



THE

BEAUTIFUL
MYSTERY

A CHIEF INSPECTOR GAMACHE NOVEL

LOUISE
PENNY

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF A TRICK OF THE LIGHT

LOUISE PENNY



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BEAUTIFUL
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This book is dedicated to those who kneel down, and those who stand up.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Beautiful Mystery started as a fascination with music, and a very personal and baffling relationship with it. I love music. Various pieces have inspired each of the books, and I'm convinced music has had a near magical effect on my creative process. When I sit on planes, or go for walks, drive and listen to music I can see scenes from the book I'm about to write, or am writing. I can feel the characters. Hear them. Sense them. It's thrilling. Gamache and Clara and Beauvoir come even more alive when I'm listening to certain music. It's transformative. Spiritual, even. I can feel the divine in the music.

I'm far from alone in this, I know.

In preparing for this book I read widely, including a book by McGill University professor Daniel Levitin called *This Is Your Brain on Music*, about the neuroscience of music—its effects on our brains.

I wanted to explore this beautiful mystery. How just a few notes can take us to a different time and place. Can conjure a person, an event, a feeling. Can inspire great courage, and reduce us to tears. And in the case of this book, I wanted to explore the power of ancient chants. Gregorian chants. On those who sing them, and those who hear them.

I had a great deal of help in writing *The Beautiful Mystery*. From family and friends. From books and videos and real-life experiences, including a remarkable and very peaceful stay at a monastery.

I'd like to thank Lise Desrosiers, my amazing assistant, who makes it possible for me to concentrate on writing, while she does all the rest. Thank you to my editors, Hope Dellon, of Minotaur Books in New York City, and Dan Mallory, of Little, Brown in London, for all their help with *The Beautiful Mystery*. Thank you, Teresa Chris and Patty Moosbrugger, my agents. To Doug and Susan, my first readers. To Marjorie, for always being so willing and happy to help.

And thank you to my husband, Michael. If there's one mystery even more baffling and powerful than music in my life, it's love. It's one mystery I'll never solve, and never want to. I just enjoy when loving Michael takes me.

And thank you, for reading my books and giving me a life beyond imagining.

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PROLOGUE

In the early nineteenth century the Catholic Church realized it had a problem. Perhaps, it must have admitted, more than one. But the problem that preoccupied it at that moment had to do with the Divine Office. This consisted of eight times in the daily life of a Catholic community when chants were sung. Plainchant. Gregorian chant. Simple songs sung by humble monks.

Not to put too fine a point on it, the Catholic Church had lost the Divine Office.

The different services throughout a religious day were still performed. What were called Gregorian chants were sung here and there, in the odd monastery, but even Rome admitted the chants had strayed so far from the originals that they were considered corrupt, even barbaric. At least, in comparison to the elegant and graceful chants of centuries earlier.

But one man had a solution.

In 1833 a young monk, Dom Prosper, revived the Abbey of St. Pierre in Solesmes, France, and made it his mission to also bring back to life the original Gregorian chants.

But this produced another problem. It turned out, after much investigation by the abbot, that no one knew what the original chants sounded like. There was no written record of the earliest chants. They were so old, more than a millenium, that they predated written music. They were learned by heart and passed down orally, after years of study, from one monk to another. The chants were simple, but there was power in that very simplicity. The first chants were soothing, contemplative, magnetic.

They had such a profound effect on those who sang and heard them that the ancient chants became known as “the beautiful mystery.” The monks believed they were singing the word of God, in that calm, reassuring, hypnotic voice of God.

What Dom Prosper did know was that sometime in the ninth century, a thousand years before the abbot lived, a brother monk had also contemplated the mystery of the chants. According to Church lore, this anonymous monk was visited by an inspired idea. He would make a written record of the chants. So that they’d be preserved. Too many of his numbskull novices made too many mistakes when trying to learn the plainchants. If the words and music really were Divine, as he believed with all his heart, then they needed to be safer than stored in such faulty human heads.

Dom Prosper, in his own stone cell in his own abbey, could see that monk sitting in a room exactly like his. As the abbot imagined it, the monk pulled a piece of lambskin, vellum, toward him then dipped his sharpened quill in ink. He wrote the words, the text, in Latin, of course. The psalms. And once that was done he went back to the beginning. To the first word.

His quill hovered over it.

Now what?

How to write music? How could he possibly communicate something that sublime? He tried writing out instructions, but that was far too cumbersome. Words alone could never describe how this music transcended the normal human state, and lifted man to the Divine.

The monk was stumped. For days and weeks he went about his monastic life. Joining the others in prayer and work. And prayer. Chanting the Office. Teaching the young and easily distracted novices.

And then one day he noticed that they focused on his right hand, as he guided their voices. U

down. Faster, slower. Quietly, quietly. They'd memorized the words, but depended upon his hand signals for the music itself.

That night, after Vespers, this nameless monk sat by precious candle-light, staring at the psalm written so carefully on the vellum. Then he dipped his quill in ink and drew the very first music note.

It was a wave above a word. A single, short, squiggly line. Then another. And another. He drew his hand. Stylized. Guiding some unseen monk to raise his voice. Higher. Then holding. Then high again. Hanging there for just a moment, then swooping and sweeping downward in a giddy music descent.

He hummed as he wrote. His simple hand signals on the page fluttered, so that the words came alive and lifted off. Became airborne. Joyous. He heard the voices of monks not yet born joining him. Singing exactly the same chants that freed him and lifted his heart to Heaven.

In trying to capture the beautiful mystery, this monk had invented written music. Not yet noted what he'd written became known as neumes.

