

A Very Small Island

Something's rotten on The Rock

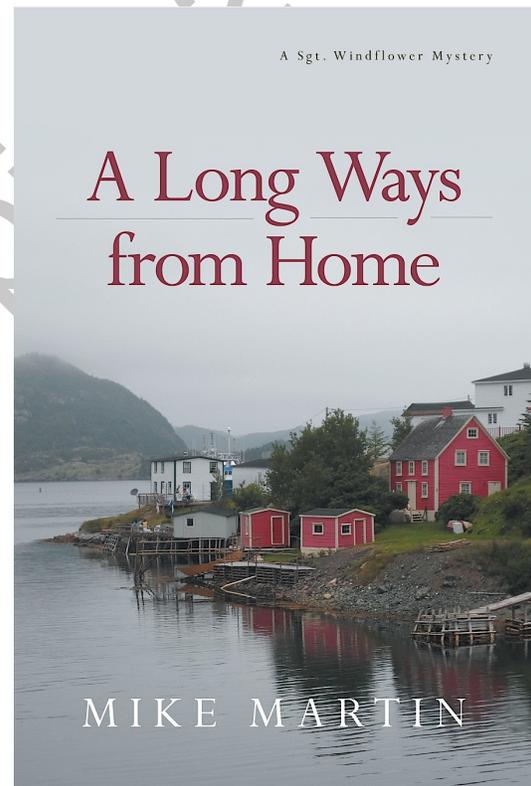
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Sergeant Winston Windflower of the RCMP is a Cree aboriginal originally from the Prairies, but now stationed in rural Newfoundland. Despite the obvious differences between the two settings he has adjusted well, and in six years has come to love his life on what Newfoundlanders affectionately call The Rock. One reason is his burgeoning romantic relationship with the acting mayor of Grand Bank, Sheila Hillier: they're living together and plan to marry in the near future. But despite the new developments in his life, Windflower is very much a traditionalist: he often has dreams that involve animals that are sacred to his aboriginal culture and which offer portents in his own life, and he practices ritual cleansing under the stars.

Today, however, he is very much in the modern, and white man's, world. A gang of bikers known as the Bacchus Motorcycle Club has invaded the island, and Windflower and other RCMP officers are monitoring their movements as they leave, alert for any signs of

criminality or violence. The unspoken question amongst the officers is, Why were they here? The answer, at least in part, is not



long in coming: two days after their departure two bodies are discovered, a man and a woman, bound and shot in the woods near a campground where the bikers had been partying.

While they are eating dinner Sheila mentions that her cousin, Carol Jackson, is planning to visit. It seems she's biker as well, and Windflower had noticed her on her bike in a nearby town. But she hasn't yet shown up.

It's not long before the woman's bike is sighted, apparently abandoned, alongside the highway. There is no sign of Jackson, but a Facebook photo shows her with a member of the Bacchus bike gang. Windflower wonders whether Sheila is aware of the company her cousin keeps. His investigation of the disappearance of Sheila's cousin will lead him to a hotbed of intrigue and, inevitably, violence, as the biker gang's illegal activities are exposed.

Much of *A Long Ways Home* is about Windflower's domestic life, his relationship with Sheila Hillier, his impending marriage, his family, and not least his native beliefs and practices. These greatly add to the

story's originality and Windflower's layered personality. Here is not merely a crime tale, or even a police story, but a portrait of a distinctive and honourable person coming from a culture rooted in symbols and rituals, caught up in a complex criminal investigation, and trying to do the right thing for all concerned. Its measured pace, evocative descriptions of settings, and straightforward writing style all bring to mind the late Tony Hillerman's highly successful New Mexico-based series featuring native policemen Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee.

The fifth in the Sergeant Windflower series, *A Long Ways from Home* will appeal to readers who enjoy Newfoundland settings, stories with an aboriginal twist, and simply well-told tales about ordinary people caught up in life on what is, when all is said and done, a very small island.

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Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on various crime fiction and literary websites, including his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com