

Neap Tide

Every business in Green Haven advertised on the toffee-colored placemats here at the café. Even the Old Maids, whose shop across the street had a gas pump outside it and carried everything from hardware to panty hose—a true Maine variety store—made sure their store was featured on the mat in the same brown, boxy typography that everyone



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used, but with a small picture of one of the ladies' prized Scottish Fold cats.

The cats had nothing to do with their business, as they certainly didn't breed or sell them, but you could always count on seeing one or two curled up at the cash register or wandering the aisles. And a cat certainly made for a prettier ad than a picture of a gas pump would have, and might attract some strangers looking for pet supplies which, mysteriously, the Old Maids did *not* stock. Once a customer was in the store, Marilyn and Marlena could sell that person a myriad of useless un-pet-related goods, and shame them into tossing pocket change into a jar to raise funds for some unfortunate local or to support Green Haven's little leaguers.

A coffee stain circled the space marked 'Your Ad Here,' leading me to believe there was room for another business in town. Maybe I should start my own private investigating service. I had always wanted to be self-employed, but could never quite reconcile myself to giving up a sure thing, like a paycheck twice a month. Besides, I didn't imagine there was much need for a private eye in a place where people sweep things under rugs and forget about them. My dual positions of Assistant Deputy of Knox County and insurance investigator for Eastern Marine Safety Consultants suited me just fine.

I had read every ad twice by the time Audrey had served Cokes to two couples and taken their food orders. Finally, she returned to refill my mug with a little more coffee.

I placed my hand over the cup and thanked her before she poured. I explained that I was sure the next couple of days would be hectic, and I needed to go home and get a good night's sleep, something that would be impossible if I caffeinated myself any more. She cheerfully whipped my check from the pocket in her apron and slapped it onto the counter with a flourish that, as always, exemplified her abundance of energy and highlighted my lack of it. I plunked a salt shaker on my last ten-dollar bill, exited the café, and headed home.

Exhaustion caught up with me before I crested the first hill, but I forced myself to pick up the pace and made it home in short order. Dragging myself up the stairs, I knew I had only one thing to do before hopping into bed. I needed to call Cal and line up a boat ride to Cobble Harbor for tomorrow



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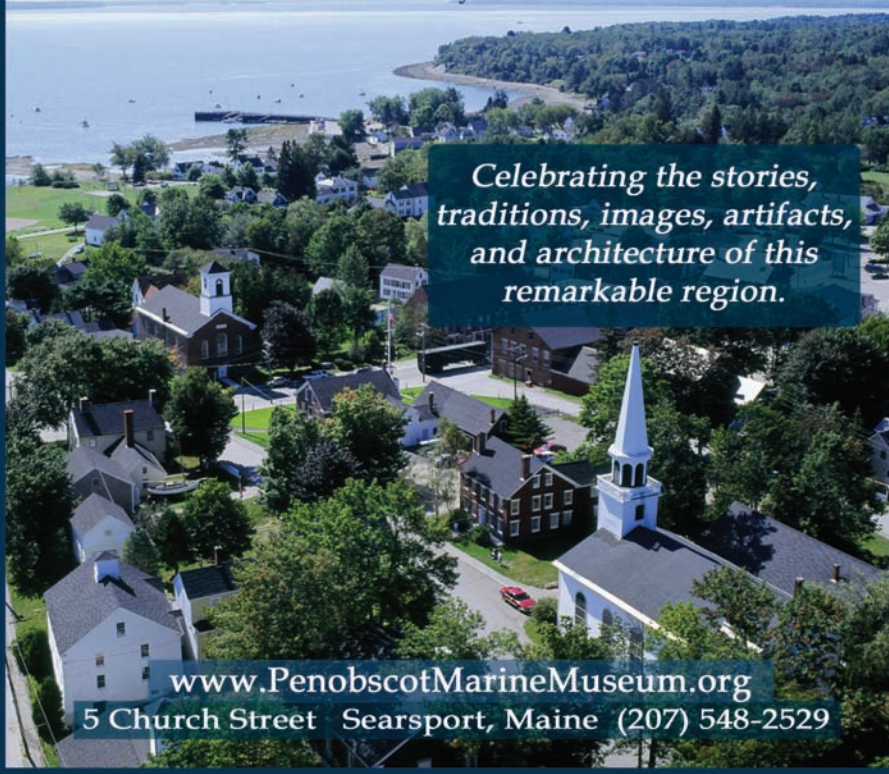
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morning. After scolding me for calling so late—eight o'clock—his wife, Betty, put Cal on the phone. He accepted my offer of work tomorrow, and agreed to meet at 7:30 for a quick coffee before boarding the *Sea Pigeon*.

