

THE BRUTAL TELLING

Discussion Questions



1. A theme in this book, and many of Louise's books, is the difference between "truth" and "opinion." Is it always important to tell the truth, no matter how brutal it may be?
2. Was Olivier really wrong to give Madame Poirier less money for her furniture than he knew it was worth? Isn't that what we all hope we'll find at antique shops or flea markets? A treasure? Would you do differently?
3. When Superintendent Thérèse Brunel asks Clara what she fears, she says, "I'm afraid of not recognizing Paradise." Thérèse responds, "So am I." Why do you think they are both worrying about this, and can you connect such concerns to your own life?
4. How do you view the various assertions that Vincent Gilbert is a saint, especially when Gamache points out that "most saints were martyrs, and they took a lot of people down with them"? How would you feel about living with a saint?
5. For a moment Gamache himself feels the tug of greed and would love to slip one of the first editions into his pocket. What do you think of Gamache at that moment? Does it remind you of any temptations you yourself have faced?
6. In the book Brunel and Gamache discuss where the finest example of a Haida totem pole is standing. Where is that, and what is the irony?
7. What was the final monster? The thing even the Mountain ran from, and that kept the Hermit hiding in his cabin? How do you think this applies to the various characters in the book?
8. Ruth puts Rosa into clothing. Why?
9. Was the Hermit happy, finally? Had he found peace? Could you live in the Hermit's cabin?
10. In the book Gamache quotes Thoreau's *Walden*: "I had three chairs in my house. One for solitude, two for friendship, three for society." How many chairs would you have in your house?
11. What is the role of storytelling throughout the novel? What about poetry and other forms of art, from painting to sculpture and totem poles?
12. If Three Pines existed, would you move there? How do you think the community will weather the events of this story?



THE BRUTAL TELLING

PART 1

INTRODUCTION

Discovering Louise Penny's books has become an unofficial rite of passage for new Murder By The Book employees. I picked up *Still Life* shortly after starting at the store 4 years ago. I was immediately hooked. I wanted to devour the books, but I knew I didn't want to rush them. I would make myself take a break after every two that I read.

Louise Penny is one of the first authors I remember being nervous to meet. We host 3 or 4 events a week, and I'd already met many authors, but this was different. I had bonded with her books and characters in a way that I hadn't bonded with anything in a while. Louise didn't want her event to just be an author talk, she wanted it to be a conversation. Since I had just read the whole series, I got interview Louise about *Bury Your Dead*. It was the first time I'd done anything like that, and I knew it would be in front of a standing-room-only crowd. Louise immediately calmed my nerves. She walked into the store and wrapped her arms around me like we'd known each other for years. We had so much fun, and it's become tradition that I interview Louise when she visits the store. It's something I look forward to every year.

When I heard about the Gamache series reread, I knew I wanted to host the conversation about *The Brutal Telling*. It's my favorite in the series. With *The Brutal Telling*, Louise put a lot of trust in her readers. She told the story she wanted, and asked the readers to go on a ride with her. I love when authors make risky decisions for the sake of the story. It shows that they have faith in their readers. It might not be the story readers expected, but it's a story that's worth telling.

RECAP (CHAPTERS 1-25)

The Brutal Telling opens deep in the woods of Three Pines. A mysterious Hermit tells Olivier a story about Chaos destroying everything in the world except one small village. The Hermit tells Olivier, "Chaos is coming, old son."

A ringing phone wakes Gabri and Olivier from their sleep on a Sunday morning. They rush to the bistro to find Myrna already there. On her way to the bookstore Myrna had noticed the bistro's open door and found a body, obviously the victim of foul play. Olivier recognizes the Hermit, lying dead on the floor, but when Gabri asks who it is Olivier lies. In Montreal, a similar call pulls Armand Gamache and Jean Guy Beauvoir away from their family time. Arriving in Three Pines, Gamache and his team find no murder weapon, and no means of identifying the dead man.

