said, dubiously. "Frank's never worn that kind."

"Best of reasons for wearing it now!" Mollie said vigorously. It always made her impatient that the people around here were so afraid to try new things, which were the very breath of life to her. "I know what Frank wears—those old clumsy two piece things, still! It's not that I'm so anxious to sell, Mate, but I'd like Frank to try a good handy piece of goods like this and get rid of those old contraptions. I want the people around here to take up new things once in a while! Now, I'll tell you, I'm going to leave this sample here, and as

soon as it gets cold, I want Frank to try this, and if he don't like it, all right; I'll take it back—give it to somebody for Christmas, or let Charlie wear it."

"I don't think we ought to take your sample," Mate demurred.

"Oh fudge! Season's ending, anyway."

"Did you say you brought my corselette?"

"You bet!"

Mollie talked while she fitted it. "I had another nice suit of men's summer underwear, but I sold it to a fellow I met on the road. That was a funny sale! I passed him, and I saw he was walking, so I says, 'Want a ride?' He says, 'Sure!' We got to talking. He told me he was a lightning insurance man. His car broke down and he was walking out to see Bert Gulley. He asked what I was selling, and I told him I had the best line of men's underwear he'd ever seen. I says, 'Don't you want to look at some of it?' and he says, 'Sure,' and I stopped the car and got out my samples, and he bought that one—it was just his size. He told me he'd get me a job selling insurance if I wanted it!" Mollie gave an eager, delighted laugh. "I bet I could make a go of it, too!"

"Aren't you afraid to ask strange men like that to ride with you?" Mate asked, in horror.

"Afraid! What of? Think they're going to run off with me?"

"They might rob you."

"Oh fudge! And all they'd get from me—!"

"Well, I think it's awful risky."

"That don't bother me any. I like it! Oh, anyway, I can't pass somebody walking along in the heat while I'm riding and not at least offer the fellow a chance to ride if he wants it. I had a tramp one day—I took him as far as the creamery."

"Weren't you scared to have him in the car?"

"No, he was a real nice fellow! He'd been bumming around

out in California, and he told me a whole lot about raising honey from onion blossoms—I'd like to try that! I learn all kinds of things from these bugs I pick up on the road."

Mollie laughed delightedly again, and rocked strenuously. It was fun to horrify Mate—and then it was so cool in here, and she wasn't anxious to get home where they all disapproved of her "going around selling things."

"You better stay for dinner," Mate urged.

"Oh gee, I can't, Mate! I've got to get on. I spent half the morning chasing that old biddie for Lena. Say, though, if you'll let me do a little of that ironing for you—"

"Oh, I couldn't let you do that! You've got your own work."

"Oh, come on, Mate, I'll be glad to do it for you. It'll give me a change. I can just as well help you out a little while I'm stopping here."

There was no resisting Mollie when she was determined to do something for you, Mate knew. So Mollie was soon hard at work with the electric iron in Mate's back kitchen. Mollie always worked harder at anything that wasn't her own work, and wasn't what she was supposed to be doing.

Frank Bell came into the house shortly before noon.

"I thought I saw a car out here that didn't belong! Hello, Mollie," he said, heartily. "How you was?"

"Fine, boy! How's yourself?"

He stuck out his hand and grinned. "Want to shake with a nigger?"

Mollie said, "Sure, you bet I do, yours aren't much worse'n mine."

"Well, us fellows that handles engines can't keep tony, can we?" Frank asked. He shook Mollie's hand with jocular vigor until Mate squealed:

"Frank, let go, you're hurting her!"

He retorted, "Aw, Mollie's not hurt so easy as all that. I'm

working up her strength so she can crank that Ford."

"Well, you aren't going to set down in any of these chairs in those clothes you've got on now."

"Oh, I ain't!" Frank retorted jubilantly. He waved his blackened hands at her until she ducked and squealed again. "Say, what's that melon I see out in the kitchen?"

"That's Mollie's."

"No, it isn't," Mollie said, eagerly. "I brought it for you folks. Come on, let's have a taste of it."

"Now? Before dinner?"

"Sure!" Frank said, heartily. "Mushmelons, any time."

"I'm not going to have Frank Bell sitting down here in this room and eating melons in those awful clothes."

