



10-15-1992

## Molly in the Mist

Orv Owens

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>

---

### Recommended Citation

Owens, Orv (1992) "Molly in the Mist," *Westview*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol12/iss1/2>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu](mailto:phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu).

# MOLLY in the Mist

by *Orv Owens*

The dim outline of a man dogged her footsteps into a blanket of mist. Molly Troy strained to see the soddy in the middle of the field—the soddy with a dirt floor—her childhood home.

The autumn wind swept leaves and old memories into a pile, threatened to destroy the memories but failed. Memories came back like brightly colored dolls marching to drum rolls on the horizon of her mind.

Molly's song had begun there amid love and laughter, watered down by occasional tears. To her, a delightful, vibrant song began each day in that wonderland only a child can know by heart. Each day added a lovely new verse to Molly's song—until the birds and small animals disappeared. She never saw them again.

She stared at memories upon the harsh face of the mist. Western Oklahoma and surrounding states had been part of the wind-erosion, part of the blackened skies of despair. Nature had punished man for his failure as caretaker of the soil.

Molly aimed herself at the musty smell enveloping the soddy.

"Remember, Harry?" she whispered, knowing there was no need to whisper. "We nearly starved. Day after day of suffocating dirt with nothing to hold it in place and not enough clothes of any kind to block out the blinding dirt and sands; not enough curtains, not enough towels, not enough quilts to keep out the smothering sound of dirt-filled wind.

"Gone now," she said loudly, knowing no one could hear. "Forever gone."

She walked across the wheat field for a closer look at the soddy of her youth and to listen for the song of earth as it spun toward a destiny only it understood.

"We won," she said to the mist. "We fought the centipedes, we fought the drought, we fought floods and finally when it all looked hopeless, we came across our field, standing tall, unbowed by the disasters hurled our way by the fickle hand of fate that hovers overhead.

"We did it, Harry. We did it." She smiled at the memory of a sun-tanned youth with thinning brown hair standing firm against seasonal tides of hope and despair—against everything nature could demand.

"Admiral Halsey said it all: There are no great men, only great challenges," she said to the mist. "But there are great men who conquer in spite of disease and



pestilence. Halsey couldn't have won our war, Harry, but we did."

A crow flew overhead. She couldn't see it; but when it cawed, it gave itself away.

She topped the soddy and stood looking down, hands on hips, at the rusted pipe extending from a dust-covered, rusted stove through the roof.

A centipede crawled out the rotted door and disappeared into the mist. She had once killed centipedes with an axe.

She turned and looked north but couldn't see the three-bedroom ranch-style brick in the distance

surrounded by elms, oaks, and evergreen shrubs. She shivered. Mist had soaked through her chambray shirt and jeans.

"Harry left us," she said and bristled when Harry's voice came out of memory. "You know better, Harry. Our son hated this life."

She put her hand to her forehead, gripped the temples.

As though imaginary trees were weaving bodies in an African clearing, the drums came pounding, throbbing, beating. She tried to force the sound away. "Stop," she mentally screamed. "Stop."

She swayed as the day raced tomorrow and hugged herself—mumbled at those naked, sweating bodies that only she could see.

"Love every brick in our house, Harry. Each board has a story to tell. Each crack has a memory...the empty cradle rocks in the attic. Do you still hear it, Harry?"

She stared at the ranch home she couldn't see, and 1935 came back, spurred by the sound of the ever-present Western Oklahoma wind. About half of the dustbowl area was cropped and half devoted to intensive cattle raising. Both forms left the soil exposed to the winds constantly sweeping over gently rolling land. Grass covering the cropland was plowed under and grass of grazing land cut short and trampled into the ground by large herds of cattle.

She clenched a hardened, sun-darkened hand, fingernails cracked and shortened almost into the quick by hard work.

"Remember, Harry?" Organic matter, clay, and silt in the soil were carried for hundreds of miles by the wind (in some cases darkening the sky on the Atlantic Coast), while sand and heavier materials drifted against houses, fences, and barns. In many places three to four inches of topsoil were blown away; sand and silt dunes four to ten feet in height were formed.

"The year of our first-born, Harry. I can hear that feeble cry—always—as the doomed must hear the call, and see the bright light of tomorrow as they leave us behind."

"She lies beside you, Harry. The child we never got to know. The child we named Evalina after a beautiful poem."

She trudged back to the house into a bright yellow kitchen to make a pot of tea. She saw her reflection in the kitchen window—looked at her hands, face, and stomach that had once been tanned and smooth, and legs that had been firm, long, and slender and now were as sun-darkened as the rain clouds that sometimes hovered overhead.

