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Molly's Hammer

By

TAMMY RYAN

Adapted from *Hammer of Justice* by

LIANE ELLISON NORMAN

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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TAMMY RYAN

Adapted from the book by LIANE ELLISON NORMAN

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(MOLLY'S HAMMER)

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by
Tammy Ryan
Adapted from HAMMER OF JUSTICE
by Liane Ellison Norman © 1989

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Molly's Hammer was originally produced by The Repertory Theater of St. Louis on March 9-27, 2016.

Cast:

Molly Rush..... Nancy Bell
Bill Rush Joe Osheroff
Daniel Berrigan..... Kevin Orton

Production Staff:

Artistic DirectorSteven Woolf
Managing Director Mark Bernstein
Director Seth Gordon
Scenic Designer Gianni Downs
Lighting and Projection Designer Mark Wilson
Sound DesignerAmanda Were
Costume Designer.....Lou Bird
Stage Manager Shannon B. Sturgis
Casting Directors Rich Cole and Bob Cline

Molly's Hammer

CHARACTERS

MOLLY RUSH: 45 but looks younger, an ordinary Pittsburgh housewife and mother of six children, ranging in age from 12 to 25, director of the Thomas Merton Center—a storefront peace and social justice organization in Pittsburgh.

BILL RUSH: Late 40s, Molly's husband, father of her children, ex-marine, a draftsman-designer of steel mill equipment, a softball umpire and an organizer of softball leagues.

DANIEL BERRIGAN: Poet, priest and leader of the Plowshares 8 with his brother Philip. An activist and protester, he's slight, elfin, charming, fighting the good fight since the 1960s. **NOTE:** The actor playing Daniel will play all of the other characters listed below. This actor doesn't have to be in his 60s; in fact, he should perhaps be close in age to actors playing Molly and Bill, maybe slightly older. The actor must, however, be able to transform quickly and fluidly, both physically and vocally, in portraying the other characters, preferably without costume changes.

GREG RUSH: 12, Molly's youngest son. Whip-smart and quiet, with the wisdom that the baby in a big family usually has. He knows more than most 12-year-olds (and most adults) about the dangers of nuclear weapons.

JOANNE: Late 30s, Molly's younger sister, married with kids, a housewife who has lived all of her life in Dormont, the working-class suburb of Pittsburgh where Molly also still lives.

DAVID MOORE: Mid 40s, Molly's younger brother, conservative, a banker.

JAMES MOORE: Early 40s, Molly's younger brother, the joker of the family, always looked up to Molly as a "second mother." Not easy for him to oppose her. He sells and repairs copy machines. Also, working-class conservative, circa 1980s. Will vote for Ronald Reagan.

LINDA: 25, Molly's oldest daughter, pregnant with her first child. As the oldest, she questions her mother the most, more critical than the others, but ultimately supports her.

SECURITY GUARD: 60, five years from retirement, ex-Navy, by the book. Doesn't like any change to his routine.

PRISON MATRON: 40s, female, chain smoker.

KILLER: 30s, African American, female, in jail for murder, loves Greek mythology.

REPORTER: 50s, works for the *Tribune*. Old school.

JUDGE: 30s, Montgomery County judge very recently appointed by Ronald Reagan. Secretly dreams of being on the Supreme Court. This trial could make or break his brilliant career. Wig wearing, conservative.

TOOLMAKER: 30s to 40s, average, lives a quiet life in a house with a white picket fence in the suburbs with his wife, 2.5 kids and a dog. He goes to work, does his job, doesn't ask questions. He makes the precision instruments that make weapons of mass destruction. He's not giving out any information, he's shut like a steel trap.

SETTING

Pittsburgh, King of Prussia, the prison and courtroom of Montgomery County and the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

TIME

September 1980 through February 1981.

STAGING

Blackouts should be avoided to facilitate quick transitions. Scenes should move fluidly and swiftly from one scene to the next from beginning to end. Characters and furniture should appear and disappear as needed to tell Molly's story. Intermission is recommended where indicated.

Molly's Hammer

ACT I

SCENE 1

(In the darkness, the sounds of water running. Lights rise on MOLLY RUSH, a small, ordinary woman with a mop of curly hair and big '80s glasses, standing at the kitchen sink.

