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The Long Good-bye

Written by Raymond Chandler

Published by Penguin Books Ltd

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The Long Good-bye

RAYMOND CHANDLER

with an Introduction by Jeffery Deaver



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Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road,
Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park,
New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue,
Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

First published by Hamish Hamilton 1953
Published in Penguin Books 1959
Reissued with a new Introduction in Penguin Books 2005
Reissued in this edition 2010
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Set in Monotype Dante
Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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ISBN: 978–0–241–95436–2

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I

The first time I laid eyes on Terry Lennox he was drunk in a Rolls-Royce Silver Wraith outside the terrace of The Dancers. The parking lot attendant had brought the car out and he was still holding the door open because Terry Lennox's left foot was still dangling outside, as if he had forgotten he had one. He had a young-looking face but his hair was bone white. You could tell by his eyes that he was plastered to the hairline, but otherwise he looked like any other nice young guy in a dinner jacket who had been spending too much money in a joint that exists for that purpose and for no other.

There was a girl beside him. Her hair was a lovely shade of dark red and she had a distant smile on her lips and over her shoulders she had a blue mink that almost made the Rolls-Royce look like just another automobile. It didn't quite. Nothing can.

The attendant was the usual half-tough character in a white coat with the name of the restaurant stitched across the front of it in red. He was getting fed up.

'Look, mister,' he said with an edge to his voice, 'would you mind a whole lot pulling your leg into the car so I can kind of shut the door? Or should I open it all the way so you can fall out?'

The girl gave him a look which ought to have stuck at least four inches out of his back. It didn't bother him enough to give him the shakes. At The Dancers they get

the sort of people that disillusion you about what a lot of golfing money can do for the personality.

A low-swung foreign speedster with no top drifted into the parking lot and a man got out of it and used the dash lighter on a long cigarette. He was wearing a pullover check shirt, yellow slacks, and riding boots. He strolled off trailing clouds of incense, not even bothering to look towards the Rolls-Royce. He probably thought it was corny. At the foot of the steps up to the terrace he paused to stick a monocle in his eye.

The girl said with a nice burst of charm: 'I have a wonderful idea, darling. Why don't we just take the cab to your place and get your convertible out? It's such a wonderful night for a run up the coast to Montecito. I know some people there who are throwing a dance around the pool.'

The white-haired lad said politely: 'Awfully sorry, but I don't have it any more. I was compelled to sell it.' From his voice and articulation you wouldn't have known he had had anything stronger than orange juice to drink.

'Sold it, darling? How do you mean?' She slid away from him along the seat but her voice slid away a lot farther than that.

'I mean I had to,' he said. 'For eating money.'

'Oh, I see.' A slice of spumoni wouldn't have melted on her now.

The attendant had the white-haired boy right where he could reach him – in a low income bracket. 'Look, buster,' he said, 'I've got to put a car away. See you some more some other time – maybe.'

He let the door swing open. The drunk promptly slid off the seat and landed on the blacktop on the seat of his

pants. So I went over and dropped my nickel. I guess it's always a mistake to interfere with a drunk. Even if he knows and likes you he is always liable to haul off and poke you in the teeth. I got him under the arms and got him up on his feet.

'Thank you so very much,' he said politely.

The girl slid under the wheel. 'He gets so goddam English when he's loaded,' she said in a stainless-steel voice. 'Thanks for catching him.'

'I'll get him in the back of the car,' I said.

'I'm terribly sorry. I'm late for an engagement.' She let the clutch in and the Rolls started to glide. 'He's just a lost dog,' she added with a cool smile. 'Perhaps you can find a home for him. He's housebroken – more or less.'

And the Rolls ticked down the entrance driveway on to Sunset Boulevard, made a right turn, and was gone. I was looking after her when the attendant came back. And I was still holding the man up and he was now sound asleep.

'Well, that's one way of doing it,' I told the white coat.

'Sure,' he said cynically. 'Why waste it on a lush? Them curves and all.'

