

June 25, 1967

Dear Marge:

Thanks for your dear letters written willy-nilly which is more than I can say. A little trip to Venice and a little sun and a little visit from a state-sider and a little red (stead of white) wine, and I am hang-dogging it around looking for excuses, appraising the four basilicas, checking Danny's water, catching up on my Italian, evaluating the Middle East Situation, reading a few chapters from Hem's latest, By-Line: Ernest Hemingway, going out for a spitted chicken for our supper if we are not going to the neighborhood trattoria, watering my flowers and potted trees and calibrating the gearth of my terrace tomatoes on something like an ~~luxury~~ basis, checking on whether the sun is entering at any point and making it a very important business to have windows open only on the shaded side ala Italian, trying to understand the Italian broadcast and finding them still too rapid and realizing that well then I could easily master those old early records and finding instead that they baffled me as thoroughly as ever, checking Danny's wound and worrying about it but at least being satisfied that the scar can no longer be found, etc. etc. While you, on the front-lines of life, real life, because Sidney is really a front line I know that, go merrily on with your manifold activities, including letters to a distant friend. Hail, Lucia, daughter of kings, I salute you.

In Venice I stayed away from Hemingway for two days, simply enjoying the fantastic delights of St. Marks Square and the surprising color of a Catholic Church and the gayeity of it all, rather than an eccliastical thing, the Greenwich Villageness of it, with the many painters, all rather good, each with his little throng, and the ladies egging pigeons (eek) to perch in their hair and be pictured in some way suggesting that they are latter day St. Francis and that creatures love and trust them and land all over them because their heart is pure - and over at the side the crumpled old lady who sells newspaper cones full of corn keeps her eyes shyly on the flagstones. All around the square are hundreds of chairs and tables with tourists sipping capachinos(sp.) and bands playing and those dratted agents of the glass factory on the isle of Murano trying, like pimps, to line you up for a visit. I see little moral difference really. The food was great, the mood subline; there was only one gnat, the tourist trapness of it all; I am rather irascible about such matters and do not like to keep being reminded that I am someplace not to enjoy but to support. Then I got after Hem and talked to some of his old friends and took many notes and found that he was not drunk all the time and rather shy. I looked at some Italian versions of his books that he had bought and inscribed to the daughter of his hotel Gritti housekeeper. Read this when you are 20, he wrote to the two-year-old girl. One book was To Have and Have not. He called that a little "rough". The other was the 49 stories, in two of which, etc. etc. We had a marvelous time at Harry's Bar, meeting a delightful Englishman named, really, Tommy Tucker; then we had lunch one day at the Hotel Cipriani, owned by Hem's good friend of Across the River etc. Terrific setting on an island, grand food, free boat to the threshold; Cost: a little steep: 10,000 lira, or almost \$17 which is as much as I ever paid for lunch I can tell you that. I guess it was worth it though since Cipriani is sending me a pix of himself with Hem on Torcello after the African crashes of 1954. During the last three days we have been visited by a widow of a dear friend of mine. Great fun from a different point of view, but the same crick in the neck looking at Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Went swimming at Ostia (she did) then we all had a grand dinner on the roof of the Hassler, Rome's No. 1 albergo. Thence to Doney's but