

Grace Darling's Story (1815–1842)

Grace Darling was the daughter of William Darling, a lighthouse keeper. In those days most girls worked in the home, but Grace was unusual – when she grew up she worked with her father instead.

The family went to live in the Longstone Lighthouse, off the coast of Northumberland, and Grace helped her father guard and maintain the light. This was life-saving work, because the lighthouse watched over the treacherous Harcar Rock.

In darkness or sea fog, ships could easily run aground or be wrecked, but the warning light helped them to keep their bearings and avoid danger.

All the same, ships could be sent off course by powerful storms, and on 7 October 1838, the Forfarshire Steamship was flung against the rock.

Grace and William saw the disaster and realised there were survivors clinging to the wreckage. The rowing boat was a heavy one, designed to be used by three strong men, and Grace was a 22 year-old girl! Yet she and her father did not hesitate, and somehow they managed to fight their way through the wind and waves.

They rescued five men and carried them back to safety. Grace and her mother tended the injured, while William and two of the crew went back to save another four men.

When news reached the mainland, Grace Darling became a national hero. She won an award for her courage, and there was even a play written about her.

Sadly, she died only four years later – but her courage has never been forgotten, and her name can still be found in the history books.

Grace Darling:

The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter

A play about Grace Darling

Cast:

TV Announcer	Doctor Why	The Seagull Chorus
Mother Darling	Father Darling	Grace Darling
Whiskers the Cat	Aunty Mildred	The Sailors
Queen Victoria		

(Mildred, Victoria and Sailors also do sounds effects)

Props:

Table and two chairs for TV studio; Sonic Drill; a telescope; table and three chairs for lighthouse; frying pan; a cardboard fish; bowl for whiskers; one tiny table (at centre of circle); fake candle; beaks for seagulls; black cloth over upturned chairs (Harcar Rock); cardboard ship (on a stick); cardboard oars; blue sheet (the sea!); cardboard box (Aunty Mildred's parcel); a letter; a crown; a medal.

Sound effects:

'Time Travel' music; music for 'Humpty Dumpty' and 'Row Your Boat'; sea sounds; stormy sounds.

Setting:

TV studio (table and two chairs); lighthouse (table and three chairs); Harcar Rock.

(All chairs, tables and 'Harcar Rock' are set. Enter TV Announcer and Doctor Why.)

Announcer: Welcome back to our Time Travel TV Studio. Today, we are taking an astonishing trip through time with a real, live Time Baron! Good morning, Doctor... um...?

Doctor Why: I'm Doctor Why.

Announcer: Is that Y for Yo-yo? And Yeti? And Yum-Yum?

Doctor Why: No. It's W.H.Y for... *WHY* don't you ask me where we're going today?

Announcer: A good idea, Doctor Why... Where *ARE* we going today? Will we meet someone rich and royal and brave?

Doctor Why: You're ALMOST right. It's somebody brave, and we're travelling back to the year 1837.

Announcer: 1837! That's when Queen Victoria was crowned. Are we going to creep around a castle?

Doctor Why: No. And we won't be peeping at a palace either. We're going to see the sea and look at a lighthouse...
(Waves the Sonic Drill.)

(‘Time Travel’ music. Sea sounds. The Seagulls enter noisily and stand by the rocks.)

Announcer: So here we are, not far from the North Coast of England. This is the Longstone Lighthouse, and it watches over the Harcar Rock. *(Points at the tiny table, then at the Harcar Rock. These can be labelled.)*

Doctor Why: And here comes Mr Darling – the man who lights the lighthouse light. *(Mr Darling enters, wearing big wellies. He carries a telescope.)*

Announcer: Mr Darling? Are we going to meet Wendy and Peter Pan?

Doctor Why: No. We’re going to meet Mrs Darling, Grace Darling and Whiskers the Cat. *(They all enter. Mrs Darling carries a frying pan and a fish.)*

Grace: Good evening, Mother Darling. Good evening Father Darling. Good evening Whiskers, darling. *(She strokes the cat’s head.)*

Mr and Mrs Darling: Good evening, Grace Darling.

Grace: What’s for supper?

Whiskers: Mee-ow! I hope it's not fish again.

Mrs Darling: It's fish again. But first, your father must light the lighthouse light.

Mr Darling: Must I? *(They all nod.)* All right then. But I'll have to climb a hundred steps, you know.

(He crosses a circle, drawn AROUND the tiny table. While the Seagulls sing, he circles the tiny table THREE times – this is VERY hard work!)

Seagulls: *(Watching Mr Darling and singing to the tune of 'Humpty Dumpty'...)*
Father Darling, climb up the stair,
Trudge around and try to take care –
Try not to tumble or stumble or trip,
You MUST light the light and warn
the ship.