'You know him?'

'I heard the dame call him Terry. Otherwise I don't know him from a cow's caboose. But I only been here two weeks.'

'Get my car, will you?' I gave him the ticket.

By the time he brought my Olds over I felt as if I was holding up a sack of lead. The white coat helped me get him into the front seat. The customer opened an eye and thanked us and went to sleep again.

'He's the politest drunk I ever met,' I said to the white coat.

'They come all sizes and shapes and all kinds of manners,' he said. 'And they're all bums. Looks like this one had a plastic job one time.'

'Yeah.' I gave him a dollar and he thanked me. He was right about the plastic job. The right side of my new friend's face was frozen and whitish and seamed with thin, fine scars. The skin had a glossy look along the scars. A plastic job and a pretty drastic one.

'Whatcha aim to do with him?'

'Take him home and sober him up enough to tell me where he lives.'

The white coat grinned at me. 'Okay, sucker. If it was me, I'd just drop him in the gutter and keep going. Them booze hounds just make a man a lot of trouble for no fun. I got a philosophy about them things. The way the competition is nowadays a guy has to save his strength to protect hisself in the clinches.'

'I can see you've made a big success out of it,' I said.

He looked puzzled and then he started to get mad, but by that time I was in the car and moving.

He was partly right of course. Terry Lennox made me plenty of trouble. But after all that's my line of work.

I was living that year in a house on Yucca Avenue in the Laurel Canyon district. It was a small hillside house on a dead-end street with a long flight of redwood steps to the front door and a grove of eucalyptus trees across the way. It was furnished, and it belonged to a woman who had gone to Idaho to live with her widowed daughter for a while. The rent was low, partly because the owner

wanted to be able to come back on short notice, and partly because of the steps. She was getting too old to face them every time she came home.

I got the drunk up them somehow. He was eager to help but his legs were rubber and he kept falling asleep in the middle of an apologetic sentence. I got the door unlocked and dragged him inside and spread him on the long couch, threw a rug over him and let him go back to sleep. He snored like a grampus for an hour. Then he came awake all of a sudden and wanted to go to the bathroom. When he came back he looked at me peeringly, squinting his eyes, and wanted to know where the hell he was. I told him. He said his name was Terry Lennox and that he lived in an apartment in Westwood and no one was waiting up for him. His voice was clear and unslurred.

He said he could handle a cup of black coffee. When I brought it he sipped it carefully, holding the saucer close under the cup.

'How come I'm here?' he asked, looking around.

'You squiffed out at The Dancers in a Rolls. Your girl friend ditched you.'

'Quite,' he said. 'No doubt she was entirely justified.'

'You English?'

'I've lived there. I wasn't born there. If I might call a taxi, I'll take myself off.'

'You've got one waiting.'

He made the steps on his own going down. He didn't say much on the way to Westwood, except that it was very kind of me and he was sorry to be such a nuisance. He had probably said it so often and to so many people that it was automatic.

His apartment was small and stuffy and impersonal. He might have moved in that afternoon. On a coffee table in front of a hard green davenport there was a half-empty Scotch bottle and melted ice in a bowl and three empty fizzwater bottles and two glasses and a glass ashtray loaded with stubs with and without lipstick. There wasn't a photograph or a personal article of any kind in the place. It might have been a hotel room rented for a meeting or a farewell, for a few drinks and a talk, for a roll in the hay. It didn't look like a place where anyone lived.

He offered me a drink, I said no thanks. I didn't sit down. When I left he thanked me some more, but not as if I had climbed a mountain for him, nor as if it was nothing at all. He was a little shaky and a little shy but polite as hell. He stood in the open door until the automatic elevator came up and I got into it. Whatever he didn't have he had manners.

He hadn't mentioned the girl again. Also, he hadn't mentioned that he had no job and no prospects and that almost his last dollar had gone into paying the check at The Dancers for a bit of high-class fluff that couldn't stick around long enough to make sure he didn't get tossed in the sneezer by some prowl car boys or rolled by a tough hackie and dumped out in a vacant lot.