"Aw, say, I can't change my clothes every time I step in and out of the house!" Frank began, indignantly.

"He can eat outdoors," Mollie broke in. "Come on, Frank, you do get treated pretty mean. I got some more in the Ford. You come out mit."

They ran away from Mate's expostulations, and Mollie rummaged through the miscellany in the back of the Ford until she'd found a nice little melon for Frank. "Here, boy! How's this?" He stood, eating it happily, letting the juice drip into the road and caring nothing for his black hands.

"Gosh, look at the plunder!" he said, marveling. "Here, Mollie—want a bite?"

"Sure, I'll take a bite."

He broke off a dripping hunk of melon, orange-tinted and coolly juicy in its pale green rind. Mate stood on the back porch watching them in disapproval. They were spoiling their dinners. Frank and Mollie were like a pair of kids when they got together. Mate was glad to have Mollie stay, though, in spite of the extra work any company made. Mollie livened things up, and took a hand at helping with all kinds of work.

Frank went back to finish his job with the machinery, and Mollie washed luxuriously in the cool soft water at Mate's sink. She was going to stay for dinner after all.

"I oughtn't to. But the morning's gone anyway—gosh, I don't know where to! Well, I got some of that ironing out of the way for you, Mate."

Mate's being so particular was all right when it came to a meal. Frank came in, scrubbed and with his hair wet, in a pair of clean, faded blue overalls. Mollie loved to eat in company. It wasn't the meal, she always said, but the sociability. Still, Mollie could get away with a pretty good meal, too, as Frank Bell had often noticed with amusement.

"Well, Mollie!" he began. "Business pretty good?"

"Took in fifteen dollars' worth last Friday!" Mollie boasted.

"Zat so! How much you taken in to-day?"

"Oh, not so much to-day—so far: I don't know what I may do this afternoon," Mollie said, easily. "I haven't stopped many places. Kind of got stuck. Well, Lena Toogood was chasing around after an old biddie, and I stopped and caught it for her, and I don't know—did some more things."

"She ought to save you a good order for that!"

"She ordered fifty cents' worth, I guess. One pair of cotton stockings."

"Well, that was pretty good for Lena."

Mollie ate with gusto of mashed potatoes, pork, and gravy. She had picked a big stiff bouquet of zinnias for the table, and it made her happy to look at the bright, gaudy colors.

"Well, if you can take in fifteen dollars' worth in one day," Frank told her, "I expect you'll go on selling union suits and stockings."

"No, that's only pick-up work."

"You've got the car, and I should think you could get all

around the country here, and do a lot of business. Work up a good trade. I always thought you were a good salesman, Mollie."

"No, it's almost over. No, sir, what I want," Mollie said vigorously, and scowling, "is real work, something that'll call out the best there is in me. Oh, it's fun to sell stuff for a while . . . but *that's* what I'm after—something big!"

"Yes, something big . . ." Frank began, dubiously.

But she went straight on: "This is nothing! This is something I can do with one hand. What fun is it to make money that way? No, *this* isn't what I'm after."

Her face glowed darkly and her eyes sparkled. Frank was impressed, as he always was when he talked with Mollie face to face. She was a strong woman, all right, and a mighty capable one in lots of ways, about as much so as a man. But he asked facetiously:

"What do you want to do? Some more vi'lets?"

Those "vi'lets" . . . That was the trouble with Mollie: always wanting to get into some fancy kind of business that nobody'd ever heard of; not contented with straight buying and selling. That showed that she was a woman. He got rid of his respect and got back his amusement, which suited him much better . . . but still with a little uneasy feeling that Mollie might make a go of one of those crazy businesses some day: she could do things.

"That all fell through," Mollie answered him, robustly.

"What was the trouble? Couldn't you and Artie get together? Thought you and him was all ready to do down South and make your fortunes!"

"We might have, too," Mollie answered, looking back over the plan with a reminiscent glow—her schemes were always radiant to her in anticipation and alluring in retrospect. "There's something in it for the fellow that takes a-hold. No,

the trouble was, Art got cold feet, and the Missus, I guess, got 'em first—heard about the snakes down South and was afraid to go down there.”