It's clear that the blow to the stranger's head killed him instantly, but it appears that the crime did not occur in the bistro. Gamache establishes a timeline. On Saturday nights, Olivier leaves the night staff to close up, and Old Mundin drops by with repaired furniture. Young Parra would have been the last person in the bistro, but it hardly matters since so many people have keys to the building.

As the investigation gets underway, Agent Lacoste interviews the Parra family in their modern home, and she learns that Roar might have seen a strange man in the woods near the Hadley house. Gamache speaks to the medical examiner and learns that the victim was in his 50s, and took good care of himself for a vagrant. A young man asks to join Gamache's team, and against Beauvoir's advice, Gamache welcomes Paul Morin to the team. Beauvoir and Gamache think the body was left in the bistro on purpose, so it would be found.

Clara hosts a dinner party for the Surete officers and her neighbors. This gives everyone a chance to view Clara's new work for her upcoming art show, and reopens old wounds for Peter. The subject of the body in the bistro comes up again, and everyone wonders why someone would leave the body as a gift for Olivier. Gamache learns that the Hadley house has been purchased and will be turned into a spa. The spa has caused conflict between Olivier and the house's new owner, Marc. A trip to meet the new owners uncovers a possible motive, as Gamache learns that Olivier had been overcharging them for antiques, causing them to take their business elsewhere.

The idea of reopening the bistro gives Olivier pause. He questions his place in Three Pines, and whether the community would still love him if they knew his secrets. Myrna tries to reassure him, but he decides he needs some time alone. Gamache and Beauvoir meet with the medical examiner and learn that the victim was killed elsewhere and moved to the bistro.

A search of the town doesn't turn up any possibilities for the murder scene. At the Hadley house, Dominique has decided to bring in old horses destined for slaughter instead of the hunters she originally wanted. A conversation with Old Mundin (who is actually not old) uncovers that Olivier has also caused friction with the antiques community as more people besides Marc feel that he isn't giving them fair deals for the pieces he purchases.

More digging into Olivier's background turns up interesting facts. While he may pay less for his antiques, he's known to give his clients other things (comfort, human contact,) and he owns most of the property in Three Pines.

A visit to the bank where he used to work reveals that Olivier resigned after borrowing money from clients and investing it. He was able to almost triple the money, but didn't have authorization to do so. As a result, he resigned and his employers were never sure whether he had intended to steal the money he made. It's still unclear where he got the money to purchase so much property in Three Pines. Olivier's father is unable to shed any light on the subject because he barely knows his son at all. He doesn't know that Olivier lives in Three Pines or that he's gay.

Paul Morin learns that only two people have recently purchased Varathane, Gabri and Marc. A visit to the Hadley house reveals that their floors had been recently varathaned. Fiber from the victim's sweater is also found stuck to the floor. But, the revelation that the body was originally found in the old Hadley house does nothing to advance the case. Marc admits to finding the body there and moving it to the bistro for revenge on Olivier, but it's obvious from a lack of blood that the stranger's body was not murdered in the Hadley house either.

While Marc is being questioned, a man is seen lurking around the Hadley house. The stranger turns out to be Marc's father, a man Marc thought was dead, a who came to town right

around the time of the murder. Dominique is the one who finds the cabin in the woods, and the blood pool that marks it as the scene of the crime. The cabin is filled with priceless antiques from a variety of times and places. No one understands how a treasure trove could have been hidden in the woods without anyone being aware of it. The location of the cabin makes the crime even more peculiar. If the murderer had left the body there, it is likely no one would have ever found it.

Among the treasures are beautifully carved figures. Everyone agrees that they are works of art, but they are also unsettling. One figure is covered in blood, and (we later learn) Olivier's fingerprints. Each figure has a series of letters carved on its bottom. Even more curious is the first edition of *Charlotte's Web* found in the cabin's outhouse, and a spider web with the word *Woo* on it.

Clara is thrilled to meet with Denis Fortin about her upcoming art show. Denis seems to really understand what Clara is trying to say with her layout and vision. It all goes well until Fortin calls Gabri "a fucking queer." Paralyzed by shock, Clara says nothing.

