

HERRING COVE

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FISHING VILLAGE

It is night, a velvet-black, coal-black, ink-black night that settles over the little fishing village of Herring Cove like a shroud. All the sleepy little cottages along Quay Row, Fisherman's Walk, Mariners Lane, even the dignified, spit polished clean sedate houses in Bay View Grove, are all covered in its dark embrace. In the little harbour the Ocean Racer, the Westerly Breeze, the Cormorant, the Wave Dancer, the Sally Anne and the Able Seaman all bob and bow to each other as though still taking part in some long forgotten ancient ritual.

The whole village is quiet, as quiet as the grave, as quiet as the ghost tip-toeing around the bones of the dear departed, as silent as the mice running around Frank Dunkens bakery. Even the giant ocean waves lashing up against the fishing boats and the harbour wall, or rolling onto the sandy beach, seem to be restraining themselves from making too much noise. While in the air the few solitary gulls were flying through the inky-black sky, were silent out of respect for the sleeping mortals below. Whereas in the daylight they and their mates scream, screech and squawk as they circle the fishing boats, waiting for some morsel of scrap to be tossed over the side.

The whole village dreams while young boy's dream of slaying dragons, young girl's dream of tall broad shouldered hansom lovers, and old folk dream of days long ago when they had the energy to love. In Custom House, Captain William Hardacer, Harbour Master, who's only experience of going to sea was in the little pleasure boats when he was on seaside holidays with his parents, dreams of catching smugglers. In his Technicolor dream he sees himself boarding a vessel new to his harbour, and on board he finds cases and cases of whisky and brandy, and cartons of cigarettes. And there is the Lord Lieutenant of the County, all dressed up in tricorne hat and breeches, giving him an award for catching the biggest haul of contraband the county, nay the country had ever seen, and Captain Hardacer smiles in his deep contented bream.

At number 3 Quay Row, Ben Chambers dreams of his days sailing the seas and oceans of the world, the exotic lands and the gorgeous girls of the night, ivory and golden skinned lovely's who had the skills and ability to send a man to the highest peaks of ecstasy and satisfaction. Pale skinned, slant eyed oriental dolls that could, with their hands alone, bring a man's passion to a fever pitch of excitement. Now, his body riddled with disease, and a never ending pain in his groin, he is spending his last days as skipper of the fishing boat Wave Dancer. Across the Row at number six, the fisherman brothers, Paul and David Tipping dream their separate dreams in their separate dream beds in their Mother's squeaky clean house. In his deep sleep, Paul dreams of becoming a world class footballer. In his dream he can see himself playing for his local team, Herring Bay Squibs, and is spotted by a scout from a top international club. And there he is, signing a contract worth a King's ransom also the big house and flash car, and the never ending supply of willing girls. David in his dream bed is dreaming of owning the biggest fishing boat in Herring Cove, it will be so successful that he will buy another, then another until he has a whole fleet of fishing boats going out to brave the wind and waves while he sits in a warm office counting the money. Along at number eleven, Jed Simpson, a crew member of the Sally Anne, is dreaming of big buxom, red lipped, peroxide Betty Ward, widow and scarlet women of the village.

In his happy dream he is walking along the beach hand in hand with Betty, talking of love and passion, at the end of the beach they turn to walk back, and there, coming towards them at the speed of an express train, eyes blazing, teeth glinting, claws reaching out, is Jed's wife. Just as she is about to attack him, he wakes with a start and in a cold sweat, and his wife nags him for disturbing her sleep. At number four Fisherman's Walk, Police Constable Jack Chapman is having a nightmare, in it he has been taken from his leisurely duties in the seaside village and posted back to the big City, where the Sergeant and Inspector are constantly breathing down his neck, and longing to be back in the little village where he has so little to do he has to invent things to make it look as though he is always busy. Next door, Peter Owen, the skipper of the Sally Anne, is dreaming of retiring and moving to Spain. He and his wife, Pearl, have only been abroad once in their lives and that was to Albia on the Costa Blanca, and he loved the long, wide, soft sandy beaches and the warm sea so much that he decided that was where he wanted to spend the last years of his life. Pearl though, hated the place, the people, and the hot climate. She was born in the village and lived there all her life, so she knew everybody, and their business, and just hated being away, even for a short time as she missed all that was going on while she was away.

