

'Rip Deep'

Synopsis:

HIGH ON MORTON'S POINT HEADLAND, battered by turbulent seas and heavy winds, stands a WHITE LIGHTHOUSE. Like a distant sentinel, it guards over the souls of those who dare bring their huge seafaring vessels through THE RIP - the MOST DANGEROUS PORT ENTRY in the Southern Hemisphere.

Inside the Lighthouse state-the-art METEOROLOGICAL AND NAVIGATIONAL EQUIPMENT constantly monitors the weather and tracks all ships entering and leaving AUSTRALIA'S PORT PHILLIP BAY MELBOURNE.

AT THE HELM IS HENRY WITTON - THE LIGHT KEEPER. The man who knows, through all weather, foul or fair, just how each vessel needs to approach and leave THE RIP if it is to escape undamaged. Professionally, Henry Witton is known as a man who remains calm and thinks with a sharp mind, no matter what. To those on the sea, Henry Witton is the voice that returns them home to their families.

Privately, HENRY KEEPS TO HIMSELF. The only familiar faces in his life being the striking, yet DARK AND MOURNFUL IMAGES he captures on canvass. The faces of yesteryear's merchant seamen. The men who survived the tyranny of a transatlantic crossing only to be SHIP WRECKED in THE RIP - the narrow stretch of water between the headlands outside Melbourne's Port Philip Bay.

TWO EVENTS CHANGE HENRY WITTON'S LIFE FOREVER - a letter from the Sea Board informing him of his RETIREMENT, and an offer from an ART DEALER, who wants to buy his complete collection of mournful paintings.

Retirement means NO MORE LIGHTHOUSE, NO MORE COTTAGE - after spending 30 years as The Light Keeper. THE OUTSIDE WORLD IS RUSHING IN TO GET HENRY, like the relentless, angry sea that floods a sinking ship.

LOUISE BEAR is the young and attractive. She owns the local Art Gallery. Henry has entrusted her with his collection of paintings. Louise, however, is tied up with RONNIE - a slick, sophisticated art dealer from Melbourne. Ronnie wants to buy Henry's entire collection, but for a price. Louise is torn between serving both their interests.

NUMB with the thought of retirement, Henry's emotions clings desperately to his paintings. Who will be looking at them? Where will they hang? Is there too much of him in them to sell? The hand of death took his wife. Will fate now separate him from his paintings? They are his past. They are him. Henry wants to keep them all. But the wheels are already in motion. Is it too late?

As Henry struggles with the question, *'Who am I if I'm not The Light Keeper?'* LOTTIE, Henry's house cleaner, sets her sights on rescuing him from his loneliness. She has marriage in her sights. But Lottie is a religious woman with an over zealous desire to serve God. Her world consists of distorted perceptions about morality and living a good Christian life. Lottie cooks and cleans obsessively. She even preens herself in an effort to win Henry's heart, but to Henry, Lottie will always be just Lottie.

It's not long before Lottie realises she is losing Henry to MATTIE MAY. Lottie's actions are soon driven by jealousy. The WARNING SIGNS are there for those who know.

MATTIE MAY is a free spirited woman who loves life. She has spent the best part of her youth working at the local fish canning factory. She is notorious for driving the 'FishVan' as if there is no tomorrow. She is often the talking point for the locals.

At first Mattie May is oblivious to Henry's attempts to reach out to her. She has resigned herself to the fact she is going to be unfortunate enough to live out the rest of her life with her brother, BERT, but fortunate enough to have someone who cares for her.

A NEAR FATAL, yet comical ACCIDENT brings Mattie and Henry together. In Mattie's eyes Henry sees his wife, and in Mattie's voice he hears her words. But the REPERCUSSIONS of their ROMANCE will be bigger than either of them can even begin to understand.

BERT, Mattie's brother, wants to buy the local dredging business. Will he cut Mattie May loose to follow her heart to be with Henry, or is Mattie Bert's anchor? Will Lottie sit tight and risk losing Henry?

TRAGEDY STRIKES in three short, sharp, blows.

Louise, the art dealer, is involved in a HORRIFIC COLLISION with a petrol tanker while transporting Henry's paintings to Ronnie in Melbourne. WHOOF. The spilt PETROL IGNITES. Henry's paintings blister in the heat, burst into flames, and burn up in the ROADSIDE INFERNO.

Henry collects the paper one morning and reads: 'LOCAL CHRISTIAN SUICIDES'. He realises it's Lottie, but why? Was it because of him?

Then, on the 99th step of the Lighthouse, while racing to answer the two-way radio, the RAZOR SHARP CLAWS of DEATH GRAB at Henry's heart and twist it. HENRY COLLAPSES, UNCONSCIOUS, days before he is due to retire.

Help arrives, but who made the call? Mattie May. Henry himself, or the Russian Captain Antonia Ekanomov? No one is prepared for the surprise she has in store.

As the ambulance pulls away from The Lighthouse the sun catches its lens. It seems to wink.

Henry is going to live, but in the following episodes life will be without The Lighthouse. At 65 years of age, HENRY WILL HAVE TO LEARN TO LIVE AND LOVE all over again...

...but perhaps there will be a guiding light in Henry Witton's life, after all.

THE END