With the fingerprint results back in, Gamache confronts Olivier. This time Olivier doesn't lie; he admits to knowing *The Hermit*. *The Hermit* was one of Olivier's first customers and trades antiques for food. After a while, he had become nervous about being in town and Olivier had started to visit him in the woods. Olivier claims that he picked up the murder weapon, and dropped it when he discovered the blood on it. Gamache asks him, "Did you kill him?"

FAVORITE QUOTE

He watched Beauvoir sit up, "How was it?"

"No one died."

"That's a bit of an achievement in *Three Pines*."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Gamache consistently recruits outcasts as members of his team? How is that mirrored by Dominique's choice of horses.
2. *The Brutal Telling* starts on the last weekend of the summer, how do you think the changing season mirrors the changes in *Three Pines*?
3. What would you have done in Clara's position? Would you have confronted Fortin or stayed silent?
4. How would you describe Olivier's friendship with *The Hermit*?
5. How do you think the citizens of *Three Pines* are going to react when they learn that Olivier owns most of the town? Do you think they will still love him, as Myrna said?
6. Do you think Olivier murdered *The Hermit*?

PART 2

RECAP (FROM CHAPTER 26 TO THE END)

Clara talks to Myrna about her incident with Fortin, and Myrna says she would have done nothing as well. Clara decides to talk with Gabri. Olivier says he didn't kill the Hermit, but confesses that he found the Hermit dead in the cabin and moved the body to the Hadley house for Marc Gilbert to find. Gamache makes a trip to the cabin to look around before it's cleaned out, and ponders who might have had motive to kill The Hermit. Vincent or Marc Gilbert, Roar or Havoc Parra. A casual look around the cabin reveals that several items all have one name in common, Charlotte.

Olivier attempts to talk to Gabri, but Gabri continues working on his preserves. Clara asks Peter what to do about Fortin, and Peter is slow to offer any advice. The next morning he tells Clara to speak to Fortin. Clara confronts Fortin, and just as Peter suspected he would, Fortin tells Clara he needs to reconsider her show.

Gamache gets help trying to decipher the codes on the bottom of The Hermit's carvings and learns that several have been sold and are worth enough money to be a possible motive for murder. Once again, Olivier lied about what he did with the carvings The Hermit gave him. The word Woo and the prevalence of the name Charlotte lead Gamache to think of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Emily Carr spent time on the Queen Charlotte Islands painting and documenting totem poles, with carvings very similar to the carvings done by The Hermit. While speaking of Emily Carr, Clara mentions the concept of "the brutal telling." Carr was estranged from her father, and later in life she said it was because her father had said something horrible and unforgivable to her. The brutal telling.

Garbi makes a trip up to the Hadley house to talk to the Gilberts. The visit doesn't go well. Tensions are high as the group argues. Gabri explains how people come to Three Pines and find their niche, rather than moving in on someone else's. He tries to apologize for Olivier's actions. In an empty bistro, Gamache questions Olivier again about The Hermit and the carvings. Olivier admits to selling them online.

Gamache takes a trip to Queen Charlotte Island to see if that's where The Hermit had come from. No one on the island knows him. Gamache strikes out, but a famous artist, Will Sommes, tells Gamache that the person who made the carvings was terrified. As he learns more about the island's history, Gamache is certain that The Hermit spent time on the island, but no one can verify it for sure. It's on the flight home that Gamache realizes how the carvings fit together.

Back in the Bistro, Gabri learns that Olivier has never told his father he is gay. When questioned about the order of the carvings, Olivier claims he doesn't know the story they're trying to tell. In a rare moment of frustration, Gamache pounds on the table and demands the truth. With more pushing, Olivier tells them that the Hermit's name was Jakob, but Gamache doesn't know much more about him. The Hermit came from Czechoslovakia just as the Berlin Wall fell, stored his treasures in Montreal, and moved them to the cabin once it was built.

Olivier says that The Hermit was telling him the story of the carvings, but never finished the story, and Olivier has never seen the final carving.