In number nine Fisherman's Walk, 17 year old Jean Gough does not sleep. For the hundredth time she goes over in her mind what happened to her as she walked home from work. How could she let it happen, why didn't she scream, shout, fight back, again she retraces the events. She gets off the bus after finishing her work in a Lady's dress shop in Hyebury, and as she starts to walk home she meets Mat Pike, all six feet three of him in his seaman's jumper and boots. He starts to talk to her and make her laugh and still gently talking and making her giggle, he leads her into Victoria Park and among the bushes. And while still chatting away and making her laugh, he invades her most privet

of private parts. Why, oh why, did she allow it to happen, fool, idiot she tells herself, as she clenches her fists and bangs the bed? Then she runs her hands over her tummy, to see if there is any change. In Maritime Lane, sleeping in the bedroom over his bakers shop, Frank Dunken dreams of owning a bakery in every town in the County. AH Dunkens bakeries would produce their own bread and confectionery, and he would spend his days going round his shops to make sure they keep up the high standards he required. Sleeping next to him his plump wife Margaret, dreams a different kind of dream.

Jean knows that since the grocers shop next door started to sell cut bread and factory produced cakes, their sales have gone down. Frank keeps saying that quality will always sell, but Margaret knows that when times are hard, and they often are in the fishing industry, housewives will save as much money as they can, and that is what is disturbing her. Next door, Harry Lewis, the grocer, is dreaming of transforming his shop into a gleaming chrome showpiece. He can see all the bright, shiny show cases and shelves with their packets of cereals and tins of soup and fish all lined up like guardsmen. And he is standing in the middle of his shop like some potentate. His wife, Alice is sleeping and dreaming next to him. But she is dreaming of getting elected onto the Parish Council, and ousting that terrible loud mouth Mrs Tibbs, who is always causing so much disruption.

Right opposite is the grocers is the Ocean Cafe in the back bedroom its owner, Maureen Needham, 56 year old spinster of the Parish, is having troubled dreams. To keep her cafe open during the quiet winter months, the summer trade has to be very good. Unfortunately, the last three or four summers have been rather poor, so if there is no improvement this summer, she may have close for the winter, and that will disappoint the few villagers that come in every day for a cooked meal. Conveniently placed between the cafe and the Anchor Inn, lives Henry "Stinker" Sullivan, he spends the night sitting, as he has done for the last two years, in his urine soaked chair, not sleeping, but in a deep, alcohol induced unconsciousness. At number 11, Jeff Nokes, skipper of the Able Seaman, is dreaming of retiring, he has been doing a job that was forced on him by his mother when he left school. His father and his grandfather owned the boat and he was expected to follow in their footsteps and take over; the fact that he wanted to follow another occupation and had no interest in fishing, made no difference to his mother, "you will follow your father and take over the boat, there's a good business waiting for you. I don't want to hear anymore of this other nonsense she said to him."

Along superior Bay View Grove, at number 3, Anne Robinson, whose husband is a Ophthalmic Practitioner in Hyebury, dreams of the forthcoming annual Summer Festival in Herring Cove. As Chairperson of the Parish Council, she is determined to make it the best ever. Already she has engaged some top celebrities to make an appearance; also success will help her to be re-elected to the Chair, keeping that awful, domineering Mrs Tibbs from taking control of the Council.

At number 8, Martin Mercier, the Headmaster of the village school, dreams of his time as head of a private school that had to close as the cost of sending children there became too exorbitant. The sad thing about the closer was that the school was doing so well, with students embodied with their parents drive for success. Now, he is in charge of a school with only two teaching staff and attended by children that were no way ambitious. At the end of the Grove, the Reverend Gabriele Read sleeps in his lonely bed, dreaming of his times in big Churches. The large congregations, all the various groups, fellowships, the activities involving the young and the old, the easy to manipulate little choirboys he was so fond of. Now he has a church that has such a small congregation that his only Holy Service is on a Sunday evening.

The whole village sleeps and dreams. But look to the East, the sky is getting brighter, and slowly the light of a new day forces the dark, evil night to retreat. Frank Dunken is already at work in his bakery, the oven is fired up and the first dough is made and proving. While this is happening, Frank goes back into the house and puts the kettle on and gets his breakfast. Outside there is the soft tread of seaman's boots as the men make their way to the harbour. As the crews get the boats ready for sea, the skippers stand on the Quay side, watching the waves, studying the clouds and sniffing the wind. "Rain before long" remarks Jeff Nokes, skipper of the Able Seaman. "Aye" replied Peter Owens, skipper of the Wave Dancer, "and the wind is getting stronger." "Then we best get out there so we can get as much time in before it gets too rough" asserts Bert Ingham, skipper of the Cormorant. Soon, lead by the Sally Anne, all the boats leave for their fishing grounds.

Having finished his breakfast, Frank makes a fresh cup of tea and takes it up to his wife Margaret, then returns to the bake house, where Dave Stolly his employee is already making a start on the dough, so starts another long days work. Grocer Harry Lewis is up and got the kettle on, while it is heating up he walks into his shop and takes in the bread and milk that has been left on his doorstep. After closing the door he surveys his shop, seeing all the dark wooden panelling and shelves and warm cabinets, and contrasts them with his dream during the night, sighs, and goes through to make his tea.

