*Moll Flanders*

***Moll Flanders***[[a]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moll_Flanders#cite_note-1) is a novel by [Daniel Defoe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Defoe), first published in 1722. It purports to be the true account of the life of the eponymous Moll, detailing her exploits from birth until old age.

Moll Flanders is a story **about the fall and rise of a beautiful woman who was born in Newgate Prison**. Because of her determination to be someone other than a servant, and because of her great greed, she sought to marry a wealthy man. She married some with money and some without.

By 1721, Defoe had become a recognised novelist, with the success of [*Robinson Crusoe*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robinson_Crusoe) in 1719. His political work was tapering off at this point, due to the fall of both [Whig](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Whig_Party) and [Tory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Tory_Party) party leaders with whom he had been associated; [Robert Walpole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Walpole) was beginning his rise, and Defoe was never fully at home with Walpole's group. Defoe's Whig views are nevertheless evident in the story of Moll, and the novel's full title gives some insight into this and the outline of the plot:[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moll_Flanders#cite_note-:0-2)

It is usually assumed that the novel was written by [Daniel Defoe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Defoe), and his name is commonly given as the author in modern printings of the novel. However, the original printing did not have an author, as it was an apparent autobiography.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moll_Flanders#cite_note-3) The attribution of *Moll Flanders* to Defoe was made by bookseller Francis Noble in 1770, after Defoe's death in 1731.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moll_Flanders#cite_note-4) The novel is based partially on the life of [Moll King](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moll_King_(criminal)), a London criminal whom Defoe met while visiting [Newgate Prison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newgate_Prison" \o "Newgate Prison).

Historically, the book was occasionally the subject of police censorship.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moll_Flanders#cite_note-5)

Moll's mother is a convict in [Newgate Prison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newgate_Prison" \o "Newgate Prison) in London who is given a reprieve by "[pleading her belly](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pleading_the_belly)," a reference to the custom of postponing the executions of pregnant criminals. Her mother is eventually [transported](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convict_transportation) to [Colonial United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial_United_States), and Moll Flanders (not her birth name, she emphasises, taking care not to reveal it) is raised from the age of three until adolescence by a kindly foster mother. Thereafter she gets attached to a household as a servant where she is loved by both sons, the elder of whom convinces her to "act like they were married" in bed. Unwilling to marry her, he persuades her to marry his younger brother. After five years of marriage, she then is widowed, leaves her children in the care of in-laws, and begins honing the skill of passing herself off as a fortuned widow to attract a man who will marry her and provide her with security.

The first time she does this, her "gentleman-tradesman" spendthrift husband goes bankrupt and flees to mainland Europe, leaving her on her own with his blessing to do the best she can to forget him. (They had one child together, but "it was buried.") The second time, she makes a match that leads her to [Virginia Colony](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colony_of_Virginia) with a kindly man who introduces her to his mother. After three children (one dies), Moll learns that her mother-in-law is actually her biological mother, which makes her husband her half-brother. She dissolves their marriage and after continuing to live with her brother for three years, travels back to England, leaving her two children behind, and goes to live in [Bath](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bath,_Somerset) to seek a new husband.

Again she returns to her [con skills](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confidence_trick) and develops a relationship with a man in Bath whose wife is elsewhere confined due to insanity. Their relationship is at first platonic, but eventually develops into Moll becoming something of a "[kept woman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kept_woman)" in [Hammersmith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hammersmith), London. They have three children (one lives), but after a severe illness he repents, breaks off the arrangement, and commits to his wife. However, he assures Moll that their son will be well cared for, so she leaves yet another child behind.

Moll, now 42, resorts to another beau, a bank clerk, who while still married to an adulterous wife (a "whore"), proposes to Moll after she entrusts him with her financial holdings. While waiting for the banker to divorce, Moll pretends to have a great fortune to attract another wealthy husband in Lancashire, assisted by a new female acquaintance who attests to Moll's (fictitious) social standing. The ruse is successful and she marries a supposedly rich man who claims to own property in Ireland. They each quickly realise that they were both conned and manipulated by the acquaintance. He discharges her from the marriage, telling her nevertheless that she should inherit any money he might ever get. After enjoying each other's company for about a month, they part ways, but Moll soon discovers that she is pregnant. She gives birth and the [midwife](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midwife) gives a tripartite scale of the costs of bearing a child, with one value level per social class. She continues to correspond with the bank clerk, hoping he will still have her.

Moll leaves her newborn in the care of a countrywoman in exchange for the sum of £5 a year. Moll marries the banker, but realises "what an abominable creature I am! and how this innocent gentleman is going to be abused by me!" They live in happiness for five years before he becomes bankrupt and dies of despair, the fate of their two children left unstated.

Truly desperate now, Moll begins a career of artful thievery, which, by employing her wits, beauty, charm, and femininity, as well as hard-heartedness and wickedness, brings her the financial security she has always sought. She becomes well known among those "in the trade," and is given the name Moll Flanders. She is helped throughout her career as a thief by her Governess, who also acts as [receiver](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fence_(criminal)). (During this time she briefly becomes the mistress of a man she robbed.) Moll is finally caught by two maids whilst trying to steal from a house.

In Newgate she is led to her repentance. At the same time, she reunites with her soulmate, her "Lancashire husband", who is also jailed for his robberies (before and after they first met, he acknowledges). Moll is found guilty of felony, but not burglary, the second charge; still, the sentence is death in any case. Yet Moll convinces a minister of her repentance, and together with her Lancashire husband is transported to [the Colonies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirteen_Colonies) to avoid hanging, where they live happily together (she even talks the ship's captain into letting them stay in his quarters, apart from the other convicts, who are sold on arrival). Once in the colonies, Moll learns her mother has left her a plantation and that her own son (by her brother) is alive, as is her husband/brother.

Moll carefully introduces herself to her brother and their son, in disguise. With the help of a Quaker, the two found a farm with 50 servants in [Maryland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Maryland). Moll reveals herself now to her son in [Virginia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colony_of_Virginia) and he gives her her mother's inheritance, a farm for which he will now be her steward, providing £100 a year income for her. In turn, she makes him her heir and gives him a (stolen) gold watch.

At last, her life of conniving and desperation seems to be over. After her husband/brother dies, Moll tells her (Lancashire) husband the entire story and he is "perfectly easy on that account... For, said he, it was no fault of yours, nor of his; it was a mistake impossible to be prevented." Aged 69 (in 1683), the two return to England to live "in sincere penitence for the wicked lives we have lived."

Throughout the novel, Moll goes through a series of relationships, legitimate and not, and through these relationships she bears many children. The lack of character names and Defoe's inability to keep clear distinctions between his many, nameless characters give the reader the difficult task of keeping track of not just characters as a whole, but specifically Moll's marriages, relationships, and children, which make up a majority of her life's story. The following maps out Moll's relationships and marriages in the order that they appeared in the novel as well as any children that might have been born as a result of their union.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moll_Flanders#cite_note-:0-2)