Over the centuries this plain chant evolved into complex chant. Instruments were added, harmonies were added, which led to chords and staves and finally musical notes. Do-re-mi. Modern music was born. The Beatles, Mozart, rap. Disco, *Annie Get Your Gun*, Lady Gaga. All sprang from the same ancient seed. A monk, drawing his hand. Humming and conducting and straining for the Divine.

Gregorian chant was the father of western music. But it was eventually killed by its ungrateful children. Buried. Lost and forgotten.

Until the early 1800s when Dom Prosper, sickened by what he saw as the vulgarity of the Church and the loss of simplicity and purity, decided it was time to resurrect the original Gregorian chants. To find the voice of God.

His monks fanned out across Europe. They searched monasteries and libraries and collections. With one goal. To find that original ancient manuscript.

The monks came back with many treasures lost in remote libraries and collections. And finally Dom Prosper decided one book of plainsong, written in faded neumes, was the original. The first, and perhaps only, written record of what Gregorian chant would have sounded like. It was on a piece of lambskin almost a thousand years old.

Rome disagreed. The pope had conducted his own search and found another written record. He insisted his piece of tattered vellum recorded how the Divine Office should be sung.

And so, as often happens when men of God disagree, a war erupted. Volleys of plainsong were hurled between the Benedictine monastery of Solesmes and the Vatican. Each insisting theirs was closer to the original and therefore, closer to the Divine. Academics, musicologists, famous composers and humble monks weighed in on the subject. Choosing sides in the escalating battle that soon became more about power and influence and less about simple voices raised to the glory of God.

Who had found the original Gregorian chant? How should the Divine Office be sung? Who possessed the voice of God?

Who was right?

Finally, after years, a quiet consensus arose among the academics. And then was even more quietly suppressed.

Neither was correct. While the monks of Solesmes were almost certainly far closer to the truth than Rome, it appeared even they were not there yet. What they found was historic, priceless—but it was incomplete.

For something was missing.

The chants had words and neumes, indications of when monastic voices should be raised, and when they should be hushed. When a note was higher, and when it was lower.

What they didn't have was a starting point. Higher, but from where? Louder, but from where? It was like finding a complete treasure map, with an X for exactly where to end up. But not where to begin.

In the beginning ...

The Benedictine monks of Solesmes quickly established themselves as the new home of the old chants. The Vatican eventually relented and within a few decades the Divine Office had regained favor. The resurrected Gregorian chants spread to monasteries worldwide. The simple music offered genuine comfort. Plainsong in an increasingly noisy world.

And so the abbot of Solesmes passed away quietly, knowing two things. That he had achieved something significant and powerful and meaningful. He'd revived a beautiful and simple tradition. He'd restored the corrupted chants to their pure state, and won the war against a gaudy Rome.

But he also knew, in his heart, that while he'd won, he hadn't succeeded. What everyone now took to be genuine Gregorian chants were close, yes. Almost Divine. But not quite.

For they had no starting point.

Dom Prosper, a gifted musician himself, couldn't believe the monk who had codified the first plainchants wouldn't tell future generations where to start. They could guess. And they did. But it wasn't the same as knowing.

The abbot had argued passionately that the Book of Chants his monks had found was the original. But now, on his deathbed, he dared to wonder. He imagined that other monk, dressed exactly as he was now, bending over candle-light.

The monk would have finished the first chant, created the first neumes. And then what? Dom Prosper, as he drifted in and out of consciousness, in and out of this world and the next, knew what that monk would have done. That anonymous monk would have done what he'd have done.

Dom Prosper saw, more clearly than his brothers chanting soft prayers over his bed, that long dead monk bending over his desk. Going back to the beginning. The first word. And making one more mark.

At the very end of his life, Dom Prosper knew there was a beginning. But it would be up to someone else to find it. To solve the beautiful mystery.

ONE

As the last note of the chant escaped the Blessed Chapel a great silence fell, and with it came an even greater disquiet.

The silence stretched on. And on.

These were men used to silence, but this seemed extreme, even to them.

And still they stood in their long black robes and white tops, motionless.

Waiting.

These were men also used to waiting. But this too seemed extreme.

The less disciplined among them stole glances at the tall, slim, elderly man who had been the last file in and would be the first to leave.

Dom Philippe kept his eyes closed. Where once this was a moment of profound peace, a private moment with his private God, when Vigils had ended and before he signaled for the Angelus, now was simply escape.

He closed his eyes because he didn't want to see.

Besides, he knew what was there. What was always there. What had been there for hundreds of years before he arrived and would, God willing, be there for centuries after he was buried in the cemetery. Two rows of men across from him, in black robes with white hoods, a simple rope tied around their waists.

And beside him to his right, two more rows of men.

They were facing each other across the stone floor of the chapel, like ancient battle lines.

No, he told his weary mind. No. I mustn't think of this as a battle, or a war. Just opposing points of view. Expressed in a healthy community.

Then why was he so reluctant to open his eyes? To get the day going?

To signal the great bells that would ring the Angelus to the forests and birds and lakes and fish. And to the monks. To the angels and all the saints. And God.

A throat cleared.

In the great silence it sounded like a bomb. And to the abbot's ears it sounded like what it was.

A challenge.

With an effort he continued to keep his eyes closed. He remained still, and quiet. But there was no peace anymore. Now there was only turmoil, inside and out. He could feel it, vibrating from all around between the two rows of waiting men.

He could feel it vibrating within him.

Dom Philippe counted to one hundred. Slowly. Then opening his blue eyes, he stared directly across the chapel, to the short, round man who stood with his eyes open, his hands folded on his stomach, a small smile on his endlessly patient face.

