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opening extract from  
**Moll Flanders**

written by

**Daniel Defoe**

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THE  
HISTORY  
AND  
MISFORTUNES  
OF THE FAMOUS  
*Moll Flanders, &c.*

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My True Name is so well known in the Records, or Registers at *Newgate*, and in the *Old-Baily*,<sup>1</sup> and there are some things of such Consequence still depending there, relating to my particular Conduct, that it is not to be expected I should set my Name, or the Account of my Family to this Work; perhaps, after my Death it may be better known; at present it would not be proper, no, not tho' a general Pardon should be issued, even without Exceptions and reserve of Persons or Crimes.

It is enough to tell you, that as some of my worst Comrades, who are out of the Way of doing me Harm, having gone out of the World by the Steps and the String,<sup>2</sup> as I often expected to go, knew me by the Name of *Moll Flanders*; so you may give me leave to speak of myself under that Name till I dare own who I have been, as well as who I am.

I have been told, that in one of our Neighbour Nations, whether it be in *France*,<sup>3</sup> or where else, I know not, they have on Order from the King, that when any Criminal is condemn'd, either to Die, or to the Gallies, or to be Transported, if they leave any Children, as such are generally

unprovided for, by the Poverty or Forfeiture of their Parents, so they are immediately taken into the Care of the Government, and put into an Hospital<sup>4</sup> call'd the *House of Orphans*, where they are Bred up, Cloath'd, Fed, Taught, and when fit to go out, are plac'd out to Trades, or to Services, so as to be well able to provide for themselves by an honest industrious Behaviour.

Had this been the Custom in our Country, I had not been left a poor desolate Girl without Friends, without Cloaths, without Help or Helper in the World, as was my Fate; and by which, I was not only expos'd to very great Distresses, even before I was capable either of Understanding my Case, or how to Amend it, nor brought into a Course of Life, which was not only scandalous in itself, but which in its ordinary Course, tended to the swift Destruction both of Soul and Body.

But the Case was otherwise here; my Mother was convicted of Felony for a certain petty Theft, scarce worth naming, (*viz.*) Having an opportunity of borrowing three Pieces of fine *Holland*,<sup>5</sup> of a certain Draper in *Cheapside*:<sup>6</sup> The Circumstances are too long to repeat, and I have heard them related so many Ways, that I can scarce be certain which is the right Account.

However it was, this they all agree in, that my Mother pleaded her Belly,<sup>7</sup> and being found quick with Child, she was respited for about seven Months, in which time having brought me into the World, and being about again, she was call'd Down, as they term it, to her former Judgment, but obtain'd the Favour of being Transported to the Plantations, and left me about Half a Year old; and in bad Hands you may be sure.

This is too near the first Hours of my Life for me to relate any thing of myself, but by hear say; 'tis enough to men-

tion, that as I was born in such an unhappy Place, I had no Parish<sup>8</sup> to have Recourse to for my Nourishment in my Infancy, nor can I give the least Account how I was kept alive, other, than that as I have been told, some Relation of my Mothers took me away for a while as a Nurse, but at whose Expence or by whose Direction I know nothing at all of it.

The first account that I can Recollect, or could ever learn of myself, was, that I had wandred among a Crew of those People they call *Gypsies*,<sup>9</sup> or *Egyptians*; but I believe it was but a very little while that I had been among them, for I had not had my Skin discolour'd, or blacken'd, as they do very young to all the Children they carry about with them, nor can I tell how I came among them, or how I got from them.

It was at *Colchester* in *Essex*, that those People left me; and I have a Notion in my Head, that I left them there, (that is, that I hid myself and wou'd not go any farther with them) but I am not able to be particular in that Account; only this I remember, that being taken up by some of the Parish Officers of *Colchester*, I gave an Account that I came into the Town with the *Gypsies*, but that I would not go any farther with them, and that so they had left me, but whither they were gone that I knew not, nor could they expect it of me; for tho' they sent round the Country to enquire after them, it seems they could not be found.

I was now in a Way to be provided for; for tho' I was not a Parish Charge upon this or that part of the Town by Law, yet as my Case came to be known, and that I was too young to do any Work, being not above three Years old, Compassion mov'd the Magistrates of the Town to order some Care to be taken of me, and I became one of their own, as much as if I had been born in the Place.