She didn't need a mirror to tell her how she looked. She knew exactly how time had creased her face, prepared it for final closing; how her entire body had been fashioned by years spent planting, harvesting, and taking care of family demands.

Success and failure seemed to be part of the fate lingering just outside the window, beyond the trees, beyond the sky, and beyond the realm of light—the same failures that sometimes crowded into

---

**'There's so many things  
left undone...  
so much I want to do.  
There's so much to  
share with Jan, so many  
stories to tell her about  
heritage.'**

---

her bed to mock and laugh at the apprehension she clutched to her breast.

"Look at these hands, Angelina," Molly whispered to the figure in the mist she strained toward with time-blurred eyes. "See the veins? Remember how they held you close, caressed your fevered cheeks? You should have been the daughter to go with my son. Imagine the talks we could have had—the memories that never came to pass."

She cocked her head. "Go 'way, drums. Go 'way." She imagined the cradle rocking in time to the drums. "The dustbowl not only took you, Angelina; it took neighbors and friends."

She smiled at the figures in the mist that only she could see. "I wouldn't have traded it, Harry. I wouldn't have traded sunflowers and daisies of the field for candlelight, roses, and the taste of the sweet red wine. It was a beautiful, wonderful life spotted with the storms everyone has to face." She sipped tea, leaned over the sink with only her plate, spoon, fork, and knife waiting to be washed, and stared at the figure coming closer, closer.

"Lights in the kitchen, Harry, warm and bright. Rocking on the porch when day was done, rocking away daily cares. Now, there's only the sound of a cradle rocking in the attic, spinning stories of what might have been.

What might have been never mattered, Harry, only what was. I miss you both, Harry. Miss the gossip we could have shared, those days of going without and sharing laughter over the antics of a girl child."

She placed a hand on her hip, straightened, and went into a pink bedroom. She stretched out on the bed, folded arms across her chest, and looked through the slitted shade at the mist.

"She had Papa's beautiful blue eyes," she said to the mist. "Mama's hair and aquiline nose. So much like..."

She rolled off the bed, strained to see through the mist for a better look at the figure, patiently waiting for her to join him.

"Ninety-six million acres," she said softly. "Black clouds of our livelihood blown away; tons of dirt covering us with its disgust.

"We won, Harry." Planted large areas in grass; a three-year rotation of wheat, sorghum, and fallow; introduced contour plowing, terracing, and strip planting; planted long shelterbelts of trees to break the force of the wind that forced our neighbors to pack meager belongings in sputtering old cars and head out under a dark cloud to seek the sun.

"We paid our dues, Harry. We paid them with heartaches and tears."

She rubbed her chest. "Go 'way," she said to the pain. "Go 'way."

She heard a car motor die and went back to the kitchen. Henry hated it but drove out from town each day to tend cattle waiting to be hayed, pigs and chickens to be fed. And each day he brought his daughter who loved the feel of dirt in her hands.

Molly leaned against the sink and nodded at the mist. She gripped the edge of the sink when her granddaughter Jan appeared out of the mist.

Molly put a hand to her cheek to brush away a tear. Jan was like Angelina in so many ways.

"Not now, Harry," Molly said to the mist. "There's so many things left undone...so much I want to do. There's so much to share with Jan, so many stories to tell her about heritage."

The wind whispered at the door, opened and tried to lift the mist. Molly imagined that the wind sobbed as it swept over tombstone grass; smothered a child who struggled to live.

She held out her arms to Jan, who ran to her and waited to be lifted up, blue eyes trusting and hopeful, waiting for the hug she knew was coming, for a kiss to warm her cheek.

Molly shook her head at the mist.

Closer came the figure in the mist.

Closer.

It withdrew when Molly kissed Jan's cheek.

Figure and drums disappeared into the mist when Molly began telling Jan about the dustbowl and how it threatened to end a way of life that held beauty, strength, and perseverance for all yesterdays, today's, and tomorrows in its bossom.

Molly glanced out the window and back at the child. "Not now, Harry," she said to herself. "There'll be plenty of time after my work here is done."

She hugged Jan, took that small hand, and together they went across the field toward the soddy where sunflowers and daisies grew.

A grandmother looked across the field with eyes that had seen feast and famine with the passage of time, and lips remembering the taste of the sweet red wine, leading a grandchild with rose-petal lips unfamiliar with watermelon fresh off the vine.

The mist lifted, the sun blessed them with warmth, and the past became today as yesterday's sorrow faded away, and smiles came out to play.

Molly laughed for the pure joy of living. Jan laughed too and reached for a hand that caressed her, protected her from harm, and being hugged, listened to a heart beat in tune with all their tomorrows.□



illustration by Tina Price

ORV OWENS of Watonga does free-lance writing and contributes to WESTVIEW and the WATONGA REPUBLICAN.