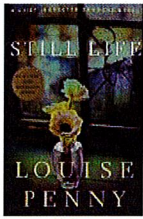


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(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0312541538/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_il?ie=UTF8&tag=litl-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0312541538)

Still Life (Inspector Gamache series, 1)

Louise Penny, 2006

St. Martin's Press

336 pp.

ISBN-13: 9780312948559

Summary

Winner, "New Blood" Dagger; Arthur Ellis; Barry; Anthony; and Dilys Awards.

Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of the Surete du Quebec and his team of investigators are called in to the scene of a suspicious death in a rural village south of Montreal and yet a world away. Jane Neal, a long-time resident of Three Pines, has been found dead in the woods. The locals are certain it's a tragic hunting accident and nothing more but Gamache smells something foul this holiday season... and is soon certain that Jane died at the hands of someone much more sinister than a careless bowhunter.

With this award-winning first novel, Louise Penny introduces an engaging hero in Inspector Gamache, who commands his forces—and this series—with power, ingenuity, and charm. (*From the publisher.*)

See all our [Reading Guides for Chief Inspector Gamache](#) novels by Louise Penny.

Author Bio

- Birth—1958
- Where—Toronto, Canada
- Education—B.A, Ryerson University
- Awards—Agatha Award (4 times) "New Blood" Dagger Award; Arthur Ellis Award; Barry Award, Anthony Award; Dilys Award.
- Currently—lives in Knowlton, Canada (outside of Montreal)

In her words

I live outside a small village south of Montreal, quite close to the American border. I'd like to tell you a little bit about myself. I was born in Toronto in 1958 and became a journalist and radio host with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, specializing in hard news and current affairs. My first job was in Toronto and then moved to Thunder Bay at the far tip of Lake Superior, in Ontario. It was a great place to learn the art and craft of radio and interviewing, and listening. That was the key. A good interviewer rarely speaks, she listens. Closely and carefully. I think the same is true of writers.

From Thunder Bay I moved to Winnipeg to produce documentaries and host the CBC afternoon show. It was a hugely creative time with amazingly creative people. But I decided I needed to host a morning show, and so accepted a job in Quebec City. The advantage of a morning show is that it has the largest audience, the disadvantage is having to rise at 4am.

But Quebec City offered other advantages that far outweighed the ungodly hour. It's staggeringly beautiful and almost totally French and I wanted to learn. Within weeks I'd called Quebecers "good pumpkins", ordered flaming mice in a restaurant, for dessert naturally, and asked a taxi driver to "take me to the war, please." He turned around and asked "Which war exactly, Madame?" Fortunately elegant and venerable Quebec City has a very tolerant and gentle nature and simply smiled at me.

From there the job took me to Montreal, where I ended my career on CBC Radio's noon programme.

In my mid-thirties the most remarkable thing happened. I fell in love with Michael, the head of hematology at the Montreal Children's Hospital. He'd go on to hold the first named chair in pediatric hematology in Canada, something I take full credit for, out of his hearing.

It's an amazing and blessed thing to find love later in life. It was my first marriage and his second. He'd lost his first wife to cancer a few years earlier and that had just about killed him. Sad and grieving we met and began a gentle and tentative courtship, both of us slightly fearful, but overcome with the rightness of it. And overcome with gratitude that this should happen to us and deeply grateful to the family and friends who supported us.

Fifteen years later we live in an old United Empire Loyalist brick home in the country, surrounded by maple woods and mountains and smelly dogs.

Since I was a child I've dreamed of writing and now I am. Beyond my wildest dreams (and I can dream pretty wild) the Chief Inspector Gamache books have found a world-wide audience, won awards and ended up on bestseller lists including the *New York Times*. Even more satisfying, I have found a group of friends in the writing community. Other authors, booksellers, readers—who have become important parts of our lives. I thought writing might provide me with an income—I had no idea the real riches were more precious but less substantial. Friendships.

There are times when I'm in tears writing. Not because I'm so moved by my own writing, but out of gratitude that I get to do this. In my life as a journalist I covered deaths and accidents and horrible events, as well as the quieter disasters of despair and poverty. Now, every morning I go to my office, put the coffee on, fire up the computer and visit my imaginary friends, Gamache and Beauvoir and Clara and Peter. What a privilege it is to write. I hope you enjoy reading the books as much as I enjoy writing them.

