

Lunedì, Aprile 24, 1967

Dear Marge:

Today marks exactly one month in Rome. It is unbelievable. Never have I known time to go so fast. Not that all is enchantment, although most is; I guess it is the newness of everything. It is stranger to me than my first days in the army or overseas in the Pacific during the war. And along with the strangeness is a kind of disorientation, a kind of loss of ritual that is a little disquieting if you think about it. You live, you get up, you react, you consume, you sleep, but I find you must carve your own life a bit or risk becoming a kind of symbolic beach-comber. So today I begin. I get back to work. I make out this is not Rome. This is a stanza and there is the plume de ma tante and I should use it already. Of course I rationalize that to use Rome as a place to hang one's hat, to be in a room oblivious of the sweep of residual history outside is a scandalous waste and up until now I have won the argument, that is the little old bellyman has.

1. I thank you for your letters and I am enchanted to hear that you are working the phones. It must come as a shock to some, but not to me.

2. I just picked up from the kiosk, seemingly hot off the press, a slick Italian magazine entirely on Hemingway, the 11th in a series on famous men. Then I saw the Restampa - it was put out in 1965, but it is good to have and something with which to kill the two birds, the practice of reading Italian and checking up on the Italian version of Hem's life. They have you in it, although somewhat hidden. Here is the reference: (in a year-by-year resume of his life) 1918-1919"..... In estate si trasferisce nel nord del Michigan, presso Horton's Bay (Petoskey) dove lavora ad alcuni racconti e all'inizio di un romanzo." One thing that interested me in this Italian version was the flat assertion that Hem served in the Italian infantry for two months after getting out of the hospital in Milan. I had always imagined references to Lt. Hemingway to be rather euphemistic allusions to the assimilated rank he obtained via his Ambulance job or perhaps a kind of honoring of his being wounded. I had not believed him to be really a Lt. (and am still not sure of it. I must write that writer to see if he checked the Italian military records). Many bibliographic references to American sources are listed so this could still be a repetition of an old legend. It's not important, really, in relation to verity since we already know what a tall story teller Hem was, but I would like to nail that fact down. Later, of course, I will go to Venice and see some of Hem's friends there, if I can, including the famous Cipriani. However I have no interest in the contessa of Across the River and Into the Trees. An Ivanovich, I believe) But the burden of all this is merely to get across to you that one finds the Hemingway trace everywhere and this may have been all I needed as a kind of hint, to get back to work.

3. It rains today, which is a pity because Ruth has journeyed to the Caresse Crosby castle in connection with capturing for Franconia College. The young president of the school, Dick Ruopp, 34, is with her, along with a waiter we met in the Pescatore the night before last. He has offered the waiter a job at the college as an Italian instructor at \$25 a week. Can you tie that. The young man is dying to get to the states, why I shall never know. This is not an impoverished land. It is one great dolci in my opinion. Ruth liked my actual expression in a pastiche the other evening: Two dolci to go I stumbled on order.

3. Italian. It goes so slowly. I suppose I keep acquiring words. I read a lot each day, the paper, a Berlitz book, the sides of dog food cans, etc. and I look up words and forget them, but I still can't make out much of the talk, hardly any, and talking myself is indeed an ordeal. I come out with a fine sentence and the guy says, speak in English please. Once I had the temerity to tell such a gent: Ecco - non parla Italian? In my mind the words sound very fluent but they come out in the most embarrassingly Kansas-like way you could imagine. I have tried the technique, with Ruth's cooperation, of not speaking anything but Italian (non una parola in Inglese) but I find myself making signals and being more silent than is my wont and I would like to know how going around like Harpo Marx is suppose to improve my Italian. I keep listening to Italian at all times, radio, tv, records, in the naive hope that I will learn by osmosis but so far it hasn't worked much. In fact I now seem to be going backwards a bit. That college prexy, Did Ruopp is in Rome one day and spoke a remembered phrase so well that (we are told) the Italian listening took him to be a native and unloosed on him an unintelligible stream of words. This young man, incidentally, rented a Vespa his first day here and on the second day knew enough about Rome to correct us on the one-wayness of certain obscure little bridges over the Tevere. But I'm not bitter. Perhaps God gave me something else. I'm grateful, but he didn't give me the fluidness and sense of direction of Dick Ruopp. Anecdote: Dick took a picture of a nun selling something much to the distress of an Italian watching. The Italian spat on the ground at his feet, which upset Dick somewhat but nevertheless left him with enough strength of riposte to pull out his handkerchief and offer it to the gentleman. (Then he beat it, I am happy to conclude.) Sad story of my life. I have always said, but just wait, if I could live among those people, it would be different. Now that theory, along with my other Walter Mitty ideas about myself, has evaporated. Only a month, you ask kindly? Yes, but these same natives said, just wait, in a month you'll be speaking like a native.
4. Danny is okay, not getting worse, and waits for the elevator as doggedly as the rest of us. The other day the fuori servizio sign was posted and I had to carry him half way down and half way up again. I was afraid he'd have a heart attack or something and would you believe it I half stepped on one of his paws in the bargain. He logs a lot of time on the terrace and seems less forlorn than before.
5. Driving. For some reason I have done well at Roman traffic and my wife, who has always considered herself my equal as a driver, has still not attempted the shambles of Centro. I don't mind it despite the rudeness and unexpectedness because everything is at such a much smaller scale than in the states; what would be a fatal accident in New York is merely an exchange of epithets here. We now own the Volkswagen and will make the most of it.
6. I must say the Spanish steppes were spectacular last week. The Roman authorities moved in perhaps a thousand pots of azaleas, red and white, mounting some on stands to create a ridge-like effect. It was simply stunning, so much so that I didn't mind the commercial photographers, and the American beatniks and other odd assorted types of quondam humanity. Enough for now, Lucia. Maybe you can plug in a wrong number sometime and get me. It is : 50 10 76.

Love,