

# A Last Word



*In this dream, the renowned painting Nighthawks by Edward Hopper serves as a backdrop for some detective novels. This very night the 'author' must tell his three elderly leading characters that he is handing them over to someone else.*

I knew it was going to be difficult.

At night, I always approached Jay's Bar, in the renowned painting Nighthawks by Edward Hopper, discreetly. On this deserted street corner, its neon lights are supposed to attract a clientele. From the pavement opposite, I see Jay in his outmoded white jacket, and the waitress Rose to-ing and fro-ing. Archie remains out of view in his corner, thank goodness, his digits on the piano keyboard.

A two-bit trio who have earned me my daily crust for more than thirty-five years. A night bar where heroes and victims alike can come in and where I can develop the plots of my crime fiction. For years they have been on the nib of my pen. They are a sympathetic trio born in 1962 along with my first novel. They were all thirty years old, like me. There were dealers, bent cops, blondes to be rescued. Even some Russian spies passed through - you know, a bit of patriotism helped to sell books.

But we are dancing to a different tune these days as we approach the year 2000. They are not money-spinners anymore. Between them, their ages add up to one hundred and seventy years. Jay is a kind boss on the verge of bankruptcy. Rose is no longer desirable, her looks, her charm, everything needs to be reworked. As for Archie, you would think you were hearing a piano organ on its last legs.

I can see clearly that this evening is the limit. It's boring as hell. Only three customers in a setting to make you down in the dumps. I cannot bear them anymore. It's not even worth seeing or hearing Archie, he would only make matters worse. I no longer know how to work in Jay's catchphrase: 'heaven is too high, earth is too low, the bar is just the right height.' In my last book, I chopped this catchphrase into three bits. There you go, a bit in each chapter ! No-one noticed this bloody dismemberment.

For ten minutes, I have been stuck on the problem of the bar. I have just sold them and they will be recycled. How do I tell them that? By asking for 'A Last Word' cocktail, a dubious joke to lighten the mood.

They know me and will take the hint, the word of the end. What's more it is from after the war, the only one, the one of 1914. It's also straightforward and old-fashioned. In equal measures you have gin, lime juice, Chartreuse and cherry brandy.

'A Last Word' then I'll put them in the know.

It's the end of the daily routine, the goings-on, the plot twists. By surrendering my author's rights for next to nothing to Janet, their new boss, I have had to adapt to the times. In fact she is reworking everything. The bar is still on the street corner, but it will be more hip, it will open later, close in the wee hours.

Archie will be a bossy, tattooed DJ with a pony tail, a real bloke. Jay becomes an ambitious go-getter, a social climber. He will put on a show shaking cocktails and do some dodgy deals. Rose will become seductive, coaxing, beating off the punters, but steering them towards drink. The basic cocktail will be cash, sex and banned substances. You can bet that Janet will insert everything that has already been used in thrillers.

I ought to tell everything to my three elderly characters, their redefined personalities, the new décor, the changed world, the cash register that should be ringing... No cocktail tonight, I don't have the courage. I will carry on past the street corner and continue to sleep.

After all, it's Janet's turn.

She'll know how to tell them.

*Andre Gouyneau – 668 words*