



The Prisoner of the Riviera

Janice Law

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In postwar France, a gambler finds that surviving his vacation may be a long shot

Peace has come to England and the blackout is over, but the gloom has yet to lift from London. One night, leaving a gambling club where he has run up a considerable tab, the young painter Francis Bacon, accompanied by his lover, sees a man gunned down in the street. They do what they can to stanch the flow of blood, but the Frenchman dies in the hospital. Soon afterward, Bacon receives a strange offer from the club owner: He will erase Bacon's debts if the painter delivers a package to the dead man's widow, Madame Renard, on the Riviera. What gambler could resist a trip to Monte Carlo?

After handing over the parcel, Bacon learns that Madame Renard is dead—and the striking young woman who accepted the delivery is an imposter. The Riviera may be lovely, but in 1945, its sun-drenched beaches can be just as dark as the back alleys of London.

The Prisoner of the Riviera Details

Date : Published December 10th 2013 by MysteriousPress.com/Open Road (first published January 1st 2013)

ISBN : 9781480436008

Author : Janice Law

Format : Paperback 232 pages

Genre : Mystery, Historical, Lgbt, Fiction, Romance, M M Romance, Glbt, Queer, Gay

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From Reader Review The Prisoner of the Riviera for online ebook

David Marshall says

This is a slightly formulaic thriller with Francis Bacon, the famous British painter, as the protagonist. It proves an entertaining read.

<http://opionator.wordpress.com/2013/1...>

Lee Heffner says

Fast paced, intelligent read. Post war France is a ripe locale filled with characters with long memories and facile trigger fingers.

A Voracious Reader (a.k.a. Carol) says

*Book source ~ NetGalley

WWII is over and Europe is trying to rebuild. Painter Francis Bacon and his lover witness a shooting while leaving a gambling hall and then, a few days later, he's asked to take a packet to the widow of the man he tried to save. In exchange, the owner will forgive his losses from that night. Finding this a strange request, he decides to do it since he's heading to France on vacation anyway. But a task that should have been simple turns out to not be and Francis soon finds himself neck deep in post-war intrigue.

At times this mystery can be a bit tedious going, but for the most part it flows from one incident to another with poor Francis stuck smack dab in the middle with not much choice but to go along for the ride. It has its moments of being a bit hard to believe and at times the plot is bit too twisty to follow. However, it did entertain me and Francis is quite the character.

Jax says

Quality writing but ultimately dull.

Kgwhitehurst says

It lacked much of the charm and insouciance of the first book. Given that this novel took place after WWII, that was expected. Francis Bacon has lost his innocence--just like most of that generation. The background charm of the first book came from Bacon's old nanny with whom he lived and whom he loves; her tart tongue, touch of blind kleptomania and love of the lurid have little or no place in this book. Arnold too is

mostly MIA, tho' his lack is more than made up for by Pierre the cyclist. The real problems with this book include its setting--the French Riviera where Bacon is out of his element--its content--the near-civil war the French suffered in addition to the total war of WWII that left many compromised people with scores to settle--and its endless twists and turns in settling those wartime scores. The darkness of story belies the narrative voice; Francis Bacon's voice is too light for this story, so the plot lines are never quite fully developed. Motivations are weak, and the ending is unsatisfying, and in too many places, unresolved. It is the strength of Law's writing that keeps this book at three; a lesser author would've floundered much worse.

Drianne says

Second in the mystery series featuring gay British painter Francis Bacon. Atmospheric.

Maine Colonial says

For her second Francis Bacon novel, *The Prisoner of the Riviera*, Janice Law jumps ahead to 1946. At first, I was disappointed that Law had chosen to leave the London-in-wartime setting she managed so atmospherically in the first novel, *Fires of London*. But I quickly got over it. Setting stories in the immediate postwar period seems to be all the rage these days, or maybe that's just a coincidence in my recent reading. It's a rewarding period because, as Law has one character put it, in France "power was lying on the ground during the war" and it was picked up by dubious characters who couldn't just return to the plow when the war was over. These characters abound in *The Prisoner of the Riviera*.