In the Provision they made for me, it was my good hap to be put to Nurse, as they call it, to a Woman who was indeed Poor, but had been in better Circumstances, and who got a little Livelihood by taking such as I was suppos'd to be, and keeping them with all Necessaries, till they were at a certain Age, in which it might be suppos'd they might go to Service, or get their own Bread.

This Woman had also a little School, which she kept to teach Children to Read and to Work; and having, as I have said, liv'd before that in good Fashion, she bred up the Children she took with a great deal of Art, as well as with a great deal of Care.

But that which was worth all the rest, she bred them up very Religiously, being herself a very sober pious Woman. (2.) Very Housewifly and Clean, and (3.) Very Mannerly, and with good Behaviour: So that in a Word, excepting a plain Diet, coarse Lodging, and mean Cloths, we were brought up as Mannerly and as Genteely as if we had been at the Dancing School.

I was continu'd here till I was eight years Old, when I was terrified with News that the Magistrates, as I think they call'd them, had order'd that I should go to Service; I was able to do but very little Service where ever I was to go, except it was to run of Errands, and be a Drudge to some Cook-Maid, and this they told me of often, which put me into a great Fright; for I had a thorough Aversion to going to Service, as they call'd it, that is to be a Servant, tho' I was so young; and I told my Nurse, as we call'd her, that I believ'd I could get my Living without going to Service if she pleas'd to let me; for she had Taught me to Work with my Needle and Spin Worsted, which is the chief Trade of that City, and I told her that if she wou'd keep me, I wou'd Work for her, and I would Work very hard.

I talk'd to her almost every Day of Working hard; And in short, I did nothing but Work and Cry all Day, which griev'd the good kind Woman so much, that at last she began to be concern'd for me, for she lov'd me very well.

One Day after this, as she came into the Room where all we poor Children were at Work, she sat down just over against<sup>10</sup> me, not in her usual Place as Mistress, but as if she set herself on purpose to observe me, and see me Work: I was doing something she had set me to, as I remember, it was Marking some Shirts, which she had taken to Make, and after a while she began to Talk to me: Thou foolish Child, says she, thou art always Crying; (for I was Crying then) Prithee, What dost Cry for? because they will take me away, says I, and put me to Service, and I can't Work House-Work; well Child, says she, but tho' you can't Work House-Work, as you call it, you will learn it in time, and they won't put you to hard Things at first; yes they will, says I, and if I can't do it, they will Beat me, and the Maids will Beat me to make me do great Work, and I am but a little Girl, and I can't do it; and then I cry'd again, till I could not speak any more to her.

This mov'd my good Motherly Nurse, so that she from that time resolv'd I should not go to Service yet, so she bid me not Cry, and she wou'd speak to Mr. Mayor, and I should not go to Service till I was bigger.

Well, this did not Satisfie me, for to think of going to Service was such a frightful Thing to me, that if she had assur'd me I should not have gone till I was 20 years old, it wou'd have been the same to me; I shou'd have cry'd, I believe all the time, with the very Apprehension of its being to be so at last.

When she saw that I was not pacify'd yet, she began to be angry with me; and what wou'd you have? says she,

don't I tell you that you shall not go to Service till you are bigger? Ay, says I, but then I must go at last; why, what? said she, is the Girl mad? what, would you be a Gentlewoman? Yes *says I*, and cry'd heartily, till I roar'd out again.

This set the old Gentlewoman a Laughing at me, as you may be sure it would: Well, Madam, forsooth, says she, *Gibing at me*, you would be a Gentlewoman, and pray how will you come to be a Gentlewoman? what, will you do it by your Fingers Ends?

Yes, *says I again*, very innocently.

Why, what can you Earn, *says she*, what can you get at your Work?

Three-Pence, *said I*, when I Spin, and 4d. when I Work plain Work.<sup>11</sup>

Alas! poor Gentlewoman, *said she again*, Laughing, what will that do for thee?

It will keep me, *says I*, if you will let me live with you; and this *I said*, in such a poor petitioning Tone, that it made the poor Womans Heart yearn to me, as she told me afterwards.

But, *says she*, that will not keep you, and buy you Cloths too; and who must buy the little Gentlewoman Cloths, *says she*, and smil'd all the while at me.

I will Work Harder then, *says I*, and you shall have it all.

