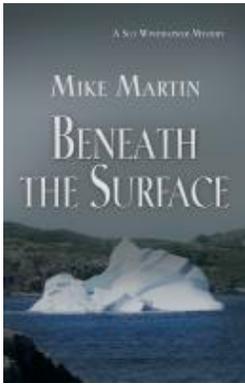


A SGT WINDFLOWER MYSTERY

MIKE MARTIN

BENEATH
THE SURFACE





In the third installment of the Sgt. Windflower Mystery series, Sgt. Windflower is back on the scene of the crime. He is joined again by his trusted ally, Eddie Tizzard, his rock-steady girl, Sheila, and a wide cast of supporters. Together they face down an international crime syndicate operating on the East Coast, and help Windflower deal with the modern challenges of sexual harassment and corruption while re-discovering his roots and inner strength.

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Chapter Four

When Windflower awoke he was surprised that it was light, and that he had slept through the night. He expected to be woken by some version of a sea shanty or old country western song, his Uncle Frank's favourites when he was in his cups. He went to the bathroom and noticed that his bedroom door was closed, but a loud snoring noise was almost shaking that side of the house. Luckily, he had a change of clothing in his overnight bag, so he didn't have to wake the snoring giant in the bedroom.

He had a quick shower and shave. He also did a brief prayer and smudge, a morning ritual that involved burning some of his sacred and medicinal herbs. This was part of his traditional Cree culture, and it helped to remind him who he was in the world. Soon he was on his way out the door to meet Tizzard for breakfast at the Mug-Up.

The morning air was beginning to hold on longer to the coolness of the night, although the fog that had followed Windflower home was now being burnt off by the sun. A beautiful late summer day in paradise, Windflower thought to himself, as he strolled the short walk to the café.

Tizzard was already there, wide awake and joking with the few early morning locals who made the Mug-Up their first coffee pit stop. Windflower was surprised to see Herb Stoodley with an apron on at the cash, and waved good morning. Soon Stoodley was by with his own personal greeting: a steaming hot cup of coffee.

Tizzard joined the two men and both ordered the breakfast special of fried eggs, bacon and homemade toast with fresh jam. He and Windflower also decided to share an order of toutons, dough fried in fatback pork to a golden brown, and then smothered in molasses.

“So how’s Uncle Frank this morning?” asked Tizzard with a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

Windflower forced a smile and said, “He’s sleeping it off. I’ll deal with him later. Let’s just enjoy our breakfast, okay?”

Tizzard took the hint and sat quietly drinking his coffee until his breakfast arrived. Then both men were happily engaged in devouring the plates of food in front of them, each saving the best part of their breakfast, the toutons, until last.

“I know I shouldn’t eat this, but it is so good,” said Windflower as he mopped up the last drop of molasses with his remaining sliver of the toutons.

“Don’t worry about it,” said Tizzard. “As my old man would say, a man’s gotta’ eat.”

“Yeah, but just remember we are what we eat,” said Windflower. “And right now I feel like I’ve eaten a hot air balloon. I guess that makes me a blimp.”

“So I hear that Sheila is coming back,” said Tizzard. “Does that mean you are coming back here too?”

“I was going to talk to you about that,” said Windflower. “I would like to, but I have to convince Arsenault to let me go. I don’t want to upset the applecart here either.”

“Well, don’t worry about me,” said Tizzard. “I’m grateful for the opportunity but I could do without the headaches and the paperwork. And the Mayor is driving me crazy with his ideas.”

Windflower laughed.

“I miss being here too,” he said. “It’s been fun doing some different work in Marystown, and it made it easier to get back and forth to St. John’s, but I’d rather be in Grand Bank on my old patch again.”

“That’s good,” said Tizzard. “So all you got to do is convince the Inspector.”

“Yeah, wish me luck with that. He’s pretty fixed in his thinking and he likes getting his own way. I think he was happy to have me there to off-load some of the work that he didn’t like to do. Anyway, I don’t have to worry about that until tomorrow. Today I’m taking the day off,” said Windflower.

“That’s a luxury,” said Tizzard. “If you get bored, drop by and say hello to everybody. They’d be happy to see you.”

“Thank you, Corporal,” said Windflower. “I’m going to say hello to Herb, our new waitress, and then it might be an earlier morning than planned for my hung-over uncle.”

Tizzard smiled and waved goodbye as Windflower went up to the cash register to pay.

“Easy on the insults,” said Stoodley. “I get a lot of points from the boss in back for this early morning shift.”

With that, Stoodley's wife Moira peeked her head around the corner from the stove and waved good morning as well.

"Morning, Moira," said Windflower. "The food is great, but the beauty of your serving staff has gone down quite a bit since my last visit."

Both husband and wife laughed, and Windflower was soon on his way back home to his little house just up the road.

When he got there, the noise from the bedroom hadn't dissipated, so he pushed open his bedroom door. His uncle was still solidly asleep and rather than wake him, Windflower just took the two duffle bags of laundry from the room, found his spare roll of quarters, and walked the short distance to the laundromat.

Windflower actually liked doing the laundry. It gave him time to think and to read, and luckily he had brought his new book with him.

It was *The Golden Egg*, by one of his favourite mystery writers, Donna Leon, and featured Commissario Guido Brunetti. It was set in Venice like all of the Brunetti mysteries, and one of Windflower's joys was reading about the Italian meals that were a staple of Leon's books. He savoured over the mouth-watering descriptions of risotto, scampi, calamari, lamb and thick, rich Italian pastries for breakfast. Windflower was in heaven just reading about it. Maybe he should take Sheila on a holiday. They could go to Italy, even to Venice, and try some of this food that he drooled over

whenever he read Donna Leon's books. Now, thought Windflower that is an appetizing idea.