The abbot's eyes narrowed slightly, in a glare, then he recovered and raising his slim right hand, he signaled. And the bells began.

The perfect, round, rich toll left the bell tower and took off into the early morning darkness. It skimmed over the clear lake, the forests, the rolling hills. To be heard by all sorts of creatures.

And twenty-four men, in a remote monastery in Québec.

A clarion call. Their day had begun.

* * *

“You’re not serious,” laughed Jean-Guy Beauvoir.

“I am,” nodded Annie. “I swear to God it’s the truth.”

“Are you telling me,” he picked up another piece of maple-cured bacon from the platter, “that your father gave your mother a bathmat as a gift when they first started dating?”

“No, no. That would be ridiculous.”

“Sure would,” he agreed and ate the bacon in two big bites. In the background an old Beauvoir Dommage album was playing. “*La complainte du phoque en Alaska*.” About a lonely seal whose love had disappeared. Beauvoir hummed quietly to the familiar tune.

“He gave it to my grandmother the first time they met, as a hostess gift, thanking her for inviting him to dinner.”

Beauvoir laughed. “He never told me that,” he finally managed.

“Well, Dad doesn’t exactly mention it in polite conversation. Poor Mom. Felt she had to marry him. After all, who else would have him?”

Beauvoir laughed again. “So I guess the bar is set pretty low. I could hardly give you a worse gift.”

He reached down beside the table in the sunny kitchen. They’d made breakfast together the Saturday morning. A platter of bacon and scrambled eggs with melted Brie sat on the small pine table. He’d thrown on a sweater this early autumn day and gone around the corner from Annie’s apartment to the bakery on rue St-Denis for croissants and *pain au chocolat*. Then Jean-Guy had wandered in and out of the local shops, picking up a couple of *cafés*, the Montréal weekend papers, and something else.

“What’ve you got there?” Annie Gamache asked, leaning across the table. The cat leapt to the ground and found a spot on the floor where the sun hit.

“Nothing,” he grinned. “Just a little *je ne sais quoi* I saw, and thought of you.”

Beauvoir lifted it into plain sight.

“You asshole,” Annie said, and laughed. “It’s a toilet plunger.”

“With a bow on it,” said Beauvoir. “Just for you, *ma chère*. We’ve been together for three months. Happy anniversary.”

“Of course, the toilet plunger anniversary. And I got you nothing.”

“I forgive you,” he said.

Annie took the plunger. “I’ll think of you every time I use it. Though I think you’ll be the one using it most of the time. You are full of it, after all.”

“Too kind,” said Beauvoir, ducking his head in a small bow.

She thrust the plunger forward, gently prodding him with the red rubber suction cup as though she was a rapier and she the swordsman.

Beauvoir smiled and took a sip of his rich, aromatic *café*. So like Annie. Where other women might have pretended the ridiculous plunger was a wand, she pretended it was a sword.

Of course, Jean-Guy realized, he would never have given a toilet plunger to any other woman. On Annie.

“You lied to me,” she said, sitting back down. “Dad obviously told you about the bathmat.”

“He did,” admitted Beauvoir. “We were in Gaspé, in a poacher’s cabin, searching for evidence when your father opened a closet and found not one but two brand-new bathmats, still in their wrapping.”

As he spoke he looked at Annie. Her eyes never left him, barely blinked. She took in every word, every gesture, every inflection. Enid, his ex-wife, had also listened. But there was always an edge of desperation about it, a demand. As though he owed her. As though she was dying and he was the

medicine.

Enid left him drained, and yet still feeling inadequate.

But Annie was gentler. More generous.

Like her father, she listened carefully and quietly.

With Enid he never talked about his work, and she never asked. With Annie he told her everything

Now, while putting strawberry *confiture* on the warm croissant, he told her about the poacher's cabin, about the case, the savage murder of a family. He told her what they found, how they felt, and who they arrested.

"The bathmats turned out to be the key pieces of evidence," said Beauvoir, lifting the croissant from his mouth. "Though it took us a long time to figure it out."

"Is that when Dad told you about his own sad history with bathmats?"

Beauvoir nodded and chewed and saw the Chief Inspector in the dim cabin. Whispering the story. They weren't sure when the poacher would return, and they didn't want to be caught there. They had a search warrant, but they didn't want him to know that. So as the two homicide investigators deftly searched, Chief Inspector Gamache had told Beauvoir about the bathmat. Of showing up for one of the most important meals of his life, desperate to impress the parents of the woman he'd fallen hopelessly in love with. And somehow deciding a bathmat was the perfect hostess gift.

"How could you have thought that, sir?" Beauvoir had whispered, glancing out the cracked and cobwebbed window, hoping not to see the shabby poacher returning with his kill.

"Well, now," Gamache had paused, obviously trying to recall his own thinking. "Madame Gamache often asks the same question. Her mother never tired of asking either. Her father, on the other hand, decided I was an imbecile and never mentioned it again. That was worse. When they died we found the bathmat in their linen closet, still in its plastic wrapping, with the card attached."

Beauvoir stopped talking and looked across at Annie. Her hair was still damp from the shower they'd shared. She smelled fresh and clean. Like a citron grove in the warm sunshine. No makeup. She wore warm slippers and loose, comfortable clothing. Annie was aware of fashion, and happy to be fashionable. But happier to be comfortable.

She was not slim. She was not a stunning beauty. Annie Gamache was none of the things he'd always found attractive in a woman. But Annie knew something most people never learn. She knew how great it was to be alive.

