

# The Rhythm of the Seasons

*Louise Penny's latest like the turning of the leaves*

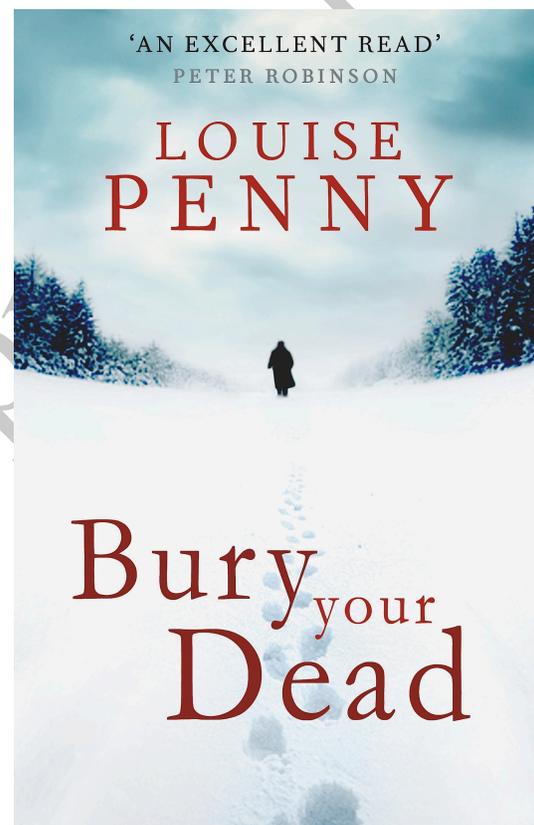
## Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

It's becoming hard to ignore the signs lately: the pewter-coloured skies, the chill in the air, the leaves just beginning to show vibrant hues of red and orange and yellow, the scent of wood fires wafting from nearby chimneys. Once again we are on the cusp of Autumn, with all that season portends. Time to break out the windbreakers and caps and lay in a stock of hearty soups and whole-grain breads, the better to ward off the weather that is sure to come. Time to think about turkey dinners with pumpkin pies, and gathering the family to celebrate the changing of the seasons and simply being together. And there is one more ritual of Autumn that Townshippers have come to expect of late: the welcome appearance of yet another captivating crime novel chronicling the exploits of Chief Inspector Armand Gamache.

Hard to believe that it's been just over five years since the amiable sleuth first made his appearance in the fictional village of Three Pines in Louise Penny's multiple-award-winning debut, *Still Life*. Since then the world at large has come to know Gamache and the tiny village very well: with over a million books in English to date, Louise's books have gone forth in another dozen languages, including Russian, Finnish, Japanese and Turkish, reflecting the fact that she has earned a global following of fans. Many Quebec readers received a long-overdue

bonus when the publisher Flammarion Quebec released *Still Life* in French, under the title *En plein Coeur*.



The accolades continue to roll in. This year Penny was awarded an *unprecedented third* Macavity Award in a row for best mystery novel, for her previous book, *The Brutal Telling*, and — hold on to your hats — *Still Life* has been nominated for a special Barry Award as best crime novel of the decade. I'd say 'finally,' but we all know there will be more honours to come.

Not surprisingly, over the years her novels have evolved, from the classic format made popular by Agatha Christie (quaint villages populated by loveable eccentrics, with the suspects gathered together at the conclusion and the culprit confronted with the evidence of his crimes) to a more contemporary format, with layered plots and nuanced characters, and a structure that moves seamlessly back and forth in time, providing readers with a more complex and challenging tale.

Happily, Penny's latest novel is no exception. Moving between Quebec City and Three Pines, the story contains not one but two plots, each drawing on events in the past that continue to shape the present. Very different settings, but these are not unrelated tales, for they share a common theme: doubt and regret, and a desire to make things right. As Penny herself notes, the novel is also about the twin needs to both respect the past and also let it go. Core values at the heart of the Chief Inspector, values that will play out in subtle and engrossing ways at the hand of this very talented writer.

**Louise Penny, *Bury Your Dead*  
(Sphere/Little Brown, 2010)**

Armand Gamache finds himself in Quebec City, recovering from wounds both physical and psychological. Although successful, a police raid he led resulted in the wounding of several officers, including Gamache himself, and tragically, resulted in the deaths of other officers under his command. Now he has taken refuge within the ancient walls of Quebec City, immersing himself in the company of an old friend and mentor, and in historical research conducted at a private library run by a local historical society.

But seeking peace, Gamache is due to be disappointed. First an amateur archeologist, Augustin Renaud is found dead, murdered in the very basement of the library where Gamache has sought solace. Renaud had been in search of the body of Samuel de Champlain, the very founder of the province of Quebec. Gamache is on leave, and is not anxious to be involved in the case; but the officer in charge calls on him for help, realizing he is out of his depth dealing with the closed circle of suspects within the Anglo-based group.

At the same time, a previous case is niggling at Gamache's conscience. In the woods near the village of Three Pines a murder had taken place, and Gamache had been forced to arrest an old friend, Olivier Brulé, for the deed. The evidence seemed overwhelming, and Brulé had been convicted and sent to prison, but one question continued to bother Gamache: why would Brulé have deliberately moved the body from the cabin in the woods, where he couldn't be connected to the crime, to his own bistro, where questions were sure to be raised?

The conviction a matter of history, the case is officially closed. But Gamache's honour won't allow him to let matters rest. He asks the senior member of his team, Inspector Jean Guy Beauvoir, to look into the case informally. Beauvoir is not ideally suited to the task: his understanding of the English — even his sympathy for them — is deeply flawed. But all that is overshadowed by his respect for his boss; Beauvoir returns to Three Pines, determined to root out an explanation for Brulé's curious actions.

***A captivating tale, set against  
Quebec's colourful history***

In *Bury Your Dead* Louise Penny has given readers a captivating puzzle containing not one, but two unrelated crimes, and set her tale against the rich tapestry of Quebec history, going back to the momentous battle on the Plains of Abraham. Amateur history buffs will perhaps come away with a deeper understanding of why the conflict unfolded as it did; students of Quebec culture will find much to ponder in Penny's account of the persistent Two Solitudes that continue to define much of Anglo-French relations; armchair travelers will be enticed to visit the unique setting that is Quebec; and readers simply in search of a cracking good plot, with plenty of misdirection and more than one twist, will also take satisfaction in a story exquisitely told.

Despite its roots, however, *Bury Your Dead* is very much a contemporary tale. A torn-from-the-headlines plot lends the story immediacy, and as with each of her previous novels, the reader comes away with an increased understanding of the complex figure of Armand Gamache. Penny has taken her writing to the next level: there is gravitas in her words, though never at the expense of their entertainment value. She has convincingly demonstrated (if such proof were needed) that she is much more than a writer of genre fiction with regional appeal, and is in fact rapidly becoming one of the preeminent crime fiction novelists of our day.

*Bury Your Dead* will be in bookstores beginning September 28<sup>th</sup>. The smart money would reserve a copy in advance.

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