Let's back up and set the scene. Francis is out for dinner in London with his longtime lover, Arnold, when they come upon a man who has been shot and is bleeding to death in the street. Francis uses all his ARP training skills to keep the man alive until an ambulance arrives, but it doesn't look good. He is contacted shortly afterward by M. Joubert, proprietor of a London casino that holds a dauntingly large number of Francis's gambling chits. Joubert tells Francis that the man, a Monsieur Renard, did die after a few days in the hospital, but left a farewell letter for his wife, who lives in the south of France. If Francis will deliver the letter, Joubert will tear up Francis's chits.

There's something rotten about this setup, right? You and I know it, and so do Francis, Nan and Arnold. Aside from the imbalance between the value of the gambling chits and the going rate for in-person mail delivery, there's something fishy about that letter. Francis and Nan couldn't resist painstakingly removing and replacing the wax seal on the letter, and they suspect it's really a coded message—though one they can't crack without a cipher key. But it's cold, grey and rainy in London and the rationing means the food is even more depressing than the weather. Who can resist the siren call of the Riviera?

After enjoying a few days in the sun, Francis decides it's about time to deliver the letter to Mme. Renard. Afterward, he narrowly avoids attack from a couple of goons as he heads back to his hotel and, soon after that, he learns that Mme. Renard was found murdered later that same day—and he is the number one suspect.

Attempting to clear his name and avoid a long stretch in a French prison, Francis uses a couple of false identities to investigate the murder and figure out what this supposed farewell letter really is. He's not the only one interested, and soon it seems that the entire south of France is seething with characters who are after the letter, Francis and each other. They all seem to have had secret underground pasts during the war, but it's

impossible to be sure which side they were on, if not both, and whether their current intentions are to help Francis, use him, abuse him or carve him up.

Here's an odd thing. When I read *The Prisoner of the Riviera*, I kept thinking about P.G. Wodehouse. In part it's because most of the story is set in the south of France, where Bertie Wooster often used to go to get into trouble gambling and falling in love. And here's Francis, on his arrival in Nice: "Have I mentioned my fondness for sailors? I have a weakness, as Nan would say, for members of the maritime profession, for the toilers of the sea, for jolly jack-tars and also the not-so-jolly ones, who are really more to my taste." Can you see a Wodehouse-ish style in that? I can.

There's a lot more about Janice Law's writing style here that makes me think her Francis Bacon is a sort of Bertie Wooster-ish character—if Bertie had a dozen or two more IQ points, considerably less of "the ready," liked risky sex (with men) and kept running into murders. The books are written in the first person, and even when fists are flying or guns are blazing, there is an air of Bertie describing one of his sticky wickets.

And, like Bertie Wooster, Francis is soon beset with troubles involving false identities, mistaken impressions, getting caught sneaking into other people's houses and bedrooms—and even being bedeviled by a pair of troublesome aunts. I found the book a dizzyingly improbable but delightful caper, just like a Wodehouse story. Unlike a Wodehouse story, this one does have a great deal of serious crime and danger in it, but for mystery lovers, that's all to the good.

Note: I received a free review text of the ebook version of this title from the publisher, via Netgalley.

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

Last year I read and adored Janice Law's previous novel featuring 20th century painter Francis Bacon, *Fires of London*. (It made my top ten of 2012!) I loved it for its dark and slightly raunchy tone, for being gritty and gay (homosexual, not cheerful), and for being atmospheric and escapist.

I hadn't realized there was a chance of more Bacon so when I learned Law had written a second novel featuring him, I was over the moon. To my delight, the novel opened (literally, the second line!) with the same flippant seediness I loved in the first book. (*We had flags and bunting, and I got marvelously drunk and committed a public indecency in Hyde Park -- my little contribution to Britannia's celebration.* p5)

The war is over, and Francis is ready to leave post-war London, with the food shortages and lingering stink of war. He rallies his childhood nanny, who is nearly blind and deeply devoted to him, and his respectable lover Albert, for a trip to Monte Carlo. But after witnessing a man getting shot outside a club in London, Francis is tasked with taking the man's effects to his widow who just happens to live on the Riviera, and the endeavor proves more complicated than he anticipated.

Francis narrates the story, and in Law's hands, he's wry, pithy, and sarcastic. Coy, too, for he sadly never dishes details on his liaisons. His voice is what makes these books so captivating: he's a reliable narrator who prefers night to day, the grotesque to the beautiful, the luxuries of life while slumming it. Law evokes the post-war Riviera in its complicated contradiction -- gorgeous beaches and sunny vistas, Vichy collaborators transforming themselves into Allied supporters -- and it makes a fascinating backdrop for a murder mystery.

