

Riddle on the Rock

Newfoundland crime novel a winner

Suspended Sentences

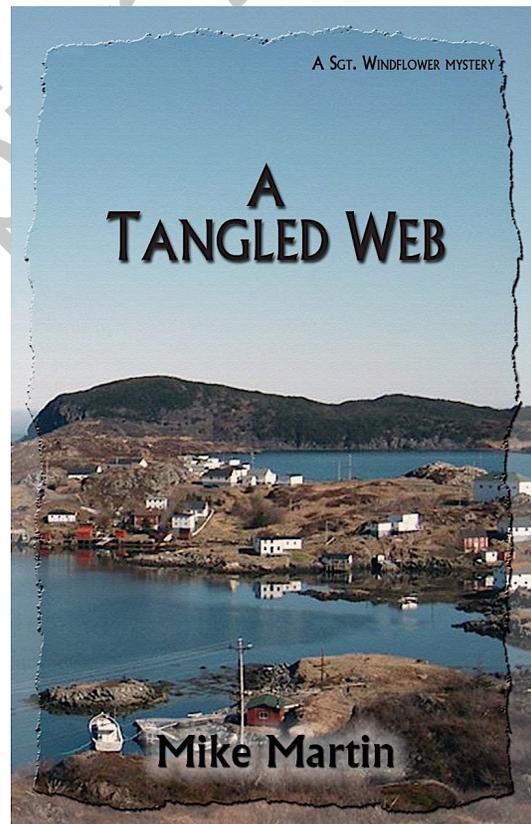
by Jim Napier

Sergeant Winston Windflower is not your typical RCMP officer. First, he's posted to a remote area of Newfoundland, where he looks after the (admittedly low) crime rate in the villages and fishing ports that make up the region. Second – and equally important – he's of Cree heritage and believes that dreams have significance in his work, and practices smudging, a symbolic cleansing ritual that date back centuries in the tribal culture that infuses his character.

In other respects, though, Windflower is Everyman. He is neither stronger nor smarter nor more virtuous than most of the people that make up his corner of Newfoundland. But he is dedicated to his work, which he interprets as being a force for good in the community. So when a six-year-old girl named Sarah Quinlan goes missing one day, Windflower mounts a major search, sparing no effort to find her and reunite her with her distraught parents.

In the coastal village of Grand Bank there are myriad places that a child might have gone, with the sea an omnipresent draw. But a search of rivers and inlets and houses and outbuildings comes up empty. What Windflower doesn't know is that

Sarah has crawled into the back of a truck, and unbeknownst to the driver, is well on her way to a ferry crossing to the mainland of Canada. She's also unaware that the driver is a killer, anxious to avoid the police at all costs.



And we watch, in horror, as the truck driver is driven to kill again in order to protect his secret life.

So begins what could be a chilling, suspense-filled tale that would keep

many people up late at night. But in the experienced hands of ex-Newfoundlander Mike Martin we are treated to a captivating tale of life in a rural outpost, with all the quirky (and occasionally charming) wrinkles that entails. We meet Windflower's lover Sheila, the town mayor, who is expecting their first child; and a local fisherman, Fonse Tessier, who searches the coastline for the missing child. We encounter RCMP Inspector Ron Quigley, in charge of the region, and the denizens of the Mug-Up café, which serves the best cheesecake for miles. And in the process we are treated to an insightful portrait of a lifestyle unlike that in any other part of Canada, that clearly holds a special place in the author's heart.

A Tangled Web is spiritually kin to a series by the British author M. C. Beaton, and set in the Scottish Highlands. Readers may recognize

the equally-quirky village of Lochdubh, whose residents' lives are superintended by an equally unremarkable copper named Hamish Macbeth. That series, too, is noteworthy for the way it perfectly captures village life, and expertly uses it to spin an engaging tale of a people largely out of place in today's world, but no less interesting for all that. And like the Hamish Macbeth tales, *A Tangled Web* is a fine read, as are the others in the series, and for readers in search of an informed, atmospheric mystery well off the beaten path, I cannot recommend it too highly.

The previous Sergeant Windflower novel, *A Long Ways from Home*, was nominated for the 2017 Bony Blithe Award for Best Light Mystery. Others in the series include *The Walker on the Cape*, *The Body on the T*, *Beneath the Surface*, and *Twist of Fortune*.

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Jim Napier is a professional crime-fiction reviewer based in Canada. Since 2005 his book reviews and author interviews have been featured in several Canadian newspapers and on multiple websites, and his own crime novel *Legacy* was published in April of 2017. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com

