

The
CHILDREN'S
COMPANION
ANNUAL



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The Chivers Light

L. M. Montgomery

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"Jack," said William Haslit one morning, as they sat down to breakfast in the lighthouse, "your mother and I have had bad news. Word has just come that your Aunt Grace is very ill, and we must go at once. Most likely we shall not be back until to-morrow, if then, and we must leave you in charge. You must not leave the Chivers to-day, and be very careful about the light."

"But, father, the cycle races over at Southport!" exclaimed Jack. "I want to see them. There will be plenty of time to get back after they are over."

Haslit shook his head gravely. "I'm very sorry, my boy, but I can't let you go. The wind sometimes blows up so quickly in the afternoon that you might not be able to get back, and that would be a terrible thing. Vessels might be wrecked and lives lost; and at the best I should lose my job."

"But, father," pleaded Jack, "I'd be careful, and if I saw the least sign of a gale I'd start home at once."

"No, Jack, you mustn't go; I can't take the risk. I know what you are like too well. If you went over to Southport and got watching the races, a hurricane might come up without your noticing it. I don't like to disappoint you, as you well know, but it can't be helped, so don't let us hear anything more about it."

When his father spoke in that tone Jack knew it was no use to plead, but he felt that he was a very ill-used boy and ate his breakfast in sulky silence.

After breakfast Mr. and Mrs. Haslit started. They had to sail across to the mainland and take the train at St. Eleanor's. Chivers Island, on which the lighthouse was built, was a tiny bit of rock at the mouth of the harbour. The Haslits were the only people living on it, so it could not be called very lively. But it was within an hour's sail of Southport and St. Eleanor's and other villages, and Jack liked the life very well.

Haslit did not feel any anxiety at leaving Jack in sole charge. He had often done

so before. Jack was a tall, strong lad of fourteen and understood the lighting-up thoroughly. He did not mind being left alone, and was proud of the responsibility.

But to-day he was in a very different mood. He had set his heart on going to the cycle races over at Southport, and he thought his father very unreasonable.

"It's going to be a splendid day," he muttered, kicking a pebble angrily into the water as he watched his father's boat skimming over the bay. "Just a fine breeze for sailing! The races would be over by four, and I'd be back by five—three hours before dark. It's too bad."

The longer Jack thought about it the worse he was convinced it was. His chum, Oscar Norton, would be expecting him at Southport, and they had planned to have such a splendid time. The races would be the last of the season, and it was unjust and unkind of his father to forbid him to go.

The morning wore away slowly. Jack hadn't enough to do to keep him out of mischief. He got his dinner and then went down to the little point where his own pretty boat, "The Pearl," with her glistening white sides and new sail, was anchored.

It was a glorious day; a splendid breeze was blowing up the bay from just the right quarter; the sky was blue and clear; there was no sign of a storm. Jack came to a sudden conclusion. He would go to the races. His father need never know, and he would be back long before dark. In a few minutes "The Pearl's" white sails were filling merrily away before the breeze, and Chivers Island, with its huge white tower, was growing dim and misty behind her.

Jack reached Southport in an hour. Oscar Norton and several other boys whom Jack knew were at the wharf and greeted him hilariously. In a few minutes they were hurrying through the streets to the park, and Jack had forgotten all about Chivers Island and the lighthouse.

They were soon absorbed in the races. The bay could not be seen from the park, and so excited were they all that they did not notice how strongly the wind was blowing up. Jack, as his father had foretold, forgot everything he ought to have remembered, and thought of nothing but the track and the whirling figures on it.

At four o'clock the races were over and Oscar proposed a trip to a restaurant by way of a wind-up to the day. Jack had awakened to the fact that a stiff wind was blowing and that it might be wiser for him to hurry home. But the track was sheltered and he did not realise how much the gale had increased. The other boys assured him that there was plenty of time, and in the end he went with them, so that it was fully five o'clock before he and Oscar found themselves again at the wharf.

"Great Scott! Jack, you can't get home to-night," exclaimed Oscar, as they came in sight of the bay. "Why, I had no idea it was such a gale. It's a regular young

hurricane. Whew! Look at those waves!”

Jack looked about him in dismay. Far and wide the bay was an expanse of rough waves, and far out Chivers Island lighthouse loomed dimly through a haze of spray. Too late he wished that he had obeyed his father.

“I *must* get home!” he exclaimed desperately. “Why, Oscar, father and mother are away and there’s nobody to light up.” Oscar looked grave.

