

The First Two Page of *Afternoons in Paris*

by Janice Law

“Just sneaky-weaky over here and hold this, Francis,” Armand said. Of course, he said it in French because he speaks no English except *Hello, Francis*, which is how he greets me when I arrive at the studio in the morning. And also if I have stayed over and gotten up early, which I always do, to make a pot of coffee first thing. *Hello, Francis*, he says, and pats me on the bum and giggles, because he’s a right old queen. But nice, I have to say nice, and as I’ve written more than once to Nan, an excellent teacher.

What am I learning in the City of Light, the Art Capital of the World? A multitude of things and much more pleasantly, if less excitingly, than in Berlin. My Francais is improving by leaps and bounds, although much of it, like my German, is not fit for polite company. This amuses Armand, who is affected and fastidious but not as timid as he likes to pretend. He tells me I am shocking and fans himself, then he gets a gleam in his eye and has me drop whatever work I am doing to help him with his hobby and his passion, his “art” photography.

That is the opening for my newest Francis Bacon novel, *Afternoons in Paris*, the middle novel of the second trilogy I’ve done using the Anglo-Irish painter as my protagonist. This second series began with him as a boy of 17 heading off to Weimar Berlin with a distinctly dodgy uncle. *Afternoons* begins with his arrival about a year later in Paris.

Although I had already written four novels about Francis, certain problems with him remained, one of which was handling his energetic and varied sex life. Erotic material really isn’t my strong suit, so it was important to indicate his tastes and his insouciant attitude early on. Then I could get onto the stronger ground of his artistic life and the various colorful – and often homicidal – characters he meets in the City of Light.

The opening with Armand did double duty in this case, and I was quite pleased when the scene came into my mind, inspired by the phrase ‘sneaky-weaky,’ a favorite of an old friend of mine. Right away, we see the relationship, both sexual and educational, as well as Francis’ amused tolerance for his lover-teacher.

The scene develops with Francis describing his apprentice work painting color variants of textile designs, worthwhile drudgery because he wants to set up a design studio in London that will support him and his beloved old nanny. Mentioning this plan was important for a couple of reasons. First, Nan was the character that convinced me I could understand enough of Francis’s otherwise mysterious psyche to use him as a protagonist. And second, she was so important in his life that I felt it vital to keep her in his mind even when

they were separated. In *Afternoons*, Francis writes to her regularly and sends her picture postcards on red letter days.

Finally, the quoted section introduces his efforts to become fluent in French. His mastery of the language will turn out to be important later in the novel and will make his easy contacts with a variety of native speakers and French-speaking emigres plausible.

So, altogether I was happy with the opening of the novel. Of course, I am always pleased to get a book started although I never plan out what the opening is to do. I'm afraid that process proceeds quite below any rational thought. However, once this scene was on the page, I could see that I had accomplished a number of things: indicating Francis's sexuality, inserting Nan into the story, sketching Francis's education in Paris, and providing a plausible reason for his rapid progress with the language.

Openings are so important that it is satisfying if one is both interesting and functional.



Janice Law is an Edgar nominated novelist who also writes short stories and award winning non-fiction. Her most recent novels are *Afternoons in Paris*, part of a new trilogy featuring the gay, alcoholic painter, Francis Bacon (mysteriouspress.com), and *Homeward Dove* (Wildside Press). Earlier work includes the Anna Peters novels from Houghton Mifflin, Walker and St. Martins, and several contemporary novels from Forge Books. She regularly publishes short mystery fiction in *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery*

Magazine and other mystery publications.

She lives with her sportswriter husband, Jerry, in Eastern Connecticut.

www.janicelaw.com

Afternoons in Paris, mysteriouspress.com

Homeward Dove, wildsidepress.com