PC Jack, as everybody in the village calls him, does not need to get up early. Although he is technically on duty 24 hrs a day, he can please himself when he goes out to patrol the village. In the summer, he is out more often than he is at

home, he is out early in the morning to keep an eye on those holiday makers that have slept rough, and he is always around when the Anchor Inn turns out at night. But this time of year, early spring, there is not much for him to do, so he takes a leisurely breakfast and reads the paper before setting out to stroll round the village.

Martin Mercier leaves his home early to walk to the school; not only is he headmaster, he is also the caretaker as well, so he has to be at school early to open the gates ready for Mrs Ada Weston, the cleaner, to start her work. Leaving her to do her work, he returns home for breakfast then returns to school just before nine to meet his two teachers, Elizabeth Yates, who takes the five to seven year olds, and Lynn Johnson, who is teaching the eight to eleven year old children, Martin has the thankless task of trying to coach some extra knowledge into the unreceptive minds of the twelve to sixteen's before they leave school.

In the baker shop the fresh bread is on the shelves and the buns, scones, and cakes are on display; Margaret opens the shop and sweeps the front, just as Alice Lewis is sweeping hers, they stop to chat. As they are doing so. Maureen makes her daily trip across the street to collect her milk and bread for her cafe and she is the first to tell them of a story she has heard that a Super Market chain is going to build a store in a field at the end of the village. Maureen and Alice exchange glances, "That's the first I've heard of it and none of my suppliers have said anything, and they are always the first to know" declared Alice; Maureen said, I know nothing about it, and I don't think there will be enough trade for them in the village, and there is no other town nearer than Hyebury, and that's too far away for people to travel and in my opinion, these big stores are killing the small businesses. I hope it all come to nothing, said Margaret.

The whole village is getting settled into its daily toil; Captain Hardacer is back in Custom House after his daily walk to see if the sea is still there. Anne Robinson is busy organising arrangements for her forthcoming Festival, and the Rev Read is ready to face another long boring day. He has already said his morning prayer thanking the Lord for seeing the village through the dark night, he makes his usual walk down to his little church on entering the building, he walks down the aisle and climbs the three steps up into the Pulpit, and surveys the empty pews; there is no Mothers Union, no men's Fellowships, no Scouts or Guides, no youth clubs for him to be involved in and occupy his thoughts, although he has tried many times to initiate them, but without any success. On a good Sunday night there might be twelve people in the church to hear him preach; the only time there is a good congregation is at Harvest Festival, and then the church reeks of fish for days afterwards.

PC Jack is out and about in the village; luckily he is blessed with an ability they do not teach at Police Training College, the art of chatting and gossiping, which helps him through the day. While passing the time of day with Mrs Hawkins one of the fishermen wives, Mrs Dorkins comes up to complain about her neighbour's dog that had been barking most of the night, stopping her from sleeping. PC Jack promises to have a word with the neighbour, a Mrs Martin. When he had finished chatting, he moves along the lane to Lilly and Bob Knowles greengrocers shop; they tell him of the rumour about the Super Market, he tells them that he knows nothing and as far as he knows the County Council have not made any announcement of receiving planning applications for one. After chatting to them for a few minutes, Jack goes into the Ocean Cafe for a cup of tea and there meets Mrs Martin and asks her to keep her dog indoors at night, only to be told it normally is, but last night it stayed out for some reason, it's barking did wake her up so she got out of bed and let him in, and he could not have been barking for long.

Harry "Stinker" Sullivan regains consciousness not knowing what day or time it is, he blindly staggers into the kitchen, takes his stinking clothes off and leaves them on the floor. Running some water into the deep Butler sink he washes and then in his own fashion, he refills the sink and put his dirty clothes in to soak. Harry puts on a clean set of clothes that are on a chair next to the sink. These clothes are put there by his neighbour, Mrs Edna Turner, not out of kindness to "Stinker", but to fulfil a pledge she made to her sister Betty, who suffered thirty years of misery married to him, that she would keep an eye on him. "Stinker's" only work was to pick out which horse would be first passed the post at Goodwood or Newmarket and other such places, but he was always wrong. Just washing his clothes was all Edna was prepared to do, she would not even put an iron them, it was her way of paying him back for all the years of unhappiness he caused Betty. After he is dressed "Stinker" finds his way into the Ocean Cafe walks through to a covered patio where he sits in all weathers and eats his only meal of the day, bacon, sausages, beans, egg and tomato's and two slices of bread. Having eaten, he stagger along to the Anchor Inn, goes straight to a seat in the corner of the bar, and there on the table, is his first pint of strong ale of the day, and there he will stay until Reg the barman throws him out at closing time.

