

The Beautiful Mystery: A Chief Inspector Gamache Novel

By Louise Penny




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The brilliant new novel in the *New York Times* bestselling series by Louise Penny, one of the most acclaimed crime writers of our time

No outsiders are ever admitted to the monastery of Saint-Gilbert-Entre-les-Loups, hidden deep in the wilderness of Quebec, where two dozen cloistered monks live in peace and prayer. They grow vegetables, they tend chickens, they make chocolate. And they sing. Ironically, for a community that has taken a vow of silence, the monks have become world-famous for their glorious voices, raised in ancient chants whose effect on both singer and listener is so profound it is known as "the beautiful mystery."

But when the renowned choir director is murdered, the lock on the monastery's massive wooden door is drawn back to admit Chief Inspector Armand Gamache and Jean-Guy Beauvoir of the Sûreté du Québec. There they discover disquiet beneath the silence, discord in the apparent harmony. One of the brothers, in this life of prayer and contemplation, has been contemplating murder. As the peace of the monastery crumbles, Gamache is forced to confront some of his own demons, as well as those roaming the remote corridors. Before finding the killer, before restoring peace, the Chief must first consider the divine, the human, and the cracks in between.

The Beautiful Mystery is the winner of the 2012 Agatha Award for best novel, the 2013 Anthony Award for best novel and the 2013 Macavity Award for best novel.

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Editorial Review

Review

Agatha Award Winner, Best Novel 2012

Publishers Weekly Best Summer Book of 2012

Booklist's Top Ten Crime Novels for 2012

Macavity Award Finalist for Best Novel 2012

Anthony Award finalist for Best Novel 2012

“With enormous empathy for the troubled human soul--and an ending that makes your blood race and your heart break--Penny continues to raise the bar of her splendid series.”

?*People Magazine* (4 out 4 stars)

“Penny writes with grace and intelligence about complex people struggling with complex emotions. But her great gift is her uncanny ability to describe what might seem indescribable – the play of light, the sound of celestial music, a quiet sense of peace.”

?Marilyn Stasio, *New York Times Book Review*

“Gorgeous writing...fresh and fully realized.”

?*The Washington Post*

“For the reader, meanwhile, there's a final beautiful mystery to contemplate: How does Penny consistently write such luminous and compassionate books?”

?*The Seattle Times*

“It’s a stirring, thought- provoking read, less a matter of whodunit than a relentless questioning of why any of us do anything. *The Beautiful Mystery* satisfies as a mystery, and stands as a powerful literary novel in its own right, regardless of whether one has read the previous seven novels in the series.”

?Margaret Cannon, *The Globe and Mail*

“Penny, the author, meets the challenge of setting a death in an utterly exotic location and then making the mystery and investigation just as enthralling. Never mind the side plot, a romance between the detective and his boss's daughter that seems too perfect to believe. This is mystery writing at its best, a novel in which everything – the crime, the characters, the setting, the plot – pulls the reader to the final pages.”

?*Christian Science Monitor*

“Penny shows us the joy of the cloistered life as surely as she has shown us the joy of village life...for fans of the series, the resulting bombshell in the characters’ lives is as much like murder as anything ever delivered by a blunt instrument.”

?*The Charlotte Observer* and *Raleigh News & Observer* (Salem Macknee)

“Powerful... the road to the finale is the stuff of grand suspense.”

?*Toronto Star*

“With *The Beautiful Mystery*, there's no longer any doubt: Penny is Canada's best contemporary crime writer, among the best in the world, and one of our best writers, period.”

?Winnipeg Free Press

“Penny ? who melds prose at once expressive and restrained with a keen understanding of human emotions ? creates a novel that earns its title, a book that shines with the grace and compassion that stamp her work.”

?Richmond Times Dispatch

“If it’s possible for Penny to outdo herself, she has accomplished it...In *The Beautiful Mystery*, she casts the meditative spell of Plainchant on the human spirit. With riveting suspense to the very last paragraph, Penny weaves a deepening web of intrigue as the two men battle their inner demons in the cloistered community, while the all-too-worldly politics of the religious community penetrates even the deep forests of Quebec Province.”

?BookReporter

“Gamache and Beauvoir play off one another brilliantly, offering a stirring point/counterpoint with regard to the spiritual and secular issues that have become such an element of modern life.”

?BookPage, Top Pick in Mystery

“Louise Penny has crafted an almost perfect crime?haunting, puzzling, brilliant and indeed a most beautiful mystery. Chief Inspector Gamache is one of my favorite characters in fiction. Here he must penetrate a cloistered monastery deep in the northern woods of Quebec, where a murdered monk is his ticket to get in. This is a tour-de-force for Penny, and a thrilling, intelligent read.”

?Linda Fairstein

“A. Ma. Zing! A remarkably courageous?and very beautiful?book that leaps the abyss between faith and despair.”