Sleep came easily. I woke as the first light climbed in orange streaks over the hills on the eastern horizon and settled, filling in the valleys like a syrupy juice before thinning and allowing blue sky to appear. I was refreshed and excited about the day ahead. The benefits of a good night's sleep are relatively unsung in today's world of spas, energy drinks, and herbal supplements. And the best thing about sleep: it's free.

The next morning, after breakfast at the café, Cal and I made our way to the dock. We boarded the *Sea Pigeon* and cast off. Just about every mooring in the commercial harbor was held by a skiff or rowboat, which meant that the fishermen of Green Haven were out in force today, anxious to benefit from prices that were finally rising after the high season glut.

The **thin trailing** end of the **funnel whisked** away in the tide at the **far edge** of the circling **gulls** while the **body** of the **oily puddle** encompassed the **Sea Pigeon**.

The mood of the entire town fluctuated along with the market price and supply of lobster. Virtually every person in Green Haven—even people far removed from fishing—were in tune with the industry. Amazing, the degree to which the ugly little crustaceans referred to by the locals as 'bugs' rule Downeast Maine. The Old Maids could quote market price on any given day, and recite statistics of flux and stasis in landings going back a decade.

We were soon slowing to an idle and rounding the first channel marker leading to Cobble Harbor. The *Sea Pigeon* settled deeply, pulling the surface up like a blanket. Swinging around and through alternating red

Form and function in *harmony.*



Photography by Brian Vanden Brink

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FICTION

nuns and green cans, we left the thoroughfare and headed for the town dock. Like Green Haven, Cobble Harbor's commercial fleet was enjoying this calm day off shore. As late fall approached, it would bring great wind, and fair days like this would become scarce.

Cal weaved a crooked path to the dock through a mooring field littered with rowboats. A gentle landing allowed me to reach a piling with the stern line, and I quickly looped it with a clove hitch. Cal wrapped a mid-ship line around a piling, and then back to the cleat from whence it came. He then made it fast with a jerk and called it good. He killed the engine and looked quite deliberately at his wrist watch.

"Take your time. I ain't going nowhere," Cal said in his usual pleasant way. I decided Cal was the perfect partner. Unlike some I'd been assigned who were as anxious to stab me in the back as cover it, Cal had no desire to take over my job. Who would? Deputy Sheriff was not exactly a coveted position, and the insurance gig had lain vacant a long time before I applied for it. Neither position had prestige or power. There wasn't even much pay.

After assuring Cal that I would return to the *Sea Pigeon* in good season—allowing him to make his usual dinner time—I hopped up onto the rail and stepped to the wharf. A quick glance toward some squawking birds stopped me in mid-stride where I straddled boat and dock.

Herring gulls swooped low, back and forth over a sheen on the surface close off our stern. I took a deep breath and enjoyed the familiar fishy smell of feeding gulls. The oily slick spot, which I assumed housed a school of bait, was shaped like a hurricane on the TV weather map. The thin trailing end of the funnel whisked away in the tide at the far edge of the circling gulls while the body of the oily puddle encompassed the *Sea Pigeon*. In the absence of the birds, I would have thought Cal's boat was pumping dirty bilge water into Cobble Harbor. I peered down into the water pinched between the hull and the dock's pilings, and there it was. The source of the slick was a bloated, badly decomposed human corpse. Somehow trouble seemed to find me even in the remotest picture-postcard of Cobble Harbor. ■

Linda Greenlaw's new Jane Bunker mystery, *Fisherman's Bend*, will be published in July by Hyperion.