Her husband, BILL RUSH, is in the other room watching TV and hammering something. The sound from the TV drones on, indistinguishable under the sound of rushing water as MOLLY stands at the sink.)

MOLLY. Bill hasn't said a word to me since I got back. I drove two hours from Cleveland without stopping so I could get home in time to make his dinner. He was mad when I left on Friday and he's still mad, but what he doesn't know is I'm not the same Molly. If he wants to give her the silent treatment, that's his choice.

(Sound of TV seems to get louder.)

MOLLY *(cont'd)*. The TV sounds strange after three days of radio silence ... If Bill is home the TV is on, but I doubt he's listening. He's always tinkering with some gadget—taking things apart just to put them back together. Figuring out how things work. But no amount of tinkering is going to help him figure out how I work—if he can't listen to what I have to tell him. *(Laughs suddenly.)* He's not going to take it well. *(A beat.)* I focus on the hot water running

through my hands, sliding the soapy sponge over the hard plates. I don't feel the heat anymore. How many dishes have I washed over the years, thousands? Thousands of loads of dirty laundry, hundreds of thousands of meals cooked, served and cleaned up, how many nights did I stay up with the kids, sick or throwing up, doctor visits, talks after school, helping with their homework, laughing at their jokes no matter how many times they tell them? What has it all been for if it's all going to end in a—?

(She would've said, "in a fiery hell," but the sounds of boys on bicycles interrupt her train of thought. FATHER DANIEL BERRIGAN appears behind her, in her mind finishing her sentence.)

DANIEL BERRIGAN. A nuclear holocaust. The likes of which no human being can ever imagine.

MOLLY. What was that? Boys? Did Greg fall off his bike?

(The bright flash of a nuclear bomb exploding.)

MOLLY *(cont'd)*. Would the water stop running? Would I hear something or see the flash first?

DANIEL BERRIGAN. If ground zero is Carnegie Mellon or Pitt there'd be a flash, though you'd never know it. You'd be vaporized where you stood. Bob and Greg would burn up, on their bikes, charred to ash, in mid fall—before the shock wave came, flattening everything, trees, telephone poles, the water tower, the school building, the football stadium, the playground, all the homes in your neighborhood would be crushed—then firestorms would burn everything left standing, sucking up all the oxygen so anyone left alive would suffocate. Or if it exploded farther away, say Harrisburg or New York City ...

(The sound from the TV transforms into a long droning beep of the Emergency Broadcast System.)

MOLLY. How long would it take for us to figure out what we'd let happen?

DANIEL BERRIGAN. Radioactive ash would fall down on us like snow. Poisoning the land, the water, crops would die, nothing would grow anymore; any people left alive would starve. Those that managed to survive would die from radiation sickness. Where there was life, there'd be nothing but death.

MOLLY. I've heard all this before, but—

DANIEL BERRIGAN. Now you *know*—

MOLLY. It could happen. I feel it. In my gut.

(Lights shift rapidly. DANIEL BERRIGAN is gone. BILL is fixing a chair with a hammer. MOLLY grabs the hammer to get his attention.)

MOLLY *(cont'd)*. Because we think we can win. That's what First Strike means.

BILL. What?

MOLLY. *First. Strike.* It means the government believes we can *win* a “prolonged limited” nuclear war.

BILL. That doesn't make sense.

MOLLY. We have so many bombs on both sides now we can wipe each other out many times over. “Mutually Assured Destruction.” That's deterrence—

BILL. I know what deterrence is—

MOLLY. But now these First Strike Weapons are unbelievably accurate. Listen to me, Bill, *our missiles are pointed at their missile silos.*

BILL. So?

MOLLY. So, we plan to hit them first. Wipe out their weapons so they can't fight back. The only reason to do that would be to start a nuclear war.

BILL. That's not gonna happen, both sides don't want it.

MOLLY. The shift in policy has been in place since the seventies, but in July, Carter signed the Nuclear Targeting Directive, they've got pre-planned attack options targeting urban centers—

BILL. It's not gonna come to that—

MOLLY. Launch on Warning. That means the military can launch on short notice, bypassing the State Department. And if the Russians think we plan to hit them first, won't that that make them more trigger happy? To strike us first before their weapons are taken out?