Poor Child! it won't keep you, *says she*, it will hardly keep you in Victuals.

Then I will have no Victuals, *says I*, again very Innocently, let me but live with you.

Why, can you live without Victuals? *says she*; yes, *again says I*, very much like a Child, you may be sure, and still I cry'd heartily.

I had no Policy in all this, you may easily see it was all



Nature, but it was joyn'd with so much Innocence, and so much Passion, That in short, it set the good Motherly Creature a weeping too, and she cry'd at last as fast as I did, and then took me, and led me out of the teaching Room; come says she, you shan't go to Service, you shall live with me, and this pacify'd me for the present.

Sometime after this, she going to wait on the *Mayor*, and talking of such things as belong'd to her Business, at last my Story came up, and my good Nurse told Mr. *Mayor* the whole Tale: He was so pleas'd with it, that he would call his Lady, and his two Daughters to hear it, and it made Mirth enough among them, you may be sure.

However, not a Week had pass'd over, but on a sudden comes Mrs. *Mayoress* and her two Daughters to the House to see my old Nurse, and to see her School and the Children: When they had look'd about them a little: Well, Mrs. — says the *Mayoress* to my Nurse, and pray which is the little Lass that intends to be a Gentlewoman? I heard her, and I was terrible frighted at first, tho' I did not know why neither; but Mrs. *Mayoress* comes up to me, Well Miss says she, And what are you at Work upon? The Word Miss was a Language that had hardly been heard of in our School, and I wondred what sad Name it was she call'd me; However, I stood up, made a Curtsy, and she took my Work out of my Hand, look'd on it, and said it was very well; then she took up one of my Hands; nay, says she, the Child may come to be a Gentlewoman for ought any body knows; she has a Gentlewoman's Hand, says she; this pleas'd me mightily you may be sure, but Mrs. *Mayoress* did not stop there, but giving me my Work again, she put her Hand in her Pocket, gave me a Shilling, and bid me mind my Work, and learn to Work well, and I might be a Gentlewoman for ought she knew.

Now all this while, my good old Nurse, Mrs. *Mayoress*, and all the rest of them did not understand me at all, for they meant one Sort of thing, by the Word Gentlewoman, and I meant quite another; for alas, all I understood by being a Gentlewoman, was to be able to Work for myself, and get enough to keep me without that terrible Bug-bear *going to Service*, whereas they meant to live Great, Rich, and High, and I know not what.

Well, after Mrs. *Mayoress* was gone, her two Daughters came in and they call'd for the Gentlewoman too, and they talk'd a long while to me, and I answer'd them in my Innocent way; but always if they ask'd me whether I resolv'd to be a Gentlewoman, I answer'd YES: At last one of them ask'd me, what a Gentlewoman was? that puzzel'd me much; but however, I explain'd myself negatively, that it was one that did not go to Service, to do House-Work; they were pleas'd to be familiar [with] me, and lik'd my little Prattle to them, which it seems was agreeable enough to them, and they gave me Money too.

As for my Money I gave it all to my Mistress Nurse, as I call'd her, and told her she should have all I got for myself when I was a Gentlewoman, as well as now; by this and some other of my talk, my old Tutoress began to understand me, about what I meant by being a Gentlewoman; and that I understood by it no more than to be able to get my Bread by my own Work; and at last, she ask'd me whether it was not so.

I told her *yes*, and insisted on it, that to do so, was to be a Gentlewoman; for says I, there is such a one, naming a Woman that mended Lacc, and wash'd the Ladies Lac'd-heads,<sup>12</sup> she, *says I*, is a Gentlewoman, and they call her Madam.

Poor Child, says my good old Nurse, you may soon be

such a Gentlewoman as that, for she is a Person of ill Fame, and has had two or three Bastards.

I did not understand any thing of that; but I answer'd, I am sure they call her Madam, and she does not go to Service nor do House-Work, and therefore I insisted that she was a Gentlewoman, and I would be such a Gentlewoman as that.

The Ladies were told all this again, to be sure, and they made themselves Merry with it, and every now and then the young Ladies, Mr. *Mayor's* Daughters would come and see me, and ask where the little Gentlewoman was, which made me not a little Proud of myself.

This held a great while, and I was often visited by these young Ladies, and sometimes they brought others with them; so that I was known by it, almost all over the Town.