She wanted to turn it off, but Frank was started on it now and wouldn't let it go. He asked, mulling over his amusement: “What was you and Artie going to do with the vi'lets when you'd raised 'em? Going to take 'em into town and stand and sell 'em to the visitors on the street corners? Say, Art Gilbert would have made a cute flower boy!”

Mate was listening to all of this nonsense without a smile, with her hand on the handle of the coffee pot, ready to fill the cups again, if anybody wanted coffee.

“Pass Mollie the meat, Frank. She's out of everything. You better tend to your knitting here instead of talking about vi'lets,” she said, with a dry coldness. Mollie's schemes neither impressed her nor gave her any amusement. If Mollie had any real sense about things, she'd marry some farmer around here—a widower, somebody who needed a good, strong wife and would be glad to have her; her friends would help her look around for somebody—or else she'd make up her mind to settle down where she was, with Luisa and Charlie, and attend to things at home.

“Well, I still think it's a good plan for the fellow that can work it,” Mollie affirmed, stoutly. “Why shouldn't people raise violets as well as raise potatoes?”

Frank was now highly amused. “Sure, and so was the goldfish a good plan!” he said. “What become of them? Last I heard you was chasing old man Davies all over town to try and rent his crick from him and set up a goldfish farm!”

“Well, now that was all—”

“And then once you was going to fence off half your place and raise skunks there and go into the fur business along with John Jacob Astor. Wouldn't you have a sweet place? Talk

about the slaughter house! On summer nights—wow, pugh!” Frank laughed hilarious, and made appropriate gestures.

“Frank Bell, you’re at the table! You act nice or leave,” Mate said with frozen dignity.

Mollie was red, but she stood up under it. “That’s all right, too, there *is* a fortune in that for the right fellow. I looked that up and I’ve got bulletins and reports to prove it.”

“All I can say is—give me the pigpen!”

“Frank Bell!”

Frank saw, then, that he would have to behave for a while. To show her disapproval of the whole conversation, Mate began to ask dutifully now about the other Schumachers.

“How are Luisa and Charlie getting along these days?”

The sparkle went out of Mollie’s eyes and she looked scowling.

“Oh, the same as they always do! Lu don’t have time from five o’clock in the morning to eight o’clock at night to pick all the grass by hand around the trees. Charlie goes back and forth to the office.”

Mate, however, would not talk satirically about the two, whom she considered more sensible than Mollie because they stuck to home, although they weren’t such good friends of hers.

“I suppose Luisa’s got lots of sewing done this summer,” she said, primly.

“Oh, yes, she’s made over a lot of flour sacks into shirts and nightgowns that neither Charlie nor I will wear, and thinks she’s accomplished a lot. Oh, yes, they’re both the same as always: everything at our house is.”

Mollie’s face was dark as she stabbed her fork into her gooseberry pie, that had a sparkling crust of sugar upon the flaky, bubbled crust of dough. She said, defiantly:

“I may go away this winter!”

"Where to?" Mate demanded, with resentful skepticism.

"To Chicago," Mollie answered, pretending to be non-chalant.

"Chicago! What would you do there?"

Frank, a little remorseful for the way he had teased Mollie, and thinking that she had more ability than Mate would ever give her credit for, said, judiciously:

"Well, Chicago's got room for lots of people."

Mate looked as if Mollie had said the South Pole.

"I'm thinking about going there."

Mollie was too eager to unburden herself, however—too helplessly and expansively communicative—to keep up the barren triumph of mystification and reticence.

"Well, I s'pose you'll have a fit when you hear who—"

Then she told them about the letter from Dorrie Parker. No matter what people in White Oak had predicted, Dorrie had been getting on well, after all. She had been working in a beauty parlor, and now some *person* (Mollie went over that very hastily—she didn't want Frank and Mate to know that the person was a man) was going to help her to set herself up in business. She wanted Mollie to come to Chicago and go in with her.

"I'm not crazy about that business," Mollie said. "It always seems to me as if folks ought to have something better to do than just fool with their looks. But I'd kind of like to help out for Dorrie."

