

The First Two Pages of *Homeward Dove*

By Janice Law

Before the internet, my sportswriter husband regularly followed British soccer with an overseas subscription to *The Daily Telegraph* from London. There was a bonus for me in this expensive dedication: *The Telegraph* had extensive crime coverage. One story, about a murder witnessed only by a speechless infant, captured my imagination. It went into my notebook, but it was years before the principals in the little drama emerged, beginning with Jeff Woodbine, who begins his story about bad choices with a little meditation on his grandmother, based on a relative who had fought the good fight against dementia:

When my grandmother got real old she began to go strange. She bought stuff she didn't need, picked fights she couldn't win, and told the damndest stories she could make up. She about drove my mom and dad nuts with crazy ideas and late night phone calls and monster bills from the shopping catalogues. The funny thing was that she could seem fine, normal, sane. She put on sanity the way you or me put on a shirt--a sleeve at a time and buttons up to the neck. And she'd get it almost right; then, just when you'd be thinking you were talking to a normal person, she'd tell you how Uncle Joe died of polio, even though he's running the lunch wagon in Plainfield this minute, or how Cousin Dorine hasn't talked to her in years, when you know Dorine, who's too dumb to recognize a hopeless case, calls her every Sunday four o'clock sharp.

I didn't appreciate Gram's efforts. I thought you're crazy or you're not, an open and shut case and not a damn thing you can do about it. Now I'm not so sure. Some days you can feel yourself getting crazy and you think why not? Shit, the whole world's crazy why not me? Other days, you decide to resist, you try to hold it together. You opt for sanity and hope it'll treat you better than the alternative.

Jeff says he's tried both with mixed success each time, before recounting his early work history, a matter of layoffs and dead end jobs and the revelation that he cannot handle heights, a combination that lands him at a big box electronics store. Working for two dollars above minimum wage plus benefits, Jeff is bright enough to be bored, and when one of his buddies introduces him to "a cousin of a friend's cousin" who's in the market for electronic inventory, TV's and stereos begin to slide from Jeff's inventory sheets to the back of the C of F C's delivery truck.

As Jeff says, it's "a no sweat operation" so long as he "doesn't press his luck." Unfortunately for him, his partners in store shrinkage are less intelligent and more greedy. One of the checkers discovers what she calls a "discrepancy," and Jeff, who's gone from hating the job to fearing he might lose it, is suddenly in a worse spot than he'd been when he was torturing his stomach up on forty and fifty foot ladders. Disaster is not long in coming.

Once trouble came, there were a number of ways I realized that the story could go: crime caper (although clever plotting is not my strong suit) or maybe something dark and homicidal with a fine string of bodies and lots of suspense. In the event, however, the novel developed, not so much from the story in the Telegraph, but from Jeff's first words about his grandmother.

Homeward Dove turned out to be a story about family ties, especially about the bond between Jeff and his ancient Scots grandfather, a character who though different in every superficial way from my own dad, owes a great deal to him.

The novel is also about how we grow into responsibility and about the compromises and even deceptions that can turn out to be necessary to protect one's family – even if the family includes an odd infant with a dangerous memory.

Janice Law Bio



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 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.