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Louise Penny's March Newsletter

"There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be a butterfly." - **R. Buckminster Fuller**



Chapter one

Well, today I started writing the next Gamache book. Set up the old clunky laptop by the fireplace in the living room. Put out a café au lait and a few biscotti...gathered myself in a moment of quiet...then started to write.

Dear Lord, is it scary!

But it is also exhilarating. When I was young I barely dared to dream that one day I'd get to do this. To write. And to make a living at it.

What makes this so wonderful is that I genuinely love the characters, and the setting. Though starting a first draft is still terrifying. But, to be honest, it's less scary than it once was. Back in the earlier books I was afraid of everything. That the book would be awful, that you'd be disappointed, that my publishers would be disappointed. That I couldn't do it. That there was magic involved and it wouldn't appear this time.

Now I know I can do it. I know I can write a book. Yes, there's definitely magic involved – some alchemy. But that alchemy kicks in in direct proportion to the courage I can muster. Not just to get to that laptop, but to dare myself. To see the edge, and go beyond it. Does this make sense?

I think, more than anything, I'm afraid of producing a mediocre book. Of playing it safe. One of the great challenges in writing a series, with many of the same characters and much the same setting, is not writing the same book. Falling into a pattern, a routine. I can guarantee you that few writers do that on purpose. It just happens.

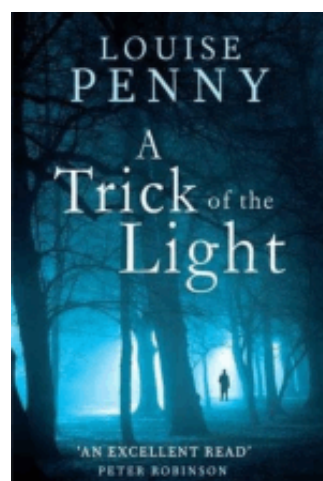
And I sure don't want it to happen to me, and you.

The only way I know not to do that is to accept that while the surface is much the same (Armand Gamache, Clara, Ruth, Beauvoir et al – and Three Pines) what lies beneath is always different. These books are about crimes – that's a constant – but that's also superficial.

What they're really about is what changes. And that's both the great thrill of writing them, and the terror. That I'll chicken out. Get to the edge of the precipice, of the unknown, and hesitate.

Pretend to leap, to look, to have the courage to head into the dark. But to not really do it.

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Perhaps that's why my first drafts are so messy. To be honest, I think I head forward, then back up, then gather myself and head forward again. A Lewis and Clark expedition led by the Cowardly Lion.

Takes a while. Isn't pretty. But I get there eventually.

And 'there' is the uncomfortable theme. The 'why' of the crime – the 'why' of people's reactions. The 'why' of what Armand and Jean-Guy and Annie and Clara and Myrna are choosing to do. In this book we learn more about Myrna – one of my favorite characters. And, of course, so many of the threads and themes and events that have been building explode in book 9.

So I need to get it right. For your sake and for mine.

Perversely, the stability I feel in Three Pines – the affection I have for the main characters – allows me to drill down.

I have to say, biscotti helps too. And doughnuts. And hot cross buns. Toasted. With butter. Oh oh.

So that's where I'm at now – beginning to write book 9.

THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY

But what I'm really excited about right now is book 8. THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY will be published in the United States and Canada on August 28th!! Heard from my UK publisher, Little, Brown.

Dan Mallory, my editor there, says he's read THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY three times – including once just for fun – and will read it again soon. He describes it as a 'modern classic'. I sure hope he's right!

The US publisher, Minotaur Books, is certain it's the best Gamache book to date – and we're all excited for the launch and the tour! I can hardly wait for you to read it.

It's set in a cloistered monastery, where the monks have taken a vow of silence, and yet sing chants of such astonishing beauty, their voices transcend reality. They have the power to take listeners to places they'd never reach on their own. The chants transport both listener and singer.

The power of these chants is called, 'the beautiful mystery'. But for one monk, the place the music takes him is anything but beautiful.

This isn't a book about religion. It's about belief – and the courage to defend those people and things you believe in - for the monks, and for Gamache and Beauvoir, who find themselves within those impenetrable walls. And who find their beliefs severely and perhaps fatally challenged.

The book is dedicated to: Those who kneel down, and those who stand up.

I sure hope you like it!

Advance Readers Copies - GIVEAWAY

As you might remember, we held a contest in the last newsletter, to win an Advance Reader's Copy (ARC) of THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY. We had more than 1,000 responses – to give away 2 copies. Between myself and My Assistant Lise (patent pending), we read every one. Most of the letters were

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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

so touching – and funny – and supportive – and generous. And deeply moving. You probably didn't hear back, but I do want you to know that we read your letter – and so appreciate your words. They're the reward, after all that fear.

Thank you!