Chief Inspector Gamache was inspired by a number of people, and one main inspiration was this man holding a copy of *En plein coeur*. Jean Gamache, a tailor in Granby. He looks slightly as I picture Gamache, but mostly it was his courtesy and dignity and kind eyes that really caught my imagination. What a pleasure to be able to give him a copy of *En plein coeur*! (From the *author's website* (<http://www.louisepenny.com/>)).

Book Reviews

Like her neighbors in the picturesque Canadian village of Three Pines, the dear old thing had hidden depths, courtesy of an author whose deceptively simple style masks the complex patterns of a well-devised plot—rather like the subtle designs of Jane's "primitive" pictures. Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of the Surete du Quebec, who is as bemused as we are by life in Three Pines, has the wit and insight to look well beyond its idyllic surface.

Marilyn Stasio - New York Times

It's hard to decide what provides the most pleasure in this enjoyable book: Gamache, a shrewd and kindly man constantly surprised by homicide; the village, which sounds at first like an ideal place to escape from civilization; or the clever and carefully constructed plot.

Chicago Tribune

(*Starred review.*) Canadian Penny's terrific first novel, which was the runner-up for the CWA's Debut Dagger Award in 2004, introduces Armand Gamache of the Surete du Quebec. When the body of Jane Neal, a middle-aged artist, is found near a woodland trail used by deer hunters outside the village of Three Pines, it appears she's the victim of a hunting accident. Summoned to the scene, Gamache, an appealingly competent senior homicide investigator, soon determines that the woman was most likely murdered. Like a virtuoso, Penny plays a complex variation on the theme of the clue hidden in plain sight. She deftly uses the bilingual, bicultural aspect of Quebecois life as well as arcane aspects of archery and art to deepen her narrative. Memorable characters include Jane; Jane's shallow niece, Yolande; and a delightful gay couple, Olivier and Gabri. Filled with unexpected insights, this winning traditional mystery sets a solid foundation for future entries in the series.

Publishers Weekly

(*Starred review.*) This is a real gem of a book that slowly draws the reader into a beautifully told, lyrically written story of love, life, friendship, and tragedy. And it's a pretty darn good mystery too. This belongs in the same league with such other outstanding Canadian mysteries as Eric Wright's Charlie Salter series. —*Emily Melton*
Booklist

Cerebral, wise and compassionate, Gamache is destined for stardom. Don't miss this stellar debut.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of *Still Life*, we are told that "violent death still surprised" Chief Inspector Armand Gamache. Why is that odd for a homicide detective, and how does it influence his work? What are his strengths and his weaknesses?
2. The village of Three Pines is not on any map, and when Gamache and Agent Nicole first arrive there, they see "the inevitable paradox. An old stone mill sat beside a pond, the mid morning sun warming its fieldstones. Around it the maples and birches and wild cherry trees held their fragile leaves, like thousands of happy hands waving to them on arrival. And police cars. The snakes in Eden." Can you find other echoes of Paradise in Three Pines, and what role do snakes—real or metaphorical—play there?
3. There are three main couples in the book: Clara and Peter, Olivier and Gabri, and Gamache and Reine-Marie. How would you characterize each of these relationships?
4. Gamache says "I've never met anyone uniformly kind and good," yet no one has anything bad to say about Jane—except regarding her art. What is your impression of that art? How do you understand the game Jane used to play with Yolande and the Queen of Hearts?
5. When the charred arrowhead is found in his home, it is said that Matthew Croft "had finally been hurt beyond poetry." How does poetry help him and other characters in this novel? Does it ever have the power to hurt? What do you think of Timmer Hadley's idea that "there's something about Ruth Zardo, something bitter, that resents happiness in others, and needs to ruin it. That's probably what makes her a great poet, she knows what it is to suffer."
6. Consider Gamache's advice to Nichol: "Life is choice. All day, everyday. Who we talk to, where we sit, what we say, how we say it. And our lives become defined by our choices. It's as simple and as complex as that. And as powerful." Similarly, Myrna stopped practicing psychology because she lost patience with people who lead "still" lives, "waiting for someone to save them....The fault lies with us, and only us."

It's not fate, not genetics, not bad luck, and it's definitely not Mom and Dad. Ultimately it's us and our choices." How do their choices affect the principal characters in the novel? Do any of their choices remind you of ones you have made in your own life?

