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Robinson Crusoe - The Original Classic Edition

Daniel Defoe

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People who have never actually read Daniel Defoes Robinson Crusoe often think of it as a childrens book. It is a tale, so they suppose, that belongs on the shelf upstairs in the playroom alongside Lassie, the Hardy Boys books, and Charlottes Web. But to discover the fallacy of this notion we need only sit down with a child and start trying to read the book. Reading Robinson Crusoe to a child usually turns out to be a different, somewhat less amiable adventure than telling the child about Robinson Crusoe in our own words. The child can eagerly attend to our retelling of the Crusoe story, relatively inept storytellers though we may be. The experiences of a man shipwrecked alone on a desert island-his initial fears, his efforts to escape, his struggle to secure food and shelter, his discovery of a footprint in the sand-all these things take powerful hold on a childs imagination. But if plunged into Defoes original narrative of Crusoes experiences, a child immediately senses that the waters of storytelling have suddenly gotten uncomfortably deep, that the exciting shallows of the story as Mom or Dad would tell it at bedtime have been left behind, that many things going on around the margins of the adventure story in Defoes book are not attractively adventurous. How can a person possibly wade through this strange book that pretends to be Robinson Crusoe? Some sort of incomprehensible adult trickery must be going on here.

Published in 1719, Robinson Crusoe is a novel for grown-up minds that has been kidnapped for, though obviously not by, the kids. In this respect its interestingly akin to another supposed childrens book that would be published midway into the next century, Lewis Carrolls Alices Adventures in Wonderland (1865).

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