As the officers meet at the B & B, they ponder the story the carvings are trying to tell, and The Hermit's possible connections to the Czech community in Three Pines. Though they've asked many Czech families about the treasures found in the cabin, they've had no leads. Another trip to the Parras doesn't turn up anything new. A search team tears apart the Bistro, and hidden in the fireplace is a sack and a Menorah, the murder weapon.

Olivier swears he didn't kill Jakob. He spent time with Jakob, and had to go back when he realized he left the artifact he was given. When he returned, Jakob was dead. Olivier took the Menorah because it had his fingerprints all over it, and admitted that part of the reason he moved the body to the Hadley house was to stop the clearing of trails that would eventually lead to the cabin. Olivier took the Menorah and the sack with the last carving, and hid them in the fireplace of the bistro. Another revelation lets us know that Olivier was the one telling the story to Jakob. Olivier knew Jakob was afraid of something, so he made up a story to keep Jakob scared and isolated. Despite claiming that he didn't kill Jakob, Olivier is arrested for the murder.

The key to the codes on the bottom of the carvings is the number 16. With the code, Gamache was able to learn that the words under them were Emily and Charlotte. Cracking the codes still doesn't offer any insight into their meaning.

Vincent Gilbert decides to stay in Three Pines and live in Jakob's cabin, Clara is contacted by Therese Brunel, and has hope that her art show might still happen. Gamache is confronted by Gabri again, trying to explain that Olivier couldn't have murdered Jakob. As the book closes, we see Ruth's duck Rosa take to the sky and fly away. Gabri is with Ruth to comfort her as they watch the duck go.

CONCLUSION

Bury Your Dead was the first book release I experienced at Murder By The Book, and every customer wanted to know if Louise was going to fix what she did in *The Brutal Telling*. I think that's a beautiful testament to the world that she created. The citizens of Three Pines have become like family to us all, and with *The Brutal Telling* we learn some things about our family that we really didn't want to know. There's no way to fix it. A Rule Against Murder changed the series because we were taken out of Three Pines, but *The Brutal Telling* changes the series because it changes Three Pines.

We're left in a place of transition. Olivier is in jail, Gabri is still convinced he didn't do it, and even Ruth's pet duck has left.

It seems dire, but I think Louise left us with some hope. I love the tender moment between Ruth and Gabri as Rosa takes flight. We see hope in Gamache's patience with Gabri, and we're left with some hope that Clara might still have her art show.

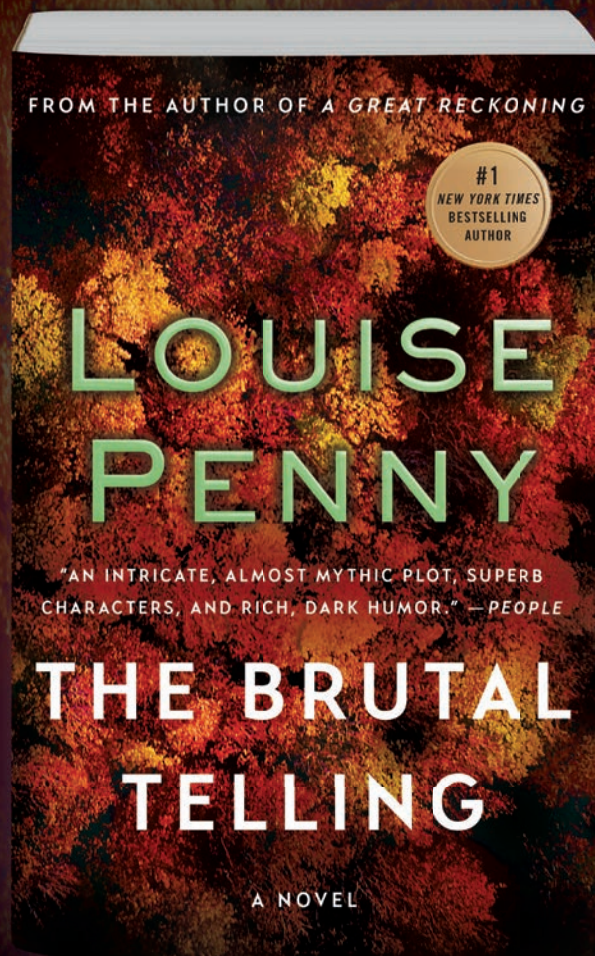
When I think of this book, the image in my head is always of Gabri and his preserves. Louise so perfectly captures that need to complete some task in order to have some control in the chaos. Part of the beauty of the series is the way Louise just nails those very human moments.

