

ROBINSON CRUSOE

Daniel Defoe

TIMELESS CLASSICS



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The Call of the Sea

I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York in northern England. My father was a wealthy merchant from Germany who had moved to England. His name was Kreutznaer. But because this name was too difficult to say in English, he changed it to Crusoe. After settling in York, he married my mother, the daughter of a very good family. When I was born, I was named Robinson, my mother's family name.

I had two older brothers and two sisters. One brother was an officer in the British Army. He was killed in a battle near Dunkirk in England's war against the Spanish. I never knew my other brother. Nobody in the family

seemed to know what had become of him. My father had always wanted me to become a lawyer. So he sent me to the finest schools. But I had my own ideas about how I wanted to live my life.

Ever since I was a young boy, I had been drawn to the sea. I used to enjoy sitting at the edge of the dock. There I would watch the tall sailing ships set out to sea. I would always wish that I could be going with them. I'd imagine that I was standing on board, waving to the people on the dock.

One day, when I was 18 years old, I dared to tell my parents about my longing for a life at sea. My father was very upset to hear this surprising news.

“You would be making a big mistake,” he said. He had a sad look in his eyes. “Think about all that you would be giving up. Here you can have whatever your heart desires. You don’t even have to work, if you would rather not. You have a family that loves you and a nice place to live. Who will look out for you at sea? You will be lonely so far from home. And life at sea is hard and dangerous. Think

about what I am saying, son. Life at sea is not for you!"

I listened politely to my father's words. Then I said to him, "Perhaps you are right, Father. I will try not to think any more about the sea." But I knew that going to sea was what my heart still desired most of all.

About a year later, I was visiting Hull. Since this city was a major seaport, I went down to the docks. As I walked along the waterfront, I ran into an old friend of mine. He told me he was sailing that day on his father's ship to London.

"Why don't you come with me?" asked my friend. "Do come! It will be great fun."

My heart beat faster at his words. Here was my chance to go to sea. I could think of nothing else. In an instant I decided to go with my friend. As we climbed aboard the ship, my heart was filled with a wild joy.

It was the first of September, 1651. I was on board a ship bound for London. Now I felt that my life was truly beginning. Since this was my first time at sea, I had no idea of what to expect. Otherwise I might have begun to

worry that the sky was growing black and the wind was kicking up.

No sooner did the ship sail out of the harbor and into the open sea than the wind began to howl. I stood on the deck as the sea began to rise. At first I enjoyed watching the waves and feeling the cold salty spray on my face. Soon, though, I began to feel sick because of the ship's rocking motion. As the ship tossed wildly about, I felt afraid for the first time. *Maybe my father was right. I should have stayed at home.*

The storm lasted for two days. I was seasick the whole time. But on the third day out, I walked up on deck. The sun shone in a clear blue sky. The sea was calm, its waves dancing in the sunlight. This was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen! Once again I heard the sea calling me.

A few days later the winds began to blow again. Soon another storm was upon us, worse than the last one. This time even the other sailors looked afraid. Huge waves washed over us. Then the mast snapped and crashed to the deck. Soon the hull sprang several leaks and



water came in faster than we could dump it out! The ship was clearly in danger of sinking.

The captain ordered all hands on deck. He fired a gun in the air to get the attention of another ship sailing close by. The sailors from the other ship helped get us off our ship and onto theirs. And not a moment too soon! Within 15 minutes our ship had sunk—without a trace of it remaining!

We were taken ashore at Yarmouth. Kind people in the town gave us places to spend the night. They also gave us enough money

to travel on to London or back to Hull. The next day, while walking in town, I ran into my friend and his father, the captain.

“Young man,” said the captain, “my son has told me all about you. Is it true that you sailed with us against your father’s wishes?” I said yes, and then explained that this was to have been only the first leg of the voyages I planned.

The captain grew angry. “Let this be a warning to you! Now you know what horrors can happen at sea! Maybe you brought us bad luck, and that’s why I lost my ship. Now, young man, don’t be a fool! Go back to your father! Listen to his wise advice. You were not meant to be a sailor. Do not go to sea again, or you will meet with nothing but disaster!”

In truth, I was torn about which way to go. I knew the wise thing would have been to return home. That would have kept me safe and made my parents happy. As it was, a good bit of time had gone by until my poor, worried father learned that I had not gone down with the ship.

But something kept me from going home. What I still wanted, most of all, was to go to sea—to see the world and to seek my fortune. Since I had some money in my pocket—and being young and foolish—I decided to travel on to London.

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Shipwrecked

When I arrived in London, I had second thoughts about what I was doing. A voice inside me was telling me to go back home. But I also kept hearing the sea calling to me. And there was something else: I was afraid that if I returned home, my family and the neighbors would laugh at me. Just thinking about them made me feel ashamed.

By chance, I met the captain of a trading ship that was going to Guinea, on the west coast of Africa. We soon became friends, and he invited me to sail with him to Africa. On his advice, I borrowed some money, about 40 pounds, from my relatives. I then bought various goods to trade in Africa.