“I don’t see how you can get there, Jack. You can’t do it in your own boat, that is sure. She would swamp in a jiffy. What is to be done?”

“I’ll have to get some of the men here to take me over in a big boat,” said Jack. “There is no time to lose, either. Well, this scrape serves me right. If I get out of it I’ll mind what father says next time, you can be sure of that.”

But “getting out of it” was no easy matter. Not a man could Jack find willing to risk an attempt to reach Chivers in that storm. One and all shook their heads; and though they looked grave enough when Jack explained the state of affairs, they persisted in assuring him that the thing was impossible.



“THERE AIN’T A BOAT IN SOUTHPORT THAT WOULD TAKE YOU TO CHIVERS TO-NIGHT.”

“There ain’t a boat in Southport that would take you to Chivers to-night,” said old Sam Buxton, who knew the bay, if any one did; “nor a man rash enough to try it. You’ll just have to make up your mind to stay here.”

“But the light!” gasped Jack. “There is no one there to light up. Father’ll lose his place—and maybe there’ll be vessels wrecked!”

“You should have thought of that before you came away,” said old Sam, grimly.

“It’s a bad piece of business, but you can’t better it by drowning yourself. You can’t get home to-night, no matter what happens, and that is the long and short of it.”

Poor Jack was in a terrible state of mind. Oscar wanted him to go home with him, but Jack refused to leave the wharf, although he knew quite well that there was no likelihood of the storm abating that night. He was very miserable. If he had only obeyed his father! What if a vessel should be coming in, amid all that tempest and darkness, with no beacon to guide her! If lives were lost, he, Jack Haslit, would be a murderer!

The boys were cold and drenched with spray, but Jack was determined to stay at the shore; and Oscar stayed too, for he felt himself a little responsible for the state of affairs, since he had helped to delay Jack.

The night came down early. They knew when the sun set by the faint glow of light among the wind-rent clouds far out to sea. Suddenly Oscar gave a start of surprise and exclaimed:

“Jack, Jack, look! There’s Chivers light. It is all right, old fellow!”

Jack, who had been sitting with his face buried in his hands, sprang up; then he gave a gasp of joy and almost reeled against his friend, so great was his relief. For there, clear and bright across the harbour, through the stormy night, shone the beacon of Chivers Island lighthouse.

“Thank God!” Jack muttered, huskily. “Father must have got home after all.”

The appearance of the light was a great relief to many others along the shore, for the men had been very anxious. Jack consented to go home with Oscar, but he did not sleep much that night, and when he did it was to live over in dreams the horror of the last few hours. He was sure that never, as long as he lived, could he forget it.

It was the afternoon of the next day before the wind calmed enough to permit Jack to go home. Even then he had an exciting passage. As he drew near to Chivers a boy came running down from the lighthouse, and when Jack sprang ashore he saw that it was his cousin Alec, who lived at St. Eleanor’s.

“Where’s father? Isn’t he here?” he asked, as they shook hands.

“No. Where on earth have you been? Uncle John and Aunt May called at our place yesterday morning and said they were going to be away all night and you’d be here all alone, and wouldn’t I come over? So I sailed merrily over yesterday afternoon, and this is the first I see of you.”

“I went over to the races at Southport,” said Jack, shamefacedly. “I oughtn’t to have gone—father told me not to—but I was sure I’d get back in time. Then the storm came up and I couldn’t. I nearly went crazy. You don’t know how thankful I felt when I saw the light flash out! Did you light it?”

“Yes, I hung around waiting for you until it got too late to go home—and, anyway, I knew somebody ought to be here. When it got dark I managed to light up. I had seen Uncle John do it lots of times. Then I stayed up all night for fear something would go wrong. A nice, cheerful time I had, you may be sure, with the waves crashing out there and not a creature to speak to but the cat! Besides, I was afraid that you had tried to come home and had got drowned.”

“I’ve got off better than I deserved,” said Jack, humbly. “I’ll never do the like again, and I’m grateful to you beyond words, Alec.”

Jack’s father came home the next day. Jack did not try to hide the story from him, but confessed all frankly. Haslit did not scold him very much, for he knew the lad’s punishment had already been severe enough. All he said was:

“You see, my son, what your disobedience might have cost you and us. Let this be a lesson to you.”

“It will, indeed, father, I’m sure,” said Jack, earnestly.

And it was.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The Chivers Light* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]