FAVORITE QUOTE

“Every surface of the kitchen was packed with colorful jars filled with jams and jellies, pickles and chutneys. And it looked as though Gabri would keep this up forever. Silently preserving everything he could.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think Peter was purposely trying to sabotage Clara with his advice?
2. We see Gamache get visibly angry with Olivier, and he’s usually so collected. How did it make you feel? Why do you think Gamache lost his cool?
3. How have the events of *The Brutal Telling* changed your opinion of Olivier? Do you think he did it? (Remember, no spoilers from *Bury Your Dead*.)
4. What do you think was Olivier’s brutal telling? Do you think any of his lies were unforgivable in the eyes of Three Pines? Was Peter’s advice to Clara about the art show a brutal telling?
5. Gamache says that he doesn’t believe Olivier is a murderer, but that he does believe Olivier has killed. Do you agree with his distinction?



REAL PLACES OF THREE PINES

THE GENERAL STORE



The dark wooden shelves were neatly stacked with tins. Sacks of dog food and birdseed leaned against the counter. Above the shelves were old boxes with backgammon games. Checkers, Snakes and Ladders, Monopoly. Paint by numbers and jigsaw puzzles were stacked in the neat, orderly rows. Dried goods were displayed along one wall, paint, boots, birdfeeders were down another. (*The Brutal Telling*, Chapter 14)

I'm a sucker for General Stores. From the worn hardwood floors to the super stocked shelves of everything you could possibly need; wine, cheese, hats, gloves, pocket knives, maple syrup, and—if you're lucky—a big old barrel of peanuts that you can shuck and freely discard the shells right there on those well-worn floors.

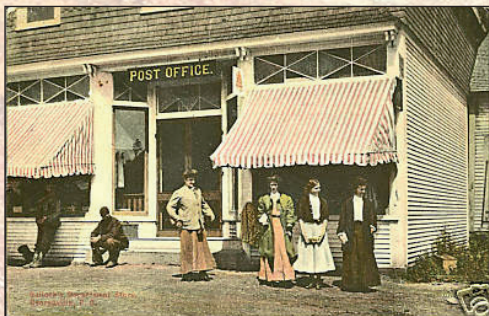
Whenever I get the chance I spend hours reveling in the history of these iconic establishments which sadly had their heyday in the late 18th century. That said, if you look hard enough and take the roads less traveled, you can still find them out there well beyond the neon signs of the big box stores.

Some of my personal favorites:

Kelloggs & Lawrence (established in 1887) in Katonah, NY. Rife with tools, camping gear, and folksy children's games; K&L has it all including the peanut barrel!

FH Gillingham & Sons (established in 1886) in Woodstock, VT. Just about dead center in the most picturesque village in the Green Mountains, it's one of the state's oldest General Stores "where you can buy everything from caviar to cow manure—accompanied by a farmstead cheese and a bottle of Corton Charlemagne!"

Gray's General Store (established in 1788 and sadly closed in 2012) in Adamsville, RI. It still pains me that that after 225 years the doors of this Ocean State mainstay were shuttered. It actually had a vintage soda fountain and authentic Johnnycakes!



The General Store in Georgeville, Quebec is the model for Three Pines' General Store. While I've found a photo of the store dating back to 1910, historical information beyond that is scant and, as of this writing, inquires to the general store have gone unanswered although, from what I gather, they're only open from May to November, so more to come! I have learned they do sell local products like honey and not so local products like fireworks! Looks like I'll have to take a trip up there soon to see for myself.

Special thanks to Bob Heath (see comments) for filling in some of the General Store's background!

Anyone here ever been to the General Store in Georgeville?

Tell us all about your favorite General Store!



CULTURAL INSPIRATIONS

FROM THREE PINES

"In the letter she said that her father had said something to her. Something horrible and unforgivable."