It had taken him almost forty years, but Jean-Guy Beauvoir finally understood it too. And knew now there was no greater beauty.

Annie was approaching thirty now. She'd been a gawky teenager when they'd first met. When the Chief Inspector had brought Beauvoir into his homicide division at the *Sûreté du Québec*. Of the hundreds of agents and inspectors under the Chief's command, he'd chosen this young, brash agent no one else had wanted as his second in command.

Had made him part of the team, and eventually, over the years, part of the family.

Though even the Chief Inspector had no idea how much a part of the family Beauvoir had become.

"Well," said Annie with a wry smile, "now we have our own bathroom story to baffle our children with. When we die they'll find this, and wonder."

She held up the plunger, with its cheery red bow.

Beauvoir didn't dare say anything. Did Annie have any idea what she'd just said? The ease with which she assumed they'd have children. Grandchildren. Would die together. In a home that smelled of fresh citron and coffee. And had a cat curled around the sunshine.

They'd been together for three months and had never talked about the future. But hearing it now, it just seemed natural. As though this was always the plan. To have children. To grow old together.

Beauvoir did the math. He was ten years older than her, and would almost certainly die first. He would

relieved.

But there was something troubling him.

“We need to tell your parents,” he said.

Annie grew quiet, and picked at her croissant. “I know. And it’s not like I don’t want to. But,” she hesitated and looked around the kitchen, and out into her book-lined living room, “this is nice too. Just for us.”

“Are you worried?”

“About how they’ll take it?”

Annie paused and Jean-Guy’s heart suddenly pounded. He’d expected her to deny it. To assure him she wasn’t the least bit worried whether her parents would approve.

But instead, she’d hesitated.

“Maybe a little,” Annie admitted. “I’m sure they’ll be thrilled, but it changes things. You know?”

He did know, but hadn’t dared admit it to himself. Suppose the Chief didn’t approve? He couldn’t ever stop them, but it would be a disaster.

No, Jean-Guy told himself for the hundredth time, *it’ll be all right. The Chief and Madame Gamache will be happy. Very happy.*

But he wanted to be sure. To know. It was in his nature. He collected facts for a living, and the uncertainty was taking its toll. It was the only shadow in a life suddenly, unexpectedly luminous.

He couldn’t keep lying to the Chief. He’d persuaded himself this wasn’t a lie, just keeping his private life private. But in his heart it felt like a betrayal.

“Do you really think they’ll be happy?” he asked Annie, and hated the neediness that had crept into his voice. But Annie either didn’t notice or didn’t care.

She leaned toward him, her elbows and forearms resting on the croissant flakes on the pine table, and took his hand. She held it warm in hers.

“To know we’re together? My father would be so happy. It’s my mother who hates you...”

Seeing the look on his face she laughed and squeezed his hand. “I’m kidding. She adores you. Always has. They think of you as family, you know. As another son.”

He felt his cheeks burn, to hear those words, and felt ashamed, but noticed that once again Annie didn’t care, or comment. She just held his hand and looked into his eyes.

“Sort of incestuous, then,” he finally managed.

“Yes,” she agreed, letting go of his hand to take a sip of *café au lait*. “My parents’ dream come true.” She laughed, sipped, then set the cup down again. “You do know he’ll be thrilled.”

“Surprised too?”

Annie paused, thinking. “I think he’ll be stunned. Funny, isn’t it? Dad spends his life looking for clues, piecing things together. Gathering evidence. But when something’s right under his nose, he misses it. Too close, I guess.”

“Matthew 10:36,” murmured Beauvoir.

“Pardon?”

“It’s something your father tells us, in homicide. One of the first lessons he teaches new recruits.”

“A biblical quote?” asked Annie. “But Mom and Dad never go to church.”

“He apparently learned it from his mentor when he first joined the Sûreté.”

The phone rang. Not the robust peal of the landline, but the cheerful, invasive trill of a cell. It was Beauvoir’s. He ran to the bedroom and grabbed it off the nightstand.

No number was displayed, just a word.

“Chief.”

He almost hit the small green phone icon, then hesitated. Instead he strode out of the bedroom and into Annie’s light-filled, book-filled living room. He couldn’t speak to the Chief standing in front of

the bed where he'd just that morning made love to the Chief's daughter.

"Oui, allô," he said, trying to sound casual.

"Sorry to bother you," came the familiar voice. It managed to be both relaxed and authoritative.

"Not at all, sir. What's up?" Beauvoir glanced at the clock on the mantle. It was 10:23 on a Saturday morning.

"There's been a murder."

It wasn't, then, a casual call. An invitation to dinner. A query about staffing or a case going to trial. This was a call to arms. A call to action. A call that marked something dreadful had happened. And yet, for more than a decade now every time he heard those words, Beauvoir's heart leapt. And raced. And even danced a little. Not with joy at the knowledge of a terrible and premature death. But knowing he and the Chief and others would be on the trail again.

Jean-Guy Beauvoir loved his job. But now, for the first time, he looked into the kitchen, and saw Annie standing in the doorway. Watching him.

And he realized, with surprise, that he now loved something more.

Grabbing his notebook he sat on Annie's sofa and took down the details. When he finished he looked at what he'd written.

"Holy shit," he whispered.

"At the very least," agreed Chief Inspector Gamache. "Can you make arrangements, please? Arrangements for just the two of us for now. We'll pick up a local *Sûreté* agent when we arrive."

"Inspector Lacoste? Should she come? Just to organize the Scene of Crime team and leave?"

Chief Inspector Gamache didn't hesitate. "No." He gave a small laugh. "We're the Scene of Crime team, I'm afraid. Hope you remember how to do it."

