

# MOLLY

1944

## A Winning Spirit



# Turnips

## ★ Chapter 1 ★

**M**olly McIntire sat at the kitchen table daydreaming about her Halloween costume. It would be a pink dress with a long, floaty skirt that would swirl when she turned and swish when she walked. There would be shiny silver stars on the skirt to match the stars in her crown. The top of the dress would be white. Maybe it would be made of fluffy angora, only Molly wasn't sure they had angora back in Cinderella's time. That's who Molly wanted to be for Halloween—Cinderella. All she had to do was

1. talk her mother into buying the material and making the costume,
2. find some glass slippers somewhere, and
3. convince Linda and Susan, her two best friends, to be the ugly stepsisters.

She could probably talk Susan into it. As long as Susan got to wear a long dress, she wouldn't mind being a step-sister. But Linda was another story. If they were going to be fairy-tale princesses, Linda would want to be Snow White because she had black hair just like Snow White's. Linda

would want Molly and Susan to be dwarfs. Probably Sleepy and Grumpy, thought Molly. Well, Molly certainly felt like Grumpy tonight. She looked at the clock. She had been sitting at the kitchen table for exactly two hours, forty-six minutes, and one, two, three seconds. She had been sitting at the kitchen table, in fact, ever since six o'clock, when Mrs. Gilford, the housekeeper, called everyone to supper.

Molly had smelled trouble as soon as she walked into the kitchen. It was a heavy, hot smell, kind of like the smell of dirty socks. She sat down and saw the odd orange heap on her plate. She made up her mind right away not to eat it. "What's this orange stuff?" she asked.

Mrs. Gilford turned around and gave her what Molly's father used to call the Gladys Gilford Glacial Glare. "Polite children do not refer to food as *stuff*," said Mrs. Gilford. "The vegetable which you are lucky enough to have on your plate is mashed turnip."

"I'd like to *return* it," whispered Molly's twelve-year-old brother Ricky.

"What was that, young man?" asked Mrs. Gilford.

"I like to *eat* turnips," said Ricky, and he shoveled a forkful into his mouth. Eating turnips was no hardship for Ricky. He would eat anything. Quick as a wink, all his turnips were gone.

*That rat Ricky*, thought Molly. She looked over at her

older sister. Jill was putting ladylike bites of turnip in her mouth and washing them down with long, quiet sips of water. Almost all of the horrible orange stuff was gone from her plate.

Molly sighed. In the old days, before Jill turned fourteen and got stuck-up, Molly used to be able to count on her to make a big fuss about things like turnips. But lately, Molly had to do it all herself. Jill was acting superior. This new grown-up Jill was a terrible disappointment to Molly. If that's what happened to you when you got to be fourteen, Molly would rather be nine forever.

The turnips sat on Molly's plate getting cold. They were turning into a solid lump that oozed water. With her fork, Molly carefully pushed her meat and potatoes to a corner of her plate so that not a speck of turnip would touch them and ruin them. "Disgusting," she said softly.

"There will be no such language used at this table," said Mrs. Gilford. "Furthermore, anyone who fails to finish her turnips will have no dessert. Nor will she be allowed to leave the table until the turnips are gone."

That's why Molly was still at the kitchen table facing a plate of cold turnips at 8:46 p.m. *None of this would have happened if Dad were home*, she thought. Molly touched the heart-shaped locket she wore on a thin chain around her neck. She pulled it forward and opened it up to look at

the tiny picture inside. Her father's face smiled back at her. Molly's father was a doctor. When American soldiers started fighting in World War Two, he joined the Army. Now he was somewhere in England, taking care of wounded and sick soldiers. He had been gone for seven months. Molly missed him every single minute of every single day, but especially at dinnertime.



Before Dad left, before the war, Molly's family never ate supper in the kitchen. They ate dinner in the dining room. Before Dad left, back before the war, the whole family always had dinner together. They laughed and talked the whole time. Now things were different. Dad was gone, and every morning Molly's mother went off to work at the Red Cross headquarters. She often got home too late to have dinner with the family. And she spent at least an hour every night writing to Dad.

