

Martedi , 22 Agosto, 1967

Dear Marge(cio, that is, Lucy):

First: Apologies.

You: Accepted.

Me: Thanks.

Extenuation: Your last two lovely letters re the condition of Sidney came while Ruth and I were up in Switzerland. But I had planned to post you something up there. I seem to write noone. Ruth is the writer, and even she has been slowed by the weather.

Summary: I was about to go to the Abruzzi via bus because of my car accident when last I wrote you. That was done. Ruth and I spent one hot night in L'Aquila (accent on first syllable). Mountains or not it was troppo caldo and not my kind of town, although part was picturesque. Our hotel, called Grand Hotel e del Parco was that one cut below acceptable where salesmen stay - even in Italy. Many trees and they stifled the breeze. At one point I left the door open and stood at the window with a hotel glass of iced bourbon in my hand while Ruth sat on the bed writing. A French lady from the room next door walked by and then, incredibly, reappeared in the doorway and stolidly, and in some sense, critically, calmly surveyed the room. How do you do? I was forced into saying. There was no response. She went on staring and somehow I felt like the Ugly American caught with a glass in his hand and (undoubtedly) some dissolute "broad" in his room. At last, having completed her look, my French visitor, kind of harumphed and walked on. Passed then from the same room another French lady, but this one more decorously kept on her course past my door, but then she must have caught up with her friend in the hall and by all that is holy, she walked back, looked thoroughly about, and then disappeared down the hall. Odd, what. This was too much so Ruth and I changed our plans (because of the heat not the ladies) and drove to a spot on the Adriatic map named Pescara. There we stayed three most enjoyable days. I should say we got on a bus for Pescara; and returned by train. In our car I looked vainly for the two seat tickets that had been reserved for us by the consierge until a friendly American voice told us to sit anywhere, the seat reservations meant nothing. It was true. They were phantom seats that didn't exist. The voice belonged to an Italian American revisiting Italy with his wife, an Argentinian Italian. He works for the pharmaceutical house Ely Lilly in Venezuela. So you see we are quite international. He was a fine low named Barbera and he had been out of the U.S. too long. He kept calling me old fellow.

Pescara is not favored by Romans or Americans apparently. It is rather hard to get to, straight across the peninsula, and it is full of Germans and French. It is rather their back yard. Not another Englese speaking couple was in our fine air-conditioned very large hotel, the Grand Hotel of Montasylvana (Pescara suburb). The bartender however spoke good American. It's not that I seek Americans, quite the contrary. I try to speak Italian, not at all successfully, but the total dominance of a place by those of other cultures has somehow a subduing effect upon one. There was not the kind of friendliness that we had encountered in Positano. We met and liked two perfectly charming Italian couples in Positano despite the fact that neither had a word of English; and we met a delightful English mother and daughter, and later a very engaging older English couple. But in Pescara it was as if we were somehow intruders to another's domain. Probably bosh, but that was the feeling. It was cool, though, and the food splendid, and the shore pictureseque beyond our stony beach - great handmade spider-like racks for nets pivoted on posts from which they are fulcrumed into a little estuary. The poor fish don't really have a chance in Italy. We spent most of the way back to Rome enjoying a battle being waged in Italian between Barbera(our Italian-American friend) and the conductor. It seems the rail authorities at Barbera's point of origin had made a \$30 mistake, and it was Barbera's contention this was not his fault and he should not pay. At times his more fluent wife pitched in to help, but they really didn't have a chance against the conductor whose presentation was made not only to the Barberas but to the entire train in a very annoying fashion that the Barberas told us was typically Italian. So as not to take a total loss, Barbera salved his pride by having the conductor check on his through-Rome rail arrangements. All this was just before the big earthquake in Venezuela.

End of Abruzzi bit.

Next phase. A week or so in boiling Rome chasing after our car and finally getting it fixed and a legal action started against our English group captain who smashed into us. The heat continued at a very high level of discomfort and so Ruth and I took off for Switzerland, leaving Danny once again with the vet. (This easy out gave me a succession of twinges let me tell you. You can rationalize to others and to your logical self without fooling the belly)

I would like to go into a lot of detail about this last trip but really cannot. Suffice it to say we drove to Perugia (2 days), Rapallo(1), Lugano in Switzerland(3), Ascona, Swiss, (2), Parma, Italy (1) and Ancona on the Adriatic, (3). It was really a very grand trip, but we were glad to get home. We liked Switzerland very much, the neatness and the glorious postcards on all sides and the coolness, but we were unhappy to run into Germany on all sides (in Italian Switzerland) and we both agreed that the price you paid for Swiss neatness was a certain amount of coldness and a kind of efficiency that I can only call ridiculous. You ask about meal hours and are told it is plainly posted on the bulletin board. You ask for the most common transistor battery in the world and are told you must have the number and you finally realize this is a sham to cover lack of inventory. You load your head with numbers, I told the preachy man. I have better uses for my head. Thus is anti-Americanism formed. You must comply or you are a brute. In Switzerland you miss the gushing good will of the Italian which formerly you denigrated. So what am I telling you? Simply that the holy grail has still not been found. Ruth and I send