As Mollie had expected, Mate had "lots to say." While there was nothing absolutely definite against Dorrie Parker, her reputation had not been good and she had left White Oak under a cloud. There had been rumors of her carrying on with other men at the time of her divorce. Mollie Schumacher was about the only person who still heard from her. Dorrie had written, sentimentally, that Mollie was the only friend she'd ever had

in White Oak. (Well, that wasn't true, but maybe it seemed so now.) She wanted to get Mollie out of there. Between them, they could work up a good business.

Frank Bell, however, was inclined to be on Mollie's side—perhaps it was just to oppose Mate.

"Dorrie Parker's a good worker," he declared. "Folks is patronizing those places now."

"Yes, the big fools!" Mollie put in, with a snort.

Frank said that Dorrie might have made a few mistakes, but she was a smart woman—knew where she was headed better than most women did. Mate listened, in silent indignation that he should defend Dorrie and urge Mollie on—she was scatter-brained enough without any urging—to desert her home and "go in with that woman."

"Well now, *that* sounds like a scheme that might work, Mollie," Frank said, in generous approval. "I'd rather polish up folks' fingernails, if I was to choose, than get up meals for skunks."

"Well, I think I'll do it," Mollie said, vigorously, "If only . . ."

"If only what?"

That warm mist filled her dark eyes.

"Oh, well . . . if it wasn't for Charlie and Lu. They needn't think they can stop me! But, I don't know . . . if they should really feel bad about it—if I thought they couldn't get along without me . . ."

The mist gathered into large tears. Frank was astounded. He saw no sense to that at all. With the quarrels that went on in that household, and Luisa doing all the housework anyway, and Charlie Schumacher such a mild soul he could get all the amusement he needed in life out of making those gimcrack bird-houses—! Mate thought it very proper, however, and something that Mollie ought to have been thinking of before.

"I don't know whether this pie's very good," she apologized. "I believe I got a little too much lard. Let me warm up your coffee, Mollie."

"Well, I oughtn't to—coffee upsets me—but then—"

"Oh, have some more!" Frank said. The ready mist had dried from Mollie's eyes. Frank felt happy and convivial. He said to Mate:

"Shall we treat wine?"

Mollie's coming was a fine excuse. Mate never touched Frank's wine. He went down into the cellar, found a bottle, and came in from the kitchen with the two miniature glasses almost slopping over with a deep red brightness that held all the warmth of the late summer—that was like the sparkle of dew in the morning and the grapes growing ripe on the fences and the dark velvety red of the blossom tufts on the sumach. Mollie liked to be a good fellow with Frank—and she liked the looks of the stuff, she said.

"This is my last year's grape. Time to drink it up and make some more. Well, Mollie—good luck!"

"Good luck, boy!" she responded heartily.

They drank.

Mollie, in spite of all the orders she'd meant to take that afternoon, didn't get away from the Bells' when dinner was over. Frank, when he'd had one glass of wine, had to have another; and then he thought about the cigars his cousin in Chicago had sent him for his birthday, and had to have one of those. The wine made him think about making more wine; and that made him remember his old cider press and how he had been wondering if he couldn't get the thing fixed up.

"You know, I'd forgot we even had it. Father used to run it every fall. But then, I don't know, guess it got out of kilter, and it got stuck into that old shed and I never saw it until I went out to look for something else."

("Yes, and you'd find plenty more things if you'd go through those sheds!" Mate put in.)

Mollie had to see the press. She liked to tinker as well as Frank did.

"Come on, finish up that cigar, Frank; let's go out and have a look," she urged. "I can just take a squint at it before I go. Maybe we can get the thing to working."

She followed Frank out of the back door, calling back to Mate:

"Wait with those dishes, Mate, I'll be in to help you—now, don't you go and do them."

Mollie and Frank went off through the farmyard. The ground was dry and the air was warm and the sun was a glorious gold in the blue September sky. A string of cats, adult and half grown and mere little scampering infants, trailed after Frank. He made pets of the cats, and fed them.

"Oh, stop and give 'em their milk, Frank!" Mollie pleaded. Her eyes grew warm and humid. She had slapped Pete Heim in the face once for beating his old horse. "I can't bear the little beggars mee-owing like that. Here, kitty, come, kitty."

