

MOLLY

At 20, Molly Oliver quit college when she married Buck because she had no more reason to go. College fit into her life as a holding tank of eligible bachelors. In high school, she carefully chose the school and her curriculum based on her ideas of how to find the ideal mate, a subject of great debate between Molly and her sister, Roberta, four years ahead of her in school. Molly was a model of beauty, organization and efficiency, who possessed an All-American, Sandra Dee perkiness. Giving birth to a child who was, at best, a vegetable, didn't exist in her well-planned visions of a Donna-Reed motherhood.

Molly and her sister were raised in middle-class comfort, growing up with 1950s values and expectations of the All-American dream. Their father, surviving WWII unharmed, successfully moved into middle management of a large corporation, though he missed his chance of a college education. He married his pretty, high-school sweetheart and settle easily into married life. The business of child raising was left to his wife, a competent young woman who approached married life like a child playing house. She enjoyed her role as housewife and spoiled her daughters according to Dr. Spock. The two girls became the main focus of the couple, who gave them what they believed the girls needed to find a nice boy to marry and settle down.

Providing social graces as a substitute dowry, the sisters were given piano and dancing lessons and sent to charm school. They progressed through their school years as Brownies, Girl Scouts, and, finally, Rainbow Girls. Neither girl showed an interest in leadership roles, and neither was it encouraged. However, they were solid, participating members of whatever group they belonged to, and each enjoyed recognition for above average performance. Scholastically, they remained in the 3.0 to 3.5 range, keeping their grades respectable, though neither had much interest in the intellectual world. They excelled in popularity amongst their peers. Each girl approached the world in completely feminine terms, avoiding even competition between themselves, lest it masculinize their feminine image—an attitude highly rewarded by their parents. In short, cooperation and compromise were the ascribed to, accepted values of the day.

Going to college was expected, not so much for the education, but as an additional activity design to prepare them for their future as upper-middleclass housewives and mothers. The girls developed their separate ideas of the perfect mate early in life and implemented their personal strategies for finding them. The sisters weighed their ideas carefully, and Roberta decided on the direct approach by going to an important engineering school.

"Look, Mol, I'm the only girl in most of my classes. And the other few look like an engineering project gone awry, leaving me the queen of the engineering school. I couldn't have hoped for a better situation." The 5'6" brunette, like Molly, took meticulous care of her appearance. Her philosophy: You never know who you're going to run into. Roberta's naturally wavy hair needed little encouragement to lay softly about her sloping shoulders, the plump waves gliding forward to veil the right side of her pleasant oval face when she tossed her head gently to that side. Though not the natural beauty of Molly, Roberta's classic, fresh looks attracted attention. Her artistic sense knew the right amount of makeup to use for the effect she wanted. She made the most of what she had and her attention to detail served her well.

Nature blessed Molly with thick, dark brown eyelashes and eyebrows, accenting pale blue eyes, giving the illusion they were lit from behind. She kept her dense, straight blond hair pulled back loosely in a pony tail, which bounced freely when she moved her head. Those few stray hairs which fell away, hung teasingly close to her freshly-scrubbed, flawless face, pointing to a provocatively full lower lip. A spray of freckles highlighted her classic up-turned, girlish nose, endowing her with an irresistible cuteness. She was Shirley Temple in straight hair.

Within two years of college, both girls met their "ideal" life partners, became engaged, and were married. Molly approved Roberta's preference to have a child the year her husband graduated. Roberta's baby was born the September Molly entered college. Before the birth, the two girls spent hours that summer shopping for baby things and planning for the arrival. It was an event eclipsing all others. Roberta's strong sense the baby was a boy excited her beyond measure. She instructed everyone to buy everything in yellows and greens, but no frills. She wanted her male child to be "all boy." A week before her due date she called Molly.

"Meet me at the department store tonight. I want to buy one last thing before the baby's born."

"OK, Bert, but I can't stay out long. School just started and I need to organize my study time. What do you want to get?"

"Don't get mad at me, but I just have to buy a boy's outfit, just in case, so I can take him home in it--I just know it's a boy."

"Bert, don't do this--"

"Oh, please, Mol. I just can't help it. I'm so excited. Help me pick something out."

"I'll do it, but what if it's a girl?" Molly also strongly preferred a boy first, though she thought her sister was pushing fate by her insistence that it was a boy.

"Don't worry. I'll bring two outfits to the hospital. One will be neutral in case it's a girl. What harm could that be?"

"No harm, I suppose, but you're getting too set on the idea it's a boy."

"Admit it, Molly. You want it to be a boy, too. I'll accept a girl, too, don't worry. But I can have my preference, can't I?"

"OK, Roberta. Don't get upset with me. I just don't want you to be too disappointed, that's all."

When the child was born with Down's Syndrome, Roberta slipped into a deep depression and disallowed any visitors. She refused to take the baby home and convinced her husband to institutionalize the infant. Easily convinced, Brad also failed to anticipate the possibility of such an intrusion into their newly married life. He had reluctantly agreed to having a baby right away, but this was more than he could cope with. He'd just graduated and started his first job as an engineer, and they were in the process of buying a new house. There just was not enough energy left to deal with a severely retarded child on top of all that. Neither felt capable of raising a handicapped child. Roberta's decision brought an unusual storm of protest from Molly.