"The Brutal Telling."

"That's how she described it."

(The Brutal Telling)

If you've read Louise's fifth novel in the Inspector Gamache Series, you'll recognize this scene, in which Clara Morrow explains the phrase "The Brutal Telling". The phrase was first used by the Modernist Canadian painter Emily Carr to describe a horrific falling out with her father.



Here she is with her Javanese monkey, Woo, who plays an important part in Louise's book. And as Superintendent Therese Brunel points out, "She adored all animals, but Woo above all."

Carr was born in 1871 in British Columbia, one of nine children and, by all accounts, had a relatively stable childhood up until "The Brutal Telling" episode. Clara describes the mysterious incident to Inspector Gamache as thus, "She went from being a happy, carefree child to an embittered woman. Very solitary, not very likable." Whatever terrible transgression took place (to this day, the details are unknown), it propelled Emily to travel to the isolated regions of Canada where she recorded, through her paintings, the vanishing indigenous cultures that resided there.

The similarities between the real life Carr and Louise's Clara are apparent. Both, of course, are painters and in a scene late in the novel, Superintendent Brunel and Clara sit before a statue of Carr where Therese tells Clara, "She looks a bit like you". This is also the point in the book in which Brunel—while examining Clara's painting—exclaims, "The Fall. My God, you've painted the Fall. That moment. She's not even aware of it, is she? Not really, but she sees something, a hint of the horror to come. The Fall from Grace."

The Fall from Grace. . . .

See our previous post on *A Rule Against Murder and Milton's Paradise Lost* to see how deftly and deeply these novels interweave with one another. It really is quite amazing!



Oh, and remember Clara's own description of Emily Carr? ". . . an embittered woman. Very solitary, not very likable."

Kinda reminds me of a certain rascally poet who also has fondness for out-of-the-ordinary pets. . . .

THE ANNOTATED THREE PINES



FROM PG. 1

“All around. Have you seen the light in the night sky?”

“I thought those were the Northern Lights.” The pink and green and white shifting, flowing against the stars. Like something alive, glowing, and growing. And approaching.

Olivier Brulé lowered his gaze, no longer able to look into the troubled, lunatic eyes across from him. He’d lived with this story for so long, and kept telling himself it wasn’t real. It was a myth, a story told and repeated and embellished over and over and over. Around fires just like theirs.

It was a story, nothing more. No harm in it.

LOUISE’S THOUGHTS:

The idea for this book, both the theme of story telling, of the ‘myth-time, and the title of the book, came completely unexpectedly when Michael and I were visiting Vancouver. We went into their splendid Art Gallery, where there was an exhibit on of one of my favourite artists, Emily Carr. She painted in a flowing, near abstract, style, uncannily capturing a sort of dream world in an area called Haida Gwaii. As part of the exhibit, there was context, about the oral traditions of the First Nations. As well as a history of Carr herself. In it they described that she was very very close to her father, until a falling out. After that, she never saw him, spoke to him, spoke of him again. And only ever once referred to what had happened, describing it as ‘the brutal telling.’ It came to me, standing there, that I wanted to write a book about myth, about the power of stories, and imagination. And perception. These lines are the beginning of a story woven throughout the book.

FROM PG. 26

Most murder investigations appeared complex but were really quite simple. It was just a matter of asking “And then what happened?” over and over and over.

LOUISE’S THOUGHTS:

Ha – what they’re really saying is that a great investigator listens. Closely. I actually got this idea from my time as an interviewer on CBC Radio, where most of the time the best thing the interviewer can do is get out of the way, and help the person tell an often painful story. And listen, very, very closely.

FROM PG. 31

“Can’t imagine what Gamache thinks of us,” said Myrna. “Every time he shows up there’s a body.”
“Every Quebec village has a vocation,” said Clara. “Some make cheese, some wine, some pots. We produce bodies.”

