

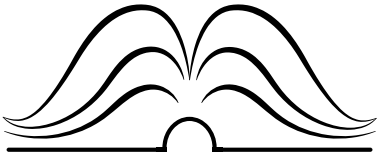
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Felicity Fair Thompson

Grandpa's Dear Old Girl

Illustrated by Carolyn Pavey



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For Felicity's darling granddaughter Imogen

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Grandpa's Dear Old Girl

'What will Grandpa do without his Dear Old Girl?' Millie whispered to her mum.

On the high end of the island on the chalk cliff was a tall round tower, the See-saw Lighthouse. It had been there



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for a hundred years. Millie's grandpa was the lighthouse keeper and he called the lighthouse his 'Dear Old Girl'.

The island men called him Big Frank and he was as tall and as strong as an oak tree.

But today the fishermen and the ferrymen were all arguing with him. 'It's more and more difficult to earn a living,' complained Travis, who owned two fishing boats. 'The fish are just not there.'

'Yes! We venture out further and stay out longer,' said Crimp, the skipper of another fishing boat.

Travis nodded. 'And we don't need a lighthouse keeper telling us not to. You're a good old chap, Big Frank, but we can take care of ourselves.'

'But who will keep watch in the Dear Old Girl?' asked Big Frank.

'Who will keep watch on the weather?' asked Millie.

'Your grandpa is behind the times, Millie,' said Fossy, the ferryman. 'We all talk to each other by radio, boat to boat.'

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‘And ship to shore,’ said another fisherman. ‘We have sonar and radar.’

‘Our boats have strong motors, don’t they, Crimp?’ said Travis.

Crimp nodded. ‘We can see any danger coming and we can sail fast. Even in big seas, we can take care of ourselves.’

‘Look!’ cried Fossy, pointing to the harbour entrance. ‘Here comes the official boat!’

Big Frank and Millie and Millie’s mum looked. The boat seemed very important, with two flags flying from the mast.

A young man climbed ashore. ‘This is Jack-o-the-lamp and he knows all there is to know about computers and modern technology,’ said Travis.

‘I’ve come to make your lighthouse automatic,’ Jack-o-the-lamp announced.

‘What? No lighthouse keeper?’ cried Big Frank.

Jack-o-the-lamp nodded. ‘No need! Now you won’t need to work nights anymore, old man. It’s quite time you retired.’

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Then he said, 'I might let you clean the glass windows now and then.'

'Is that all?' asked Millie, seeing how upset her grandpa was. 'Can't he live there anymore?'

'No, he can't,' said Jack. 'The lighthouse will look after itself now. Your old grandpa's days up there are over!'

'But what will Grandpa do?' Millie whispered to her mum.

'I don't know,' said her mum, looking very worried.

The fishermen saw all the new equipment being carried up the hill, and they slapped each other on the back.

'Now we won't need a lighthouse keeper,' Crimp said. 'What's Big Frank there for anyway? It's the light that guides us in. Hooray for Jack-o-the lamp!'

'I'll be back tomorrow to bring the rest,' Jack told Big Frank. 'Make sure your belongings are moved out.'

'Can I help you set the new equipment up?' asked Big Frank. 'Fifty years I've been there. I know how everything works.'

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‘You’d be in the way,’ said Jack. ‘Things are different now. New technology is far better than experience. Just be pleased you’re getting some time to yourself.’

But Big Frank wasn’t pleased. He loved that lighthouse and he spent all his time there. From the top of the tower, he could see everything for miles around.

He sat in Millie’s kitchen with a mug of tea. ‘What will I do without my Dear Old Girl?’ he said, with tears in his eyes. ‘I’ve been there, man and boy. She’s my home, she is.’

‘You can live with us,’ said Millie.

Millie’s mum nodded. ‘Yes! And maybe Jack is right. At your age you shouldn’t be doing so much.’

‘But who will notice if a boat gets into trouble?’ he said. ‘What if a bad storm comes now?’

Millie’s mum shook her head. ‘Those people don’t know how lucky they were having you to keep watch every night.’

Millie saw the lines on her grandpa’s face were much deeper than usual. He looked old and very tired. She took

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his hand. ‘No one knows as much about that lighthouse as you do, Grandpa,’ she said.

‘If it can work itself, it will be a wonder,’ said her grandpa. ‘But so long as it shines out its warning light—that’s what counts most when all’s said and done. And if they don’t need me, perhaps it’s better to get the lamp automated now while I’m still around to know what’s what.’

‘That’s right,’ said Millie’s mum.



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‘I wanted to be a lighthouse keeper,’ said Millie, sadly.

Big Frank looked at her. ‘Do you want to visit my Dear Old Girl before everything changes?’ he asked.

‘Oh yes, please!’ cried Millie.

Millie’s mum put her arms round Big Frank. ‘I remember, Dad, when I was Millie’s age and you showed me,’ she said, smiling. ‘And there never was a better lighthouse keeper!’

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