On the way down in the elevator I had an impulse to go back up and take the Scotch bottle away from him. But it wasn't any of my business and it never does any good anyway. They always find a way to get it if they have to have it.

I drove home chewing my lip. I'm supposed to be tough but there was something about the guy that got

to me. I didn't know what it was unless it was the white hair and the scarred face and the clear voice and the politeness. Maybe that was enough. There was no reason why I should ever see him again. He was just a lost dog, like the girl said.

2

It was the week after Thanksgiving when I saw him again. The stores along Hollywood Boulevard were already beginning to fill up with overpriced Christmas junk, and the daily papers were beginning to scream about how terrible it would be if you didn't get your Christmas shopping done early. It would be terrible anyway; it always is.

It was about three blocks from my office building that I saw a cop car double-parked and the two buttons in it staring at something over by a shop window on the sidewalk. The something was Terry Lennox – or what was left of him – and that little was not too attractive.

He was leaning against a store front. He had to lean against something. His shirt was dirty and open at the neck and partly outside his jacket and partly not. He hadn't shaved for four or five days. His nose was pinched. His skin was so pale that the long thin scars hardly showed. And his eyes were like holes poked in a snow bank. It was pretty obvious that the buttons in the prowl car were about ready to drop the hook on him, so I went over there fast and took hold of his arm.

'Straighten up and walk,' I said, putting on the tough. I winked at him from the side. 'Can you make it? Are you stinko?'

He looked me over vaguely and then smiled his little

one-sided smile. 'I have been,' he breathed. 'Right now I guess I'm just a little – empty.'

'Okay, but make with the feet. You're half-way into the drunk tank already.'

He made the effort and let me walk him through the sidewalk loafers to the edge of the kerb. There was a taxi stand there and I yanked open the door.

'He goes first,' the hackie said, jerking a thumb at the cab ahead. He swung his head around and saw Terry. 'If at all,' he added.

'This is an emergency. My friend is sick.'

'Yeah,' the hackie said. 'He could get sick somewheres else.'

'Five bucks,' I said, 'and let's see that beautiful smile.'

'Oh well,' he said, and stuck a magazine with a Martian on the cover behind his mirror. I reached in and got the door open. I got Terry Lennox in and the shadow of the prowl car blocked the far window. A grey-haired cop got out and came over. I went around the taxi and met him.

'Just a minute, Mac. What have we got here? Is the gentleman in the soiled laundry a real close friend of yours?'

'Close enough for me to know he needs a friend. He's not drunk.'

'For financial reasons, no doubt,' the cop said. He put his hand out and I put my licence in it. He looked at it and handed it back. 'Oh ho,' he said. 'A P.I. picking up a client.' His voice changed and got tough. 'That tells a little something about you, Mr Marlowe. What about him?'

'His name's Terry Lennox. He works in pictures.'

'That's nice,' the cop said sarcastically. He leaned into the taxi and stared at Terry back in the corner. 'I'd say he didn't work too lately. I'd say he didn't sleep indoors too lately. I'd even say he was a wag and so maybe we ought to take him in.'

'Your arrest record can't be that low,' I said. 'Not in Hollywood.'

He was still looking in at Terry. 'What's your friend's name, buddy?'

'Philip Marlowe,' Terry said slowly. 'He lives on Yucca Avenue, Laurel Canyon.'

The cop pulled his head out of the window space. He turned, and made a gesture with his hand. 'You could of just told him.'

'I could have, but I didn't.'

He stared at me for a second or two. 'I'll buy it this time,' he said. 'But get him off the street.' He got into the police car and the police car went away.

I got into the taxi and we went the three odd blocks to my parking lot and shifted to my car. I held out the five spot to the hackie. He gave me a stiff look and shook his head.

