

The Difficult *Seventh* Book
July 2018

Yesterday I typed “the end” and breathed a huge sigh of relief. Okay, maybe not “the end,” rather “конец.” Not a “Fin” in sight, because this time our Hugo is in Russia, so there is also a distinct lack of ouis, nons, d’accords and désolés but in case you miss practicing your languages you’ll find a splattering of dahs, nyets and dasvidanyas to tide you over until we’re back in Montgenoux. Ah, Montgenoux. Who knew I could miss it so much in my sojourn to snowy Russia? *Le Cri de Coeur* was originally conceived with the notion to make each investigation a stand-alone story as is the case in many others serial books, allowing new readers to dip in and out without having to read the previous books in a series (in Hugo’s case, six). I’d tied up loose ends in book 6 (*L’Imponderable*) and even ended it without the customary cliffhanger. But something went wrong. Not writers block but just life in general. I know it sounds a bit conceited to say, but honestly the previous six books seemed to write themselves, I don’t remember any struggles, maybe the odd bit of procrastination but in the end all six were written in two years.

In July 2017 I began *Le Cri de Coeur* while finishing off book 6 and getting book 5 ready for publication (I always work in threes for some reason - edit, write, publish) but I was well and truly derailed. If you’re reading this the chances are you’ll know why, life kicked me where it hurts and for once my strength deserted me. The good thing however was these stories seem to want to be written, so even if I don’t feel like it, they keep nagging at me. The new year came and I was on a roll but then came a sprained shoulder which limited my progress for about three months and once better it was a case of getting to the end. The end, however, seemed to be taking an age to get to, and finally when I got to page 550 and still wasn’t finished I realised I had to stop and go back to the beginning to figure out a way to simplify the story, which ultimately became easier said than done, characters had to be written out, plots changed, new characters added and slowly from the pile of discarded pages appeared a new book. The finished manuscript is still nudging 550 pages but once it goes through the editing process it may lose a few.

Typing “конец.” was a relief, a chance to put this particular chapter to bed and move on. In the first chapter of “*La Famille Lacroix*” Hugo climbs out of his trusty (but now a bit worse for wear) Citroen, flicks on his glasses, lights a cigarette and walks across the cobbles towards the Mairie where his team awaits him and it really did feel like a homecoming for us all. Back with familiar friends which is often what we need most at times of darkness in our life. Don’t get me wrong, *Le Cri de Coeur* isn’t all doom and gloom, and my difficulty with it wasn’t to do with the book, rather the clouds in my brain at the time. Structurally, it shares a lot with book 2 in the series (*Les Fantômes du Château*) as most of the action takes place within the grounds of the Chinese Embassy which is placed on lockdown after Hugo discovers a box half buried in the snow, of course he looks inside and the contents are, well, let’s just say a bit grisly... Of course because it’s set in Russia, there’s a bit of cold war rhetoric, spies and double-agents, but all wrapped in a neat Hugo bow and with his unique take on things! There’s a bit of danger (oh no, Ben!) and instead of a cliffhanger at the end we get one at the beginning. We first see Hugo when he is waking up injured in a Moscow hospital. How did he get there and why is he injured? Where are Ben and Baptiste?

Ultimately, I’m glad I’ve made it to the end of the difficult *seventh* book and I hope you’ll think so too later in the year but one thing I’m really looking forward to is you all getting to the chapter called “The Ouija Board” (oh yes, no un, deux, trois in this book, the chapters all have names) because I’m sure I’ll be able to hear the collective cries of “No, don’t spell out that name!!!” I’ll leave you on that note and give you a metaphorical and knowing wink.

Much love, and wishes of good health and peace of mind.
Gary