?Diana Gabaldon

“Elliptical and often oracular... also remarkably penetrating and humane. The most illuminating analogies are not to other contemporary detective fiction but to *The Name of the Rose* and *Murder in the Cathedral*.”

?Kirkus Reviews

“An entire mystery novel centering on Gregorian chants (whose curiously hypnotic allure is called the “beautiful mystery”)? Yes, indeed, and in the hands of the masterful Penny, the topic proves every bit as able to transfix readers as the chants do their listeners.”

?Booklist (starred review)

“Elegant... This heart-rending tale is a marvelous addition to Penny's acclaimed series. Fans won't be disappointed.”

?Library Journal (starred review)

“Traditional mystery fans can look forward to a captivating whodunit plot, a clever fair-play clue concealed in plain view, and the deft use of humor to lighten the story's dark patches. On a deeper level, the crime provides a means for Penny's unusually empathic, all-too-fallible lead to unearth truths about human passions and weaknesses while avoiding simple answers.”

?Publishers Weekly (starred review)

About the Author

LOUISE PENNY is the author of the #1 *New York Times* and *Globe and Mail* bestselling series of Chief

Inspector Armand Gamache novels. She has won numerous awards, including a CWA Dagger and the Agatha Award (five times), and was a finalist for the Edgar Award for Best Novel. In 2017, she received the Order of Canada “for her contribution to Canadian culture.” Louise lives in a small village south of Montréal. Visit her on Facebook or at www.louisepenny.com.

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THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY (Chapter 1)

As the last note of the chant escaped the Blessed Chapel a great silence fell, and with it came an even greater disquiet.

The silence stretched on. And on.

These were men used to silence, but this seemed extreme, even to them.

And still they stood in their long black robes and white tops, motionless.

Waiting.

These were men also used to waiting. But this too seemed extreme.

The less disciplined among them stole glances at the tall, slim, elderly man who had been the last to file in and would be the first to leave.

Dom Philippe kept his eyes closed. Where once this was a moment of profound peace, a private moment with his private God, when Vigils had ended and before he signaled for the Angelus, now it was simply escape.

He closed his eyes because he didn't want to see.

Besides, he knew what was there. What was always there. What had been there for hundreds of years before he arrived and would, God willing, be there for centuries after he was buried in the cemetery. Two rows of men across from him, in black robes with white hoods, a simple rope tied at their waists.

And beside him to his right, two more rows of men.

They were facing each other across the stone floor of the chapel, like ancient battle lines.

No, he told his weary mind. No. I mustn't think of this as a battle, or a war. Just opposing points of view. Expressed in a healthy community.

Then why was he so reluctant to open his eyes? To get the day going?

To signal the great bells that would ring the Angelus to the forests and birds and lakes and fish. And the monks. To the angels and all the saints. And God.

A throat cleared.

In the great silence it sounded like a bomb. And to the abbot's ears it sounded like what it was.

A challenge.

With an effort he continued to keep his eyes closed. He remained still, and quiet. But there was no peace anymore. Now there was only turmoil, inside and out. He could feel it, vibrating from and between the two rows of waiting men.

He could feel it vibrating within him.

Dom Philippe counted to one hundred. Slowly. Then opening his blue eyes, he stared directly across the chapel, to the short, round man who stood with his eyes open, his hands folded on his stomach, a small smile on his endlessly patient face.

The abbot's eyes narrowed slightly, in a glare, then he recovered and raising his slim right hand, he signaled. And the bells began.

The perfect, round, rich toll left the bell tower and took off into the early morning darkness. It skimmed over the clear lake, the forests, the rolling hills. To be heard by all sorts of creatures.

And twenty-four men, in a remote monastery in Québec.

A clarion call. Their day had begun.

* * *

"You're not serious," laughed Jean-Guy Beauvoir.

"I am," nodded Annie. "I swear to God it's the truth."

"Are you telling me," he picked up another piece of maple-cured bacon from the platter, "that your father gave your mother a bathmat as a gift when they first started dating?"

"No, no. That would be ridiculous."

"Sure would," he agreed and ate the bacon in two big bites. In the background an old Beau Dommage album was playing. "La complainte du phoque en Alaska." About a lonely seal whose love had disappeared. Beauvoir hummed quietly to the familiar tune.

"He gave it to my grandmother the first time they met, as a hostess gift, thanking her for inviting him to dinner."

Beauvoir laughed. "He never told me that," he finally managed.

"Well, Dad doesn't exactly mention it in polite conversation. Poor Mom. Felt she had to marry him. After all, who else would have him?"

Beauvoir laughed again. "So I guess the bar is set pretty low. I could hardly give you a worse gift."