(On the tiny table is a fake candle. This should glow when it is lit. It could be built around a torch or a table lamp.)

Mr Darling: Ninety-nine. A hundred. *(He puffs and pants, then lights the candle.)*

Mrs Darling: Grace Darling – can you ask your father if he'd like his fish baked, boiled or battered?
(Puts fish in the frying pan.)

Whiskers: Mee-ow! He can have MY fish.

Grace: All right, Mother Darling. *(She crosses to the circle, and steps around THREE times while the Seagulls sing to the same tune as before...)*

Seagulls: Dear Grace Darling, climb up the stair,
Twist and turn until you are there,
Try not to trip on the hem of your gown,
You mustn't get dizzy;
you mustn't fall down.

Grace: Ninety-nine. A hundred. How would you like your fish?

Mr Darling: Fried. Would you like to look at the Harcar Rock?

Grace: Yes, please.
(She takes the telescope and looks.)
Oooh, I can see a ship.
(Gives the telescope back to Mr Darling.)

(A Seagull hides behind the Harcar Rock and holds up the cardboard ship.)

Mr Darling: You're right. It's the Forfarshire Steamship.

Grace: The Floor's-On Fire-Scream-Ship?
The For-Father-Steam-Fish?

Mr Darling: No. The For-Far-Shire Steamship. And she's steaming away safely. Let's have supper.
(They follow the circle THREE times.)

- Seagulls:** *(The ship bobs away. The Seagulls sing as before...)*
Grace and Father, race down the stair,
Hurry, scurry, till you are there,
Guess what's for supper and
guess what's for tea...
It's sure to be fish when you live by the sea.
- Grace and Mr Darling:** Ninety-nine. A hundred.
What sort of fish is it?
- Mrs Darling:** I'm afraid it's herring.
- Whiskers:** I'm afraid it's boring.
- Mr Darling:** *(As a splashing sound is heard.)*
What's that splashing sound?
- A Sailor:** *(Shouting off stage.)*
Ahoy there! It's the supply boat.
Anyone at home?
- All:** Yes! Yes! Yes! Mee-ow! Squawk!
- Sailor:** Stand back! Here it comes! *(A parcel lands on stage.)*
- All:** Hooray! It's our supplies. Thank you,
supply boat. *(They all wave.)*
- Grace:** *(As splashing sounds fade away.)*
What's inside our parcel?

Whiskers: Mee-ow! I hope there's a mouse for me.

Mrs Darling: *(Peering inside.)* Flour, porridge, more flour, more porridge, socks, AND...

Whiskers: A really BIG mouse? Mee-ow?

Mrs Darling: No. It's a letter. *(Takes out a large letter and unfolds it.)* It's from Aunty Mildred.

Whiskers: *(Crossly.)* I'm off to annoy the seagulls. *(Turns her back and looks at the Seagulls, who flap their wings at her.)*

Grace: What does Aunty Mildred say?

Mrs Darling: *(She starts to read.)* My dear Darlings. I hope you are all well...

(Aunty Mildred enters and takes the letter. She reads it gloomily...)

Aunty Mildred: I don't have much to tell you...
Uncle Horace has hay fever.
Cousin Maurice has measles. Poor little Boris has a blister, and Doris the Dog has a dry nose.

Grace: Oh dear. Isn't there any good news?
(The Seagulls squawk.)

Aunty Mildred: P.S. We've just heard some GOOD news. There's a new Queen! Her name is Victoria and she's only 18. Must stop now – all this happiness has given me a headache. Lots of Love, Aunty Mildred.

(Mildred gives the letter back, and exits gloomily. Mrs Darling puts the letter in the box.)

Grace: *(Dreamily.)* Queen Victoria! Everyone will love her, and her name will be in all the history books. But I don't think anyone will remember MY name.

(The three Darlings sit down and pretend to eat their supper. The Seagulls fall asleep.)

Announcer: Poor Grace. It must have been boring, living in a lighthouse.

Whiskers: Very boring. Mee-ow!

Announcer: Didn't anything interesting EVER happen to her?

Dr Why: Well, MOST days were the same as all the others...

(The Seagulls squawk. The Darlings stand up. Everyone speaks and acts QUICKLY.)

Grace: Good evening Mother Darling. Good evening Father Darling. Good evening Whiskers, darling. *(Strokes the cat.)*

Mrs Darling: Good evening, Grace Darling.