"I'll bring the Hoover."

"Bon. I've already packed my magnifying glass." There was a pause and a more somber voice came down the line. "We need to get there quickly, Jean-Guy."

"D'accord. I'll make a few calls and pick you up in fifteen minutes."

"Fifteen? All the way from downtown?"

Beauvoir felt the world stop for a moment. His small apartment was in downtown Montréal, but Annie's was in the Plateau Mont Royal *quartier*, a few blocks from her parents' home in Outremont. "It's a Saturday. Not much traffic."

Gamache laughed. "Since when did you become an optimist? I'll be waiting, whenever you arrive."

"I'll hurry."

And he did, placing calls, issuing orders, organizing. Then he threw a few clothes into an overnight bag.

"That's a lot of underwear," said Annie, sitting on the bed. "Are you planning to be gone long?" Her voice was light, but her manner wasn't.

"Well, you know me," he said, turning from her to slip his gun into its holder. She knew he had it, but didn't like to actually see it. Even for a woman who cherished reality, this was far too real. "Without benefit of plunger I might need more tighty whities."

She laughed, and he was glad.

At the door he stopped and lowered his case to the ground.

"Je t'aime," he whispered into her ear, as he held her.

"Je t'aime," she whispered into his ear. "Look after yourself," she said, as they parted. And then, as he was halfway down the steps she called, "And please, look after my father."

"I will. I promise."

Once he was gone and she could no longer see the back of his car, Annie Gamache closed the door and held her hand to her chest.

She wondered if this was how her mother had felt, for all those years.

~~How her mother felt at that very moment. Was she too leaning against the door, having watched her heart leave? Having let it go.~~

Then Annie walked over to the bookcases lining her living room. After a few minutes she found what she was looking for. The bible her parents had given her, when she'd been baptized. For people who didn't attend church, they still followed the rituals.

And she knew when she had children she'd want them baptized too. She and Jean-Guy would present them with their own white bibles, with their names and baptism dates inscribed.

She looked at the thick first page. Sure enough, there was her name. Anne Daphné Gamache. And the date. In her mother's hand. But instead of a cross underneath her name her parents had drawn two little hearts.

Then Annie sat on the sofa and sipping the now cool *café* she flipped through the unfamiliar books until she found it.

Matthew 10:36.

“And a man's foes,” she read out loud, *“shall be they of his own household.”*

TWO

The open aluminum boat cut through the waves, bouncing every now and then, sending small sprays of fresh, frigid water into Beauvoir's face. He could have moved back, toward the stern. But Beauvoir liked sitting on the tiny, triangular seat at the very front. He leaned forward and suspected he looked like an anxious and excited retriever. On the hunt.

But he didn't care. He was just glad he didn't have a tail. To put the lie to his slightly taciturn façade. Yes, he thought, a tail would be a great disadvantage to a homicide investigator.

The roar of the boat, the bounce, the occasional jolts were exhilarating. He even liked the bracing spray and the scent of fresh water and forest. And the slight smell of fish and worms.

When not ferrying homicide investigators, this small boat was obviously used to fish. Not commercially. It was far too small for that, and besides, this remote lake wasn't for commercial fishing. But for enjoyment. The boatman casting into the clear waters of the craggy bays. Sitting a day, casually casting. And reeling in.

Casting. And reeling in. Alone with his thoughts.

Beauvoir looked to the stern. The boatman had one large, weathered hand on the handle of the outboard motor. The other rested on his knee. He too leaned forward, in a position he'd probably known since he was a boy. His keen blue eyes on the water ahead. Bays and islands and inlets he also known since he was a boy.

What pleasure there must be, Beauvoir thought, in doing the same thing over and over. In the past the very idea had revolted him. Routine, repetition. It was death, or at least, deadly dull. To lead a predictable life.

But now Beauvoir wasn't so sure. Here he was zooming toward a new case, in an open boat. The wind and spray on his face. But all he longed to do was sit down with Annie and share the Saturday papers. To do what they did every weekend. Over and over. Over and over. Until he died.

Still, if he couldn't be there, this was his second choice. He looked around, at the forests. At the rock cuts. At the empty lake.

There were worse offices than this.

He smiled a little at the stern boatman. This was his office too. And when he dropped them out would he find a quiet bay, pull out his rod, and cast?

Cast, and reel in.

It was, now that Beauvoir thought of it, not unlike what they were about to do. Cast for clues, for evidence, for witnesses. And reel them in.

And eventually, when there was enough bait, they'd catch a killer.

Though, unless things became terribly unpredictable, they probably wouldn't eat him.

Just in front of the boatman sat Captain Charbonneau, who ran the Sûreté du Québec station in Lévesque, Mauricie. He was in his mid-forties, slightly older than Beauvoir. He was athletic and energetic and had the intelligent look of someone who paid attention.

He was paying attention now.

Captain Charbonneau had met them at the plane and driven them the half kilometer to the dock and

the waiting boatman.

“This is Etienne Legault.” He introduced the boatman, who nodded but didn’t seem inclined to fuller greeting. Legault smelled of gasoline and smoked a cigarette and Beauvoir took a step back.

“It’s about a twenty-minute boat trip, I’m afraid,” Captain Charbonneau explained. “No other way to get there.”

“Have you ever been?” Beauvoir had asked.

The captain smiled. “Never. Not inside anyway. But I fish not far from there sometimes. Like everyone else, I’m curious. Besides, it’s great fishing. Huge bass and lake trout. I’ve seen them at distance, also fishing. But I’ve left them on their own. I don’t think they want company.”