I was now about ten Years old, and began to look a little Womanish, for I was mighty Grave and Humble; very Mannerly, and as I had often heard the Ladies say I was Pretty, and would be a very handsome Woman, so you may be sure, that hearing them say so, made me not a little Proud; however, that Pride had no ill effect upon me yet, only as they often gave me Money, and I gave it my old Nurse, she *honest* Woman, was so just to me, as to lay it all out again for me, and gave me Head-Dresses, and Linnen, and Gloves and Ribbons, and I went very Neat, and always Clean; for that I would do, and if I had Rags on, I would always be Clean, or else I would dabble them in Water myself; but *I say*, my good Nurse, when I had Money given me, very honestly laid it out for me, and would always tell the Ladies, this, or that, was bought with their Money; and this made them oftentimes give me more; Till at last, I was indeed call'd upon by the Magistrates as I understood it, to go out to Service; but then I was come to

be so good a Workwoman myself, and the Ladies were so kind to me, that it was plain I could maintain myself, that is to say, I could Earn as much for my Nurse as she was able by it to keep me; so she told them, that if they would give her leave, she would keep the Gentlewoman as she call'd me, to be her Assistant, and teach the Children, which I was very well able to do; for I was very nimble at my Work, and had a good Hand with my Needle, though I was yet very young.

But the kindness of the Ladies of the Town did not End here, for when they came to understand that I was no more maintain'd by the publick Allowance, as before, they gave me Money oftner than formerly; and as I grew up, they brought me Work to do for them; such as Linnen to Make, and Laces to Mend, and Heads to Dress up, and not only paid me for doing them, but even taught me how to do them; so that now I was a Gentlewoman indeed, as I understood that Word, and as I desir'd to be; for by that time, I was twelve Years old, I not only found myself Cloathes, and paid my Nurse for my keeping, but got Money in my Pocket too beforehand.

The Ladies also gave me Cloaths frequently of their own, or their Childrens, some Stockings, some Petticoats, some Gowns, some one thing, some another, and these my old Woman Managed for me like a meer<sup>13</sup> Mother, and kept them for me, oblig'd me to Mend them, and turn them and twist them to the best Advantage, for she was a rare House-Wife.

At last one of the Ladies took so much Fancy to me that she would have me Home to her House for a Month she said, to be among her Daughters.

Now tho' this was exceeding kind in her, yet as my old good Woman said to her, unless she resolv'd to keep me

for good and all, she would do the little Gentlewoman more harm than good: Well, says the Lady, that's true and therefore I'll only take her Home for a Week then, that I may see how my Daughters and she agree together, and how I like her Temper, and then I'll tell you more; and in the mean time, if any Body comes to see her as they us'd to do, you may only tell them, you have sent her out to my House.

This was prudently manag'd enough, and I went to the Ladies House, but I was so pleas'd there with the young Ladies, and they so pleas'd with me, that I had enough to do to come away, and they were as unwilling to part with me.

However, I did come away, and liv'd almost a Year more with my honest old Woman, and began now to be very helpful to her; for I was almost fourteen Years old, was tall of my Age, and look'd a little Womanish; but I had such a Taste of Genteel living at the Ladies House, that I was not so easie in my old Quarters as I us'd to be, and I thought it was fine to be a Gentlewoman indeed, for I had quite other Notions of a Gentlewoman now than I had before; and as I thought, I say, that it was fine to be a Gentlewoman, so I lov'd to be among Gentlewomen, and therefore I long'd to be there again.

About the Time that I was fourteen Years and a quarter Old, my good old Nurse, Mother I ought rather to call her, fell Sick and Dyed; I was then in a sad Condition indeed, for as there is no great Bustle in putting an end to a Poor bodies Family when once they are carried to the Grave, so the poor good Woman being Buried, the Parish Children she kept were immediately remov'd by the Church-Wardens; the School was at an End, and the Children of it had no more to do but just stay at Home till they

were sent some where else, and as for what she left, her Daughter, a married Woman with six or seven Children, came and swept it all away at once, and removing the Goods, they had no more to say to me, than to Jest with me, and tell me that the little Gentlewoman might set up for her self if she pleas'd.