Fans of WWII settings will enjoy this one; the inclusion of a gay lead makes it all the more novel and interesting. Those new to the series will be fine picking this one up without being lost, but you will want to indulge in the delicious seediness of Francis, and I strongly encourage you to get *Fires of London*. Then get this one, so there will be a third Francis Bacon book!

Christine Zibas says

Set in postwar Europe along the Riviera, this dark story of mystery and death has a surprisingly light tone. Acting as the hapless lead detective in this continuing series is the 20th century Irish-born but British-raised Painter Francis Bacon. While Bacon is famous for his enjoyment of gambling halls and café society, it is his witness of a murder outside a London club that sets him on his journey. A man is shot just as he is leaving a London hot spot, and Bacon goes to his side.

After it appears the man has died, the French club owner comes to Bacon in his studio and offers to retire Bacon's not insubstantial gambling debts in exchange for a package to be delivered to the dead man's widow in the South of France. Seeing the opportunity for les bonnes vacances, how can he refuse? Monte Carlo is calling.

Of course, the task is much more complex and dangerous than it first appears. Things get very convoluted, and the action seems to really ratchet up as the ending becomes closer. It's hard to sort out the good guys from the bad, and with several characters, it's hard to determine exactly how they fit into the plotline at all. Most surprising for a genre that prides itself on creating stories that draw together all the loose bits into a neat ending, this one is messy and never completely explained.

That may dismay some readers, but it can also be refreshing, much as is the light-hearted tone of the painter, given his dire circumstances throughout so much of the story. In the book, there is much lore about Bacon (the real artist) slipped in (for example, he lived with his aging nanny throughout his adult life, who appears in the book as his companion). The author has made the artist into a very charming, if inept, sleuth and thus lifted what could have been a very dark storyline and setting, with historical asides into World War II France, into something much more breezy, which appears to be just the right touch.

For those with an interest in art (or even not), there is much pleasure to be derived from "The Prisoner of the Riviera." Expect the unexpected, and this will be a very enjoyable trip to the Riviera and back.

Review first appeared on ReviewingtheEvidence.com.

Bill says

British painter Francis Bacon becomes entangled in the post-war French Riviera when he tries to deliver a package to a widow in exchange for the forgiving of his gambling debts.

But he soon finds out that the supposed widow is a stand in for a murdered woman, herself not who she was supposed to be, and then he gets picked up by the police.

Plot complication follows plot complication until Bacon find, beaten, nearly stabbed and shot, finds it difficult just who the good guys are.

This is one page turning mystery with an intriguing seasoning of history that will keep you out of trouble till the last page – grab this book!

Barbara Mitchell says

The setting of this amusing little eBook novel is post WWII London, and then southern France and the riviera. Francis Bacon, London artist, bon vivant, gambler, and ogler of handsome young men has had it with rationing, rebuilding, and chronic lack of good champagne. When his friend Arnold, a respectable businessman with enough money to finance the trip suggests going to Monte Carlo, Bacon is more than ready to go. They also take Bacon's former nanny, Nan, who he lives with. Her vision is going so he won't leave her alone - and she's fun.

As the two men leave a gambling club the night before their planned departure, they see a man shot. Bacon tries to save him while Arnold calls for help. Then the club owner, to whom Bacon owes a lot of money, offers to forgive the debt if Bacon will deliver a small packet to the man's widow on Riviera. He says the gunshot wound led to pneumonia and the man died.

This is the beginning of a sort of Shakesperean comedy with mistaken identities, dead people who aren't really dead, scoundrels, some who learned illegal dealings during the war, corrupt cops, even the Tour de France is part of the story. Meanwhile, Bacon assumes aliases and occasionally has conversations with his alter ego of the moment. He is a prisoner because a weasel of a police chief confiscates his passport at a time when various bad guys are trying their bumbling best to kill him.

All through the story Bacon rejoices in his appreciation of the male figure. He is gloriously homosexual, and of course finds many other men of his persuasion along the way.