"You won't catch none of them!" Frank told her, with admiration for the adroit elusiveness of the cats. Mollie made a dive for them, and the whole tribe fled at once, with soft vanishing evasion—all but one little tiger with white mittens and round emerald eyes, who stood poised, with eyes glittering, until Mollie's fingers almost touched his whiskers . . . and then was gone, in one flattened furry dive, beneath the woodshed.

"Little villains! Confound 'em!" Mollie said, hotly. She adored cats, but they always ran from her.

Frank laughed uproariously. "You'll never get any o' *them*, Mollie! Not if they don't want you to. They're smart! . . . Well, here's where I dragged the press. I kind of gave it a

looking over, but—I don't know, something's out o' whack—I ain't figured out what."

Mollie's eyes darkened into concentration. "Well, now, sir, we're going to find out what's the matter with this thing!"

Both began studying it, Mollie bending over it, and Frank crouching with knees bowed out. He had set the press outside the woodshed, and the pleasant sunshine of early autumn burned down glossily upon their heads as they conjectured and tinkered.

"Think it's this here that needs tightening?"

"I think it is, Frank. Then I think she'll run."

Mate came out when she had finished the dishes and stood watching them. She looked slightly satirical, but she had brought out a hat and a sunbonnet, and she said:

"You better put these on your heads if you're going to stay out here."

The dryness of her tone made them both feel guilty. Mollie exclaimed:

"Say! I wonder what's the time."

"It ain't late," Frank assured her. "Let's finish the job. Course, I hate to take you away from your canvassing—"

"Oh, well," she told him, robustly, "that ain't the only thing on earth. I'd like to see you get this thing to working."

It was late enough, when Mate told them the time. Frank said:

"Well, the afternoon's gone now, anyway, Mollie. Better stay on and have supper with us, and make a day of it."

"I can't!" Mollie cried, in a panic. "I was going to stop at all those places along the road this afternoon. I haven't sold a thing to-day but these cotton stockings and one of my own samples. Well . . . oh, well, why not go the whole hog!"

She threw away her afternoon with splendid recklessness. Her eyes sparkled and she was warm with sunshine and hap-

piness. She and Frank were like two children playing hooky from school. They tinkered with the cider press for another hour, coming at last to the conclusion that they couldn't make it go, anyway.

"But I found out what was wrong with it!" Mollie boasted, with a triumphant laugh. "I'll look for a bolt when I go through town, and then Frank can make his cider."

Frank told her, seriously:

"I sure am grateful to you, Mollie. Hope I haven't taken too much of your time."

She answered generously:

"Oh, shoot, Frank, forget it! It wasn't what I'd planned to do, but I guess it was just as good as selling a few stockings. You and Mate might just as well be enjoying some cider this winter."

She glowed under Frank's praise of her mechanical prowess.

When they had finished with the press, he wanted to take her to see his melons.

"Here's old Rastus! Why, what's the matter with him?"

"Oh, I don't know, he's hurt his paw some way," Frank said.

"Rastus! Did the old boy hurt himself? Well, that won't do!"

As soon as she reached the melon patch, Mollie sat down on the bare, hot ground, and took the dog's paw in her hands. The paw was swollen, and sand and burrs were tangled in the coarse, black fur. Frank told her: "Oh, I guess it'll heal up, Mollie," impatient to have her look at his melons. But that wouldn't do, for Mollie. Here was something that called for help, alive, and more absorbing than the cider press. She made Rastus go back with them to the house, and then called for warm water, a cloth, and a darning needle from Mate. Mate thought that was a dreadful fuss to make over a dog. Rastus yelped and snarled, so that Mate shrieked, "Be careful!" and

even Frank was worried; but Mollie held him until she had got out the splinter.

"See there, what it was! No wonder! Now, old boy, just a minute—"

She laughed with triumph again. She forced Rastus to stay while she put salve on the wound and bound it up in her best surgical style. Frank laughed at her.

"How long do you think he'll keep that on?"

Still, he and Mate both, although they derided so much to-do over an animal, were glad to find out what was the matter with the dog and to have the splinter out.

"There now!" Mollie cried.

Mate was beginning to get the supper ready. Mollie remembered about the dishes—she was full of contrition and helpfulness.

"But there's always so much. If I'd done that, I couldn't have done the other things."