When a letter came from Dad, it was a surprise and a treat. Everyone gathered and listened in silence while Mrs. McIntire read the letter aloud. Dad always sent a special message to each member of the family. He told jokes and drew funny sketches of himself. But he didn't say which hospital he worked in or name any of the towns he visited. That wasn't allowed, because of the war. And even though Dad's letters were long and funny and wonderful, they

still sounded as if they came from very far away. They were not at all like the words Dad spoke in his deep-down voice that you could feel rumbling inside you and filling up the house. Molly used to be able to hear that voice even when she was up in her room doing homework.



When Dad called out, "I'm home!" the house seemed more lively. Everyone, even Jill, would tumble down the stairs for a big hug. Then Dad would sit in his old plaid chair, cozy in a warm circle of lamplight, and they'd tell him what had gone on in school that day. Dad's pipe smoke made the room smell of vanilla and burning leaves. Sometimes, now that Dad was gone to the war, Molly would climb into the plaid chair and sniff it because that vanilla pipe smell made her feel so safe and happy, just as if Dad were home.

Molly remembered the fun they had at the dinner table when Dad was home. He teased Jill and made her blush. He swapped jokes with Ricky and told riddles to Brad, Molly's younger brother. And he always said, "Gosh and golly, olly Molly, what have you done today?" Suddenly,

everything Molly had done—whether it was winning a running race or losing a multiplication bee—was interesting and important, wonderful or not so bad after all. Dad loved to tease Mrs. Gilford, too. As she carried steaming trays out from the kitchen with lots of importance, Dad would say, “Mrs. Gladys Gilford, an advancement has been made tonight in the art of cooking. Never before in the history of mankind has there been such a perfect pot roast.”

Mrs. Gilford would beam and bustle and serve up more perfect pot roast and mashed potatoes and gravy. She never, ever, served anything awful like turnips.

But everything was different now because of the war. Dad was gone and Mom was busy at the Red Cross. So Mrs. Gilford, who had arrived at the dot of seven o’clock every weekday morning of Molly’s life to cook and clean, now ruled the roost more than ever. And Mrs. Gilford was determined to do her part to help win the war. A Victory Garden was Mrs. Gilford’s latest war effort. Last spring she sent away for a pamphlet called *Food Fights for Freedom*. It explained how to start a Victory Garden in your own backyard. The pamphlet had a picture of vegetables lined up in front of a potato and an onion that were wearing military hats and saluting. Under the picture it said “Call vegetables into service.”

“From now on, there will be no more canned vegetables

used in this house,” Mrs. Gilford announced. “The soldiers need the tin in those cans more than we do. From now on, we will grow, preserve, and eat our own vegetables. It’s the least we can do for our fighting boys.”

All summer long, Mrs. Gilford had tended her Victory Garden. She wore a stiff straw hat, Dr. McIntire’s gardening gloves, and knee-high black rubber boots. Everyone, even little Brad, had helped her. Molly had worked in the Victory Garden every Tuesday morning from ten to eleven o’clock. She had crawled on her hands and knees through rows of green seedlings, pulling weeds. The rows were as strict and straight as soldiers on parade. Each one was labeled with a colorful seed packet on a stake. The seed packets showed fat carrots, plump red tomatoes, and big green peas.

But by fall, after months in the hot sun, the pictures on the seed packets had faded away. The packets hung on the stakes like limp white flags of surrender. Mrs. Gilford’s Victory Garden had not been quite as victorious as she had hoped. All but the toughest vegetables had been beaten by the dry summer. The carrots were thin and wrinkled. The tomatoes were hard as nuts. The peas were brown. But that did not defeat Mrs. Gilford. She would never give up and open a tin can. Mrs. Gilford had a rather successful crop of radishes, lima beans, and turnips, so that’s what they would eat.



As Molly stared at the turnips on her plate, she remembered Mrs. Gilford saying, “Wasting food is not only childish and selfish, it is unpatriotic. Think of your poor father off in some strange land. Maybe he didn’t have enough to eat tonight. And you turn up your nose at fresh turnips. You will not leave this table until those turnips are gone. Completely.”

