

## Chapter One

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Armand Gamache didn't like what he was looking at, but then, few people would.

"I don't see a note, chief," Inspector Beauvoir reported. He was searching the ground.

"Keep looking, please," said Chief Inspector Gamache. "It might have blown away."

All around him his police team was hard at work, taking pictures, taking samples, putting out police tape.

"Crime scene," the bright yellow plastic tape said.

But was it a crime scene?

While his team was busy, Chief Inspector Gamache was still and silent, like the forest itself. They were deep in the woods of Quebec

this November morning. The chief felt the cold and damp. He pulled his coat closer, trying to find some warmth. But there was little warmth and no comfort to be found.

A man was hanging from a tree in front of him.

Gamache tore his eyes from the body and looked at the tree. It, too, looked dead. Its leaves were brown and dry. The branches clacked together in the wind like bones.

What a terrible place to end a life, he thought. Why would someone choose to die here?

Gamache turned back to the dead man. He was middle-aged, with greying hair. He wore a warm coat, but his hat lay on the ground below him.

Did it make sense to dress warmly to kill yourself?

Did this poor man take his own life? Gamache wondered. Or was it taken from him?

Had he been murdered?

“Dr. Harris is here.” Inspector Beauvoir pointed to a woman following one of the police officers through the woods.

“Doctor.” He greeted her with a small bow, then stood aside.

The doctor saw why she was there. She had never gotten used to violent death, though she saw it almost every day. It still made her sad. That was one of the many things she liked about Chief Inspector Gamache. Death also made him sad. He never joked in the company of the dead. Never made fun.

This was not funny.

“When was he found?” Dr. Harris asked as they walked closer to the hanged man. She tried not to think of him as just a body. It was important not to forget that this thing strung up from the tree had once felt as they did. Had once held a lover’s hand. Had once smiled at a child. Had once had dreams. And sorrows.

What sorrow had brought him here? To this tree and to this end?

“He was found about two hours ago,” said Gamache, and pointed to a man wrapped in a blanket. “By that man over there.”

“A jogger?” Dr. Harris asked. The man was wearing a sweat suit and running shoes.

Inspector Beauvoir nodded. "He's staying at the local Inn and Spa. Name is Tom Scott. He found the man at seven-thirty this morning and called the police."

"Do we know who the dead man is?"

"Not yet, but Mr. Scott thinks he may know the man. It's hard to say for sure."

Dr. Harris nodded. She doubted that the dead man's mother would know him right away. Hanging did that to a person's face.

"Scott didn't try to cut him down?" she asked.

Chief Inspector Gamache shook his head. "No. He told the officers he didn't have a knife."

Gamache knew that was reasonable. Who went jogging with a knife? Except maybe in Detroit. And even then the weapon would be a gun. And the person would be running more than jogging.

But he also knew the doctor had hit on one very troubling part of this sad event. Why hadn't Tom Scott tried to help the man? It would be natural to at least try to do something. And yet he'd done nothing.