LOUISE’S THOUGHTS:

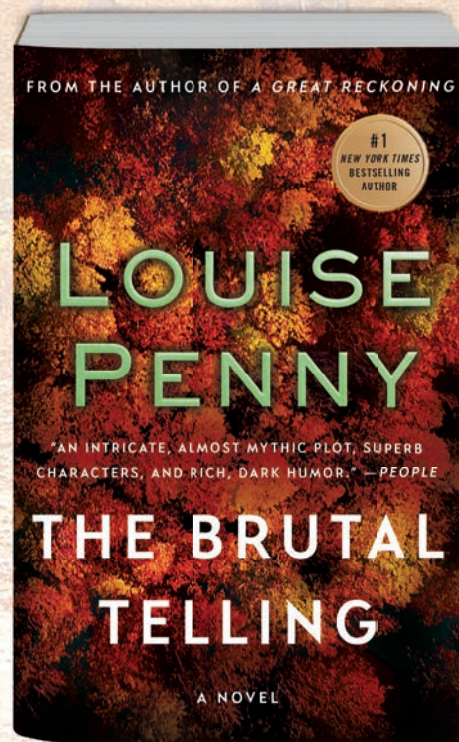
Now, this is facing a slight problem head on. No use pretending that the body count in Three Pines (a village continuously described as idyllic) is in any way normal. Might as well embrace this abnormality, own it, even have some fun with it, then move on. I really hadn’t thought of this when I first started writing the books. As a result, I didn’t want to strain credibility too much, so many of the actual deaths now happen elsewhere. But the investigations are conducted from the village.

FROM PG. 33

People lied all the time in murder investigations. If the first victim of war was the truth, some of the first victims of a murder investigation were people’s lies. The lies they told themselves, the lies they told each other. The little lies that allowed them to get out of bed on cold, dark mornings.

LOUISE’S THOUGHTS:

The Gamache books are absolutely crime novels, murder mysteries, but the biggest mystery in each is human behaviour. Human nature. And part of that nature is a certain willful disregard for the truth about ourselves. That’s what I love exploring. What motivates us. Thomas Hobbes said that hell is truth seen too late. That’s the vortex around which **THE BRUTAL TELLING** swirls.



POSTCARDS

FROM THREE PINES



"Received great news today - Barnes and Noble has chosen THE BRUTAL TELLING for their Recommends Program! Off to the Brume County Fair with Michael to research the next book. Onward!"

AN EXCERPT FROM THE BRUTAL TELLING

The Brume County Fair was more than a century old, bringing people in from all over the townships. Like most fairs it had started as a meeting place for farmers, to show their livestock, to sell their autumn produce, to make deals and see friends. There was judging in one barn and displays of handicraft in another. Baking was for sale in the long aisles of open sheds and children lined up for licorice and maple syrup candy, popcorn and freshly made doughnuts.

It was the last celebration of summer, the bridge into autumn. Armand Gamache walked past the rides and hawkers, then consulted his watch. It was time. He made for a field to the side of the barns, where a crowd had gathered. For the Wellington Boot Toss.