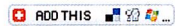
7. There's a huge clue to the murder early in the book, when Jane gives Ben a meaningful look and then quotes from W. H. Auden: "Evil is unspectacular and always human, and shares our bed and eats at our own table." Why is it so easy to overlook that clue at the time, and what impact does it have when it's quoted again in the last chapter?

8. Who do you think Gamache has in mind when he tells Gabri and Olivier: "You're not the types to do murder. I wish I could say the same for everyone here."

9. Clara has "very specific tastes" in murder mysteries: "Most of them were British and all were of the village cozy variety." Do you see *Still Life* as a typical "cozy"? Why or why not?

(Questions issued by publisher.)

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And Then There Were None (Christie) - Author Bio

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Author Bio

- Birth—September 15, 1890
- Where—Torquay, Devon, UK
- Death—January 12, 1976
- Where—Wallingford, Oxfordshire, UK
- Education—home schooled and finishing school in Paris.
- Awards—Edgar Award and the Grand Master Award (broth from Mystery Writers of American)

Dame Agatha Mary Clarissa Christie, DBE was a British crime writer of novels, short stories, and plays. She also wrote six romances under the name Mary Westmacott, but she is best remembered for the 66 detective novels and more than 15 short story collections she wrote under her own name, most of which revolve around the investigations of such characters as Hercule Poirot, Miss Jane Marple and Tommy and Tuppence. She also wrote the world's longest-running play *The Mousetrap*.

According to the Guinness Book of World Records, Christie is the best-selling novelist of all time. Her novels have sold roughly four billion copies, and her estate claims that her works rank third, after those of William Shakespeare and the Bible, as the world's most widely published books. According to Index Translationum, Christie is the most translated individual author, and her books have been translated into at least 103 languages. *And Then There Were None* is Christie's best-selling novel with 100 million sales to date, making it the world's best-selling mystery ever, and one of the best-selling books of all time. In 1971, she was made a Dame by Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace.

Christie's stage play *The Mousetrap* holds the record for the longest initial run: it opened at the Ambassadors Theatre in London on 25 November 1952 and as of 2012 was still running after more than 25,000 performances. In 1955, Christie was the first recipient of the Mystery Writers of America's highest honour, the Grand Master Award, and in the same year *Witness for the Prosecution* was given an Edgar Award by the MWA for Best Play. Many of her books and short stories have been filmed, and many have been adapted for television, radio, video games and comics.

Childhood

Born to a wealthy upper-middle-class family in Torquay, Devon, Christie would describe her childhood as "very happy" and was surrounded by a series of strong and independent women from an early age. Her time was spent alternating between her Devonshire home, her grandmother's house in Ealing, West London, and parts of

Southern Europe, where her family would holiday during the winter. Nominally Christian, she was also raised in a household with various esoteric beliefs, and like her siblings believed that their mother Clara was a psychic with the ability of second sight.

Her mother insisted that she receive a home education, and so her parents were responsible for teaching her to read and write, and to be able to perform basic arithmetic, a subject that she particularly enjoyed. They also taught her about music, and she learned to play both the piano and the mandolin; she was also a voracious reader from an early age. Much of her childhood was spent largely alone and separate from other children, although she spent much time with her pets, whom she adored. Eventually making friends with a group of other girls in Torquay, she noted that "one of the highlights of my existence" was her appearance in a local theatrical production of *The Yeomen of the Guard* where she starred alongside them.

Her father was often ill, suffering from a series of heart attacks, and in November 1901 he died, aged 55. His death left the family devastated, and in an uncertain economic situation. Clara and Agatha continued to live together in their Torquay home; Madge had moved to the nearby Cheadle Hall with her new husband, and Monty, who had joined the army, had been sent to South Africa to fight in the Boer War. Agatha would later claim that her father's death, occurring when she was 11 years old, marked the end of her childhood for her.

In 1902, Agatha would be sent to receive a formal education at Miss Guyer's Girls School in Torquay, but found it difficult to adjust to the disciplined atmosphere. In 1905 she was then sent to the city of Paris, France, where she was educated in three pensions—Mademoiselle Cabernet's, Les Marroniers and then Miss Dryden's—the latter of which served primarily as a finishing school.

Early writing

Returning to England in 1910, she engaged in social activities in search of a husband and also took part in writing and performing in amateur theatrics. She helped put together a play called *The Blue Beard of Unhappiness* with a number of female friends.

