

Tuesday, Jan. 3, 1967

Dear Mrs. Main:

Thanks:

- 1) For the wonderful interview or, rather, conversation.
- 2) For your recent long letter, including the Jepson letters.
- 3) For your wonderfully kind and helpful attitude.

I hadn't realized, until later, that we logged about eight hours together, which is a record, even for me. I must say though, I wasn't tired which I would have been had our meeting been in fact a straight question and answer business. None-the-less I was taken to task by my wife for putting you through what must have seemed (but not to me) an interminable session. In any case it was all very worthwhile. I think, with the letters and the talk and perhaps some more offerings from you that the subject will have been really handled in depth. I am trying for images now, to tell you. At first, after reading the story some years ago, I had a picture of a young, attractive and rather sophisticated girl who was being given the brush after a summer romance of possibly unsuperficial proportions. It was a good story because it told in microcosm the story of a million brush-offs, some by men, some by women, after a certain phase had been reached and passed. In a way, it told the story of every shipboard romance with the exception that in THE END OF SOMETHING the crisis was met by the boy and talked about, whereas in many, many cases, a drifting apart is the only sign that something has happened. I did have the notion that we were dealing with a couple of snobbish young men, and this too was par for the universal course. After meeting you, the girl in the story changed in at least two important ways; she was less sophisticated, would not have said some of the slightly warring things that Hemingway's Marjorie did, and when she said isn't love any fun anymore, she was not being euphemistic, although in this too, of course, I find a statement that you could not have said, since you did not recognize the relationship as anything more than a palship (although it was probably more than that) You were always too much of a Hemingway code hero yourself to have ever talked about things so frontally. Hemingway probably substituted some other girl, perhaps an irritating amalgam of girls, when he had Marjorie talk about "our castle" and about "love being fun." It is a fact that women do very often talk things to death; Hemingway was masterful in getting at that point. How unlovely is something lovely that has been loved a couple of times. What I am getting at is that I think Hem used you as the superstructure of his story upon which he hung a few universal traits and by means of which he told his favorite story: that nothing must be done too long. He applied that theme, ~~unavoidably~~ to his marriages and, finally, to his life. But there is another point: that few endings are irrevocable. He liked the idea that he could see you again. And in life he liked the idea too because he did see you again, and I think in the second meeting, while nothing was said, it was you who gave him the brush. Seeing him put on his little acting scene,

confirmed your own happiness somehow.

You will be interested to know that some of this interpretation was aided by my subsequent meeting with Bill. Bill is 70 now, a touch stooped, perhaps that isn't the phrase, perhaps there is simply a kind of stiffness about the shoulders; but there is an old man fragility there, even though the eyes and the manner are still very good. I think Bill may have a touch of Parkinsonism; there seemed to be just the slightest suggestion of a tremor. Of course all of this is confidential between you and me, since he invited me into his house as a friend and was terribly nice; in fact a great guy. It was easy for me to see how strong an influence this shy, diffident, unforceful man might have had upon Hemingway. Bill still has his hair; it is almost white and he has a rather full, but not flowing mustache, not the trim little job he had in his *SUN ALSO RISES* DAYS. Bill is married, but has no children; his wife is a very, very vigorous real estate woman whose career has, no doubt, been more successful financially, than Bill's. Bill has been in government all his life, mostly as a writer; mostly on labor subjects. He wrote some of Harry Truman's best speeches, Marion Smith tells me. But he never made the kind of money that Dr. Main or Bill's wife made and makes. He lives in a delightful part of Arlington on a double lot backed up to a nunnery, so that he sees nothing but a little valley and across that many trees. He likes to garden now, is retired; they were to leave for two months in Florida a few days after my visit.

He was very nice; not the beleaguered partner of greatness that I encounter at times. He referred invariably to Hemingway as Wemedge, the name used in *THE THREE DAYS BLOW*. He remembered you very well, and with fondness. He did not remember advising Hemingway against involvement with you. It was Hadley he warned Hem against, because of her age, nine years older than Hem, although they later became good friends. I pressed him on this point and he said well, he might have sounded off against getting involved with Bump and McCabe's. Get that. He remembered that firm name and it wasn't mentioned in the story. But the funny thing is; he said the same thing you did in your last letter; it was not social snobbery; it was just that he didn't think Hem should get bogged down in a small town situation. I think most people have missed this rather significant point, and perhaps Hem thought it was too subtle to underscore and define. He did not remember the incident on the point you recalled and thought it was more likely you little girls would have walked around the point but at no point was he hard and fast. When I asked if he and Hem had had a falling out, he said no, it was a falling apart - because of geography. However, he showed me a Christmas card in which Hem had castigated Dos Passos for his Hem charicature in *THE CHOSEN COUNTRY* and while he took the attitude it was pretty funny in a Christmas card I do think he cooled to Hem after that, although he is too much of a code man to admit such a thing. Once, I accidentally folded one of his priceless Hemingway letters, one that outlined the plot of *FAREWELL TO ARMS*, in some of my notepapers, and when I realized that I had almost unwittingly carried it off, I was rather voluble in stating my shock. "That's all right," he said, "you would have sent it back."

"But what would you have thought in the meantime?"

"That you would send it back."

The next thing I am about to say, I hate to say in a way, because it will look like a form of pressure on you, but it isn't and I expect you to believe that. Bill had a lot of pictures that were of interest to me and I wondered if I could try and make copies of them with my camera. "Take them," he said, "make your copies; then send them back."

Bill's wife, Marion, I must concede, looked a touch pained at this, but she was very gallant. "You see how we trust people," she said. Bill looked at his wife as severely as this mild man could look. "He'll send them back," he said.

"It may take me a little time."

"Take all the time you want."

In fact, he offered to let me take some of his Hemingway letters, but I drew the line on that. I quavered to think at my mental state if something happened to them and so I stoutly, like stout Cortez, refused them. Bill is very strange. These letters may possibly be worth several thousand dollars and yet they had been forgotten in an attic until Marion found them. And the idea of Bill selling them is laughable. They will all be given to the Kennedy Library. No thanks to Mary Hemingway, however. She wrote the Smiths asking for copies of his letters. Marion replied that they would do this as soon as they got home from vacation. Two weeks later they got a very brusque letter from Mary pointing out that the letters could not be used without her permission, etc. etc. Marion told Ruth and me that the idea of Bill wanting to use those letters for commercial purposes, particularly after all those years, was almost more than she could stand. So the letters are still going to the Kennedy Library but straight rather than through Mary. (All this is confidential)

Now, having painted this picture, with effective daubs about myself included, I will brazenly come out and ask you to send me the pictures, let me copy those of interest, and then send the whole shebang back. Any other way would entail more bother to you than I would care to shoulder upon you. And of course I am grateful to begin with. The odd thing is, Bill remembered a picture of Hemingway in his camping clothes getting on a train and does not know what happened to his. There was nothing sensational in his collection, but there were a few previously unused pictures of Ernest, including a marvelously handsome one of Hem in soldier hat and tunic. It was signed: Yclept the Massive Woodsman. Bill said an enormous amount of nicknaming went on between them in those days and he doesn't know how you escaped the process. He said they would change word endings a certain way: Eating became eatage, walking, walkage, etc. His name William became Willage in this way and eventually Wemedge and after that, apparently, there came a period when nicknames were exchanged.

I really have a lot more to say, and perhaps more questions to ask when I go over my Marjorie notes, but I do not have the gall to go on any longer with this letter and will save ~~himmmmm~~ the rest for later. I enclose the Ursula letters which you were kind enough to send me. Thanks again and, all the best,

Don St. John