

Maritime Mystery

A Fishy Tale...

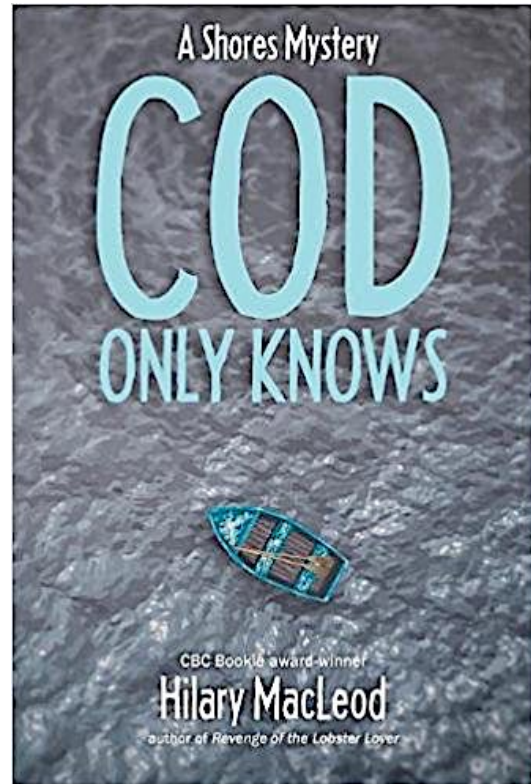
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Seamus O'Malley had been a fisherman much of his life. There's little he hasn't seen before. But this isn't little, not by a long shot. He's looking at a photo of a cod, but not just any cod. Normally cod run between ten and twenty pounds. This one must run in the hundreds of pounds. No clue, though, as to who the fisherman was in the photo, or who took it, or when. It had been ripped from a book, the photo credit left behind. It's enough to get Seamus thinking, though. There must be a market for such a behemoth, and he's a man with a keen eye for markets.

Thus begins the saga of the search for the giant cod, and for ninety-year-old Abel Mack, the only man with first-hand knowledge of the fish, who has himself gone missing. As the community mounts a search for the elderly man his story attracts the interest of more than one person who sees him—and the giant cod—as a shortcut to fame and perhaps even fortune.

So begins Hilary MacLeod's latest, er, tale of life in Atlantic Canada, where fishermen, and thus fish stories, are the staff of life. Born in Scotland, MacLeod is a natural storyteller,



superbly shaped both by her character and experience to fashion stories of the lives of everyday people who make their living from the sea. And like life itself her story meanders, subject only to it's own rhythm, as we are gradually made privy to the foibles and follies of each of the local villagers, and in the end we have not only the tale of the disappearance of an elderly eccentric (isn't everyone in this secluded rural community an eccentric?), but also the history of the self-reliant, inward-looking, and al-

together ordinary people that make up the population. It is all told evocatively and sympathetically, a fetching little narrative told in plain language and simple sentences, as befits the people and events it chronicles. Easily overlooked in an age of fast-moving plots and larger-than-life characters, but timeless in its appeal, *Cod Only Knows* is up there with the works of such other enduring outpost writers as Lillian Beckwith,

whose classic narratives of life in the Scottish Hebrides were published half a century ago. *Plus ça change*, and we're all the better for it. For those who are, er, hooked by her stories, MacLeod's previous works include (are you ready for it?) *Something Fishy*, *Mind over Mussels*, *Bodies and Sole*, and *All is Clam*. I suppose she comes up with all those fishy puns just for the halibut...

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Since 2005 more than 500 of Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetingler*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January* magazine, the *Montreal Review of Books*, the *Ottawa Review of Books*, and *Amazon.com*, as well as on his own award-winning crime fiction site, *Deadly Diversions*. His own crime novel, *Legacy*, was published in April of 2017. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com