Her writing extended to both poetry and music, and some of her early works saw publication, but she decided against focusing on either of these as future professions. It was while recovering in bed from an illness that she penned her first short story; entitled "The House of Beauty", it consisted of about 6000 words and dealt with the world of "madness and dreams" which fascinated Christie. She soon followed this up with a string of other shorts, all of which were rejected, although they would all be revised and published at a later date, sometimes under new titles.

Christie then began to put together her first novel, *Snow Upon the Desert*, which was set in Cairo and drew from a recent visit to the city. Sending it to various publishers under the pseudonym of Monosyllaba, which was rejected by a number of publishers.

Marriage

Meanwhile, she had continued searching for a husband, and had entered into short-lived relationships with four separate men before meeting a young man named Archibald "Archie" Christie at a dance given by Lord and Lady Clifford of Chudleigh, about 12 miles from Torquay. Archie had been born in India, the son of a judge in the Indian Civil Service, before travelling to England where he joined the air force, who stationed him in Devon in 1912. Soon entering into a relationship, the couple fell in love, and after being informed that he was being stationed in Farnborough, Archie asked her to marry him, and she accepted.

1914 saw the outbreak of the First World War, and Archie was sent to France to battle the German forces. Agatha also involved herself in the war effort, joining the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) and attending to wounded soldiers at the hospital in Torquay. In this position she was responsible for aiding the doctors and trying to keep up morale, performing 3,400 hours of unpaid work between October 1914 and December 1916 before earning a wage as a dispenser at an annual rate of £16 until the end of her service in September 1918.

She met her fiancé in London during his leave at the end of 1914, and they were married on the afternoon of Christmas Eve. They would meet up again throughout the war each time that he was posted home. Rising through the ranks, he was eventually stationed back to Britain in September 1918 as a colonel in the Air Ministry, and with Agatha he settled into a flat at 5 Northwick Terrace in St. John's Wood, Northwest London.

First novels: 1919–1923

Christie had long been a fan of detective novels, having enjoyed Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* as well as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's early Sherlock Holmes stories. Deciding to write her own detective novel, entitled *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, she created a detective named Hercule Poirot to be her protagonist. A former Belgian police officer noted for his twirly moustache and egg-shaped head, Poirot had been a refugee who had fled to Britain following Germany's invasion of Belgium; in this manner, Christie had been influenced by the Belgian refugees whom she had encountered in Torquay.

After unsuccessfully sending her manuscript to such publishing companies as Hodder and Stoughton and Methuen, she sent it to John Lane at The Bodley Head, who kept it for several months before announcing that the press would publish it on the condition that Christie agreed to change the ending. She duly did so, and signed a contract with Lane that she would later claim was exploitative.

Christie meanwhile settled into married life, giving birth to a daughter named Rosalind at Ashfield, where the couple—having few friends in London—spent much of their time. Archie obtained a job in the City working in the financial sector, and although he started out on a relatively low salary, he was still able to employ a maid for his family.

Christie's second novel, *The Secret Adversary* (1922), featured new protagonists in the form of detective couple Tommy and Tuppence; again published by The Bodley Head, it earned her £50. She followed this with a third novel, once again featuring Poirot, entitled *Murder on the Links* (1923), as well as a series of Poirot short stories commissioned by Bruce Ingram, editor of *Sketch* magazine. When Archie was offered a job organising a world tour to promote the British Empire Exhibition, the couple left their daughter with Agatha's mother and sister and travelled to South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii. The couple learnt to surf prone in South Africa and in Waikiki became some of the first Britons to surf standing up.

Disappearance

In late 1926, Christie's husband Archie announced he was in love with Nancy Neele, and wanted a divorce. On 3 December 1926 the couple quarrelled, and Archie left their house Styles in Sunningdale, Berkshire, to spend the weekend with his mistress at Godalming, Surrey. That same evening Agatha disappeared from her home, leaving behind a letter for her secretary saying that she was going to Yorkshire. Her disappearance caused an outcry from the public, many of whom were admirers of her novels. Despite a massive manhunt, she was not found for 10 days.

On 14 December 1926 Agatha Christie was identified as a guest at the Swan Hydropathic Hotel (now the Old Swan Hotel in Harrogate, Yorkshire, where she was registered as Mrs Teresa Neele from Cape Town. Christie never accounted for her disappearance. Although two doctors had diagnosed her as suffering from psychogenic fugue, opinion remains divided. A nervous breakdown from a natural propensity for depression may have been exacerbated by her mother's death earlier that year and her husband's infidelity. Public reaction at the time was largely negative, supposing a publicity stunt or attempt to frame her husband for murder.