In the school the headmaster and his two teachers are having their coffee break, while in the playground the children enjoy a little time to play and get rid of some of their pent up energy. Elizabeth Yates is saying how well PC Jack's daughter Lucy is doing, and Lynn Johnson is also praising Jack's son James for his work in the class. This news is pleasing to the head because it will probably mean that for the first time since he has been head, the school will be sending two of its pupils to High School. PC Jack continues to stroll around the village; he came across the wife of one of the fishermen Mrs Ivy Baxter, being lectured by Mrs Tibbs on how the Parish Council will be run when she is

elected to the Chair. Jack stops, knowing that Ivy was not a member of the council, he tries to change the subject, though Mrs Tibbs berates him on a trivial matter, and then she goes on to talk about holding a forth Summer Festival, predicting it would be a flop, but when she gets to organise the event it will be the best ever. Ivy and Jack exchange glances, and Jack thinks to himself that she will be lucky to retain her seat, never mind holding the chair.

The Rev Read is visiting old Mrs Lewson, the oldest villager, calling on her and other old folk helps him to fill his day and gives him some satisfaction in doing little jobs for them. In the Ocean Cafe, Maureen Needham is busy preparing for lunch time; as it is out of season, it will be the same people who come in every day, PC Jack and his wife Molly, Mrs Barbara Stephens, Mrs Meg Hows, Doris Brown, old Jack Guthrie a widower from the greengrocers, then Bob Knowles and the Ward sisters. All knowing they will get a good, well cooked meal. Mrs Anne Robinson is taking an opportunity to persuade Alice Lewis to stand for the Parish Council at the next election, thereby ousting that horrible loudmouth Mrs Tibbs. Alice is not too sure of her chances, but Anne assures her that everybody wants the trouble maker out.

The afternoon quickly advances; Frank Moor has finished working in his bakery and given it a good clean ready for the next day. School has finished and the children are slowly making their way home and Martin Mercier is doing his caretaking part in making sure the school is all locked and secure.

At sea, the weather is getting worse, the wind is blowing hard and the waves are getting higher. The fishing boats scattered over a wide area of the sea, all act as though they have received an unseen signal, they all start to haul in their nets and turn for home all at the same time. As the skippers pilot the boats back to harbour, the crews are busy packing the fish into boxes ready for unloading. Peter Owens is disappointed in his catch; if the fishing does not improve it will be good-bye to Spain. As the boats enter the safe water of the harbour they see the refrigerated lorries waiting to take their catch to the markets, so after tying up, the crews start to unload their boxes.

It is late afternoon and the village is winding down, Bob and Lily Knowles are packing away their vegetables; Harry and Alice are getting ready to close their shop. PC Jack has made his last walk round the village and is back at home; in the summer, when there are more people about, he is out doing evening patrols. Jean Gough gets off the bus from Hyebury and starts to walk home, on the way she sees Mat Pike and crosses the road and turns her head away so she does not see the smirk on his face. Captain Hardacer has made his last tour of the harbour to make sure all the fishing boats and other craft are moored securely.

The day gradually gives way to the gloomy night. The centre of activity is the Anchor Inn. Harry Lewis and Bob Knowles are chatting over a pint; they are joined by most of the skippers and crews of the fishing boats, and all ignore old "Stinker" sitting in his corner getting drunk. The topic of conversation is the dwindling catches that have been steadily falling over the years, nobody had the answer, only opinions about how to reverse the trend. What is certain is that the whole village will go into decline if fishing stops. In the living room behind the bakers shop Frank has finished his book keeping, and he is talking to his wife Margaret about the possibility of opening another shop; they are both well aware that the future of the village is uncertain, so would another shop help if times got hard, but would it be too risky?

Anne Robinson is chairing the monthly Parish Council meeting; she is doing her best to keep Mrs Tibbs from upsetting the members. Whenever a suggestion is made or some point of order was raised, Mrs Tibbs shouts her down and criticises everything, saying that if they all listened to her the Council would be run smoothly. Anne is certain she is unbalanced and the sooner she is off the Council the better.

The Rev Gabriel Read sits alone in his study trying to think of some new way to present his next sermon so it will be more interesting to his small congregation, although it will be like preaching to the dead. Paul Tipping has finished his football training with the village team and goes with them to the Anchor for a refreshing pint, his brother David is busy courting Peter Owens daughter, Brenda, in the wood at the edge of the village, he tells her about his dream of becoming a successful business man with a large fleet of fishing boats all working out of the harbour, although they both know how unlikely that will be. Martin Mercier writes for the hundredth time to the local Education Authority about the under staffing at his school, knowing he will get the same answer back saying that there are not enough pupils in the school to justify more staff. As he seals the envelop he tells his wife that if help is refused again, he will be asked to be sent to another school. This does not please Mrs Mercier as she has grown to like the village and the people. It is now very late; the Rev Read thanks the Lord for keeping the village safe during the day and asks for His protection through the night.

And once again the village is covered in a velvet black, coal black, and ink black shroud.

By Alf