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Louise Penny

January Newsletter



"If ever there is tomorrow when we're not together... there is something you must always remember. You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think. But the most important thing is, even if we're apart... I'll always be with you."

A.A. Milne

2016

Happy New Year!! 2016. Can you believe it? Honestly, the year 2000 seems just the other day. And now there are millennial children celebrating their Sweet 16. Incredible.

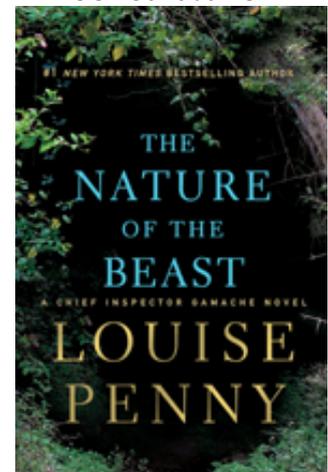
I love that quote by AA Milne and wanted to share it with you. It sort of became the refrain for 2015, much as Noli Timere was for the year before. It's no use choosing a saying, no matter how profound, for the year to come since I have no idea what's in store.

I was having lunch a few months ago with a friend when he showed that quote to me. He's going through a difficult time too, and he started to cry as we read it. It sounded familiar, and it's possible I'd seen it before, but it didn't make an impression.

This time it resonated. Funny how that works. I can hear something a hundred times, but on the hundred and first time, I suddenly know what it means. Or something I'd always dismissed as silly or superficial suddenly becomes profound and wise.

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We are always learning.

I think the Milne quote resonated not just because of the kindness it contains, but because AA Milne was the first poet I read. My love of poetry came from two powerful sources - Winnie the Pooh and my grandfather. Pappa. He'd take us for walks in a nearby park and as my brothers whipped around, running and playing, I'd walk beside Pappa while he talked. And what he spoke was poetry. But it seemed like just normal conversation. Nothing intimidating or baffling. Just words and thoughts.

I memorized what he said, mostly Kipling and Wordsworth, and still carry them with me, learned by heart.

And then I found "*When We were Very Young*", by AA Milne. I knew the Winnie the Pooh books and had befriended Piglet and Eyore and Christopher Robin. But the poetry was new. I gobbled it up, aimed, as it was, at kids like me.

*They're changing the guard at Buckingham Palace -
Christopher Robin went down with Alice.*

And so began a life-long love affair with poetry. And the habit of memorizing poems that are particularly beloved. So that I have them with me always.

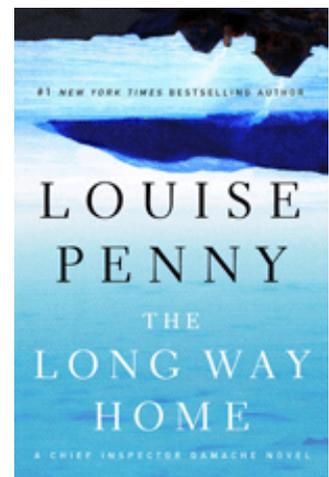
*Halfway down the stairs
Is a stair
Where I sit.*

2015

2015 has been a year of unexpected events. Of course. They all are. Though some years prove more unexpected than others.

I would never have predicted that Michael and I would go to Jamaica twice. That we'd spend almost a month in London. That I'd go to a literary festival in Lyon. That THE NATURE OF THE BEAST would outsell all the other Gamache books.

I would never have predicted that we would end the year in a new



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home, having said goodbye to our beloved home in the woods.

And, having done that, I would never have predicted that we would be so very, very happy here.

I'd hoped, but didn't dare expect or predict, that Michael would be doing so well.

He no longer knows my name. And now needs help eating. He can no longer walk on his own, and cannot read, or do puzzles. He barely speaks. He sleeps a lot, and I try not to take it personally, as though I am not doing a good job stimulating him. But, poor guy, when I try to stimulate him, by singing or dancing or finding games that might interest him, he looks at me, smiles. And falls asleep.

He remains the happiest man I know. Smiling at everyone. Reaching out for people's hands.

And people are so very, very kind. I could never have predicted that when people visit, the first thing they do is go over to Michael, introduce themselves even though he's known most for years, and chat. He loves it.

And then he falls asleep.

At bedtime, when he is finally and gratefully horizontal, I whisper in his ear. Something that came out of a horrific event in 2014, when Corporal Nathan Cirillo was shot and killed by a gunman on Parliament Hill, in Ottawa.

As the young man lay dying, men and women ran over to try to help him.

One woman, Barbara Winters, knelt beside him and whispered in his ear that he was loved. That he was a good man and a brave man.

She just kept repeating that.

And now, every night, after I turn the light out, I whisper in Michael's ear that he's a handsome man. A kind man. That he is thoughtful and funny and he makes everyone around him feel special. I whisper that he is loved, and he is safe. And then I kiss him good night.

And he smiles.

Then I whisper to myself, "You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."

May 2016 be filled with peace - for you, for Michael, for me, for all the hurt and displaced and frightened and angry people.

May we learn what Michael knows - that there are few things more powerful than a smile. Something he's known all his life, as you can tell by the older photographs above. And then the one from this Christmas.

With love and thanks for your company. And Happy New Year!

Louise, Michael and Bishop

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Louise Penny on [Facebook](#)

E-mail: contact@louispenny.com

Louise Penny [website](#)