Author Jared Cade interviewed numerous witnesses and relatives for his sympathetic biography, *Agatha Christie and the Missing Eleven Days*, and provided a substantial amount of evidence to suggest that Christie planned the entire disappearance to embarrass her husband, never thinking it would escalate into the melodrama it became. The Christies divorced in 1928.

Second marriage and later life

In 1930, Christie married archaeologist Max Mallowan after joining him in an archaeological dig. Their marriage was always happy, continuing until Christie's death in 1976. Max introduced her to wine, which she never enjoyed, preferring to drink water in restaurants. She tried unsuccessfully to make herself like cigarettes by smoking one after lunch and one after dinner every day for six months.

Christie frequently used settings which were familiar to her for her stories. Christie's travels with Mallowan contributed background to several of her novels set in the Middle East. Other novels (such as *And Then There Were None*) were set in and around Torquay, where she was born. Christie's 1934 novel *Murder on the Orient Express* was written in the Pera Palace Hotel in Istanbul, Turkey, the southern

terminus of the railway. The hotel maintains Christie's room as a memorial to the author. The Greenway Estate in Devon, acquired by the couple as a summer residence in 1938, is now in the care of the National Trust.

During the Second World War, Christie worked in the pharmacy at University College Hospital, London, where she acquired a knowledge of poisons that she put to good use in her post-war crime novels. For example, the use of thallium as a poison was suggested to her by UCH Chief Pharmacist Harold Davis, and in *The Pale Horse*, (1961) she employed it to dispatch a series of victims, the first clue to the murder method coming from the victims' loss of hair. So accurate was her description of thallium poisoning that on at least one occasion it helped solve a case that was baffling doctors.

To honour her many literary works, she was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire in the 1956 New Year Honours. The next year, she became the President of the Detection Club. In the 1971 New Year Honours she was promoted Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire, three years after her husband had been knighted for his archaeological work in 1968. They were one of the few married couples where both partners were honoured in their own right. From 1968, due to her husband's knighthood, Christie could also be styled as Lady Mallowan.

Final years

From 1971 to 1974, Christie's health began to fail, although she continued to write. In 1975, sensing her increasing weakness, Christie signed over the rights of her most successful play, *The Mousetrap*, to her grandson. Recently, using experimental textual tools of analysis, Canadian researchers have suggested that Christie may have begun to suffer from Alzheimer's disease or other dementia.

Agatha Christie died on 12 January 1976 at age 85 from natural causes at her Winterbrook House in the north of Cholsey parish, adjoining Wallingford in Oxfordshire. She is buried in the nearby churchyard of St Mary's, Cholsey.

Christie's only child, Rosalind Margaret Hicks, died, also aged 85, on 28 October 2004 from natural causes in Torbay, Devon. Christie's grandson, Mathew Prichard, was heir to the copyright to some of his grandmother's literary works (including *The Mousetrap*) and is still associated with Agatha Christie Limited. (*Adapted from Wikipedia.*)

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About the Author



Full text biography:

Louise Penny

Birth Date : 1958

Place of Birth : Canada, Ontario, Toronto

Nationality: Canadian

Occupation : Novelist

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Awards:

New Blood Dagger for Best First Mystery, Crime Writers Association in Great Britain, and Arthur Ellis Award for Best First Mystery, Crime Writers of Canada, both 2006, Dilys Award, Independent Mystery Booksellers Association, 2007, Anthony Award for Best First Novel, and Barry Award, all for *Still Life*; Agatha Award, Malice Domestic, 2008, for *A Fatal Grace*; Agatha Award, Malice Domestic, 2009, for *The Cruellest Month*; Agatha Award, Malice Domestic, Best Mystery Novel Award, Mystery Writers of America, and Anthony Award for Best Crime Novel, all 2010, all for *The Brutal Telling*; Best Mystery Award, American Library Association, Agatha Award, both 2010, Arthur Ellis Award for Best Novel, 2011, all for *Bury Your Dead*; Anthony Award, 2013, for *The Beautiful Mystery*.

Personal Information:

Born July 1, 1958, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada; married Michael Whitehead (a physician and pediatric hematologist).

