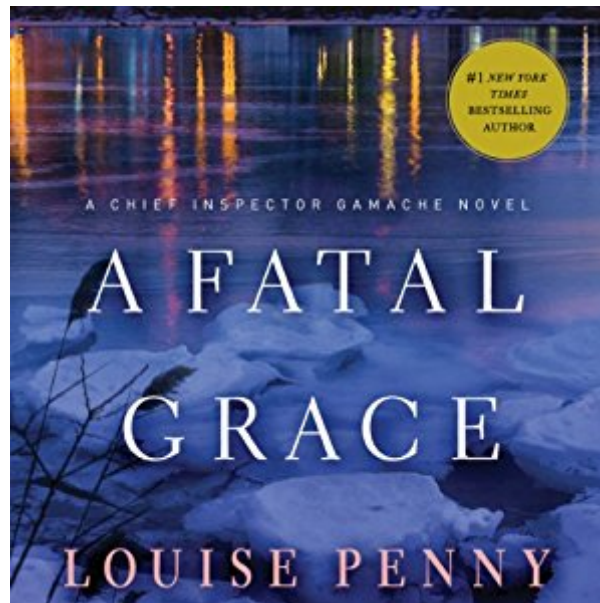




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A Fatal Grace: Chief Inspector Gamache, Book 2



Synopsis

Winner of the 2007 Agatha Award for Best Novel! Welcome to winter in Three Pines, a picturesque village in Quebec, where the villagers are preparing for a traditional country Christmas, and someone is preparing for murder. No one liked CC de Poitiers. Not her quiet husband, not her spineless lover, not her pathetic daughter - and certainly none of the residents of Three Pines. CC de Poitiers managed to alienate everyone, right up until the moment of her death. When Chief Inspector Armand Gamache, of the *Sûreté* du Québec, is called to investigate, he quickly realizes he's dealing with someone quite extraordinary. CC de Poitiers was electrocuted in the middle of a frozen lake, in front of the entire village, as she watched the annual curling tournament. And yet no one saw anything. Who could have been insane enough to try such a macabre method of murder - or brilliant enough to succeed? With his trademark compassion and courage, Gamache digs beneath the idyllic surface of village life to find the dangerous secrets long buried there. For a Quebec winter is not only staggeringly beautiful but deadly, and the people of Three Pines know better than to reveal too much of themselves. But other dangers are becoming clear to Gamache. As a bitter wind blows into the village, something even more chilling is coming for Gamache himself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I found Fatal Grace to be a little slow. The beginning was good and the end was great but the middle was slow and didn't move along like I wanted it too. I felt like there were several stories going on with too many characters with similar names to keep up with. So many L's in the Surete. I still

feel like Nicol is annoying and hoped several times she would disappear. In *Fatal Grace* CC De Poitiers who is universally hated is murdered during a curling match around Christmas. She is electrocuted in full view of everyone but no one sees anything. We meet some new colorful inhabitants of Three Pines but I missed Oliver and Gabri, even Peter and Clara were extremely supporting. I will continue with this series but I enjoyed *Still Life* much better.

