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Louise Penny's January Newsletter

"Great is the art of beginning, but greater is the art of ending."
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



Happy New Year!

The end of 2011, and the beginning of 2012. An unmarred year. Filled with potential. Like a huge present.

I know this isn't true of everyone. Some of you are facing a scary time, through health problems, through terrible diagnosis, and financial uncertainty. For some, 2012 isn't filled with the promise of happiness. I won't try to jolly you out of the pain you're feeling, or heading in to. All I can offer is respect for your travels and company along the way.

I could never have predicted the events of 2011 in my life. Both the glorious and the painful. Was a time when the New Year struck that I'd try to imagine what the year might hold. I've given up trying to do that - it has been so far beyond imagining.

My year - writing

On a practical level, the new year is a time when I put the next Armand Gamache book to 'bed' and begin thinking about writing the next next. Confused? I'm beginning to befuddle myself.

The thing is, I write about a year ahead.

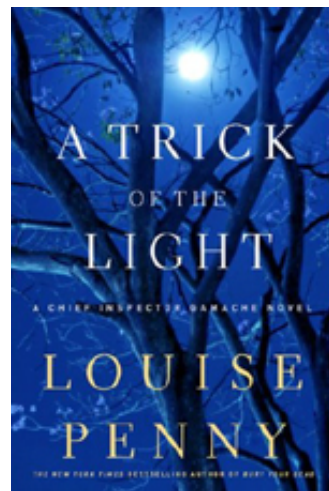
In 2011, A TRICK OF THE LIGHT was released in the US and Canada. It was the most astonishing time of my professional life. As I toured the continent for 6 weeks I got to meet thousands of you - and had the breathtaking experience of hearing that the book made it to number 4 on the New York Times list, and number 7 in Canada. It received starred reviews and was named one of the top 100 books of the year (fiction and non-fiction) by the New York Times, Publisher's Weekly, The Toronto Globe and Mail, Amazon.com, and many others.

No one could have seen this coming a year ago - I sure didn't. And I suspect, very few authors expect this sort of reception. I sure didn't.

As well, in 2011 BURY YOUR DEAD won the Dilys, Agatha, Anthony, Macavity and Arthur Ellis Awards and, in early December Michael and I traveled to New York City for the Nero Awards - and BURY YOUR DEAD won that!



A Trick of the Light US / Canada



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I have to say, I was floored. And very, very happy. And even more grateful - to the powers that are so generous. It might sound odd, but I'm quite aware that while I might be an instrument, the credit for the Gamache books lies elsewhere. Having said that, I'm happy to accept that credit when offered!

But, I began to describe the rhythm of the books.

In the winter/summer of 2011, I wrote the eighth book in the Gamache series. It's set in a monastery and explores issues of community, of the Divine, of faith in God and in our fellows. Of how we communicate. The power of music, and the power of silence.

It's about belief. And is called THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY.

I finished it, and turned THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY in to the publishers at the end of the summer.

In the first week of September A TRICK OF THE LIGHT (book 7) was released - and the wild ride began.

And now, as 2012 begins, I will do the final 'line edits' on THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY (mostly grammatical issues) and continue to think about, and plan, the next book.

As you might know, the books are increasingly intertwined, so I need to have a very clear idea of the next book as I'm writing the current one, at least in the broad strokes. For instance, I know how book 9 ends. Have known for a few books now - and certainly THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY builds toward that in a way that is both shocking and natural.

What I plan to do now, in January and February, is rest my brain before beginning to write book 9 (do you remember that wonderful Monty Python sketch with the Michael Palin saying, "My brain hurts"? - that's sort of how I feel). The magical thing is that when I rest my brain, ideas form. Some quite ridiculous - but some not so stupid. Often it's more about making connections than actual ideas. Linking thoughts and ideas and actions and bits of poetry, and art and music and lyrics and snippets of conversation. Things that had been swirling, or lightly buried, become apparent. They appear in my consciousness, and connect.

If I hold them lightly, and don't dig or force or grab, they coalesce. And while they don't form an entire book, they form the heart and soul of the next book. The things that matter. It's like sitting quietly in a forest and seeing what free creatures approach.

Then, in March, I come to the end of the calm, and begin to write.

I've very task and goal oriented, so it always amazes me what happens when I stop marching forward, and stand still. What magic happens with patience, and calm.

But this would be no fun without your company. I say it often, but I know it bares repeating - my career, this extraordinary life, wouldn't exist without you. Your support. Your sharing in, and magnifying, my happiness. If you didn't tell friends and family (and strangers!) about the books, I'd never have had that unforgettable experience in the hotel room in Omaha, when Andrew Martin, my US publisher called with the news -

"A Trick of the Light is number 4 on the New York Times list!" he said.

And I sank to the side of the bed.

In the agenda I carry with me, with all my appointments and notes on daily tasks, I have wedged in at September 7th a slip of paper from the Marriott Hotels and Suites in Omaha. Scrawled on it - in bold, and underlined - #4!!!!

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Here's the order of the **Chief Inspector Gamache books**, from the first to the most recent:

STILL LIFE

A FATAL GRACE / DEAD COLD

THE CRUELEST MONTH

**A RULE AGAINST MURDER /
THE MURDER STONE**

THE BRUTAL TELLING

BURY YOUR DEAD

A TRICK OF THE LIGHT

But, of course, that's just a number. What we are really celebrating is you - and your kindness and support and generosity in spreading the word.

Thank you, for an extraordinary year. An unforgettable year.

And now, for you, and Michael, and me, and all our loved ones, it's onward, as we begin 2012.

Across the top of the pad, the Marriott hotels have printed, "Leave a trail of genius".

I'm thinking maybe they don't mean 'genius' as in Leonardo da Vinci or Benjamin Franklin genius (at least, I hope they don't) - what I'll be aiming for in 2012 is the quieter genius of knowing when to march, and when to rest. When to act, and when to think. When to let go, and when to hold on. When to begin, and when to end.

Happy 2012, my friends.

Louise

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