Education: Ryerson Polytechnical Institute (now Ryerson University), B.A., 1979. **Addresses:** Home: Sutton, Quebec, Canada. Agent: Teresa Chris Literary Agency, 43 Musard Rd., London W6 8NR, England. **E-mail:** contact@louisepenny.com.

Career Information:

Writer, novelist, journalist, television producer, radio broadcaster. Worked as a journalist, radio host, and documentary producer for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), c. 1979-96.

Writings:

"CHIEF INSPECTOR ARMAND GAMACHE" MYSTERY SERIES

- *Still Life*, Minotaur Books (New York, NY), 2006.
- *Dead Cold*, Headline Publishing Group (London, England), 2006, published as *A Fatal Grace*, Minotaur Books (New York, NY), 2007.
- *The Cruellest Month*, Minotaur Books (New York, NY), 2008.
- *The Murder Stone*, Headline Publishing Group (London, England), 2008, published as *A Rule against Murder*, Minotaur Books (New York, NY), 2009.
- *The Brutal Telling*, Minotaur Books (New York, NY), 2009.

- *Bury Your Dead*, Minotaur Books (New York, NY), 2010.
- *A Trick of the Light*, Minotaur Books (New York, NY), 2011.
- *The Beautiful Mystery*, Minotaur Books (New York, NY), 2012.
- *How the Light Gets In*, Minotaur Books (New York, NY), 2013.
- *The Long Way Home*, Minotaur Books (New York, NY), 2014.

Author of *Louise Penny's Blog*.

Media Adaptions:

All the books in the "Chief Inspector Armand Gamache" series have been adapted as audiobooks.

Sidelights:

Former broadcast journalist and radio host Louise Penny has become well known as the author of a mystery series focusing on Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of the Surete du Quebec, or Quebec police force. He lives in Montreal but is frequently called upon to solve murders in the picturesque village of Three Pines. Some reviewers have compared Gamache to French writer Georges Simenon's Inspector Maigret. "Each delights in great wine, good food and their loving wives, both command the unswerving loyalty of their men, and both can see, clearly and deeply, into the murderous hearts of men," commented Erna Buffie in an article on the series for *Suite 101.com*. Three Pines, Buffie added, "harbors as much greed, jealousy and betrayal as any big city," and the setting, the recurring and often quirky characters, and Penny's plotting combine for "a wonderfully original mystery series."

"Chief Inspector Gamache was inspired by a number of people," Penny wrote in an autobiographical essay published on her home page, "and one main inspiration was this man holding a copy of *En plein coeur*. Jean Gamache, a tailor in Granby. He looks slightly as I picture Gamache, but mostly it was his courtesy and dignity and kind eyes that really caught my imagination. What a pleasure to be able to give him a copy of *En plein coeur*!"

In the series' first novel, *Still Life*, Gamache is called in to investigate the death of Jane Neal, a middle-aged artist and well-loved local, found dead near Three Pines with an arrow through her heart. Since she was discovered near an area frequented by deer hunters, Neal's death is at first considered an accident. However, Gamache's investigation indicates that the more likely scenario involves murder. Unfortunately for him, the village of Three Pines contains a multitude of suspects, as a good many of its residents are accomplished archers. Finding a murderer among the generally affable residents of Three Pines will not be easy. Gamache discovers that Neal had recently contributed a controversial painting to a local juried show—observers either loved or hated her primitive-style work. The intensely private Neal had also just announced that she would open her house to the public for the first time in order to celebrate her painting. Her death happened the day of the announcement. Neal's obnoxious niece Yolande immediately stakes a claim to the artist's house and does her best to keep the police out. Meanwhile, a will is found, in which Neal leaves everything to Clara Morrow, a married neighbor who had been like a daughter to the aging artist. Gamache persists in looking for clues, not only in Neal's painting and behavior, but also in the secrets that might be found in her house and among her neighbors.

Still Life won praise from several critics. "Like a virtuoso," Penny sounds a "complex variation on the theme of the clue hidden in plain sight," remarked a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer, while *Kliatt* contributor Jean Palmer observed that "Penny's descriptions of the people and the setting are beautifully crafted." Emily Melton, writing in *Booklist*, dubbed the novel a "beautifully told, lyrically written story of love, life, friendship, and tragedy," and a *New York Times* commentator called Penny "an author whose deceptively simple style masks the complex patterns of a well-devised plot." A *Kirkus Reviews* critic concluded: "Cerebral, wise and compassionate, Gamache is destined for stardom. Don't miss this stellar debut."

