

The First Two pages of *Nights in Berlin*, by Janice Law

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*Nights in Berlin* starts with that old fashioned device a letter, in this case from the hero's old nanny:

*Dear Francis,*

*So they are sending you amongst the godless Huns. You will need to look sharp, dear boy, and mind yourself. They say a lot about Berlin and I don't doubt for a moment that most of it is true, being as the city is full of heathens.*

*Still, a trip to the Continent is an education in itself. Remember that a young gentleman must be educated, and travel is undoubtedly the least painful means.*

The letter includes the information that, now Francis has left home, she has been discharged and concludes, *Keep a stout heart and a bright face and never doubt your Nan loves you.*

Why did I employ this letter rather than the ever popular discovery of a corpse or something else alarming? First, because the appearance of that letter was the Muse's hint that a new novel was on my horizon, and second, because I needed to alert readers that this fourth outing by Francis Bacon represented a drastic time shift.

The previous novel, *Moon over Tangiers*, was set in the early 1950's when the painter was in his early forties and, despite many personal problems, on the verge of being both famous and rich, a combination that I felt would not be conducive to more stories. My first thought, having completed a trilogy of mysteries, was to end the series.

However, I haven't had too many characters as appealing as Francis, and I decided it was foolish to ignore his earlier life: a teenager in decadent but artistically vibrant Weimar Berlin, another year or so in the fascinating Paris of the Roaring Twenties, before back to London for the Depression, Hunger Marchers, and Mosley's Black shirts. A shame to let all that go to waste!

So I turned the clock back to the year when Francis was 17. Some of his previous history had appeared in *Fires of London*, the first of the earlier trilogy, so I didn't want to repeat too much about his devotion to his old nanny. I thought a paragraph or two would do to indicate his affection, as well as his youth, loneliness, and vulnerability:

*I folded up the letter, already well creased from reading and put it back into my jacket pocket. Nan was leaving and with her went the last possible reason for me to return to Ireland. As far as I can determine after nearly 17 years of observation, my dear Nan is the one and only person who is always glad to see me. For the rest of the family, I have been the cuckoo in the nest. My main thought has been to take flight, and theirs, to see the back of me.*

*Sitting on my trunk, waiting for Uncle Lastings, and anticipating the unknown delights of Berlin, I was feeling sorry for myself. This is something Nan always discouraged, self-pity being in her mind the eighth deadly sin. Hence my re-reading of a letter that I already know by heart. Count your blessings, Francis, she used to say, and, yes, the last few months have brought some definite advantages: I am in London. Therefore, I am not in Ireland, which means I am not surrounded by the horses and dogs that cause my eyes to swell up and my lungs to close. I am also out of reach of my father, who dislikes me.*

Why this friction between father and son, friction sufficient to sent him into what he regards as mostly welcome exile in Soho? In Francis own words:

*Trifles, really. I was too fond of certain boys at school, hence my return to the family home, and then too partial to trying out Mother's underwear and rouge, hence my exile to London.*

He explains that in Soho he has used his assets and landed on his feet. By the time we come to the end of the second page, I hope the reader knows that while Francis likes makeup and lingerie, he is also tough, clever, and adaptable. Ready, in short, for Weimar Berlin, dangerous, decadent, and, to certain minds, delightful. All that remains is to indicate how he will get there, and Francis obliges.

Noting that his father is convinced that he is *on the road to ruin*, he explains, *Now I am to be rescued by Uncle Lastings, who will return me to home and family as a model boy in the soldierly mode, my uncle, late of the Royal Berkshires, being, in Father's words, 'the right sort to make a man of you'.*

I hope the readers of *Nights in Berlin* will not be disappointed when Father Bacon's hopes and plans go spectacularly wrong!



Janice Law is an Edgar nominated novelist who also writes short stories and award winning non-fiction. Her most recent books are the Lambda award winner, *Prisoner of the Riviera*, featuring the gay, alcoholic painter, Francis Bacon, and its sequel, *Moon over Tangier*. Earlier work includes the Anna Peters novels from Houghton Mifflin, Walker and St. Martins, and several contemporary novels from Forge Books.,

*Nights in Berlin*, the start of a new Bacon trilogy, debuts in April from [mysteriouspress.com](http://mysteriouspress.com) and will be available in both paper and e-book formats. Forthcoming is *Homeward Dove*, a novel with strong mystery elements from Wildside Press, which has also reissued some of the Anna Peters mysteries and published a volume of her short fiction. She lives with her sportswriter husband, Jerry, in Eastern Connecticut.