(BILL hesitates.)

BILL. I don't think it's that simple.

MOLLY. People make mistakes. One thing leads to the next. And some scared and confused soldier gets a message— then someone pushes a button.

BILL. OK, OK, OK, so if it's gonna happen, it's gonna happen! What do you want me to do about it?

(Long silence. The nuclear flash again.)

MOLLY. It's 1980. I don't believe we're going to see the end of this century.

BILL. That's twenty years.

MOLLY. That's why I ... am about ... to do ... something.

BILL. What's "something" mean?

MOLLY. Something big. I can't tell you what it is. Or when it's going to happen. Or where. I know how this must sound—

BILL. You go to Cleveland with those scripture-quoting priests, that Father Berrigan, and you come back under this spell, like they got some kind of mind control over you—

MOLLY. You want to talk about mind control? Look at the control this government has over everyone. We're all living in denial that the end of the world could ever happen, or that we can do anything to stop it. It's too much, so we've all become psychically numb—but we can—we can act—

BILL. What are you talking about?

MOLLY. I'm trying to tell you. They've asked me to do ... something. Something more serious than anything I've ever done before and I will probably, most likely. I will definitely be arrested.

BILL. Now I know they put something in your Kool-Aid at that "retreat." I know this got to do with that priest, Daniel Berrigan.

MOLLY (*overlapping*). It wasn't just the retreat. I've been working for peace and social justice my whole life, Bill. And yes, Dan is an influence, but so is everything I've been learning and doing all these years. What do you think my work at the Thomas Merton Center has been about? The protests and marches and candlelight vigils and letters to the editor are not enough now. We're at a crossroads. And I have to decide. Am I going to passively accept the death this government is handing out—to me, to you, to our children—or am I going to resist? (*A beat.*) Don't look at me like that.

BILL. Like what?

MOLLY. Like, I'm off my rocker. I'm not crazy, Bill. Do I look crazy to you?

(She waits. He doesn't answer for a long moment, considering it.)

BILL. *I know* what mind control is, I been in the marines. First they separate you, then they tell you the same things over and over and over until you think like they want you to. I recognize this.

MOLLY. This will be my decision.

BILL. What's going to happen if you get arrested?

MOLLY. There will be a trial.

BILL. And then what?

MOLLY. I could go to jail. To prison.

BILL. This got nothing to do with first strike nuclear bombs. This is about our marriage.

MOLLY (*bursts out laughing*). This has nothing to do with our marriage, Bill—!

BILL (*overlapping*). It has everything to do with it.

MOLLY (*overlapping*). This is bigger than our marriage. Bigger than me and you, or what I want or what I would rather be doing—

BILL. But you can't tell me what it is?

MOLLY. I can't tell anyone.

BILL. This is about what it's always about, about my not being home every night. Whenever I have a game I hear the same thing, over and over and over—

MOLLY (*overlapping*). I don't need to go to prison because you've been playing softball for twenty years—

BILL. But don't I get to relax, after working all day? I come home, you're not here or you're on the phone till midnight or you're at some meeting, nobody knows anything about dinner. / I been putting up with this for years—

MOLLY (*overlapping*). I make dinner. Maybe it's not always on your time table, but these boys are fed and taken care of every night and I'm the one making sure their homework gets done.

BILL. You were just in Cleveland for the whole weekend who made dinner then—?

MOLLY. How many family dinners did you miss because you had a game?

(An old argument between them.)

MOLLY *(cont'd)*. When Greg was *born* you were at a double header, you came to the hospital when it was over. If you want to talk about our marriage, *let's talk about it*.

(Her "Irish" temper is up now, but she stops, takes a breath, gets back on point.)

MOLLY *(cont'd)*. What is a marriage, Bill? What do you think it is? Two people connected by love, yes, and family, but something else. *Purpose*. And we don't have that. We are like two parallel lines that move along the same track but never meet—because you will never meet me *where I am!* You can rant and rave and close your ears to the truth that I'm telling you, but that won't change where I am now.

BILL. Where are you—you're right here.

MOLLY. In twenty years, Greg will be thirty-two. He'll be a young man, with a young family. I don't believe he's going to have that future because I don't believe any of us will be alive.