A Fatal Grace, published in England as *Dead Cold*, is the next book in the series. The story begins with the death of C.C. de Poitiers during a curling competition around Christmastime in Three Pines. A local socialite known as something of a sadist, C.C. worked as a spiritual guide of sorts, attempting to convince others to give up emotion in

order to live a more placid existence. Unfortunately, her personality was such that she rarely achieved her goals but was more likely to end up with a highly aggravated client on her hands. Her reputation makes it difficult to narrow down the list of people who might have wished her ill, but Gamache comes into town from Montreal to do just that. He must sort through a number of likely characters, including C.C.'s daughter, who had been abused by her mother all her life, and a local teacher on a spiritual topics whose business C.C. had threatened. It also appears that C.C.'s death might have been linked to the recent murder of a vagrant in Three Pines.

This novel received critical compliments, but some carried qualifications. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer noted that "Penny gorgeously evokes the small-town Christmas mood" but concluded that "the plot's dependence on lengthy backstory slows the momentum." David Pitt, writing in *Booklist*, observed: "Penny is a careful writer, taking time to establish character and scene."

The third installment, *The Cruellest Month*, is set at Easter time in Three Pines. As a special seasonal treat, the local bed and breakfast owner decides to hire a Hungarian psychic who is traveling through town to conduct a séance for the locals. Unfortunately, the event backfires in more ways than one. The psychic turns out to be a fraud, neither Hungarian nor able to channel any spirits from beyond the grave, making the séance a resounding failure. However, the townspeople who have participated decide to meet for a second attempt, this time at the deserted Hadley house. Something happens at the second séance that no one is expecting, however, and one of the participants drops dead of fright. Gamache is called to determine whether there was foul play. This proves to be a difficult case, as the chief inspector is thwarted at every turn by the residents and their secrets, and also by some of his officers, who have a grudge against him. A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor remarked of the book: "Penny produces what many have tried but few have mastered: a psychologically acute cozy."

The next novel in the series, *The Murder Stone*, was published in the United States as *A Rule against Murder*. This installment finds Gamache and his wife spending their anniversary at their favorite inn, Manoir Bellechasse. The inn is also hosting a large family reunion. After a staff member finds one of the guests dead, crushed by a statue that toppled from its pedestal, Gamache takes on the case.

Some critics commented favorably on the novel's setting as well as Penny's plotting skills and prose style. Andy Plonk, writing on the *Mystery Reader Web* site, noted that "Penny has a superb command of the English language. She is able to evoke images in the minds of her readers such that it is easy to imagine what her characters look like as well as the characteristics of the log cabin type inn where the story takes place." Plonk concluded: "This is a novel that can and will be enjoyed by a variety of readers and is on a par with the first in the series." A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor remarked that the novel "will keep fans salivating in anticipation, savoring each delectable morsel and yearning for more."

The Brutal Telling, the fifth novel in the series, brings the reader back to Three Pines, where Gamache has been called upon to solve the murder of a hermit who lived in a remote cabin in the woods full of priceless antiquities. According to a reviewer on the *Blogcritics Web* site, "the characterization in the book is rich; it feels like Penny has written full biographies of each character in the book, along with details of how they interact with other characters." The reviewer also noted that "Penny has woven subtext, red herring, and truth together into a plot as rich as any tapestry hanging on the wall." *Reviewer's Bookwatch* contributor Gloria Feit noted that "the village residents are drawn with this author's usual fine hand, their distinct and quirky personalities vividly presented."

The sixth installment, *Bury Your Dead*, finds Gamache not in Three Pines but in Quebec City, a 400-year-old walled metropolis. He is haunted by guilt feelings over the outcome of the case detailed in *The Brutal Telling*, and he is recuperating from physical injuries as well. On leave in the city at the time of its winter carnival, he visits a longtime friend and mentor and immerses himself in research at the Literary and Historical Society. He becomes involved in a murder investigation, though, when another patron of the historical society, who dabbled in archaeology, is found dead in the building's basement. The man had been obsessed with finding the body of French explorer Samuel de Champlain, who founded Quebec City in 1608. Champlain died in 1635, and his burial place is unknown. Gamache comes to believe that the mystery of Champlain's whereabouts is related to the death of the researcher. A third mystery figures in the novel when Gamache decides to reopen the case from *The Brutal Telling*, as he thinks he has arrested the wrong man. He sends one of his deputies to Three Pines to look into the matter.