"You are interfering with God's plans for you, Roberta," she accused. "How could you so coldly give up an infant you nurtured for nine months?"

Roberta's answer was less than satisfactory to Molly's mind, "I can't bear to look at him," was all she would say. Molly's scant religious training bloomed and swamped her sympathies towards her sister, causing the first major crises between them. The incident seemed to spark Molly's sense of religion, solidifying her earlier preference to find a religious man. The girls' parents supported Roberta's wishes and told friends and family that the baby died. After a year, Roberta agreed to give the baby up for adoption. She had visited the baby only once and needed medication to cope with the strain. Molly had never seen, nor requested to see, the baby.

After Roberta's baby was born, Molly joined every religious organization on campus and molded herself into the image of the perfect Christian woman. She attended church regularly and talked endlessly about God and Jesus. She met Buck that first year at a church event on campus and immediately fell in love.

Although his outward appearance reflected his athletic nature, he differed from all the other jocks because he openly espoused his strong religious views. Molly easily saw herself the subservient wife of such a strong and compassionate man. He was everything she could wish for. They married him the next year and she left academia without a backward glance, anxiously pursuing her dream of the "perfect" wife and mother.

~~She was daddy's little girl and mommy's little helper, critically observing social norms and behavior. In school, she courted the role of teacher's pet, securing the title early on. But this was a natural, since teacher's tend to coddle towards nice-looking, well-dressed children who obey the rules and are friendly with most of the other students.~~

After marriage, the ex-cheerleader settled quickly into a busy home life with a calendar full of civic and church-oriented activities. She accepted her role as Buck's wife very seriously, keeping a spotless house and learning to be an excellent cook. She was the hit of all Buck's college buddies--beauty and mother rolled into one lovely package. She and Buck attended church every Sunday, and she joined the church women's group and volunteered for various committees. Molly's world expanded, giving her a sense of participation in the small, bed-room community where they rented a house. Before moving to this area, she thoroughly researched the surrounding areas, checking the school systems, churches, and civic organizations. Before planting their roots, she wanted to be certain the area met all of their needs. She stressed to Buck, that wherever they decided to live, they were staying for a long time. She couldn't see wasting time learning about an area after moving into it. So, Danbury, California, filled all her requirements--a small community in close proximity to major metropolitan centers, established, though still relatively young with many young families, and close to her own family. There was still plenty of room for her to implant her mark upon this community, to custom-make it, so to speak.

Specifically hand-chosen because of his religious leanings, Buck shared Molly's interests in the church, though he was less interested in civic duties. Molly excused this shortcoming because he proved an adequate provider. His job as a sales rep provided them with a comfortable home and lifestyle. His management ambitions pleased her and represented additional inroads into the social structure. Molly always welcomed new social engagements.

Nature accommodated Molly's desire to conceive a child in Buck's last semester, thus giving birth after he had become established in his new career. Everything fell into line. Buck received his BS in Business in May, was hired right away by a national company, and Molly gave birth in October to a healthy boy. That there was a genetic chance that she too could produce a Down Syndrome child never occurred to her. She saw her sister's misfortune as a totally random event, spurred by the hand of God. Jason's birth seemed a sign that God felt she had done well serving Him because she planned to have only two children--a boy first, then a girl. She wanted plenty of alone time with each child, so she planned to have them about six years apart.

Jason captured Buck's imagination. He had never considered how joyful it felt to be a parent.

"Molly, I thank Jesus everyday that I met and married you," he'd say repeatedly. Molly never felt so important as being Buck's wife and Jason's mother. Each morning after Buck left for work, she'd bundle up her small baby and place him in the carriage for a stroll through the neighborhood, glowing when the neighbors would fuss over the boy. To her, other children were faded dolls compared to her pink-cheeked, towheaded charmer. Jason resembled her, bonding her even closer to him. At six months, his hair started coming in curly like his father's, which sent her into delirium. A head full of bouncing blond curls, fat pink cheeks, and clear blue eyes--"surely a creation made in heaven," she'd exclaim gleefully nibbling his tiny fingers or toes to make him laugh.

Jason grew into boyhood, his parents ever in amazement at his beauty and intelligence. His Aunt Roberta never missed an opportunity to be with him. When Molly questioned when Roberta would have another child, she would answer simply, "It just hasn't happened yet."

"I worry about you, Bert. Are things OK with you and Brad?" she probed one day as they sat in Molly's kitchen over coffee.

"Things are fine, Molly. You know how it is with men and their jobs. Brad's working hard, so we don't see each other much. But, we're fine, really, Mol," she glanced down at her wedding ring, turning it with her thumb. "I'm thinking of taking a few classes, maybe become a real estate agent. What do you think?"

"You're going to work?"

"Sure, why not. I'm not tied down to a child like you are. There's nothing wrong with working." She got up and strolled over to the window and gazed across the yard to nowhere.

"What's Brad say?"

Molly knew things were changing for women in the 70s, but she couldn't imagine herself working.