

# MIDNIGHT AND MOLL FLANDERS

Freely Adapted from Defoe's novel, "Moll Flanders"

After many life challenges, it seems to Moll that good luck is finally around the corner. Now married to a respectable Captain, the two settle in Virginia to farm the land belonging to the Captain's Mother. But entanglements from their shared pasts come to light... and the darkest surprise of Moll's life is about to unfold.

In Newgate Prison, Moll shares the story of her life with the Minister, while Young Moll and other characters bring alive her tale of survival.

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## ACT I, Scene 15

MOLL

(Rapt in her memory of the wonder of the place.)

The New World lay before us... shining. Forests stretched out on the horizon, as far as eye could see. Birds, free and soaring, sailed high above the trees. The air was sweet with strawberries... All was silent. Perfect. Green.

(An older woman, CAPTAIN'S MOTHER, approaches.)

My husband's mother – a mighty cheerful crone - was there to welcome us.... Eden. A garden in the wilderness. Fortune opened up its happy doors.

(CAPTAIN'S MOTHER holds out her arms to YOUNG MOLL. Beat. Then she enfolds the younger woman in an embrace.)

YOUNG MOLL

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

MOLL

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

## Scene 16

MOLL

(Recalling from Newgate, contented.)

We worked long hours -- and we were glad to.

(Actors set up chairs, cradle, etc. of a farm living room, as CAPTAIN'S MOTHER directs them.)

MOLL (cont.)

We raised our crops, baked bread, kept the books, oversaw the household, all together. At night, we'd fall asleep exhausted -- when we awoke, we'd happily begin again. For six months we lived in bounty and abundance. At last, the chance I'd hoped for -- to create a thriving, peaceful home. And most wonderful of all -- I was with child.

(CAPTAIN and the two women sit keeping peaceful company before bed.  
YOUNG MOLL, pregnant, and CAPTAIN'S MOTHER do needlework or spin as they talk.)

CAPTAIN

Our early crops yield well.

YOUNG MOLL

Welcome news.

MOLL

I had found my own safe harbor...

CAPTAIN

The summing up today exceeds all years previous. Our harvest of tobacco may yield even better.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

How fine!

CAPTAIN

Such a prosperous crop. Well over a thousand our yield should be.

YOUNG MOLL

(Stitching.) A thousand forty, dear.

CAPTAIN

(With good humor.) To be corrected by so fair a wife --

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

And over such a pretty sum! Now don't distract us, son. We have work to do.

YOUNG MOLL

'Aye, twill make fine trim for the Christening gown.

MOLL

But storms have ways of coming up on tranquil seas.

CAPTAIN

I love to watch these hands so busy, but I must retire. Accounts are due tomorrow.

YOUNG MOLL

I will help you in the morning.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Arithmetic, eh?

YOUNG MOLL

Accounting, aye.

CAPTAIN

No one knows their summing-up like Molly.

(To his wife.) Don't be too late, my dear.

(To his mother.) And tell her no more frightening stories, Mother.

YOUNG MOLL

Sleep well, my dearest.

(He kisses her and exits.)

(For a moment silence, then eagerly.)

Tell me more of last night's tale?

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

(Teasing.) I don't know... ye' think it best? Your husband said I mustn't.

YOUNG MOLL

Do not tease me! I love him well, but I'm not so fragile as he thinks I am.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Nay, ye' are a hearty girl, and strong.

YOUNG MOLL

I do so love the way you tell a story.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

(Cheerful.) And stubborn, too! Ye cannot deny it! Alright. Then, as I've said before...this is a place of wildness and great freedom. The people are the same -- but ye' know all this by now, Moll.

YOUNG MOLL

Go on, it is so colorful the way you tell it.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

They are the stories of my life -- I hope I tell them well.

YOUNG MOLL

They help me pass the time when my mind begins to wander...

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

What -- are ye' frettin', Moll? Ah, sure there's only one answer to that question when a woman is with child... especially with her first.

YOUNG MOLL

(Uneasy.) Aye, the forest is so vast -- not a neighbor about for miles and miles --

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Now don't let your thoughts be wanderin', child. We most of us survive, ye' know. We most of us survive.

YOUNG MOLL

Aye, aye. But.... Madam...have you another story... please?

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Very well, girl. Very well.

(YOUNG MOLL settles into the storytelling.)

Many 'round about have had hard lives, girl -- not like you. Many are slaves from Africa, forced to work the rich men's fields. And those they call Indians in this new world are pushed far from their own lands...

YOUNG MOLL

So sad. I have heard that.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

'Tis true, aye. And, many a prisoner sentenced to be hung in England has instead been transported here. But when their sentence has been served, some plant a little land here -- in time it belongs to them. Many prosper...(mischievous) including Mr. Sallow.

YOUNG MOLL

In truth? The merchant?

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

(Amused.) Old Robert, Aye. 'Tis all true! Here in Virginia, many a Newgate-bird becomes a great man. Many in the towns 'round about have been burnt in the hand.

YOUNG MOLL

Burnt in the hand?

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

The Newgate Prison brand, my child. (Cheerfully.) Some of the best men in the country are burnt in the hand and are not ashamed to own it... Justice Sallow, as ye' have said... And Major Rightsford...

YOUNG MOLL

Nay!

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Oh yes. (Amused.) An eminent pickpocket in his day! And Mister Brown -- a shoplifter! And Magistrate Whiting.

YOUNG MOLL

Not Magistrate Whiting!?

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

The very one. But help me with this tying off, child. My eyes are poorly.

YOUNG MOLL

Tell me more of this brand you speak of, Mother.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

(Casual.) The Brand of Newgate, child? Oh, burned on the flesh of all those who enter -- square on the inside of the palm, it is. Clean and white. Quite fine, 'tis, too. Have ye' never seen one?

