

April 2, 1967

Dear Margie:

No, I haven't dropped to the bottom of the ocean. I have simply been dazed for a week or more by the trip and Rome and learning Italian and forgetting Hemingway and somehow living another life altogether. All the past is dimly there, far away, neglected, deserving. Thank God Ruth has at least written my brother and my other brother's wife and a couple of our friends. I can see how a man can disappear in another country. We are such primitive mechanisms. Who would think that the old saw was essentially right, out of sight out of mind. I remember Bill Smith saying that was how he and Hemingway drifted apart. It was a matter of geography, he said, not temperament. This seems silly, and of course it is; but as we have both agreed, we humans are simply a heap of irrational inclinations and habits wandering around this restless coil.

Sked: We left Sunday night exactly a week ago. The auto dealer who will sell our Tempest kindly supplied us with a man to drive us and our impedimenta and our knocked down kennel AND Danny to Boston, a matter of 150 miles and two and a half hours. Everything went fine except the Alitalia expressman tried to charge us for Danny by the dimension of the kennel (\$160) instead of by the weight of Danny and the kennel as promised (\$118). Real sad, firm look from the Italian with much referring to a complicated book. Finally, as kindly as I could, I suggested arbitration so he called the line manager. Much nodding and shaking of the head, and finally the matter was solved in what I think a typically Italian way. The dimensions would simply not be put down and so would not apply. Semplice i vero? Had a martini at a quickie bar at Logan airport. I tried to tell myself I was nervous about the flight over the big water, but can't honestly say I convinced myself. It helps to have cinquante anni. You at least feel you have had your money's worth. The flight was in a DC 8, that is a great big jet, with a configuration of 129 passengers for the 39 of us aboard. You see it was the day after Easter that we would be arriving in Roma which is not the usual time for pilgrims. The Italians call the jet the motori reazione, which seems reasonable. It was a sad business abandoning Danny to the freight department, after the administration of three tranquilizers, and I can say now that while he survived the trip well enough it did not do him a lot of jolly good. He is an old, arthritic dog and being cramped for almost ten hours was most desolating and he has not yet got over his limp. Ruth keeps blaming us for possibly shortening his life(11 anni) but I think he would have preferred the alternative even less.

The trip was absolutely perfect, except that I never saw the sea. Only the topside of cottony clouds. No vibration, smoothness, fussing over by large staff, marvelous dinner (we left around 8:30 p.m.) much reading of Italian brochures by me and much falling to sleep and my first sight of something below were the fields of France as we sped eastward toward Milan. Note: the fields look the same, geometrical. But then we saw many white covered and very bleak looking alps. Landing smooth as cream at Milan and then a 45 minute wait because we were that much ahead of time. I bought an Italian paper to practice on for 100 l. (16 cents, I paid 20 cents American) and it turned out to be a soccer sheet and most tedious for me. What soccer players these people be. We arrived smoothly at Da Vinci airport about 11 a.m. Italian time and then ensued about three hours of getting Danny past the Italian vet. Our things were no problem, but we had committed a boo-boo for having Danny examined by a private vet (the trip instead of a state dottore. Friends (an Italian with his American wife) helped us in this difficulty or they might have required us to leave Danny impounded 30 days.

(Note: I will not inflict similar detail on your henceforth, but I thought you would want to get us safely in Rome.)

Getting accustomed to the time change took about four days. You see there is about a six hour difference.

The apartment which our friends had engaged for us is simply unbelievable. It is in the Trastevere section across the Tivere from Rome proper, but is still in Rome. Our living room is tremendous as is our terrace. We look out for endless miles, toward montagne in two directions and the distances of Rome elsewhere. The dominant color is a kind of yellowish, orangish terra color with an impression devised by the genius of time, not by man. One can see the colosseum, the white wedding cake of Vittoria Emanuele, St. Peters, the Spanish steps and other sights to et cetera to mention. But the effect is rather general, a kind of jerusalem spread out before us, a city of stone lying quietly in the sun. On our left flank are many trees, a comparative rarity in this overcut land, cypress, cedars, pines, etc. and there is a park so close that we can look down over an immense Chinese wall onto a breathlessly spreading wisteria arbor. In front of that wall right outside our apartment house is a little park like sanctuary, not really a park, no benches or old men, just a kind of lawned interruption of the strade, where we can take Danny without any trouble of any kind. The place abounds in dogs so the atmosphere is not hostile to ours. They often wear little wicker muzzles. Our dog, I want you to know, is a pastore Tedesco of undieci anni, a bit on the vechio side I gather. He is mascolina. Our apartment is beyond further desire. The floors are mostly ceramic, except for the parkayed bedroom. The walls and ceiling have been freshly painted in spotless white and beige pastels. The furniture is oldish and chic. There are good oils on the walls. There is fine central heating, windows, picture and casement everywhere; in 20 days the Italian bureaucracy will regurgitate a phone for our patient efforts I am told. We have rented a Fiat for one week for \$40 and hope to buy a second hand one from ads in Rome Daily American placed by departing Americans. Believe it or not, Ruth and I drove from our place to the American consulate in the heart of Rome and registered - in the midst of a Communist demonstration protesting our presence in Vietnam and tied to the momentary present of Hubert Horati o Humphrey. I stopped once in front of the conulate and was waved on so precipitously one might have thought I was a Communist agitator myself. On Monday we report to the Questura, (pol. ezai) because we plan to stay more than the vizaless three months period. We also plan to acquire a tv because of importance in learning language. Almost my entire attention this week has been devoted to linguistics; it is very discouraging because I understand so little, but I am learning. We met the wife of the American publisher of the Rome Daily American and found that she was still trying to learn Italian after 2½ years, which is frightening, since she is intelligent. But I imagine I will try harder than she does. I listen to the raddio, read constantly, try to talk. We have found a simply wonderful trattoria near our house where the food is the best I have ever tasted. Ospitality of the house only, they say apologetica but it is great and, mirabile dictu, they don't talk English (Although an American priest came in yesterday, with a copy of Arizona Highways; still he talks nothing but Italian during his meals. He has a pastorate in Roma, and he is Irish. Of course our diets have been knocked for a loop in all this; we shall have to get back on it sometime. The main thing, Margie, is that I feel so wonderful; I refuse to say anymore about it; one tends to sound like a travel writer or tourist when attempting inventories. But I know you are a feeling person and the feeling she is grand. Feel dreadfully disloyal