They’d all climbed into the open boat and now were halfway through the trip. Captain Charbonneau was looking ahead, or appeared to be. But Beauvoir realized the senior Sûreté officer wasn’t focused completely on the thick forests or into the coves and bays.

He was stealing glances at something he found much more riveting.

The man in front of him.

Beauvoir’s eyes shifted and came to rest on the fourth man in the boat.

The Chief Inspector. Beauvoir’s boss and Annie’s father.

Armand Gamache was a substantial man, though not heavy. Like the boatman, Chief Inspector Gamache squinted ahead, creating creases at his mouth and eyes. But unlike the boatman, his expression wasn’t glum. Instead his deep brown eyes were thoughtful, taking everything in. The glacier-stunted hills, the forest turning brilliant autumn colors. The rocky shoreline, unbroken by docks or homes or moorings of any kind.

This was the wilderness. Birds flew over them who might never have seen a human being.

If Beauvoir was a hunter, then Armand Gamache was an explorer. When others stopped, Gamache stepped ahead. Looking into cracks and crevices and caves. Where dark things lived.

The Chief was in his mid-fifties. The hair at his temples curled slightly above and behind his ears and was graying. A cap almost hid the scar at his left temple. He wore a khaki-colored waxed field coat. Beneath that was a shirt and jacket and gray-green silk tie. One large hand clasping the gunwale was wet with cold spray, as the boat chopped across the lake. The other rested absently on a bright orange life preserver, on the aluminum seat beside him. When they’d stood on the dock looking at the open boat with its fishing rod and net and tub of squiggling worms, and the outboard motor that looked like a toilet, the Chief had handed a life preserver, the newest, to Beauvoir. And when Jean-Guy had scoffed, he’d insisted. Not that Beauvoir had to wear it, but that he had to have it.

In case.

And so, Inspector Beauvoir’s life jacket sat on his lap. And with each bounce he was privately happy to have it there.

He’d picked up the Chief at his home before eleven. At the door, Gamache paused to hug and kiss Madame Gamache. They lingered a moment before breaking the embrace. Then the Chief had turned and walked down the steps, his satchel slung over his shoulder.

When he’d gotten into the car Jean-Guy had smelled his subtle cologne of sandalwood and rosewater and been overwhelmed at the thought that this man might soon be his father-in-law. That Beauvoir’s infant children might be held by this man, and smell that comforting scent.

Soon Jean-Guy would be more than an honorary member of this family.

But even as he thought that he heard a low whisper. *Suppose they aren’t happy about that? What would happen then?*

But that was inconceivable, and he shoved the unworthy thought away.

He also realized, for the first time in more than a decade together, why the Chief smelled of sandalwood and rosewater. The sandalwood was his own cologne. The rosewater came from Madame

Gamache, as they'd pressed together. The Chief carried her scent, like an aura. Mixed with his own.

~~Beauvoir then took a long, slow, deep breath. And smiled. There was the slightest hint of citrus on Annie. For a moment he was fearful her father would also smell it, but realized it was a private scene. He wondered if Annie now smelled a little of Old Spice.~~

They'd arrived at the airport before noon and had gone straight to the Sûreté du Québec hangar. There they'd found their pilot plotting the course. She was used to taking them into remote spots. Landing on dirt roads and ice roads and no roads.

"I see we actually have a landing strip today," she said, climbing into the pilot's seat.

"Sorry about that," said Gamache. "Feel free to ditch in the lake if you'd prefer."

The pilot laughed. "Wouldn't be the first time."

Gamache and Beauvoir had talked about the case, shouting at each other over the engines of the small Cessna. But eventually the Chief looked out the window and lapsed into silence. Though Beauvoir noticed that he'd put small earplugs in and was listening to music. And Beauvoir could guess which music. There was the trace of a smile on Chief Inspector Gamache's face.

Beauvoir turned and looked out his own small window. It was a brilliantly clear day in mid-September and he could see the towns and villages below. Then the villages got smaller, and sparser. The Cessna banked to the left and Beauvoir could see that the pilot was following a winding river north.

Further and further north they flew. Each man lost in his own thoughts. Looking at the earth below as all sign of civilization disappeared and there was only forest. And water. In the bright sunshine the water wasn't blue, but strips and patches of gold and dazzling white. They followed one of the golden ribbons, deeper into the forest. Deep into Québec. Toward a body.

As they flew, the dark forest began to change. At first it was just a tree here and there. Then more and more. Until finally the entire forest was shades of yellow and red and orange, and the dark, dark green of the evergreens.

Autumn came earlier here. The further north, the earlier the fall. The longer the fall, the greater the fall.

And then the plane started its descent. Down, down, down. It looked as though it would plunge into the water. But instead it leveled off and skimmed the surface, to land at a dirt airstrip.

And now Chief Inspector Gamache, Inspector Beauvoir, Captain Charbonneau, and the boatman were bouncing across that lake. The boat banked to the right slightly and Beauvoir saw the Chief's face change. From thoughtful to wonderment.

Gamache leaned forward, his eyes shining.

Beauvoir shifted in his seat and looked.

They'd turned into a large bay. There, at the end, was their destination.

And even Beauvoir felt a *frisson* of excitement. Millions had searched for this place. Looking all over the world for the reclusive men who lived here. When they'd finally been found, in remote Québec, thousands had traveled here, desperate to meet the men inside. This same boatman might have even been hired to take tourists down this same lake.

If Beauvoir was a hunter, and Gamache an explorer, the men and women who came here were pilgrims. Desperate to be given what they believed these men had.

But it would have been for nothing.

All were turned away at the gate.