Now it was almost nine o’clock. It was getting cold in the kitchen. Molly was lonely. She was tired of thinking about how unpatriotic she was. She looked at the turnips, lifted a tiny forkful, and put it in her mouth. Just then Ricky burst through the swinging kitchen door.

“How do you like eating old, cold, moldy brains?” he teased. Then he ran out. Molly swallowed the turnips fast, then gulped down a whole glass of water. Old, cold, moldy brains was exactly what the turnips were like.

“Ricky, you rat!” she said. “I’m going to get you!” She started to get up.

From behind the door Ricky chanted, “Nyah, nyah, nyah-nyah nyah! You can’t leave the table. You haven’t finished your turnips!”

“Ricky, stop it!” yelled Molly. But Ricky was right. The turnips were still on her plate and she was stuck. To make matters worse, Molly heard her mother calling good-bye to the car-sharing group she rode with from

Red Cross headquarters. *Now Mom will be mad at me, too,* thought Molly. *Now she’ll never make a Cinderella dress for my Halloween costume.*

Mrs. McIntire walked in the back door, looked at Molly, looked at the plate, and knew immediately what had happened. “Well, Molly,” she said. “I see we had the first turnips from the Victory Garden for dinner tonight.”

“Mom,” said Molly, “I hate turnips. I know I do. And Mrs. Gilford says I can’t leave the table until I eat them. I’ll be here forever. I really mean it.”

“I see,” said Molly’s mother. “Do you mind if I join you for a while? Not forever, of course—just while I have a cup of tea. And while I’m heating up the stove, why don’t I reheat those turnips for you? They certainly don’t look very good when they’re cold like that.”

“It won’t help,” said Molly.

But Mrs. McIntire took Molly’s plate and put the turnips in a frying pan. “I’ll just smooth out these lumps. And I think we can spare a little bit of our sugar and butter rations to add to the turnips,” she said, almost to herself. “And a little cinnamon, too.”

Soon a delicious, spicy aroma filled the kitchen. The kettle whistled, and Mrs. McIntire made her tea. She spooned the turnips back onto the plate and put the plate in front of Molly. Molly took a deep breath, raised a small

forkful to her lips, and tasted it. It wasn't so bad. In fact, it was pretty good—sweet, cinnamony, and kind of like applesauce.

Mrs. McIntire sat down with her tea. "When I was about your age," she said, "my mother made sardines on toast for dinner one night. Little oily dead fish on toast!



I refused to eat them. But my mother said I could not leave the table until the sardines were gone. *Gone* was exactly what she said. So when she wasn't looking, I put each sardine, one by one, into my napkin. Then I stuck my napkin into my pocket. When my mother saw my empty plate, she was surprised, but she excused me from the table.

"I used to play checkers with my father every night after dinner. That night it was very hard to concentrate on the game. Our two cats, Bessy and May, yowled and meowed and climbed all over me. They smelled the sardines. Finally, when I had one hand on Bessy and the other hand on a checker, May pulled the napkin out of my pocket. The sardines spilled out all over the rug. Bessy and May gobbled them up."

"Oh, Mom!" laughed Molly.

"Oh, Molly," sighed Mrs. McIntire. "Sometimes we have to do things whether we like it or not. There aren't always cats around who will eat the sardines." She brushed

Molly's bangs out of her eyes.

"I know this war is hard on you children. And I know you miss your father. I miss him, too."

"Everything is so different with Dad gone," said Molly. "Nothing is the way it used to be."

"The war has changed things," said Mrs. McIntire. "But some things are still the same. Isn't Ricky still Ricky?"

"He sure is," said Molly. "Still dumb old Ricky."

"And you are still my olly Molly," said Mrs. McIntire. "And I am still me." She gave Molly's hand a squeeze.

Molly smiled. The turnips were gone. Mom was not mad. Mrs. Gilford wouldn't think that Molly was ruining her war effort. "Thanks, Mom," she said as she gave her mother a hug. She walked carefully up the stairs to bed, pretending she was wearing a long, floaty pink skirt that swished as she took each step.

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