

**The First Two Pages: “Famous Last Words” by Doug Allyn
Winner of the Derringer Award for Best Long Story, 2010**

From *Hot Shots: Celebrating Thirty Years of the Short Mystery Fiction Society*,
Edited by Josh Pachter (Level Best Books)

An Essay by Doug Allyn

According to an ancient rock and roll legend, pop star Richard Carpenter was unwinding after a show, watching an old movie on late night TV, when a character in the film said that he'd written a new song called “Goodbye to Love.” Carpenter's ears perked up. Songwriters remember songs forever but he couldn't recall that one. He tried looking it up, but he couldn't find a reference to “Goodbye to Love” anywhere. Apparently the song only existed as a single mention in a midnight movie. Intrigued now, Carpenter spent the rest of the night writing music to match the orphan title and by morning? He'd completed a brand-new version of “Goodbye to Love.”

The song went on to become a monster hit for the Carpenters, in a fresh new style the music press dubbed the ‘power ballad.’ All this from a long lost title in a forgotten film. all this, from three little words. That's all he had in the beginning, But apparently, sometimes, that's all we need.

I can't recall the subject now, or what I said to earn my wife's quick retort, “famous last words.” It's a common comeback, we've all heard it a million times, but this time, for reasons known only to serendipity, it bothered me. I found myself

brooding about her reply, wondering what my “famous last words” might be. What would I say? A prayer? A wisecrack? Or honestly, when the sand in my hourglass is finally running out, will I be able to come up with a single sentence? I had no idea, but I did know how to find out.

Sometimes, three little words are all you need.

The First Two Pages of “Famous Last Words”

Ever wonder what you’d say? If you knew that the next words you spoke would be your very last?

Would you try to justify your life?

Would you say *I love you*? Or say a prayer?

Could you even assemble a coherent sentence?

I couldn’t. And I had my chance.

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A golden autumn evening, dusk settling on our little college town like a flannel comforter. Linette had picked me up after my last class, and we were stopped at a busy intersection, bickering cheerfully about whose turn it was to cook dinner, waiting for the light to change.

It suddenly dawned on me that the headlights in the rearview mirror were growing larger and brighter. Much too quickly.

The large truck coming up behind us wasn’t slowing down at all. Speeding up, if anything. I expected him to pull around us, but he didn’t. Just kept coming, straight on. And then it was too late.

Sweet Jesus! He was going to hit us! And I turned to Linette, wide-eyed, and said, “What the hell?”

Famous Last Words.

Not very profound. But then, I’m not the one who died.

As Linette swiveled around to look, the truck slammed into us! Instantly smashing our world into a whirling, mind-shredding maelstrom of shrieking metal, exploding airbags and howling rubber. Blasting my boxy little Toyota hybrid out into the flashing steel river

of rush-hour traffic, triggering a horrendous chain-reaction accident. Panicked commuters slamming on their brakes, desperately cranking their wheels, swerving to avoid us.

And failing. My new Toyota Prius—with its state-of-the-art hybrid motor, rearview parking camera and electric cup warmers—was banged around like a ping-pong ball, hammered by at least three other cars before being literally smashed in half by a flatbed truck hauling twenty tons of rolled steel.

Our gas tank ruptured and spewed. And my clever little car exploded like a napalm bomb.

I hope to God Linette was already dead before the flames reached her.

But I don't know. And maybe that's best.

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I woke slowly in a world of white. White tiled walls and ceilings. Even my pain felt white. My memory, too. A white blank. Empty as an unwritten page.

All I could remember were my last words to Linette: *What the hell?*

“Professor Frazier?”

I swiveled my head slowly. A woman was standing beside my bed. Tall and lanky, sandy hair cropped short as a boy's. Wearing a black suit and turtleneck. She was holding out an ID folder, but I couldn't focus on it.

“I'm Sergeant Shane Kovacs, Professor,” she said, slipping the badge back inside her jacket. “Do you know where you are?”

“Hospital.” I coughed, dry-mouthed. “University?”

She nodded, scanning my face like a form she had to fill out.

“Can you tell me what happened?”

“Somebody ... rear-ended us. A truck, I think.”

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The author of eleven novels and more than 130 short stories, Doug Allyn has been published internationally in English, German, French and Japanese. More than two dozen of his tales have been optioned for development as feature films and television. Allyn studied creative writing and criminal psychology at the University of Michigan while moonlighting as a guitarist in the rock group Devil's Triangle and reviewing books for the *Flint Journal*. His background includes Chinese language studies at Indiana University and extended duty with USAF

Intelligence in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. Career highlights? Sipping champagne with Mickey Spillane and waltzing with Mary Higgins Clark. “Twice an Edgar Allan Poe Award winner, and the record holder in the *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* Readers Award competition, Doug Allyn is one of the best short story writers of his generation—and probably of all time. He is also a novelist with a number of critically acclaimed books in print.”—*Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*.