Beauvoir realized he'd seen this view before. In photographs. What they now saw had become a popular poster and was, somewhat disingenuously, used by Tourisme Québec to promote the province.

A place no one was allowed to visit was used to lure visitors.

Beauvoir also leaned forward. At the very end of the bay a fortress stood, like a rock cut. Its steep

rose as though propelled from the earth, the result of some seismic event. Off to the sides were wings
Or arms. Open in benediction, or invitation. A harbor. A safe embrace in the wilderness. —————

A deception.

This was the near mythical monastery of Saint-Gilbert-Entre-les-Loups. The home of two dozen
cloistered, contemplative monks. Who had built their abbey as far from civilization as they could get.

It had taken hundreds of years for civilization to find them, but the silent monks had had the last
word.

Twenty-four men had stepped beyond the door. It had closed. And not another living soul had been
admitted.

Until today.

Chief Inspector Gamache, Jean-Guy Beauvoir and Captain Charbonneau were about to be let in.
Their ticket was a dead man.

THREE

“Want me to wait?” the boatman asked. He rubbed his stubbly face and looked amused.

They hadn’t told him why they were there. For all he knew they were journalists or tourists. More misguided pilgrims.

“*Oui, merci,*” said Gamache, handing the man his payment, including a generous tip.

The boatman pocketed it and watched as they unloaded their things then climbed onto the dock.

“How long can you wait?” asked the Chief.

“About three minutes,” laughed the boatman. “That’s about two minutes more’n you’ll need.”

“Can you give us,” Gamache checked his watch. It was just after one in the afternoon. “Until five o’clock?”

“You want me to wait here until five? Look, I know you’ve come a long way, but you must know it won’t take four hours to walk to that door, knock, then turn round and come back.”

“They’ll let us in,” said Beauvoir.

“Are you monks?”

“No.”

“Are you the pope?”

“No,” said Beauvoir.

“Then I’ll give you three minutes. Use ’em well.”

Off the dock and up the dirt path, Beauvoir swore under his breath. When they reached the big wooden door the Chief turned to him.

“Get it out of your system, Jean-Guy. Once through there the swearing stops.”

“*Oui, patron.*”

Gamache nodded and Jean-Guy raised his hand and hit the door. It made almost no sound, but hurt like hell.

“*Maudit tabernac,*” he hissed.

“I think that’s the doorbell,” said Captain Charbonneau, pointing to a long iron rod in a pocket chiseled out of the stone.

Beauvoir took it and hit the door a mighty whack. That made a sound. He hit it again and noticed the pockmarks, where others had hit. And hit. And hit.

Jean-Guy looked behind him. The boatman raised his wrist and tapped his watch. Beauvoir turned back to the door and got a start.

The wood had sprung eyes. The door was looking at them. Then he realized a slit had been opened and two bloodshot eyes looked out.

If Beauvoir was surprised to see the eyes, the eyes seemed surprised to see him.

“*Oui?*” The word was muffled by the wood.

“*Bonjour, mon frère,*” said Gamache. “My name is Armand Gamache, I’m the Chief Inspector of homicide with the Sûreté. This is Inspector Beauvoir and Captain Charbonneau. I believe we’re expected.”

The wooden window was rammed shut and they heard the unmistakable click as it was locked.

There was a pause and Beauvoir began to wonder if they really would get in. And, if not, what would they do? Ram the door down? Clearly the boatman would be no help. Beauvoir could hear a soft chuckle coming from the dock, mingling with the lapping of the waves.

He looked into the forest. It was thick and dark. An attempt had been made to keep it at bay. Beauvoir could see evidence of trees chopped down. Stumps dotted the ground around the walls, though there'd been a battle and now an uneasy truce. The stumps looked, in the shadow of the monastery, like tombstones.

Beauvoir took a deep breath and told himself to get a grip. It wasn't like him to be so fanciful. He dealt in facts. Collected them. It was the Chief Inspector who collected feelings. In each murder case Gamache followed those feelings, the old and decaying and rotting ones. And at the end of the trail of slime, Gamache found the killer.

While the Chief followed feelings, Beauvoir followed facts. Cold and hard. But between the two men, together, they got there.

They were a good team. A great team.

Suppose he isn't happy? The question snuck up on Beauvoir, out of the woods. *Suppose he doesn't want Annie to be with me?*

But that was, again, just fancy. Not fact. Not fact. Not fact.

He stared at the door and saw again the pockmarks, where it had been beaten. By someone, something, desperate to get in.

Beside him, Chief Inspector Gamache was standing solid. Calm. Staring at the door as though it was the most fascinating thing he'd seen.

And Captain Charbonneau? Out of the periphery of Beauvoir's vision he could see the outpost commander also staring at the door. He looked uneasy. Anxious to either enter or leave. To come or go. To do something, anything, other than wait on the stoop like some very polite conquerors.

Then there was a noise, and Beauvoir saw Charbonneau twitch in surprise.

They heard the long, drawn-out scrape of wrought iron against wood. Then silence.

Gamache hadn't moved, hadn't been surprised, or if he was he hadn't shown it. He continued to stare at the door, his hands clasped behind his back. With all the time in the world.

A crack appeared. It widened. And widened.

Beauvoir expected to hear a squeal as old, rusty, unused hinges were finally used. But instead there was no sound at all. Which was even more disconcerting.

The door opened completely, and facing them was a figure in a long black robe. But it wasn't totally black. There were white epaulettes at the shoulders, and a small apron of white partway down the chest. As though the monk had tucked a linen napkin into his collar and forgotten to remove it.

