

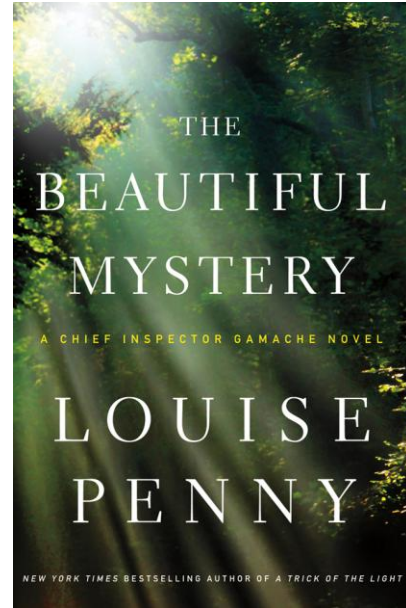
# READING GROUP GUIDE

## The Beautiful Mystery

By Louise Penny

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Beautiful Mystery* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Beautiful Mystery*.

### About the Book

The brilliant new novel in the *New York Times* bestselling series by Louise Penny, one of the most acclaimed crime writers of our time.

No outsiders are ever admitted to the monastery of Saint-Gilbert-Entre-les-Loups, hidden deep in the wilderness of Quebec, where two dozen cloistered monks live in peace and prayer. They grow vegetables, they tend chickens, they make chocolate. And they sing. Ironically, for a community that has taken a vow of silence, the monks have become world-famous for their glorious voices, raised in ancient chants whose effect on both singer and listener is so profound it is known as “the beautiful mystery.”

But when the renowned choir director is murdered, the lock on the monastery’s massive wooden door is drawn back to admit Chief Inspector Armand Gamache and Jean-Guy Beauvoir of the Sûreté du Québec. There they discover disquiet beneath the silence, discord in the apparent harmony. One of the brothers, in this life of prayer and contemplation, has been contemplating murder. As the peace of the monastery crumbles, Gamache is forced to confront some of his own demons, as well as those roaming the remote corridors. Before finding the killer, before restoring peace, the Chief must first consider the divine, the human, and the cracks in between.



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## About the Author

Louise Penny is *The New York Times* and *Globe and Mail* bestselling author of the novels featuring Chief Inspector Armand Gamache. Her debut, *Still Life*, won the John Creasey Dagger and the Arthur Ellis, Barry, Anthony, and Dilys Awards, and was named one of the five Mystery/Crime Novels of the Decade by *Deadly Pleasures* magazine. Penny was the first author ever to win the Agatha Award for Best Novel four times—for *A Fatal Grace*, *The Cruellest Month*, *The Brutal Telling* (which also received the Anthony Award for Best Novel), and *Bury Your Dead* (which also won the Dilys, Arthur Ellis, Anthony, Macavity, and Nero Awards). *A Trick of the Light* won the Anthony Award for Best Novel (her third win in a row and her fourth overall) and an Independent Literary Award and was named one of the Best Crime Novels of 2011 by *The New York Times*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *Publishers Weekly*. Louise lives with her husband, Michael, in a small village south of Montréal.

## Discussion Questions

1. What does "the beautiful mystery" of the title refer to? What are the powers and/or limitations of music throughout the novel?
2. As we get to know the inner workings of the monastery, how do you come to regard the community of Saint-Gilbert-Entre-les-Loups and the individuals who choose to devote their lives to it?
3. To solve the crime Gamache needs "to think about the Divine, the human, and the cracks in between." How do all of these qualities manifest themselves in the story?
4. What do you see as Gamache's greatest strengths as a detective and as a man? Does he also have weaknesses?
5. How do you view Jean-Guy Beauvoir throughout the book? What do you think will become of him?
6. Because the monastery is so cut off from most methods of communication, text messages take on unusual importance for Gamache and Beauvoir. How does Louise Penny use them to convey the tone of real-world relationships?
7. What do you make of Francoeur's fierce hatred for Gamache? What does the novel tell us about good and evil, and is the distinction between them always clear? For example, see page 318, where Gamache sits through the service in the Blessed Chapel amid "peace and rage, silence and singing. The Gilbertines and the Inquisition. The good men and the not-so-good."



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8. The abbot tells Gamache, "That's the difference between us, Chief Inspector. You need proof in your line of work. I don't." What role does faith play for various characters in the novel?

9. At one point Gamache finds himself wondering if the abbot's private garden "existed on different planes. It was both a place of grass and earth and flowers. But also an allegory. For that most private place inside each one of them. For some it was a dark, locked room. For others, a garden." How might that allegory apply to particular characters in *The Beautiful Mystery*?

10. When Gamache quotes the line from *Murder in the Cathedral*, "Some malady is coming upon us," Frère Sébastien replies, "Modern times. That's what came upon the Gilbertines." Do you feel that the monks could or should have remained in isolation from the outside world forever?

11. How is *The Beautiful Mystery* similar to/different from the books set in Three Pines?

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