There are many hilarious scenes, i.e. when Bacon (who doesn't know how to drive) is behind the wheel of a truck careening down a steep, curvy mountain road while a bad guy tries to stab him in the back. I laughed and laughed at Bacon's adventures. Nice eBook for a dreary winter day.

Recommended reading

Source: Open Road Media

Brian Collyer says

A fantastic follow-up in the series. I enjoyed this more than the first!

Lena♥Ribka says

DNF at 66%

I did everything to finish it. I really tried. But I failed.

**I give one star rating to books I DNF.*

It is my subjective feeling about the book and has nothing to do with the quality of the writing or the story itself.

What I like:

This book broadened my horizons. I learned a lot about the painter Francis Bacon. BECAUSE I googled a lot after I'd found out that the protagonist of the series was a real person. A British gay painter, Francis Bacon, was a major twentieth-century British artist.

Janice Law took some real chronological facts out of his life and created an imaginary adventure. Hats off to her creativity!

In spite of my personal problems with the book, I can't question the writing skills of this woman. She can write. Period.

Why I couldn't finish it or What were my problems:

Let me repeat myself - I don't consider *The Prisoner of the Riviera* a gay mystery. We can have long discussions about what kind of book we COULD or not consider a gay mystery, how many sex is allowed in it and if at all. But let me say so: If Miss Marple would have been a real person who loved women, could we consider that Agatha Christie wrote a lesbian mystery without changing ANYTHING in her books? It is exactly what I felt reading Janice Law's series. Yes, the main character is gay, but it WAS ALL. And it is NOT what I expect from MY gay mystery books. (view spoiler)

The first person POV belongs to my all time favourite way of telling. It is amazing if it well written. It is not easy to write from the first person's POV, it is FUCKING difficult, but if you can....you are the best. Unfortunately it was not a winner here. I had to remind myself that I was reading a first person's POV, it felt like a third person's POV. I knew what the main figure DID at the moment, what he THOUGHT at the moment. I HAD NO IDEA WHAT HE FELT.

There was always a HUGE emotional distance between me and him.

The mystery was STRANGE. I didn't like it. It felt so old-fashioned. Not because it is a historical mystery - the French Riviera after the WWII, the French Resistance, the gangsters, the cops. But how it was written, how it was told, how it was structured. It was my biggest problem. A lot of illogical chaotic events followed each other. My interest was faded away as the story went on. Up until the point I HAD to stop. It started not bad but it didn't manage to keep my interest.

The major and minor characters. Pale. Fade. Boring. Cute? Maybe. In some way. But they won't turn your world upside down. In any good or bad way.

My conclusion:

A pretty collection of nice words and expressions without any emotional intensity. You could even enjoy it, but it won't make your heart race or blew your soul open or leave deep scars in your memory.

I could recommend it to fans of historical mystery, but I would never recommend it to MM-readers.

R.Z. says

Very well written, this mystery is for readers who like twisty tales with odd characters, all of whom have an agenda. In England and France, during World War II, individuals made strange alliances as a way to eat, to protect themselves and their families, and to stay alive. Now that the war is over, these older survivors, men and women, are still beholden to others who survived, some of whom grew fabulously wealthy with their conniving and war-profiteering, and now care only about protecting the riches that they have stashed away in secret places.

When a young Londoner, trying to get his gambling debts forgiven, agrees to deliver a package to a mysterious woman in Paris, he is drawn into a web of old-world intrigue of which he knows nothing. As the story progresses, he becomes trapped in Paris and will do anything to get home to London.

Bob H says

Second in the Francis Bacon mysteries (#1 is Fires of London) with a prequel, Nights in Berlin), and #3, a sequel, Moon Over Tangier. Each book can stand alone, as does this one. Francis Bacon, a young British aspiring artist, and a survivor of the Blitz, is now in the French Riviera in the immediate postwar period. He's the kind of protagonist to whom things happen, who keeps falling into predicaments involving crooked French police, various postwar local gangsters, and some colorful local society. (There isn't much of a gay subplot, even though Francis is gay -- poor man doesn't have any time for romance, what with all the scrapes). There's plenty of gunfire and motor-vehicle chases through the coastal mountains, and plenty of Francis getting roughed up. It's a fast, never-dull read and quite entertaining, and the Riviera setting seems believable enough in place and time.