Tied at his waist was a rope, and attached to that was a ring with a single giant key.

The monk nodded, and stepped aside.

"*Merci,*" said Gamache.

Beauvoir turned to the boatman and barely resisted giving him the finger.

Had his passengers levitated, the boatman could not have looked more surprised.

On the threshold Chief Inspector Gamache called back.

"Five o'clock then?"

The boatman nodded and managed, "*Oui, patron.*"

Gamache turned back to the open door, and hesitated. For a heartbeat. Unnoticeable by anyone other than someone who knew him well. Beauvoir looked at Gamache and knew why.

The Chief simply wanted to savor this singular moment. With one step, he would become the first nonreligious ever to set foot into the monastery of Saint-Gilbert-Entre-les-Loups.

Then Gamache took that step, and the others followed.

The door closed behind them with a soft, snug thud. The monk brought up the large key and placed it in a large lock, and turned.

They were locked in.

* * *

Armand Gamache had expected to need a few moments to adjust to the dark interior. He hadn't expected that he'd need to adjust to the light.

Far from being dim, the interior was luminous.

A long wide corridor of gray stones opened up ahead of them, ending in a closed door at the far end. But what struck the Chief, what must have struck every man, every monk, who entered those doors for centuries, was the light.

The corridor was filled with rainbows. Giddy prisms. Bouncing off the hard stone walls. Pooling on the slate floors. They shifted and merged and separated, as though alive.

The Chief Inspector knew his mouth had dropped open, but he didn't care. He'd never, in a life of seeing many astonishing things, seen anything quite like this. It was like walking into joy.

He turned and caught the eye of the monk. And held it for a moment.

There was no joy there. Just pain. The darkness Gamache had expected to find inside the monastery was not in the walls, but in the men. Or, at least, in this man.

Then, without a word, the monk turned and walked down the hallway. His pace was swift, but his feet made almost no sound. There was just a slight swish as his robe brushed the stones. Brushed past the rainbows.

The Sûreté officers hiked their packs securely over their shoulders and stepped into the warping prisms.

As he followed the monk, Gamache looked up and around. The light came from windows high up on the walls. There were no windows at head height. The first were ten feet off the ground. And there was another bank of windows above that. Through them Gamache could see blue, blue skies, a few clouds, and the tops of trees, as though they were bending to look in. Just as he was looking out.

The glass was old. Leaded. Imperfect. And it was the imperfections that were creating the play of light.

There was no adornment on the walls. No need.

The monk opened the door and they walked through into a larger, cooler space. Here the rainbows were directed to a single point. The altar.

This was the church.

The monk rushed across it, managing to genuflect on the fly. His pace had picked up, as though the monastery was slightly tilted and they were tumbling toward their destination.

The body.

Gamache glanced around, quickly taking in his surroundings. These were sights and sounds never experienced by men who actually got to leave.

The chapel smelled of incense. But not the musky, stale scent of so many churches in Québec, that smelled as though they were trying to hide something rotten. Here the scent was more natural. Like flowers or fresh herbs.

Gamache took it all in, in a series of swift impressions.

There was no somber and cautionary stained glass here. He realized the windows high on the walls were angled slightly so that the light fell to the simple, austere altar first. It was unadorned. Except for the cheerful light, which played on top of it and radiated to the walls and illuminated the farthest corners of the room.

And in that light Gamache saw something else. They weren't alone.

Two rows of monks faced each other on either side of the altar. They sat with their heads bowed, their hands folded in their laps. All in exactly the same position. Like carvings, tipping slightly forward.

They were completely and utterly silent, praying in the prism of light.

Gamache and the others passed from the church and entered yet another long hallway. Another long rainbow. Following the monk.

The Chief wondered if their guide, the hurrying monk, even noticed the rainbows he was splashing through anymore. Had they become humdrum? Had the remarkable become commonplace, in this singular place? Certainly the man in front of them didn't seem to care. But then, the Chief knew violent death did that.

It was an eclipse, blocking out all that was beautiful, joyous, kind or lovely. So great was the calamity.

This monk who was leading them was young. Much younger than Gamache had expected. He quietly chastised himself for having those expectations. It was one of the first lessons he taught new recruits to his homicide division.

Have no expectations. Enter every room, meet every man, woman and child, look at every body with an open mind. Not so open that their brains fell out, but open enough to see and hear the unexpected.

Have no preconceptions. Murder was unexpected. And often so was the murderer.

Gamache had broken his own rule. He'd expected the monks to be old. Most monks and priests and nuns in Québec were. Not many young people were attracted to the religious life anymore.

While many continued to search for God, they'd given up looking for Him in a church.

This young man, this young monk, was the exception.

In the brief moment Chief Inspector Gamache and the monk had stared at each other, locked eyes, Gamache had realized two things. The monk was barely more than a boy. And he was extremely upset and trying to hide it. Like a child who'd stubbed his toe on a rock but didn't want to admit to the pain.

Strong emotions were the rule at a murder scene. They were natural. So why was this young monk trying to hide his feelings? But he wasn't doing a very good job.

"Jeez," puffed Beauvoir, coming up beside Gamache, "what do you wanna bet Montréal is through there?"

He nodded to the next closed door, at the far end of the corridor. Beauvoir was more winded than Gamache or Captain Charbonneau, but then he carried more baggage.

The monk took a wrought-iron rod, like the one at the front door, from the side of the door and hit the wood. There was a mighty thump. He waited a moment, then hit again. They waited. Finally Beauvoir took the rod and gave the door a mighty rap.

Their wait ended with a familiar rasp, as again a deadbolt was pulled back. And the door opened.

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