

Via Fazzello 25
Taormina 98039 Italia
Dec. 27, 1967

Dear Marge:

Thanks for your last two letters, noting plan changes and adding to the Hem hoard. Both Ruth and I enjoyed same very much. Perhaps this letter will have to follow you across the country.

My best auguries for the new year, Marjorie. That's the way the Italians put it. I hope you keep well and live a life of your own choosing. I don't know when we'll see each other next. We now expect to return to New York by boat sometime in May, probably bringing our car, and then motoring north after stopping in Conn. to see my relatives. Who knows, maybe you will come to New England. Or maybe still you will come to Sicily.

It is friendlier here in Taormina, and the days move swiftly; they are happier in some ways and less productive in others. I mean we have so much truck with the foreign colony that my Italian suffers a bit. I sometimes forget I am in Italy, and the voices I hear in the street sound strange. Now that is bad. I had always been critical of Americans who insulated themselves with their own kind in a strange land and yet it is a great temptation. Learning is one verity, but just ordinary getting along and communicating and laughing quickly and playing games and being sure of things, these too are verities; I think what is still a legitimate charm about living with language co-evils in a strange land is that you mean more to each other than you do at home. You are like survivors of a shipwreck and everybody has a ticket to the society. There is no shutting out as there is at home. There is a big international club here for which the town has supplied quarters and it is always a pleasant place to play bridge or ping pong or talk or drink or for Ruth to feel useful decorating or taking part in language etc. etc. Of course the Christmas season has thrown everybody together. Most of the stranieri and many Italians too gathered next door at Englishman Miles Woods villa for xmas eve party of punch and then 20 of us had a christmas eve supper and later adjourned to the club for carols, meanwhile running up the street to see the starting of the big fuoco in the square. Only Italians would start a public fire right in the middle of everything. But it is thrilling. And so it has gone, lots of fun, a kind of country club existence but not as homogenized as that. With us in all this has been Harold Loeb, as I think I predicted to you. He is the model for the Robert Cohn of THE SUN ALSO RISES. He is 76 and has a 44-year-old English wife - and angina. These steps and the climate, that is colder inside than out, it seems, is hard on him but he rallies well and when he is warm and seated he can talk with pleasure and relaxation about the expatriate period of the 20's. He is officially a Hemingway hater but I think this is just his head man talking. Actually he enjoys hemingway research as much as I do, although he tries to find reasons in Hem's background for his hatefulness to friends. He thinks Hem's mother's raising him as a Marcelline twin when they were very young, in other words as a little girl, filled him with unknowing horror and that later it came out as strident over masculinity. He says Hem and Bill Smith were the least girl chasing men he ever knew and that when anything exciting happened to Hem he tended to put it out of balance. He thinks Bill's first girl, actually, in all ways, was his wife Marion married him at 36 years of

age. So you see I chatter. I don't talk with him about you of course.

All for now to get this