

20, Maggio 1967

Dear Marge:

1. (To catch up on a little correspondence) I'm really quite upset about that Hem article and if it gave you nightmares I don't see how a good light could be put on it. It must show, however, how deep the impression was and remained and is and this tells both of us something although at undue cost. I had imagined that most of this Hemingway memory had been eroded away by the attrition of time and subsequent events if not by its minisculeness against the whole panoply of your life. I am still inclined to think this may be so and that some concurrence of circumstances, not excluding a cucumber sandwich, resulted in the difficulty - but I do not mean to be inappropriately funny. I know it isn't. Let me review this in my own mind. Before I knew you you were Marge the girl in those stories. You were attractive, memorable in fact, and perhaps no better than you had to be. But in my mind you had been rejected and because I see things from Hem's point of view, or the man's point of view, I pictured you as a kind of pitiful hank of humanity wending your way sorrowfully to life's end always you were simply the girl who was brushed off. You became the girl of that story who got married and had kids and always you were fleeing from that rather horrid story. I couldn't help being fascinated somehow and I wondered, as was my practice, whether the story was true and in any case if the girl in that story shouldn't have at least something to say. Hem had had the floor long enough. Then I discovered you and met you and corresponded with you and you weren't pitiful at all, far from it, you seemed a more successful person in many ways than Hem himself - and interesting in your own right - and this at one and the same time - gave the lie to Hem's implications and (because he had sense enough to discover you) also bore out his own powers of discernment. You remembered quite a bit about Hem, more than one had any right to expect, but Hem seemed safely out of your system, and, as it seems, had been really only a very small part of your life, and he had been your experience just as he thought you had been his. But now I must readjust a little and it is disturbing, because you are my friend, and, in a way, reassuring too, because it tends to justify my own original instinctive belief that the relationship between you and Hem was very very meaningful. All very puzzling, don't you think.

2. About the peculiarities of your hotel duties I must say that while I knew about related matters I did not realize things were that mechanical and it is all a little shivery, I must say. You are a good scout I must say.

3. Quick and crude question which I may have asked before: Who wrote Hem I won't

4. You may be sure that I have not and will not disclose the whereabouts of.

Any leak now could only come, I think from Curtis or Palethorp. It took Palethorp several months to remember O.B. and he had forgotten Toby's name

5. The truth: The Hem booklet, after the chronology of his life, was too much for me; I have another copy and will tackle it after reading my boy's books. I hate to look up every word. I find abstract things much more difficult to read. Thus, I can read the news stories easily, in the papers, but the editorials are almost impossible for me. Do they write the rapines for 11-year-olds and the editorials for a higher sort. No, it's the kind of words used.

6. Re George's letter, I enjoyed it very much, including the nice things about me. I remember, may I point out, that it was Georgie who egged you into answering my first letter. I consider her opinion, as I consider yours, of a high critical nature. I return the letter now since you may be a letter saver.
7. Do not think I have forgotten the pix or have taken possession of same. it is just that I do feel you have confidence in me and, as I have inferred, I have done very little office work since getting to Italy. My second stroke just arrived recently, however, and that will make my task easier.
8. I can't help feeling that your warning antennae are accurate. Sounds fraught with potential messiness and would doge same. But then I am really no Abigail Van Buren. In all candor, though, Miz Main, you is pretty, with all them nice teeth and all, (but I better be quiet or somebody will take what I say for a wolfcall.)
9. Just read today in the overseas edition of the Times a review of HEMINGWAY: Bylines, a collection of his stories put out by Scribners; Mostly the review is unfavorable which seems to be the chic thing to be. If you can write condescendingly of a great writer that means you are a greater writer. It is odd. The collection consists entirely of Hem's peripheral writing, that is, it contains only journalism, and yet the Time reviewer, used the stories and the quality of the stories as an index to the declining quality of Hemingway. The old cliches: parodies of himself, etc. That was why Hem never allowed his news stories to be printed in his lifetime. They take stories you wrote under pressure and put them with the stories you took trouble over and judge you by them - he said in effect, which is what this Time man has done. Of course I agree that Hem's work declined after 30 but I am not sure enough about this to say so insultingly; in any case, the worst stuff he ever wrote was damn good, and if he wrote about himself, what better subject did he have and anyhow who doesn't write about himself? The Time reporter belittled all Hem's Collier work, including an account of Hem's D-Day landing in France, which I happen to think was a work of art. So there you are. Probably you should get the book to enjoy those early Toronto pieces that he wrote right after leaving Petoskey and while you were writing to each other. You might even come up with a "scene" or two that such stories evoke.
- 10: Re Susie: Do you know I actually felt a sense of unfaithfulness to Danny while I was gallivanting down the Amalfi Coast and enjoying it and (this is the important thing) not thinking about him.
- 11: My ability to understand Italian or speak it has become sufficiently unbearable to me so that I have made tentative plans to hire a teacher; which is another way of saying, to pay someone to talk to you. Yesterday, walking the new Danny in our little wedge of a park on the other side of the Mura from Scharra Park, I met an old man who insisted on talking to me. Malatta, malatta, he kept saying, and I was irritated but suppressed this emotion and was technically polite. Well he was a nice old guy and I realized I was the lucky one. He had otto due anni, and yet he was small and slim and healthy, with a slight repairing job on the nose to attest to time passage, nothing more. He talked slowly by nature and so I could understand him. He had a wide-shouldered blue suit and his wife's brother ~~manimamion~~ lived in Cahlahphonia. He made me feel very young and he didn't laugh at my Italian or tell me to please speak something else and I think I made a date with him to have caffe the following day. We'll see. Capisco, capito? I said. Parola e capito, he said reluctantly. All for now and keep yourself (ugh) ...