

MANHATTAN NIGHTS

I know you are there, watching my every move. Telling me, "You must do better."

You see, I fall in love too easily and end up in the basin of my blues when I inevitably get hurt. And I always get hurt. Now where are my bloody fags?

I'm on the right side of Manhattan, on the right side of the law, on the right side of everything; and yet, when I take risks I fall, fall right to the bottom. "But don't worry", you say. "You'll bounce back and stronger."

How does the song go? "We have Manhattan..." I can see Ella pointing at me through the smoke and grime of Winnie's bar down on West 38th. Never did like that false line of "...boy and goil." You were there again, cringing, correcting, and wanting to leave. "Let's get out of here!" you cry. "It's not for you. Get back to what you know, man!"

Right. I'm sitting here. "Are you ready? Eh, you, grim reaper of words, are you here?" The lights across the city are burning. There's a skyline neon exposé that can only be Times Square. Bob James LP is on. His taxis are downtown, and the loose joints are beating the street. "I say, watchman, are you there?"

I've opened the scotch – it's on the rocks. This is the new start, the new novel. I've got enough material to fill two paperbacks, maybe three? I've found my fags. Where's a new sheet for the typewriter?

This thing can't write itself. "C'mon, where are you villain?" You haunt me on other nights, so why not tonight. Give me the inspiration to push my character onto my readers.

Enzo. Hell, that's a great name for a jazz smoking alcoholic that lives by night and sleeps by day.

"Thanks for that reaper." An Italian American womaniser living in Manhattan, but people think he is on the Bronx. He tells those who wanna know that he lives in Jerome Avenue and frequents Gianni's Diner. Got it! Gianni's is where it's at. If you need to know what's getting' down, you go to Gianni's. His pasta is the best in the city, his wines are plenty, his coffee is strong.

"Now what? You, voice, now what?" Ha! The first time I've made a confident start on a book in ages, and you decide to check out. You'll be back telling me it's no good and I shall be heading downtown to my agent with the manuscript. We've been there before.

Another fag. Another scotch.

She'll be back. Betty will be back when I've made a few bucks from this one, you'll see. Maybe Dinah might call as well and then I can pitch them against each other. I mean that's what The Cool Cat did. He chose Dinah. Betty went to Joe the Sax; but, I know it's me they really want.

3am. I'm going strong. Bob James has touchdown!

(494 words)

Author's note:

Inspired by the title of a Robert Graves poem, *To The Reader Over My Shoulder*, taken from Graves' collection, *Poems 1926 – 1930*, (first published in 1931).

The character in my story is a struggling writer who is plagued by a voice in his head. He lives alone in a reasonable but sparsely furnished Manhattan apartment. By day, he works uptown for an international financial company trading global stocks and shares. He dreams of giving it all up to write full time.

By night, he ventures to Winnie's jazz bar on West 38th Street and immerses himself into the culture, in his head at times rather too much. Returning to his apartment on the thirtieth floor which has a desk right up against a full-length window and an old typewriter, he looks out over the bright lights of New York waiting for inspiration to strike. The next book is always the one!

He barely sleeps, just like the city.

Everything is an invention of his mind, including the voice, his womanising, drinking, and drug use. The only constants that are real are, his smoking, and... jazz.

Bob James *Touchdown* LP, released in 1978 on Columbia/Tappan Zee records, contains the tune *Angela* which was used for the TV series *Taxi*.