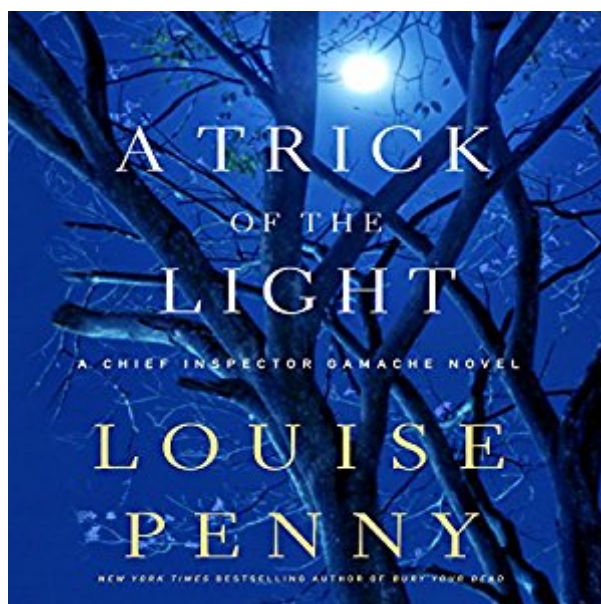


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A Trick Of The Light: A Chief Inspector Gamache Novel



Synopsis

"Hearts are broken," Lillian Dyson carefully underlined in a book. "Sweet relationships are dead." But now Lillian herself is dead. Found among the bleeding hearts and lilacs of Clara Morrow's garden in Three Pines, shattering the celebrations of Clara's solo show at the famed Musée in Montreal. Chief Inspector Gamache, the head of homicide at the Sûreté du Québec, is called to the tiny Quebec village and there he finds the art world gathered, and with it a world of shading and nuance, a world of shadow and light. Where nothing is as it seems. Behind every smile there lurks a sneer. Inside every sweet relationship there hides a broken heart. And even when facts are slowly exposed, it is no longer clear to Gamache and his team if what they've found is the truth, or simply a trick of the light.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Clara Morrow, at age 50, is far beyond the age when most artists are discovered. Yet, on the evening this novel opens, she is about to enter the prestigious Musée d'Art Contemporain in Montreal for a gala solo show of her work. Clara's nerves nearly get the best of her, but she gets through the experience and is soon able to return to her idyllic Eastern Townships home of Three Pines for a celebratory party with her Three Pines friends, and artists, gallery owners and artists' agents from Montreal. In the "friends" category are Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of the Québec Sûreté and his second-in-command, Jean-Guy Beauvoir. Gamache and Beauvoir have become acquainted with Three Pines and its quirky residents during their investigations of several

prior murders. (Penny amusingly acknowledges the incongruity of Three Pines being simultaneously a place of art, friendship and warm hospitality, and a locale with a frighteningly high murder rate, by having bookseller Myrna describe Three Pines as "a shelter[, t]hough, clearly, not a no-kill shelter.") The celebratory mood of Clara's Three Pines party doesn't last. Early the next morning, it is brought to an abrupt end by the discovery of the murdered corpse of a woman in Clara's garden. The woman is identified as Lillian Dyson, Clara's childhood friend who cruelly betrayed her while they were in art college. Clara claims she hadn't seen or heard from Lillian in over 20 years. Looking at means and opportunity leaves Gamache and Beauvoir with a wide field of suspects. They must focus on motive, which reveals a huge gap between the type of person Lillian is widely reported to have been 20 years earlier and how she is seen contemporarily by her new circle of acquaintance.

In this story about art, artists, love, hate, addiction, redemption and, yes, murder, readers will visit the beautiful and perhaps magical village of Three Pines, Quebec, a place that isn't on any maps and "...could only be found if you were lost." The plot is intricate and follows all the rules of mystery writing, with red herrings and false denouements, and would make a satisfactory read without any gourmet touches. Yet, as always, Penny gives us characters that are so real and nuanced that, frankly, you want to go and, if not live with them, at least spend a few weeks of quality time. Calling them "real," is perhaps a disservice, because the central characters, especially Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of *Sûreté* du Québec, are in many ways the people we wish we could be. They are wise and kind and generous and damaged and flawed and trying their very best. They love and are loved, and have good friends with whom they share wine and simple meals (food is taken very seriously in these books!). The mental landscape of the characters is revealed through writing of such elegant and resonant clarity that the advancement of the story becomes synonymous with the development of a deep personal relationship with the characters. This story revolves around the first solo art show of 50-year-old but 'newly discovered' portrait artist and Twin Pines resident Clara Morrow, at the prestigious *Musée d'Art Contemporain* in Montreal. In the book, Clara's portraits are described by those who view them: at first, they see unremarkable-looking individuals that, upon closer consideration, are found to have depths of emotion and beauty of spirit that affect the viewer strongly, often with great joy.

I'm prepared for the "unhelpful" votes. Because as much as I like Louise Penny, I wish I liked her more. There's no question that she's a superb writer, with a keen understanding of the human heart and mind; her dialogue is, for the most part, very good; and her ability to create distinct,

idiosyncratic characters is unmatched. But for me, the mechanics of a mystery are paramount, and in "A Trick of the Light," I feel that Penny falls short. Simply put, she jumps through some mighty big hoops to ensure that all of her suspects remain -- or return -- to the cosy town of Three Pines after the murder takes place. Characters hang out for no good (or believable) reason (even those who can't stand one another) or make the drive to and from Montreal arbitrarily. They even assemble, most improbably, at a climactic dinner party so that Penny's detective can actually announce, more or less, "The killer is in this very room." As psychologically astute as Penny can be, the nuts and bolts of plot seem to elude her. One of the problems, I think, is the very narrow focus Penny has created for herself. Yes, the denizens of Three Pines are a colorful bunch, but ensuring that each of her mysteries (but one) somehow takes place there, creates logistical problems that strain credulity. Even Miss Marple traveled beyond the boundaries of St. Mary Mead. I think Penny would get more bang from her buck if the supporting characters surrounding Inspector Gamache changed with each book. This worked for Conan Doyle, Christie, James, Rendell -- the list is endless. I'd hate to see happen to Penny what happened to Martha Grimes, whose Richard Jury series became repetitive and precious precisely, I think, because her story telling was held hostage by characters who wore out their welcome.

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