I was frighted out of my Wits almost, and knew not what to do, for I was, as it were, turn'd out of Doors to the wide World, and that which was still worse, the old honest Woman had two and twenty Shillings of mine in her Hand,<sup>14</sup> which was all the Estate the little Gentlewoman had in the world; and when I ask'd the Daughter for it, she huft<sup>15</sup> me and laught at me, and told me, she had nothing to do with it.

It was true the good poor Woman had told her Daughter of it, and that it lay in such a Place, that it was the Child's Money, and had call'd once or twice for me to give it me, but I was unhappily out of the way, some where or other; and when I came back she was past being in a Condition to speak of it: However, the Daughter was so Honest afterward as to give it me, tho' at first she us'd me Cruelly about it.

Now I was a poor Gentlewoman indeed, and I was just that very Night to be turn'd into the wide World; for the Daughter remov'd all the Goods, and I had not so much as a Lodging to go to, or a bit of Bread to Eat: But it seems some of the Neighbours who had known my Circumstances, took so much Compassion of me, as to acquaint the Lady in whose Family I had been a Week, as I mention'd above; and immediately she sent her Maid to fetch me away, and two of her Daughters came with the Maid tho' unsend; so I went with them Bag and Baggage, and with a glad Heart you may be sure: The fright of my

Condition had made such an Impression upon me, that I did not want now to be a Gentlewoman, but was very willing to be a Servant, and that any kind of Servant they thought fit to have me be.

But my new generous Mistress had better thoughts for me; I call her generous for she exceeded the good Woman I was with before in every Thing, as well as in the matter of Estate; I say in every Thing except Honesty; and for that, tho' this was a Lady most exactly Just, yet I must not forget to say on all Occasions, that the First tho' Poor, was as uprightly Honest as it was possible for any One to be.

I was no sooner carried away as I have said by this good Gentlewoman, but the first Lady, *that is to say*, the *Mayoress* that was, sent her two Daughters to take Care of me; and another Family which had taken Notice of me when I was the little Gentlewoman, and had given me Work to do, sent for me after her, so that I was mightily made of, as we say; nay, and they were not a little Angry, especially, Madam the *Mayoress*, that her Friend had taken me away from her as she call'd it; for as she said, I was Hers by Right, she having been the first that took any Notice of me; but they that had me wou'd not part with me; and as for me, tho' I shou'd have been very well Treated with any of the others, yet I could not be better than where I was.

Here I continu'd till I was between 17 and 18 Years old, and here I had all the Advantages for my Education that could be imagin'd; the Lady had Masters home to the House to teach her Daughters to Dance, and to speak *French*, and to Write, and others to teach them Musick; and as I was always with them, I learn'd as fast as they; and tho' the Masters were not appointed to teach me, yet I learn'd by Imitation and enquiry, all that they learn'd by

Instruction and Direction. So that in short, I learn'd to Dance and speak *French* as well as any of them, and to Sing much better, for I had a better Voice than any of them; I could not so readily come at playing on the Harpsicord or Spinnet, because I had no Instrument of my own to Practice on, and could only come at theirs in the intervals, when they left it, which was uncertain; but yet I learn'd tollerably well too, and the young Ladies at length got two Instruments, that is to say, a Harpsicord, and a Spinnet too, and then they Taught me themselves; But as to Dancing they could hardly help my learning Country Dances, because they always wanted me to make up even Number; and on the other Hand, they were as heartily willing to learn me every thing that they had been Taught themselves, as I could be to take the Learning.

By this Means I had, as I have said above, all the Advantages of Education that I could have had, if I had been as much a Gentlewoman as they were with whom I liv'd, and in some things, I had the Advantage of my Ladies, tho' they were my Superiors; but they were all the Gifts of Nature, and which all their Fortunes could not furnish. First, I was apparently<sup>16</sup> Handsomer than any of them. Secondly, I was better shap'd, and Thirdly, I Sung better, by which I mean, I had a better Voice; in all which you will I hope allow me to say, I do not speak my own Conceit of myself, but the Opinion of all that knew the Family.

I had with all these the common Vanity of my Sex (*viz.*) That being really taken for very Handsome, or if you please for a great Beauty, I very well knew it, and had as good an Opinion of myself as any body else could have of me; and particularly I lov'd to hear any body speak of it, which could not but happen to me sometimes, and was a great Satisfaction to me.