In my review of *Still Life* I noted several areas in the first book of the Inspector Gamache series that left a bit to be desired. The writing was a little sophomoric and the characters seemed a little bland but the mystery itself was enjoyable enough and judging from reviews in the later books, Louise Penny's writing only improves so I wanted to continue on with the series. Having just finished *A Fatal Grace*, I wasn't disappointed. Rather than delve into the plot, which you can read amidst the other reviews, I'll give my overall impressions starting with the negative and ending with the positive. One of my complaints with *Still Life* was the fact that Gamache's charisma seemed unbelievable. I didn't understand everyone's draw to him (even the readers!) and while this is improved quite a bit in *A Fatal Grace*, it's still a little over the top. I will add here, however, that we do get to peer a bit more into Gamache's personal life with this effort and I think that helped to bring some balance to this issue. Nichol reappears and that was frustrating for a few reasons; perhaps the greatest of these is because she was just so ridiculous in *Still Life*. Her role in *A Fatal Grace* is a bit more minor and not so unbelievably stupid. It also looks as though some of the plot elements she brings to the picture will be weaved into later books. She's a distraction, but I believe this will be redeemed as the overall story continues. Those items aside *A Fatal Grace* was a huge improvement in writing and storytelling. The characters are becoming much more real and the care that seems to go into the creation of the setting and mood is really showing here. Three Pines is coming to life as a real town with real people who have real issues and yet get along and enjoy each other all the same. *Still Life* saw the murder of the town's beloved Jane Neal. We never really got to meet her outside of the telling after her death. The difference with this mystery is we do get to meet CC and really get a taste of just how revolting she really is. I found this to be a great bonus feature of the story because it helped bring to life the reason for the reactions of those who were around her on a daily basis. On this note, it's also a bonus that Gamache isn't paraded about from the start. Instead, the Inspector doesn't make an appearance until a little further in, sort of in the manner that the old Columbo series did so well. Everyone wants to see him spring into action but some important pieces to the story need to be addressed first. It's tasteful and a little classy, not to mention subdued in a good way. Finally, there are plot elements that are being slowly introduced that are sure to span

through the series. This is a great feature because it gives you more reason to continue the series and yet it's done in a way that doesn't leave you on the edge of your seat just because the author wants to set up the sequel. In that sense, there isn't a sequel so much, it's a series with characters that spring to life and have issues that span more than the 300 or so pages for this particular story. You don't feel cheated as much as you feel invited. My hope is that Louise has sorted these things out well enough that they don't have a bunch of inconsistencies when it's all said and done. Overall, book two of the Gamache series is a great read and if you're a fan of murder mysteries, I recommend it - especially because you get two murders to solve for the price of one! I'm really looking forward to book three, *The Cruellest Month* and plan to get that one started in the coming weeks.

I liked her first book much better than this one, frankly. Normally, I don't read mysteries, but after seeing the story on CBS Sunday Morning, and all of her loyal followers, I decided to give it a try. I really liked parts of the first book, though I felt like the young agent Nichol's character and Agent Gamache's interaction with her was not true to character. Some of their character traits were alluded to, but not actually acted upon, and I felt not genuine. I may try to read one MORE of Louise Penny's books at a later time, but I read the first two of her Gamache books back-to-back, and just felt that perhaps this second one was written with more "formula" and perhaps with less deliberation.

As Louise Penny recognizes, *Three Pines* is even more idyllic with snow and Christmas decorations in this second Chief Inspector Gamache novel. Although the *Three Pines* setting is too good to be true, the characters who live there as well as the author know they have chosen a special place over the more hectic impersonal city--and the contrast to more realistic settings tells us something about what is wrong with our world. However, Penny gives *Three Pines* an almost magical quality, and some other aspects of the book strain credulity as well. After two murders in a short time span, I wonder how credible *Three Pines* will be as a setting for repeated murders investigated by Gamache and Beauvoir and their colleagues. Two or three characters in this novel see God in the form of strangers who come into their lives briefly; this seems in character for only one of them, but even that intersection of people is quite a coincidence. On the other hand--and more importantly--the main characters and recurring secondary candidates are very well drawn and the evolution of their relationships interesting. (I live in a small town, and I do find it credible that very different types and ages of people come together as good friends.) The plot is complex and engaging with many

credible suspects. I found just enough clues to keep me guessing instead of simply following along with Gamache's logic. An additional level of mystery comes from wondering which of Gamache's colleagues are on his side and wondering whether he is trusting the right people; this mattered to me because the author made me care about Chief Inspector Gamache. Penny also encourages the reader to keep thinking with her references to literature, music, films, etc. Some readers might complain about not knowing which characters are being described as some sections begin; I found this technique effective, illustrating Gamache's admonition not to jump to conclusions. Louise Penny's writing flows well, in spite of some typos that an editor should have caught. This is a good series of mysteries--I liked this one enough to finish it in two days.

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