Several reviewers found *Bury Your Dead* a compelling story in a fascinating setting. "Louise Penny's portrait of Quebec City is as lovingly detailed and evocative as anything she has written, and her control over this intricate blending of history and mystery is absolute," related H.J. Kirchoff in Toronto's *Globe & Mail*. The novel, Kirchoff added, "demonstrates once again that she is in the first rank of crime-fiction writers in Canada, or indeed, in the world." A *Publishers Weekly* commentator praised Penny's characterizations and plotting, noting her "ability to combine heartbreak and hope in the same scene." *New York Times Book Review* contributor Marilyn Stasio did not care for the revisiting of the case from *The Brutal Telling*, saying it "undermines the much more interesting central narrative." *Denver Post* critics Tom and Enid Schantz, however, welcomed this aspect of the novel. "The mystery was far from over at book's end, and its shocking final solution here is brilliantly conceived and executed," the reviewers observed. Bill Ott, writing in *Booklist*, called *Bury Your Dead* "the best yet" in the series, as "Penny hits every note perfectly in what is one of the most elaborately constructed mysteries in years."

In *A Trick of the Light*, wrote Toronto *Globe and Mail* reviewer Margaret Cannon, "we are returned to the perfect country village: lilac-scented air, superb cuisine at the local auberge, a wonderful bookstore and congenial, interesting people for conversation. It is, of course, Three Pines, the paradise in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, where one can find peace and a kind of perfection, at least until murder rears its head ... again." The story opens with the dramatic success of new artist Clara Morrow's showing at a major Montreal venue. "The day after the showing, back in Clara's garden in Three Pines," declared a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor, "Lillian Dyson, former critic ... lies dead of a broken neck." "Penny shows how the tight structure of the classical mystery story can accommodate a wealth of deeply felt emotions," Ott stated in *Booklist*.

"Penny writes very well of the village and of flowers, food, furniture, painting, gardens and landscapes; hers is a fluid, graceful prose. She's also skilled at presenting the complex relationships her characters become enmeshed in," explained Patrick Anderson in the *Washington Post Book World*. In *A Trick of the Light*, "Penny writes eloquently about the glories of art and scathingly about greed, pettiness and jealousy among artists."

Gamache's adventures proceed in *The Beautiful Mystery* and *How the Light Gets In*. The latter tale follows Gamache as he deal with corrupt supervisors and a deteriorating homicide department. Most of his friends on the force have retired or quit. The remainder are incompetent or indifferent. Then Constance Ouellet, an old woman who was a child star, is killed. Struck in the head by a lamp, Constance was the last surviving member of a famous set of quintuplets. But that was decades ago; the woman is no longer recognizable, she had no great wealth, and there's no motive for killing her. The death leads Gamache deep into Three Pines's underbelly, and the quirky idyllic town is idyllic no more. "Penny impressively balances personal courage and faith with heartbreaking choices and monstrous evil," a *Publishers Weekly* critic noted. Ott, writing again in *Booklist*, seconded this opinion, asserting: "Penny has always used setting to support theme brilliantly, but here she outdoes herself, contrasting light and dark, innocence and experience, goodness and evil." According to a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor, "it's Three Pines, with its quirky tenants, resident duck and luminous insights into trust and friendship, that will hook readers and keep them hooked." Commending the novel further in the *Washington Post Book World*, Maureen Corrigan stated that "Penny's voice--occasionally amused, yet curiously formal--is what makes the world of her novels plausible. ... [She] has written a magnificent mystery novel that appeals not only to the head, but also to the heart and soul."

In an interview posted on the *Getting Medieval* Web site, Penny discussed why she decided to write mysteries: "I actually had planned to write the best book ever, and win the Nobel Prize. Surprisingly, I then suffered writers block for five years and watched Oprah and ate gummi bears instead. Then I looked on my bedside table and saw all those Golden Age mysteries. Books by Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, Dorothy L. Sayers and Josephine Tey. The books I actually read. And it came to me in that instant. I would simply write a book I would like to read. And that's what I've done ever since. Each book is for me."

In a biography on her home page, Penny stated: "There are times when I'm in tears writing. Not because I'm so moved by my own writing, but out of gratitude that I get to do this." She concluded: "What a privilege it is to write. I hope you enjoy reading the books as much as I enjoy writing them."

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