A few hours later, with his laundry dried and folded, he was feeling relaxed both from his time reading, and listening to the gentle hum of the dryers. He was also getting a little bit hungry from reading about Brunetti's lunch of carpaccio and involtini of chicken breast and thinking about what to have for his own lunch.

He lugged his duffle bags back to his house where his uncle was up, but barely, and moving about even less.

"Good morning, Uncle," said Windflower in his RCMP voice, the one he used when he wanted someone making a disturbance to both realize that resistance was futile, and to go gently into the back of his cruiser. Or else.

"Morning, Winston," said his uncle, much quieter than his antics of yesterday.

His head hung down to his chin as he slouched in his long johns, Windflower's long johns, looking every bit of his 63 years.

A good sign, thought Windflower. He must be really hung over.

"Uncle, I am glad you came to visit but I need you do a few things for me. First of all, no smoking in the house; it stinks and it's dangerous, especially if you are drinking. Secondly, no drinking when I'm not here, and you can't have your friends over drinking either. I trust

you, but I don't want strangers here when I'm not," said Windflower.

"They're not strangers, they're my friends," said his uncle. "I can see that I'm not wanted here. I'm leaving. I'm going to St. John's as soon as I can get a taxi out of here."

And with that he retreated back into his bedroom, actually Windflower's bedroom.

Windflower pleaded with him from outside the bedroom to come out and discuss the matter as adults, but there was no sound from the other side. Finally, he gave up, at least for now, and decided to make the most of his day off on a nice September day in Newfoundland.

He found a few plastic containers and a bucket, and made himself a thermos of tea and a thick cheese and lettuce sandwich with plenty of hot mustard on his molasses raisin bread. Then he was off for a spate of blueberry picking.

He had heard that one of the best places to pick berries was up on a place called "Farmer's Hill", where the old radio and television tower had been built. Years ago, it had been an area where some of the locals had grown root vegetables and oats for their animals. Now it had been supplanted by Sobeys, where everybody went to get their fresh fruit and vegetables. Maybe, because the land had been cleared before, it was now a prime place for blueberries. Windflower didn't really care why. He just hoped there was enough for him to give a few cups to Herb Stoodley so that he could make him some jam

to get through the winter. And enough for Sheila to make him a blueberry buckle.

There was now a new nature trail in Grand Bank. It started at the back of the Grand Bank Health Centre and meandered its way up and around the brook and past the dam. The dam kept the brook from overflowing its banks further down, and there was a side path leading up to the transmission tower. Along the way, there were benches to rest on, a myriad of settings and views, and an opportunity sometimes to see hares, an occasional moose or even a black bear.

One sighting of a young black bear had already been reported in the area. The local man who saw it said that 'it was bout 250 pounds and I probly coulda rassled it but e probly coulda given an ard slap up the ead.'

Windflower wasn't interested in the wildlife today. He was focused on the berries, and along the trail found a few small patches and got to work filling his bucket. But he was still looking for the mother lode of berry patches. He was sure it was up the hill and further away from the lazy pickers at the bottom.

So he left the trail and headed up towards the tower. There, near the top and just inches away from the trail he found what he was looking for, the Holy Grail of berries. There were so many blueberries that Windflower didn't know where to begin. Finally, he just spread out his picking materials and sat and relaxed for a minute. He gazed back down the hill at the little town of Grand Bank where people and cars scurried like ants. He also remembered that he had not even said thank you to Creator this morning.

He didn't have his smudge kit with him, but he could still do his prayers. So there, in the abundance of nature's beauty he thanked Creator for his many blessings and prayed for Sheila and his relatives, especially his Uncle Frank, that they may find a good path to travel. He also thanked his ancestors, his mother, father and grandfather, who were no longer with him, that they would guide him on his journey. His final prayer was for Mother Earth who was nurturing him today with blueberries; that people would learn again to love and respect her for the gifts that she gave them every day.

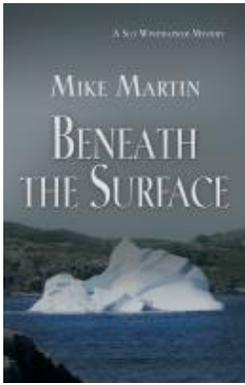
After his prayers were finished Windflower spent the next hour in the quiet and reflective task of berry picking. Once he was halfway through his goal of a full bucket, he took a break and had his cheese sandwich and tea.

There's nothing better, he thought, than having what the Newfoundlanders called a "boil up", in the woods. Refreshed from his meal Windflower returned to his task, and was soon back walking down the hill with his brimming bucket of fat, ripe blueberries.

At the bottom he cleaned the berries, removing stalks and stems and the occasional misfit berry and divvied them up into portions. Half a bucket would go to Herb Stoodley for jam-making and the other half would be split between a portion for Sheila's blueberry buckle, and some to just sprinkle on top of cereal or toast or even just as a snack. Feeling particularly pleased and proud of his efforts, Windflower returned home, just in time to see Foote's Taxi speed away from his house with his Uncle Frank sitting in the back, already

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engaged in telling a story to his fellow passengers. I just hope it's not about me, thought Windflower, but knowing his Uncle Frank, he was pretty sure it was.



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