She insisted on gathering the eggs for Mate. Mate considered that a task: Mollie adored it. She hunted through old boxes with hay pushed into one corner, through folds of the harsh old dusty robe in the ancient cutter, through the mangers and the loft. She carried the eggs in a basket into the house through the low shafts of sunshine. The excitement of all her accomplishments was upon her still, of the praise and gratitude they had yielded her, and she sang, happily, and off the key.

"Well, I certainly didn't think when I stopped in here I was going to stay for supper! But I guess I've done a pretty good day's work of it, after all."

When Mollie came to leave, the glow and triumph of her visit were still upon her. She was taking more plunder with her: eggs, and a glass of fresh jelly, and an old rooster in a gunny sack mysteriously moving and plunging on the seat beside her.

"Now, you keep that sample, Mate," she was urging. "Frank, you try that suit when cold weather comes—you'll never wear anything else, I'll tell you that!"

"We sure are grateful, Mollie, for all the help you've given us—"

"Oh, shoot! Forget it!" But she glowed happily. "I think that press'll run now, Frank, when you get the bolt. Put some more of that salve on the dog's foot. He'll get some good out of it even if he does lick off most of it."

"Aren't you afraid to drive home alone at night?" Mate asked, fearfully.

"No! I enjoy it. There's nothing I like better in this world than to get off in this old car by myself, and get the wheel under my hands, and go it!" Mollie said, with shining eyes.

"Sure, you bet! That's the truth," Frank told her. "Mollie ain't one of these scared she-males that always think she's going to be run away with."

"You bet I'm not!"

She tried the starter, but it had a streak again, and wouldn't go.

"You crank it for her, Frank," Mate said anxiously.

Mollie cried:

"No, I'll crank the old beast, I'm used to it. Here, boy! Give me hold of that crank."

But Frank would not let her go. The car started, and Frank shouted at Mollie above the loud noise of the engine:

"Well, Mollie, we're glad you stopped. And we're sure grateful—"

"Now you forget it! If we can't do a few things for folks once in a while when we get the chance, why, what's the use? Well, I've had a fine day of it—and I'd like to know why that isn't just as good!"

"Sure!" Frank said heartily.

"You're going to get the engine heated," Mate told her.

"Well, good-by, folks!"

"Good-by, Mollie!"

She started with a suddenness that almost killed the engine—recovered, went on—and stuck her head out of the car, to Mate's horror, just as she was turning out of the driveway, to shout back to the dog:

"Good-by, old boy!"

Mate and Frank listened to the loud rattle of the car as it went on through the country stillness.

"Well, sir," Frank said with relish, and with a laugh, "she's a great Mollie!"

He thought over all Mollie's escapades, and the goldfish, and the violets, and laughed again.

"I bet she didn't do fifty cents' worth of business to-day. She'll have to hump when she gets to Chicago with Dorrie! Well, it's a good thing she's going, although I'll hate not to have her come around. Charlie and Luisa, you couldn't move with a derrick. If the town burned up, Charlie Schumacher wouldn't notice it as long as he could go on puttering with those bird houses."

"Well, I don't know what Mollie does so much more!"

"Fudge, Mate, she's got three times the get-up to her! Yes, sir, I'd like to see her to go to Chicago. Those girls haven't got a thing but that old place and what little salary Charlie gets. Now's Mollie's chance. Mollie may be left alone some day."

Frank felt satisfied. At last Mollie had a scheme that wasn't crazy. She was finally going to get to do something.

"She won't go," Mate said calmly.

"Why won't she?" Frank demanded belligerently.

The idea was a fine one. What was to stop Mollie this time?

"Because I know she won't."

Frank stopped to take this in. All at once he had a memory of the darkness of Mollie's eyes, warm and defenseless, and he seemed to see them mist with ready tears. Yes, sir, Mollie was

a woman! After all, she was unaccountable. She could do anything for anybody but herself. Then Frank said, as if in defense of his own statements:

“Well, anyway, Mollie gets a darned good time out of it!”

Mate still had her look of small, calm, satisfied wisdom.

The last far-away rattle and hum of the car was lost, now, in the hugeness of the evening, and the crickets took up the sound in a thin, shrill, minor chorus.