

"You bought a lot of me, Terry. For a smile and a nod and a wave of the hand and a few quiet drinks in a quiet bar here and there. It was nice while it lasted. So long, amigo. I won't say goodbye. I said it to you when it meant something. I said it when it was sad and lonely and final."

"I came back too late," he said. "These plastic jobs take time."

"You wouldn't have come at all if I hadn't smoked you out."

There was suddenly a glint of tears in his eyes. He put his dark glasses back on quickly.

"I wasn't sure about it," he said. "I hadn't made up my mind. They didn't want me to tell you anything. I just hadn't made up my mind."

"Don't worry about it, Terry. There's always somebody around to do it for you."

"I was in the Commandos, bud. They don't take you if you're just a piece of fluff. I got badly hurt and it wasn't any fun with those Nazi doctors. It did something to me."

"I know all that, Terry. You're a very sweet guy in a lot of ways. I'm not judging you. I never did. It's just that you're not here any more. You're long gone. You've got nice clothes and perfume and you're as elegant as a fifty-dollar whore."

"That's just an act," he said almost desperately.

"You get a kick out of it, don't you?"

His mouth dropped in a sour smile. He shrugged an expressive energetic Latin shrug.

"Of course. An act is all there is. There isn't anything else. In here--" he tapped his chest with the lighter--"there isn't anything. I've had it, Marlowe. I had it long ago. Well--I guess that winds things up."

He stood up. I stood up. He put out a lean hand. I shook it.

"So long, Señor Maïoranos. Nice to have known you--however briefly."



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