



Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress (Immortal Classics)

Daniel Defoe

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Roxana (1724), Defoe's last and darkest novel, is the 'autobiography' of a courtesan who has traded her virtue, at first for survival, and later for fame and fortune. Its narrator tells the story of her own 'wicked' life as the mistress of rich and powerful men. A resourceful adventuress, she is also an unforgiving analyst of her own susceptibilities, who tells us of the price she pays for her successes. Equipped with many seductive skills, she is herself in turn seduced: by money, by dreams of rank, and by the illusion that she can escape her own past. Unlike Defoe's other penitent anti-heroes, however, she fails to triumph over these weaknesses. Roxana becomes pregnant many times due to her sexual exploits, and it is one of her children, Susan, who comes back to expose her, years later, helping to precipitate her flight abroad, subsequent loss of wealth, and repentance. Roxana's fame lies not only in the heroine's 'vast variety of fortunes', but in her attempts to understand the sometimes bitter lessons of her life as a 'Fortunate Mistress'. Defoe's achievement was to invent, in 'Roxana', a compelling storyteller as well as a compelling story.

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