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## Louise Penny's December Newsletter

"...I can never remember whether it snowed for six days and six nights when I was twelve or whether it snowed for twelve days and twelve nights when I was six."

- Dylan Thomas 'A Child's Christmas in Wales'

That is, I believe, my favourite literary work of all time, and happily, when I read it, I hear the writer's own voice in my head. Have you ever heard that recording? It was made in New York City in 1954, when Dylan Thomas was broke and perhaps drunk (the producers thought he was). He agreed to record a couple of poems and at the last moment decided to also record A Child's Christmas in Wales, though no one had ever heard of it, and he didn't even have a copy. But it had been published recently in a magazine and a copy was found, and he recorded it.

It is a masterpiece. Part prose, part poem. Genius. And the reading/recording is sublime. Hilarious, warm, funny:

*"There were the Useful Presents: engulfing mufflers of the old coach days, and mittens made for giant sloths; zebra scarfs of a substance like silky gum that could be tug-o'-warred down to the galoshes; blinding tam-o'-shanters like patchwork tea cozies and bunny-suited busbies and balaclavas for victims of head-shrinking tribes; from aunts who always wore wool next to the skin there were mustached and rasping vests that made you wonder why the aunts had any skin left at all; and once I had a little crocheted nose bag from an aunt now, alas, no longer whinnying with us. And pictureless books in which small boys, though warned with quotations not to, would skate on Farmer Giles' pond and did and drowned; and books that told me everything about the wasp, except why."*

Every Christmas we sit by the fire and listen to Dylan Thomas read A Child's Christmas in Wales, and are in tears at the beauty, the yearning, the hilarity.

*...and books that told me everything about the wasp, except why.*

Oh, perfect.

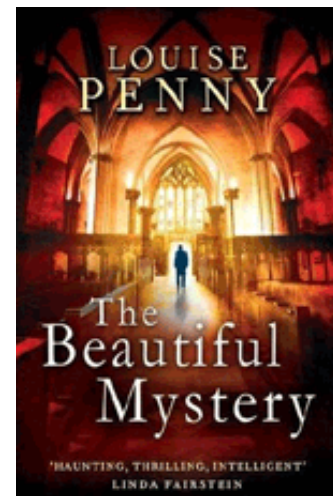
### Christmas

And now we find ourselves at another Christmas. Michael and I are in London right now, but will be heading home to Quebec for our country Christmas. Every year we toy with the idea of going somewhere else for the holidays, since we have no young children and are now free to do anything and go anywhere. A cruise. A hotel. London. Paris. Bolivia.

After a fun evening tossing around all the possibilities, we arrive

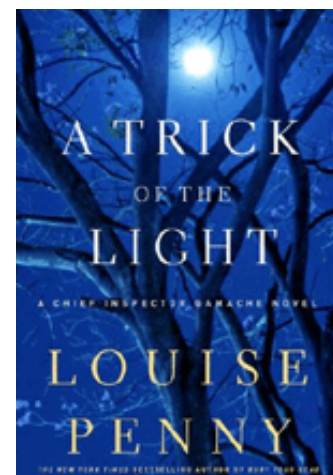


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where we started, and where the discussion always ends. Home. The truth is, there's nowhere we'd rather be than in front of the fireplace, with the tree on, with carols playing and a turkey in the oven. And snow. As Dylan Thomas describes it - eternal snows - eternal ever since Wednesday.

Wherever you are, we hope you have a happy holiday. A Merry Christmas.

## London

It's been a wonderful month. Book 9 has been handed into the editors and they all say it's the best one yet. Phew! I'll tell you more about it later, but I felt the need to get away and recharge before diving into their editorial notes. So we came to London!

As you see, our suffering continues. London. What a magnificent city. We rented a flat in Mayfair, a part of the city we knew but only to visit (Fortnum and Mason, Floris, The Wolseley for breakfast). But now we're staying here. Gosh, what a different experience. Berkeley Square just down the road, with its giant Christmas tree. All the decorations up on Regent Street and Bond Street.



There's a photo of me outside Floris. It's the oldest perfumery in Britain and second oldest in the world. My mother adored Floris, as do I, and we try to visit when we're here. It's in Jermyn Street, behind Fortnum and Mason.

You can see me holding the new Vive Gamache Three Pines tote bag, full of soaps (just about all we can afford at Floris, though we of course pretend we might buy all sorts of cologne and perfumes....then settle on soaps). I suspect the clerks at Floris are wise to us, but are always gracious and patient and allow us (me) to spritz myself.

## Gamache café au lait mugs and NEW tote bags

By the way, if you'd like to order a Vive Gamache café au lait mug, or the tote, you can contact Danny and Lucy at Brome Lake Books - they can almost certainly get them to you in time for Christmas, just email Danny and Lucy at:

Brome Lake Books [blb@b2b2c.ca](mailto:blb@b2b2c.ca) Or you can call them at: 450-242-2242.



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Here's the order of the Chief Inspector Gamache books, from the first to the most recent:

STILL LIFE

A FATAL GRACE / DEAD COLD

THE CRUELEST MONTH

A RULE AGAINST MURDER / THE MURDER STONE

THE BRUTAL TELLING

BURY YOUR DEAD

A TRICK OF THE LIGHT

THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY

## STILL LIFE - official photos



The film of STILL LIFE is in post-production. We recently got the official photos from the set - very fun to look at them. Here's one, with Nathaniel Parker as Chief Inspector Gamache. To see some of the others, [click here](#) and it will take you to the 'film' section of my website.

## CanadaReads competition

I know many of you voted for THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY in the CanadaReads competition - thank you! The book made it through to the final 5 for Quebec, but did not make it beyond that. A panel of judges took over and decided to send Hugh MacLennan for Two Solitudes to the national finals. It's a great book, and will do Quebec literature proud. I'm extremely happy to have been in the running, and so deeply grateful to you for getting the book there. Thank you!

And, speaking of THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY, it has now gone into its 9th printing in the US!

This is solely because you've spread the word - told others about it and the whole Gamache series. You are so wonderful to do that. I'm 54 and my life has never been better. I wish I could have told my 15 year old self, my 30 year old self - my 10 year old self come to that - that life does get better.

Having said that, I know that some of you are facing a difficult holiday, because of the economy perhaps - or, far worse, because you've lost someone you love. As I've mentioned before - I once had a Christmas where I thought I'd die from loneliness. From emptiness. When I knew that the best had been and all that remained was bleak.

I was 35.

I didn't know it then, but the best was still to come. Just around the corner, in fact.

Christmases chez nous are simple affairs. Small, intimate. No gifts anymore. At least, not ones we can see.

*Looking through my bedroom window, out into the moonlight and the unending smoke-colored snow, I could see the lights in the windows of all the other houses on our hill and hear the music rising from them up the long, steady falling night*

Merry Christmas. Happy holidays. And thank you for a life so blessed, beyond anything I ever had a right to expect.

Joyeux Noël.

Louise and Michael

*... I turned the gas down, I got into bed. I said some words to the close and holy darkness, and then I slept.*

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