

Penny's Latest Brings Fire and Ice

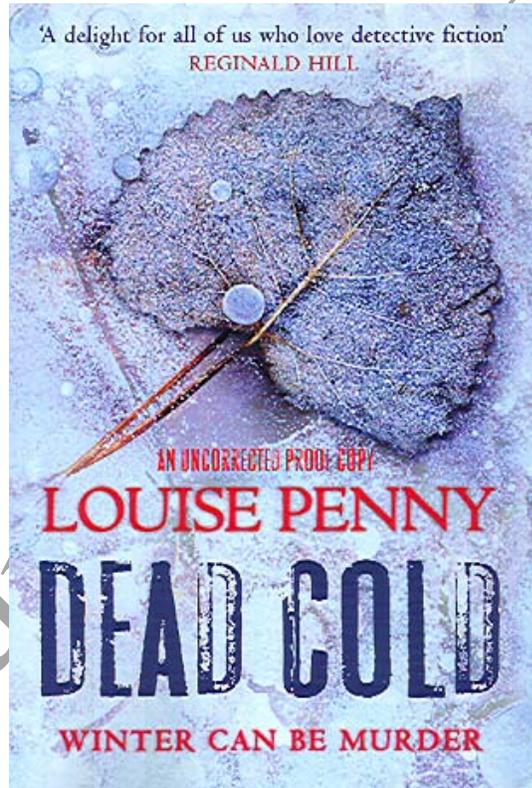
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

A little over a year ago I had the pleasure of alerting readers to the appearance of a new star in the literary heavens: former CBC journalist and Townships resident Louise Penny had just published her debut mystery novel, *Still Life*, set in the idyllic village of Three Pines, Quebec.

And what a debut it was! First, *Still Life* was shortlisted for the British Crime Writers Association's Debut Dagger Award. Shortly thereafter Louise inked a three-book deal with Britain's Hodder Headline publishing house. Then, last June, my wife and I had the pleasure of being at Louise's table at the Crime Writers of Canada Arthur Ellis Awards in Toronto, when *Still Life* garnered the award for Best First Novel. Only a few weeks later, Louise and her husband Michael journeyed to London to accept the John Creasey New Blood Dagger award for Best First Crime Novel. From there it was on to New York, where *Still Life* was released to American readers by St. Martin's Press, accompanied by a glowing review in the *New York Times Review of Books*. The past year, in short, has been a whirlwind tour of banquets, readings, signings, and awards ceremonies, marking a truly impressive debut in the highly competitive world of crime fiction.

Fans of her first work, *Still Life*, will not be disappointed by the second in the series, *Dead Cold*, with its familiar faces, and set in the Eastern Townships



village of Three Pines. But it is not merely another tale in the same series. The characters have moved on, and the tone of the work is darker, wittier, and—dare I say—more delicious. With much-deserved fanfare, the worldwide launch of *Dead Cold* took place on September 22nd at Knowlton's own Brome Lake Books.

When she's not signing books, giving talks, accepting awards or simply rubbing shoulders with other literary luminaries, Louise can be found (appropriately, for a Canadian) beavering away on her third novel in the series.

Dead Cold
(Headline, 2006)

It is winter in the tiny village of Three Pines, and Gamache is back. The tranquility of the community has once again been shattered by the ugly face of murder, and it is up to Chief Inspector Armand Gamache and his team of the Quebec Sureté to bring the culprit to book for the crime. There is no shortage of suspects. The victim, CC de Poitiers, was — well, universally hated. She constantly humiliated her daughter, nibbled away at her husband's self-esteem, threatened a local woman's business, and for good measure, dashed the hopes of an aspiring artist simply because it gave her pleasure to do so. When she purchases a house where a murder had only recently taken place, it seems cosmic forces are put into motion, and when CC dies in full view of most of the village, no one sees anything. But then, death by electric chair is not exactly a common, everyday event — is it?

For Armand Gamache, the prospect of returning to Three Pines, even if it is to investigate a murder, has its attractions. He looks forward to renewing his friendships with Gabri Dubeau and Olivier Brulé, gay owners of the local B & B, exchanging barbs with the village's resident prize-winning poet and inveterate curmudgeon, Ruth Zardo, and immersing himself in a place which, for all its violence, exudes the quiet charm of the Eastern Townships.

But things are not always what they seem. Complicating his task is another investigation he has taken on: the death of a vagrant woman on the sidewalk outside of Ogilvy's in Montreal. And snakes abound in Eden, as members of his own team conspire to undo his

career. Armed only with his own formidable mind, and supported, as ever, by his loving wife Reine-Marie, Armand Gamache must wrestle with the eccentric oddballs and twisted psyches that inhabit the picturesque village, and somehow penetrate the conspiracy of silence that protects a murderer.

A richer, darker book

Like its predecessor, *Dead Cold* is first and foremost a traditional cozy, replete with a cast of characters both engaging and repellent, fiendish clues, clever red herrings, and an original plot in which events come together in a maelstrom of fire and ice. But you can also perceive the skilled writer at work, constantly testing herself, seeking to expand her literary repertoire. *Dead Cold* is a richer, darker book, with bleak humour and a sub-plot that builds on relationships and events only hinted at in her debut novel. Louise cleverly teases us with a few threads of what may await us in the next story in this series. The result is an engrossing read that will only add to the ranks of her readers.

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