I wish we could give you all ARCs – but the publisher would kill me (and there'd be very little mystery about who or why). My Assistant Lise (patent pending), Michael and I had a dreadful time deciding – indeed after making quite a long 'shortlist', we finally realized all we could do is choose at random.

And so – the winners of the Advance Reader's Copy of THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY are:

Jan and Nancy - both of whom have been notified.

The ARCs won't actually be available for a few months – but the winners will still get to read them months before anyone else. And I'll be happy to sign them to you.

Now – we're giving away 2 more copies! We've kept all the February entries, so no need to re-enter. But if you haven't entered the draw, and you'd like an advance copy of THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY, please email me (and My Assistant Lise) contact@louisepenny.com please put The Beautiful Mystery in the subject line and, when you enter, can you please tell us where you're writing from, in case you win? Makes life easier! We're so excited to get this book into your hands.

Good luck – and thank you for all your support.

It's also a great idea to pre-order the book since the first editions sell out almost immediately. You can get your bookstore to reserve one for you, or go online.

And, please, tell everyone you know about the Gamache books!! I can't begin to tell you how powerful word-of-mouth is in building a readership. And, as we know, no readers, no books. I also realize, even as I write this, that you have almost certainly spread the word far and wide....which is why the books are doing so well.

You might now consider stopping strangers. On the street, in stores, on the bus. You can tell the arresting officer and guards about the Gamache books. The judge might like them too. And just think, an entire prison filled with potential readers.

I'd really appreciate that.

Jamaica

Michael and I had a wonderful February – with two weeks of it in a place we've never been – Jamaica! We found this wonderful place...the Jamaica Inn (no, this isn't a paid advertisement, more's the pity). What we craved was peace and calm. A quiet place in the bright sunshine.

As you know – we have a sorry history of trying places – then leaving early. We left St Lucia last year....and Paris the year before that (I know, I must have been nuts....but the problem was, Paris was just to frenetic.)

But the resort website looked so great we decided to give it a try.

Wow! Even better than we imagined. We arrived at night – in the rain. Exhausted. Were shown to our cottage, apparently on the beach, but it was so dark we couldn't see anything. But, we could hear a steady roar, which we hoped was the Caribbean.

We ordered dinner and sat on our private veranda, which was really more of a very large living room/dining room. We ate papaya and lime soup and a fresh Greek salad, then fell into bed. Next morning we opened the shutters – to Glory.

Oh, dear Lord, just remembering it now I can feel tears. Not because I miss it, but just remembering the amazement, the beauty, but mostly the relief. The place we'd been searching for for years, we'd found.

The sound was indeed the Caribbean sea, coming ashore just feet from our verandah. Between us and the water was an almond tree, a palm, and soft white sand. We ran out of our Blue Cottage onto the beach, like Christmas morning. Giddy and laughing.

You can see the photos...breakfast that first morning...then the view from our lounge chairs. Through the two weeks we got to know other guests – it was like a gracious country house party. Cocktails every night (we drank a refreshing Jamaican soft drink called Ting – made of grapefruit juice and also ginger beer, which I love). Then dinners at our private table in the open-air dining room, to the sound of the live band....we'd eat, grilled fresh fish, then dance under the stars – and wonder at our great good fortune.

We could (and did) also have dinner brought to us, so we could eat on our verandah. But for the most part we surprised ourselves, by actually enjoying the company of others.

We met so many fascinating people – whose greatest achievement seemed to be knowing when to talk and when to be silent. Knowing when to approach and when to leave others alone. Like everyone else, we'd drift in and out of conversations with our fellow guests – always aware that they too were there for peace and quiet.

And then it was time to come home. Refreshed. Happy to have been away and happy to be back home.

A TRICK OF THE LIGHT - nominated for Agatha Award

While at the Jamaica Inn we also received wonderful news! A TRICK OF THE LIGHT has been nominated for the Agatha Award for Best Mystery Novel in the US!!! And what a shortlist – containing many of my personal favorites, and friends....

The Real Macaw by Donna Andrews (Minotaur)

The Diva Haunts the House by Krista Davis (Berkley)

Wicked Autumn by G.M. Malliet (Minotaur)

Three-Day Town by Margaret Maron (Grand Central Publishing)

A Trick of the Light by Louise Penny (Minotaur)

Congratulations to all the nominees – the winner will be announced at Malice Domestic, a mystery convention in Washington at the end of April.

Gamache films

It has now been officially announced that the first two books have been optioned, to be turned into television films. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is developing them, and the script for *Still Life* is in the works.

Deep breath.

As a child who felt like a caterpillar, I could never have imagined this butterfly life – and I suspect no one around me would have either. Gives me pause.

We're off to London later this month – spending April there, writing and meeting with my agent and publishers. Hope you'll come along (breakfast at the Wolseley, tickets to the Hockney exhibition at the RA, tea at Harrods. Bring money)

Thank you for your company – hope you have a great March, and don't forget to enter the draw for the advance copy of *THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY*, and to pre-order it. Good luck, my friend. Be well.

Louise

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