'Just what's on the meter, Jack, or an even buck if you feel like it. I been down and out myself. In Frisco. Nobody picked me up in no taxi either. There's one stony-hearted town.'

'San Francisco,' I said mechanically.

'I call it Frisco,' he said. 'The hell with them minority groups. Thanks.' He took the dollar and went away.

We went to a drive-in where they made hamburgers that didn't taste like something the dog wouldn't eat. I fed Terry Lennox a couple and a bottle of beer and drove

him home. The steps were still tough on him but he grinned and panted and made the climb. An hour later he was shaved and bathed and he looked human again. We sat down over a couple of very mild drinks.

'Lucky you remembered my name,' I said.

'I made a point of it,' he said. 'I looked you up too. Could I do less?'

'So why not give me a ring? I live here all the time. I have an office as well.'

'Why should I bother you?'

'Looks like you had to bother somebody. Looks like you don't have many friends.'

'Oh I have friends,' he said, 'of a sort.' He turned his glass on the table top. 'Asking for help doesn't come easy – especially when it's all your own fault.' He looked up with a tired smile. 'Maybe I can quit drinking one of these days. They all say that, don't they?'

'It takes about three years.'

'Three years?' He looked shocked.

'Usually it does. It's a different world. You have to get used to a paler set of colours, a quieter lot of sounds. You have to allow for relapses. All the people you used to know well will get to be just a little strange. You won't even like most of them, and they won't like you too well.'

'That wouldn't be much of a change,' he said. He turned and looked at the clock. 'I have a two-hundred-dollar suitcase checked at the Hollywood bus station. If I could bail it out I could buy a cheap one and pawn the one that's checked for enough to get to Vegas on the bus. I can get a job there.'

I didn't say anything. I just nodded and sat there nursing my drink.

'You're thinking that idea might have come to me a little sooner,' he said quietly.

'I'm thinking there's something behind all this that's none of my business. Is the job for sure or just a hope?'

'It's for sure. Fellow I knew very well in the army runs a big club there, the Terrapin Club. He's part racketeer, of course, they all are – but the other part is a nice guy.'

'I can manage the bus fare and something over. But I'd just as soon it bought something that would stay bought for a while. Better talk to him on the phone.'

'Thank you, but it's not necessary. Randy Starr won't let me down. He never has. And the suitcase will pawn for fifty dollars. I know from experience.'

'Look,' I said, 'I'd put up what you need. I'm no big soft-hearted slob. So you take what's offered and be good. I want you out of my hair because I've got a feeling about you.'

'Really?' He looked down into his glass. He was only sipping the stuff. 'We've only met twice and you've been more than white to me both times. What sort of feeling?'

'A feeling that next time I'll find you in worse trouble than I can get you out of. I don't know just why I have the feeling, but I have it.'

He touched the right side of his face gently with two finger-tips. 'Maybe it's this. It does make me look a little sinister, I suppose. But it's an honourable wound – or anyhow the result of one.'

'It's not that. That doesn't bother me at all. I'm a private dick. You're a problem that I don't have to solve. But the problem is there. Call it a hunch. If you want to be extra polite, call it a sense of character. Maybe that

girl didn't walk out on you at The Dancers just because you were drunk. Maybe she had a feeling too.'

He smiled faintly. 'I was married to her once. Her name is Sylvia Lennox. I married her for her money.'

I stood up scowling at him. 'I'll fix you some scrambled eggs. You need food.'

'Wait a minute, Marlowe. You're wondering why if I was down and out and Sylvia had plenty I couldn't ask her for a few bucks. Did you ever hear of pride?'

'You're killing me, Lennox.'

'Am I? My kind of pride is different. It's the pride of a man who has nothing else. I'm sorry if I annoy you.'

I went out to my kitchen and cooked up some Canadian bacon and scrambled eggs and coffee and toast. We ate in the breakfast nook. The house belonged to the period that always had one.