BILL. All right, Molly! I get it! We gotta stop what we're doing before we blow ourselves up! But, why's it gotta be *you*?

MOLLY. *Because I know!* *(Quick beat.)* And because I love you. Because I love my family. Because I *love* this world, and if we cross the line, Bill, we won't be able to step back. It will all be gone forever.

(Silence, finally. Pause.)

BILL. Listen to me, Molly—

MOLLY. I'm listening to my conscience. And my conscience tells me not to act—would be a sin.

BILL. I don't know what kind of mumbo jumbo they're telling you in that prayer circle, but you're a married woman with kids still at home. No. Until you tell me what it is you're planning to do, I can't agree to this Molly.

MOLLY. I'm not asking for your permission, Bill. *(Beat.)* I'd like your blessing. But I'm not asking permission.

(An impasse. A tense pause.)

BILL. I gotta go to work. But we're not done here, Molly. We're not done.

(BILL gets his car keys ready to go to work and leaves MOLLY standing there—still holding the hammer. She wants to swing it at him, but of course, she doesn't. She watches him go. She goes back to finishing the dishes, drying and putting them away loudly through the following competing "narratives.")

BILL *(cont'd, getting into his car)*. She takes off on a Friday doesn't come home till Monday and I'm not supposed to ask questions. She got mysterious plans involving the government and I'm supposed to just nod my head. Yeah, well. There's no winning an argument with her once she thinks God is on her side, so I'll just go to work. *(Turning on ignition, backing up, driving.)* There's always been unanswered questions between her and me: whether our marriage was more important than some *cause*. Whether she made the right choice marrying me.

(MOLLY rolls her eyes at the audience.)

MOLLY. Bill always thinks it's about our marriage.

BILL. Maybe she wouldn't have married me if she had other options.

MOLLY. I'm more than just a wife and mother. I've always seen myself in the wider world.

BILL. Her old man drank away their money. The mother had enough to do putting up with him, now there was a saint. So that left Molly stuck at home wrangling her brothers and sisters.

MOLLY. I never minded taking care of my brothers and sisters. Since I was the oldest they looked at me like a second mother. But I was eighteen years old and I wanted my own life.

BILL. Then Molly won a full ride to Duquense University and I knew I had to work fast.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE 2

(MOLLY at the trolley stop. It's raining.)

BILL *(to MOLLY)*. Where's your umbrella?

MOLLY. Somebody else got it first.

BILL. Did your brother tell you I wanted to meet you?

MOLLY. Many times. *(Beat.)* Nice to meet you.

BILL. You like the movies?

MOLLY. I have a boyfriend. Didn't Jamesy tell you that?

BILL. He told me. You like John Wayne? Have you seen *The Quiet Man*?

MOLLY. Are you inviting me to the movies?

BILL. I don't like going to the movies by myself.

MOLLY. I'd rather see *Singing in the Rain*.

BILL. How about Saturday?

MOLLY. You're persistent I'll give you that.

BILL. I heard you won a scholarship to Duquesne. Your brother said you scored top three in the city.

MOLLY. Oh, he shouldn't have told you that.

BILL. Guess you must be pretty smart. Smart and pretty.

MOLLY. I've watched you flipping over the railing off your porch. You're gonna hurt yourself doing that.

BILL. Nah. I just got back from the Marines.

MOLLY. So I've heard.

BILL. I start at Connolly Vocational School for drafting in the fall. I'm going for a career building things. I could take care of you.

MOLLY. I've been taking care of myself and my brothers and sisters my whole life.

BILL. Don't you want to get married, have kids of your own?

MOLLY. Of course I do.

BILL. College might interfere with that—don't you think?

MOLLY. Oh, I'm not going to college. I need to work.

BILL. Hop in. I'll give you a ride to town.

MOLLY. The trolley will be here soon.

BILL. I thought you said you liked *Singing in the Rain*. Not standing in the rain.

(MOLLY cracks a smile. BILL laughs. MOLLY laughs.)

BILL *(cont'd)*. Come on, I'm going your way.

MOLLY. Oh, which way is that?

BILL. Wherever you tell me. That's where I'm going.