YOUNG MOLL

Nay.

(CAPTAIN'S MOTHER takes off a work glove and holds out her hand to YOUNG MOLL.)

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Well then, feast your eyes, Moll. See?

(Happily.) I have one here me'self.

YOUNG MOLL

(Stunned.) Madam -- What?

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

So ye' never noticed?

YOUNG MOLL

I never saw it.

(Pause.)

You were in Newgate Prison?

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

I was. What -- are ye' shocked, child?!

YOUNG MOLL

(pause) I knew someone who was there once. She was hanged there.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

What was her name? Perhaps I knew her.

YOUNG MOLL

I cannot quite recall it...

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Never mind, child. My memories of Newgate are a little foggy -- for I was a very different person then.

YOUNG MOLL

What was your crime?

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

(Casual.) Oh, nothin' so awful... I stole three pieces of cloth from a draper in Cheapside.

(Ghost-like figures begin to emerge. CAPTAIN'S MOTHER does not notice, but YOUNG MOLL feels their presence.)

WOMAN I

(Echoing.) I stole three pieces of cloth...

WOMAN II

(Echoing.) I stole three pieces of cloth from a draper in Cheapside...

MOLL

Something stirred within me. Suddenly, I felt so sad...

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

From Newgate, I was transported here. And then my luck began to change -- I was assigned good work. And when my mistress died, my master married me -- by whom I had your husband. Indeed, there's only one regret I have of those early years, my dear...

YOUNG MOLL

A regret?

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

It's that I left a babe there -- a child I've never seen again.

MINISTER

A child?

WOMAN I

A child.

WOMAN II

A child.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Aye. A baby left in Newgate. A daughter left behind.

(YOUNG MOLL pricks her finger while sewing.)

CAPTAINS MOTHER

What is it, Moll?

YOUNG MOLL

Nothing. I pricked my finger.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

'Twas a sad affair. I never saw the babe. And the only thing I ever gave that child was one gold watch --

YOUNG MOLL

A watch?!

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Aye. How queer life is, eh?

(Cheering herself.) But, better not to dwell on it...

MOLL

Better not to dwell on it.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Here in Virginia, I doubled my fortune, since I have been a widow now for all these years...

(She begins to exit.)

YOUNG MOLL

Let's talk no more about it...

MOLL

I knew it then for certain.

(CAPTAIN'S MOTHER turns to look at her daughter-in-law.)

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

What is it, Moll?

YOUNG MOLL

(Beat.)

Not a thing.

(Beat.)

'Tis just the babe that stirs. That's all.

MOLL

Curse my luck. I was speaking with my mother.

(YOUNG MOLL touches her stomach.)

And my husband was her son.

(An enormous sound of large gates slamming shut is heard.)

ACT II  
Scene 1

(Virginia, in MOLL's memory. Time has passed since the last scene. YOUNG MOLL is closer to delivery.)

(MINISTER and MOLL witness the story unfold in Newgate.)

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Fie, child, it cannot be! Why did you not speak of this before?

YOUNG MOLL

I couldn't bear to think it.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Who filled your head with this wicked nonsense?

YOUNG MOLL

The Puritan housewife who reared me -- she told me of my mother.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Oh, those righteous Puritans, they love to gossip. Nay. 'Tis not possible. Me, your mother!? Fie!

YOUNG MOLL

Tell me again... What was the charge you were tried for?

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

A common crime. Stealing cloth from a draper in Cheapside –

YOUNG MOLL

Dear God, as I'd thought. (pause) And what was your name on the streets of London? I was told they called my mother "Prudence Cutpurse"...

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

The very same! But there were dozen us, girl – we changed our names to suit our fancy.

(YOUNG MOLL is suffering.)

YOUNG MOLL

Perhaps this will decide it. (Pulls out the watch.) Do you know this watch? They said it was my mother's.

(Passes it to the CAPTAIN'S MOTHER, who examines it.)

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Zounds. (pause) 'Twas mine.

(Dark.) I remember it well. I stole it from a woman big with child, in Covent Garden. 'Twas the only article of mine that I convinced the prison guard to pass along to you.

YOUNG MOLL

In God's name why?

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

'Twas the artifact I felt the blackest for. I thought 'twould cleanse the deed, giving it to my daughter -- you know, as a sort of dowry... to help her make her way. (Pause) Your way.

(YOUNG MOLL turns away from her mother.)

'Ts true then. (beat) These are the darkest memories, these are -- and from the darkest times. They are better left forgotten. (Rallying.) So... all's one, now, eh? After all is said and done, I'm glad to be united --

(She holds out her arms; YOUNG MOLL does not accept the embrace.)

Indeed, what miserable chance could bring thee hither? And into the arms of me' own son! Tsk. 'Tis tinker's luck. 'Tis tinker's luck, indeed. But it's over and forgotten. Now we must both of us look forward --

YOUNG MOLL

I cannot deceive of him any longer --

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

'Ye have not told him, Molly?! What does he know of it?

YOUNG MOLL

Nothing, but he senses something is awry. I have asked him to send me back to England.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Nay, girl, nay! 'Ye will stay -- ye' must! We'll bury the thing entirely.

YOUNG MOLL

I cannot!

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

"Cannot?!" What else can ye' do?

YOUNG MOLL

I can leave this place and begin again. Alone.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

How would ye' live, girl? England on your own holds nothing for ye'. I cannot see ye' have much choice.

YOUNG MOLL

You think I should live out my days and nights here? Wife to my own brother!?

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER

Half-brother, child. Half is all.