He reached down beside the table in the sunny kitchen. They'd made breakfast together that Saturday morning. A platter of bacon and scrambled eggs with melted Brie sat on the small pine table. He'd thrown on a sweater this early autumn day and gone around the corner from Annie's apartment to the bakery on rue St-Denis for croissants and pain au chocolat. Then Jean-Guy had wandered in and out of the local shops, picking up a couple of cafés, the Montréal weekend papers, and something else.

"What've you got there?" Annie Gamache asked, leaning across the table. The cat leapt to the ground and

found a spot on the floor where the sun hit.

“Nothing,” he grinned. “Just a little *je ne sais quoi* I saw, and thought of you.”

Beauvoir lifted it into plain sight.

“You asshole,” Annie said, and laughed. “It’s a toilet plunger.”

“With a bow on it,” said Beauvoir. “Just for you, *ma chère*. We’ve been together for three months. Happy anniversary.”

“Of course, the toilet plunger anniversary. And I got you nothing.”

“I forgive you,” he said.

Annie took the plunger. “I’ll think of you every time I use it. Though I think you’ll be the one using it most of the time. You are full of it, after all.”

“Too kind,” said Beauvoir, ducking his head in a small bow.

She thrust the plunger forward, gently prodding him with the red rubber suction cup as though it was a rapier and she the swordsman.

Beauvoir smiled and took a sip of his rich, aromatic café. So like Annie. Where other women might have pretended the ridiculous plunger was a wand, she pretended it was a sword.

Of course, Jean-Guy realized, he would never have given a toilet plunger to any other woman. Only Annie.

“You lied to me,” she said, sitting back down. “Dad obviously told you about the bathmat.”

“He did,” admitted Beauvoir. “We were in Gaspé, in a poacher’s cabin, searching for evidence when your father opened a closet and found not one but two brand-new bathmats, still in their wrapping.”

As he spoke he looked at Annie. Her eyes never left him, barely blinked. She took in every word, every gesture, every inflection. Enid, his ex-wife, had also listened. But there was always an edge of desperation about it, a demand. As though he owed her. As though she was dying and he was the medicine.

Enid left him drained, and yet still feeling inadequate.

But Annie was gentler. More generous.

Like her father, she listened carefully and quietly.

With Enid he never talked about his work, and she never asked. With Annie he told her everything.

Now, while putting strawberry confiture on the warm croissant, he told her about the poacher’s cabin, about the case, the savage murder of a family. He told her what they found, how they felt, and who they arrested.

“The bathmats turned out to be the key pieces of evidence,” said Beauvoir, lifting the croissant to his mouth. “Though it took us a long time to figure it out.”

“Is that when Dad told you about his own sad history with bathmats?”

Beauvoir nodded and chewed and saw the Chief Inspector in the dim cabin. Whispering the story. They weren't sure when the poacher would return, and they didn't want to be caught there. They had a search warrant, but they didn't want him to know that. So as the two homicide investigators deftly searched, Chief Inspector Gamache had told Beauvoir about the bathmat. Of showing up for one of the most important meals of his life, desperate to impress the parents of the woman he'd fallen hopelessly in love with. And somehow deciding a bathmat was the perfect hostess gift.

"How could you have thought that, sir?" Beauvoir had whispered, glancing out the cracked and cobwebbed window, hoping not to see the shabby poacher returning with his kill.

"Well, now," Gamache had paused, obviously trying to recall his own thinking. "Madame Gamache often asks the same question. Her mother never tired of asking either. Her father, on the other hand, decided I was an imbecile and never mentioned it again. That was worse. When they died we found the bathmat in their linen closet, still in its plastic wrapping, with the card attached."

Beauvoir stopped talking and looked across at Annie. Her hair was still damp from the shower they'd shared. She smelled fresh and clean. Like a citron grove in the warm sunshine. No makeup. She wore warm slippers and loose, comfortable clothing. Annie was aware of fashion, and happy to be fashionable. But happier to be comfortable.

She was not slim. She was not a stunning beauty. Annie Gamache was none of the things he'd always found attractive in a woman. But Annie knew something most people never learn. She knew how great it was to be alive.

It had taken him almost forty years, but Jean-Guy Beauvoir finally understood it too. And knew now there was no greater beauty.

Annie was approaching thirty now. She'd been a gawky teenager when they'd first met. When the Chief Inspector had brought Beauvoir into his homicide division at the Sûreté du Québec. Of the hundreds of agents and inspectors under the Chief's command, he'd chosen this young, brash agent no one else had wanted as his second in command.

Had made him part of the team, and eventually, over the years, part of the family.

Though even the Chief Inspector had no idea how much a part of the family Beauvoir had become.

"Well," said Annie with a wry smile, "now we have our own bathroom story to baffle our children with. When we die they'll find this, and wonder."

She held up the plunger, with its cheery red bow.

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