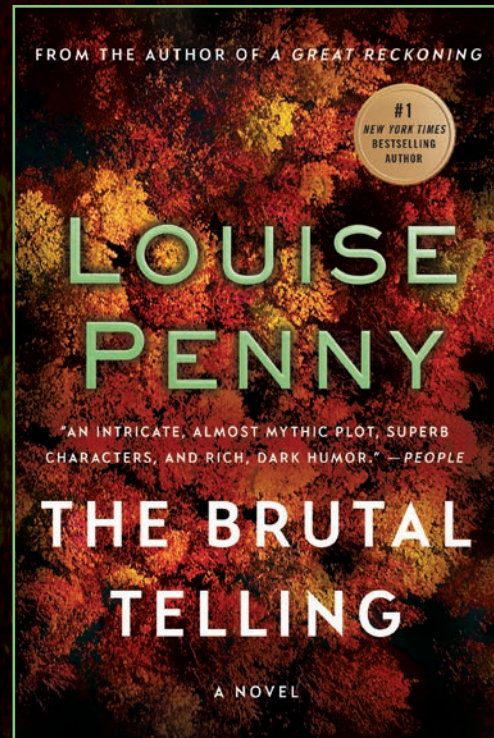
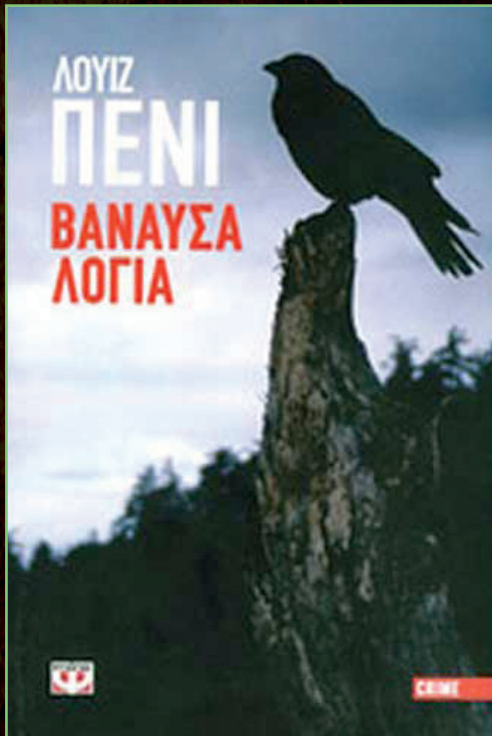
Standing on the edge of the field he watched as kids and adults lined up. The young man in charge settled them down, gave them each an old rubber boot, and standing well back he raised his arm. And held it there. The tension was almost unbearable. Then like an ax he dropped it.

The line of people raised their arms in unison and shot them forward, and to whoops of encouragement from onlookers a storm of Wellington boots was released.

Gamache knew in that instant why he'd gotten such an unexpectedly good spot at the side of the field. At least three boots shot his way.



GAMACHE GOES ABROAD



Off to Greece this week, with the cover of *The Brutal Telling* as envisioned by our Greek colleagues. There's clearly a stark difference between the two cover treatments: while we chose to emphasize the fall season in our jacket approach, they focus on traditional mystery elements.

With the silhouette of a raven, their cover puts the reader in the mind of Edgar Allen Poe, and immediately suggests something sinister is afoot. In contrast, the US jacket focuses on the vibrant fall foliage of Canada, with only the darkness at the edges to symbolize danger.

Both jackets, however, speak to the untamed landscape that Chief Inspector Gamache must navigate to solve the crime.

Which cover do you think best fits the story?

If you were designing a new cover, which elements of the book would you choose to highlight?



THE NATURE OF THE FEAST

PAIN DORÉ



Gamache tried the door to the bistro and was surprised to find it open. Earlier that morning, over breakfast of pain doré, sliced strawberries and bananas, maple syrup and back bacon, Gabri had admitted he didn't know when Olivier might reopen the bistro.

—The Brutal Telling

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

- Eight 1-inch (2.5-cm) slices challah, brioche, or other eggy, soft-textured dough (see Note)
- 1 cup dry-textured muesli
- ½ cup (120 ml) milk
- 1 large egg
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter

TO SERVE (choose any or all)

- Fresh blueberries
- Powdered sugar
- Maple syrup

1. Arrange the bread slices on a cooling rack (or a plate) and let them get slightly stale overnight. This will give the finished pain doré an almost custardy texture.

2. Grind the muesli in a food processor to the texture of very coarse sand. Spread out the ground muesli on a wide plate.
3. In a bowl, whisk together the milk, egg, maple syrup, vanilla, and cinnamon until smooth. Pour into a square 9 x 9-inch (22 x 22-cm) baking pan. Add the bread slices and soak for 4 minutes; turn and soak the second side for another 4 minutes. There should be very little egg mix left after soaking.
4. Heat the butter in a large (10-inch/25-cm or so) nonstick pan over medium-low heat until the butter is foaming. Carefully dredge both sides of the soaked bread slices in the ground muesli. Add the bread slices to the pan as you dredge them and cook, turning only once, until golden brown on both sides, about 8 minutes. Serve warm with blueberries, powdered sugar, and/or additional maple syrup.

