

A long time coming  
July 2021

Well, it certainly has, hasn't it? It feels an awfully long time since I've written a blog and that's because it is! It's not that I haven't tried, I have, I've even started a few but never quite managed to finish them. Why? A myriad of reasons. The world's been a little crazy, in case you hadn't noticed. I hope you have managed to stay healthy and sane. We have just about. I've been at home with my husband and our boys and I realise we're luckier than a lot of people, so I don't try to get too maudlin about anything.

I won't talk about the return to a sense of normality (something about not counting our chickens...). But, things are looking up, but we all have to still do our bit because if we don't, we'll be in this shit storm for longer than we can imagine. It feels like an eternity since I've been anywhere because it has! I'd booked my next trip to Paris for November 2021, the usual, a Julien Doré concert, a bit of culture, a lot of nice food and drink and of course, a trip to a graveyard... but that isn't going to happen. Let's hope for April next year...

And the books. Ah, well therein lies a number of tales! I'd finished Hugo book ten (Prisonnier Dix) in the early part of the year and off it went for the first polish. And then something happened which changed my mind about something that happens in the book. I can't really talk about it until you've read it, but I hope to be able to explain why I changed what I did at some point down the line. In all of the Hugo books, I've tried to maintain a balance of storytelling with a crime story and throwing in a bit of social backstory. I've always tried really hard to do it sensitively and that's why I just thought I could do a little better in book ten. So I went back and changed what I needed to change and I'm happy with the result.

When it went off for a second attempt at editing, I ploughed on with the next book, the first story featuring Charlotte "Coco" Brunhild, the foul-mouthed Parisian cop we first met in "Les Mauvais Garçons." She's a fun character to write and the book, while a little stylistically different to the Hugo books, follows the same sort of formula. If you enjoy the Hugo books, I think you'll enjoy the Coco book. It happened very quickly and was finished before I knew it.

And then started the problems. Firstly, the chest infection that's been bothering me for over a year came back with a vengeance, and then I tripped over my dog (occupational hazard in my life!) and sprained my ankle and my knee. As Prisonnier Dix neared the finish line, one of the people I work with developed COVID and was very poorly. Of course, all I could do was wait and carry on with writing, so I began the next book. "Hugo & Josef" is a book I've wanted to write for a long time. A prequel of sorts. We are introduced to a fifteen-year-old Hugo and the book explores the first time he fell in love with a person and with what would eventually become his vocation. It's a murder mystery, but it's also Hugo's origin story and I think it's actually quite sad (hankies to the ready!)

As my chest and ankle got better, I developed a trapped nerve in my arm and shoulder (probably as a result of the coughing) which has made typing challenging. I can't sit at my desk, but I'm managing sitting on the sofa. It's slowed things down a little, but I am ploughing on. So, as a result of all these things, deadlines have been missed all around. But finally (fingers crossed) everything is aligning. "Prisonnier Dix" is heading towards a late July/early August release and "Sept Jours" is back from her first round of edits, and "Hugo & Josef" has gone off for their first pass. A complicated process! So, as I wait for it all to come together, I have begun the next Hugo book. I'm really enjoying Hugo 11, set in a fictional seaside town in France, it's also given me a chance to reunite Hugo with his adopted son, Baptiste. I never like shoehorning characters into books unless they have a part of the narrative. I've wanted to write Baptiste for a while, so it's great to finally have a story he can be actively involved in.

This is the first year since the books began where we haven't had a book out for a while, but it's all been a series of unavoidable setbacks. However, it's also the first year where we have a backlog of books waiting for release, so in a lot of ways, it's actually worked out quite well.

As for my day to day life, all is well! I'm double vaccinated now and so is my husband (do it kids!) and I enjoy my thrice weekly Skype lessons with my French teacher Bastien. He's very patient (he has to be!) but I'm enjoying it a lot and I *think* I'm getting better at it....

I couldn't let this moment pass without mentioning one of my biggest inspirations. It's been a hundred years since Agatha Christie began her reign. My first inspiration, not my last, but the one who certainly pointed me in the direction I needed to go in. AC and JB Fletcher. True fact. I can't tell you how happy I was I had initials just so I could be GN. I grew up hating my middle name because it felt awfully old fashioned and all the boys at school mocked me for it, but I finally became particularly enamoured in having one when I needed it. I never tried to emulate her, or anyone else for that matter, simply because it's impossible to do so, but I desperately wanted to do my own take on 'murder on the orient express' or 'death on the Nile' but knew I couldn't do it unless I managed to create something very different. And then it came to me. My very own ocean-bound mystery. I'm really excited to get going on it, but first, there's the small matter of Hugo10 and Coco1 and Hugo & Josef to get out of the way.

I'm thrilled finally to have my very own Hercule Poirot and Jane Marple in Hugo and Coco, although it's fair to say my two characters couldn't be more different. Jane Marple would blush all kinds of scarlet if she heard half of the things which come out of Charlotte Brunhild's mouth.

It won't be so long until the next time, promise!

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

Gary