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Midnight and Moll Flanders

By

MARIE KOHLER

Adapted from the novel *Moll Flanders* by

DANIEL DEFOE

Dramatic Publishing Company

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MARIE KOHLER

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(MIDNIGHT AND MOLL FLANDERS)

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For Julilly Waller Kohler,
my brilliant sister, who has done so much
to help the unfortunate

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Wisconsin-Parkside's Theatre Department

Midnight and Moll Flanders was produced by the University of Wisconsin-Parkside (Kenosha, Wisc.) on Nov. 30, 2018, during the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival.

CAST:

MOLL FLANDERS Christiane Laskowski
OLD MINISTER/MINISTER.....Cole Conrad
YOUNG MOLL.....Jennifer Nelson
CHILD MOLL/CHILD..... Jessica Baker
PURITAN HOUSEWIFE/CAPTAIN’S MOTHER/
MOTHER MIDNIGHT/ENSEMBLEJenna Eve Kleinofen
ROBIN/JUDGE/ENSEMBLE..... King Hang
ELDER SON/GENTLEMAN OF BATH/
ENSEMBLE Alexander Gray
JEMMY’S COMPANION/MRS. FLEETWOOD/
ENSEMBLE Lauren Stoner
CAPTAIN/ENSEMBLE Shamoon Mian
DRAPER/ENSEMBLE.....Ben Compton
JEMMY/BANKER/ENSEMBLE Kyle Aaron Racas
SISTER/MRS. SMITH/ENSEMBLE Erin Dillon
GENTLEWOMAN/ENSEMBLE Lyric Simonson

PRODUCTION:

Director Brian J. Gill
Scenic Designer Jody Sekas
Assistant Director..... Maxwell Alexander
Costume Designer.....Darice Damata-Geiger
Technical Director..... Chelsea Strebe
Lighting Designer Noah Frye
Composer/Sound Designer Joshua Schmidt
Makeup Designer Bezza LeGreve
Properties Master Jordan Stanek
Scenic Charge Artist..... Alexa Joy
Choreographer..... Hannah Shay
Stage Manager Bri Humke
Dramaturg Olivia Jardas

Midnight and Moll Flanders

CHARACTERS

CHILD MOLL: Girlhood version of Moll, both spirited and innocent. 6 to 12 years old.

YOUNG MOLL: From adolescent to mature, a vulnerable, attractive, entrepreneurial, increasingly jaded version of Moll. 16 years old through her 40s.

MOLL: Older version of Moll Flanders as a master thief captured in prison. 50s or older.

MINISTER: Strait-laced Puritan visiting Moll's cell the night before her hanging. In his 20s to 30s.

OLD MINISTER: Old spiritual man who wanders American colonies to help any and all. In his 60s or older.

PURITAN HOUSEWIFE: Takes in Child Moll when she's an orphan, teaches her to sew. In her 30s to 60s.

GENTLEWOMAN: Allows Young Moll to live in her home as a maid, offers her culture. In her 30s to 60s.

ELDER SON: Upper-class elder son who seduces Young Moll and with whom she is in love. In his 20s to 30s.

ROBIN: Upper-class brother to Elder Son and Sister, who Young Moll marries as a second choice. 18 to 20s.

SISTER: Upper-class sister to Elder Son and Robin. 16 to 20s.

CAPTAIN: Young Moll's third husband. In his 20s to 30s.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER: In her 40s to 60s.

DRAPER: Young Moll's fickle second husband. In his 20s to 60s.

BANKER: Young Moll's banker husband. In his 20s to 50s.

JEMMY: A highwayman and Young Moll's true love. In his 20s to 30s.

MOTHER MIDNIGHT: Midwife, brothel mistress and ring-leader of thieves. In her 40s to 60s.

JUDGE: Presides over Moll's trial. 30s or older.

CHILD: Girl with a necklace who Moll robs. 4 to 10 years old.

ENSEMBLE: Various roles including, but not limited to, inmates, townspeople and thieves.

TIME: Early 1700s with fluid flashbacks to the late 1600s.

PLACE: Newgate Prison in London with flashbacks to past scenes in England and Virginia.

CASTING NOTES

The play lends itself easily to doubling for a cast of 9 (3m., 6w.) or expansion to upwards of 18. There are numerous opportunities for ensemble roles to fill out the scenes and provide lines for an expanded cast. "Characters" not listed above are intended to be portrayed by the ensemble at the director's discretion. Additionally, Minister and Old Minister are the same character at different ages, and you may cast the same performer for both parts. The characters of Child Moll, Young Moll and Child can also be doubled to suit your cast.

Gender-fluid casting is possible with roles other than those of the Molls and the Ministers, and diversity casting would be extremely meaningful to the play.

SOUND DESIGN

The original sound design by Joshua Schmidt is available for free upon request. Please contact Dramatic Publishing's customer service department for more information.

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.

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.

The following pages are from ACT I, Scene 15 through part of ACT II, Scene 1:

MOLL (*cont'd, 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.*)

MOLL (*cont'd*). 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 *(cont'd, 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'd)*. 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.)

YOUNG MOLL (*cont'd*). 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! All right. 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.)

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER (*cont'd*). 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.)

YOUNG MOLL *(cont'd)*. 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 1 *(echoing)*. I stole three pieces of cloth ...

WOMAN 2 *(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 1. A child.

WOMAN 2. A child.

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER. Aye. A baby left in Newgate. A daughter left behind.

(YOUNG MOLL pricks her finger.)

CAPTAIN'S 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 YOUNG MOLL.)

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.)

MOLL *(cont'd)*. 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 a dozen of 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—*your* way!

(*YOUNG MOLL turns away from her mother.*)

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER (*cont'd*). 'Tis 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.*)

CAPTAIN'S MOTHER (*cont'd*). 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. No, we have had a month of lies!

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.