Mr Darling: I must make sure the lighthouse is alight. *(He races round the circle, while the Seagulls sing HIS 'Humpty Dumpty' song.)*

- Mrs Darling:** Ask your father if he'd like his fish baked, boiled or battered.
- Grace:** All right. *(She follows her father while the Seagulls sing HER 'Humpty Dumpty' song.)* Ninety-nine. A hundred. How would you like your fish?
- Mr Darling:** Fried. Let's look at the Harcar Rock... *(He looks through his telescope. A seagull hides behind the rock and holds up the ship. Everyone acts at NORMAL speed.)*
- Dr Why:** But in 1838 a dreadful storm began... *(Stormy sounds are heard.)*
- Grace:** *(Rocking on her feet.)* A dreadful storm has begun.
- Mr Darling:** And there's the Forfarshire Steamship! Oh no! It's heading for the Harcar Rock. *(The ship wobbles.)*
- Grace:** The For-Far-Shire Steamship? It'll be wrecked on the rock! *(The ship wobbles more and starts to sink.)*
- Mr Darling:** It's been wrecked on the rock! There are sailors in the sea!

Grace: We must row to the rescue... *(They both start to run in circles.)*

(As Grace and Mr Darling puff and pant, the Sailors enter and cling to the Harcar Rock. Meanwhile, four Seagulls flap away and return with two oars and a blue sheet.)

Mr Darling: *(To Mrs Darling.)* We must row to the rocks! *(Takes an oar.)*

Grace: Save the sailors from the sea!
(Takes an oar.)

Mrs Darling: But there's only TWO of you – and the rowing boat needs THREE!

Doctor Why: Grace knew she was risking her life – but she wouldn't turn back.

(Two Seagulls shake the sheet to make waves in front of Grace and Mr Darling, who start rowing BACKWARDS to the Harcar Rock. Mrs Darling and Whiskers watch and WORRY.)

Seagulls: *(Singing to the tune of 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat' – crocodile version!)*

Row, row, row your boat –
Look for lives to save,
Heave and ho – And off you go...
Just because you're brave.

Sailors: Is anyone there? Help! Help!
(Shouting over the storm.)

- Announcer:** *(Shouting.)* Did they reach the For-Far-Shire Steamship in time?
- Dr Why:** *(Shouting.)* The ship was lost – but the men were clinging to the rocks.
- Sailor 1:** We're stranded! *(All the Sailors shout over the storm...)*
- Sailor 2:** We're squelchy!
- Sailor 3:** We're scared!
- Sailors 4 and 5:** *(Pointing at Grace and Mr Darling.)*
We're SAVED!
- Mr Darling:** Who wants a trip to the lighthouse?
(He and Grace turn around!)
- Sailors:** *(Jumping behind the blue sheet.)*
ME! ME!
- Seagulls:** Row, row, row your boat –
Cross the stormy sea,
Soon you'll reach –
The stony beach,
Just in time for tea.
- (Grace and Mr Darling row. The Sailors peep over the sheet. After the song, the Seagulls can remove the sheet and oars, then flap back. Mrs Darling and Whiskers greet everyone.)*
- Sailors:** *(As the storm stops.)* You risked your lives to save us.

- Grace:** Of course we did. We couldn't let you drown.
- Sailors:** *(Looking at Grace and gasping.)*
But... you're a GIRL!!
- Mrs Darling:** She's a very BRAVE girl. Now – who wants a lovely boiled fish?
- Everyone:** Errrrgh! *(This includes Whiskers – but the Seagulls look quite keen!)*
- Announcer:** Grace and her father were heroes. It's a pity no one knew about it.
- Dr Why:** Don't worry – when the men reached home, they told EVERYONE.
- Sailors:** *(They can share out the lines.)*
The rain, it rained.
The storm it blew.
The ship went down with all her crew.
We reached the rock.
We clung on tight.
A boat rowed through the stormy night.
One girl, one man – they heard our call.
One man, one girl – they saved us all.

(Queen Victoria enters, carrying a large medal.)

- Queen Victoria:** A splendid girl! Who can she be?
(Aunty Mildred enters.)
- Aunty Mildred:** *(Pointing proudly at Grace.)* Our
Grace Darling. Star of the Sea!
- Queen Victoria:** Grace Darling? What a DARLING
name! *(Grace steps forward.)* You've
earned your medal – AND your
FAME! *(Gives Grace her medal.)*
- Dr Why:** So you see, Grace – your name
WILL be remembered after all...
- All:** *(Singing.)*
Grace, you rowed your boat –
Saved the squelchy crew,
One day we – Would like to be
Just as brave as YOU.

*(All applaud Grace and bow. Then exit 'rowing' BACKWARDS
and singing the final chorus.)*

The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter

Darling Grace Darling,
You lived on a rock,
You worked with your father
And wore a long frock.

Darling Grace Darling,
You tended the light,
You witnessed disaster
One dark, stormy night.

Darling Grace Darling,
You heaved on your oars,
You rescued the sailors
To cheers and applause.

Darling Grace Darling,
You won lasting fame,
You earned it with skill
And a rather cool name!

By Clare Bevan