I said I had to go to the office and would pick up his suitcase on the way back. He gave me the check ticket. His face now had a little colour and the eyes were not so far back in his head that you had to grope for them.

Before I went out I put the whisky bottle on the table in front of the couch. 'Use your pride on that,' I said. 'And call Vegas, if only as a favour to me.'

He just smiled and shrugged his shoulders. I was still sore going down the steps. I didn't know why, any more than I knew why a man would starve and walk the streets rather than pawn his wardrobe. Whatever his rules were he played by them.

The suitcase was the damnedest thing you ever saw. It was bleached pigskin and when new had been a pale cream colour. The fittings were gold. It was English

made and if you could buy it here at all, it would cost more like eight hundred than two.

I planked it down in front of him. I looked at the bottle on the cocktail table. He hadn't touched it. He was as sober as I was. He was smoking, but not liking that very well.

'I called Randy,' he said. 'He was sore because I hadn't called him before.'

'It takes a stranger to help you,' I said. 'A present from Sylvia?' I pointed at the suitcase.

He looked out of the window. 'No. That was given to me in England, long before I met her. Very long ago indeed. I'd like to leave it with you, if you could lend me an old one.'

I got five double sawbucks out of my wallet and dropped them in front of him. 'I don't need security.'

'That wasn't the idea at all. You're no pawnbroker. I just don't want it with me in Vegas. And I don't need this much money.'

'Okay. You keep the money and I'll keep the suitcase. But this house is easy to burgle.'

'It wouldn't matter,' he said indifferently. 'It wouldn't matter at all.'

He changed his clothes and we ate dinner at Musso's about five-thirty. No drinks. He caught the bus on Cahuenga and I drove home thinking about this and that. His empty suitcase was on my bed where he had unpacked it and put his stuff in a light-weight job of mine. His had a gold key which was in one of the locks. I locked the suitcase up empty and tied the key to the handle and put it on the high shelf on my clothes closet. It didn't feel quite empty, but what was in it was no business of mine.

It was a quiet night and the house seemed emptier than usual. I set out the chessmen and played a French defence against Steinitz. He beat me in forty-four moves, but I had him sweating a couple of times.

The phone rang at nine-thirty and the voice that spoke was one I had heard before.

'Is this Mr Philip Marlowe?'

'Yeah, I'm Marlowe.'

'This is Sylvia Lennox, Mr Marlowe. We met very briefly in front of The Dancers one night last month. I heard afterwards that you had been kind enough to see that Terry got home.'

'I did that.'

'I suppose you know that we are not married any more, but I've been a little worried about him. He gave up the apartment he had in Westwood and nobody seems to know where he is.'

'I noticed how worried you were the night we met.'

'Look, Mr Marlowe, I've been married to the man. I'm not very sympathetic to drunks. Perhaps I was a little unfeeling and perhaps I had something rather important to do. You're a private detective and this can be put on a professional basis, if you prefer it.'

'It doesn't have to be put on any basis at all, Mrs Lennox. He's on a bus going to Las Vegas. He has a friend there who will give him a job.'

She brightened up very suddenly. 'Oh – to Las Vegas? How sentimental of him. That's where we were married.'

'I guess he forgot,' I said, 'or he would have gone somewhere else.'

Instead of hanging up on me she laughed. It was a

cute little laugh. 'Are you always as rude as this to your clients?'

'You're not a client, Mrs Lennox.'

'I might be some day. Who knows? Let's say to your lady friends, then.'

'Same answer. The guy was down and out, starving, dirty, without a bean. You could have found him if it had been worth your time. He didn't want anything from you then and he probably doesn't want anything from you now.'

'That,' she said coolly, 'is something you couldn't possibly know anything about. Good night.' And she hung up.

She was dead right, of course, and I was dead wrong. But I didn't feel wrong. I just felt sore. If she had called up half an hour earlier I might have been sore enough to beat the hell out of Steinitz – except that he had been dead for fifty years and the chess game was out of a book.