

March 4, 1968

Dear Marge:

Now we are in March which happens to be the month we came over. So fast it seems and so little accomplished writing-wise. But so much done and so much fun and so much pasta consumed and so many inches added to the waistline.

Ruth and I are both well and Danny continues about the same, which is to say creaky and always hungry. He reacts to damp weather it seems and since we have had sirocco for two weeks or more it hasn't been pleasant for him. Here sirocco seems to mean fog over the shoreline caused in some way by the African influence. I know not the physics of it. Days go by that we cannot see the horizon line, but there will be brightness spotted around to relieve things. The other day seven of us went to Nino's in Lattijanno for lunch. We sat at a table installed for us right on the beach. There was no wind and the sun beat down benevolently upon us as we had pasta and pesce misto and rosso and bianco vino. Down the beach away a young man was letting a horse romp in the sand; he would roll over with seeming delight, jump straight up in the air and then dash through the water at knee depth, his master trailing along behind. When I went up close to get a picture, I noticed many harness marks on that nag and I felt good that this was apparently a real outing for the horse. Then a red-faced, blue-eyed Irish looking Sicilian drove up in his Sicilian cart driving a fine steed with the traditional bonnet. He would make the horse curtsy and rear but, mirabile dictu, when I tried to pay him he was offended, although not fatally, and later he accepted some wine for himself and his horse; the horse preferred rosso. The man would pour it in the palm of his hand and the horse would lap it up with seeming delight. Then the man asked for a cigarette and I thought at last we had cracked him but he gave the cigarette to the horse, who held it momentarily in comical fashion and then attempted to swallow it but was forced to cough it up by his master. Finally, the man took a shovel from his cart and handed it to the horse. No, he didn't start shoveling, but he held that wooden handle so firmly in his strong teeth and brandished it around like a baton. It was all very delightful and I particularly remember the man's very blue eyes and his pride in our enjoyment and of course the occasion was made by his refusal to take money. On such simplicities do our joys turn. With us was Langston Mofett, six feet five, 64 years old, an alcoholic who doesn't drink but gives drinking parties for his friends, and met Hemingway in Paris in 1929 and remembers a strange penetrating look Hemingway gave him; that is all he remembers. Langston is really a swell guy, wrote a novel, Devil By the Tail, which sold well in Italy (got him a Mercedes) but was hurt in the U.S.A. by THE LOST WEEKEND by Charles Jackson. He soon hopes to send for his wife of 42 years who, I think, must have money. He is now writing the 13th version of a new novel and finds the writing good here. He gave a party for a group of us last night. Also on the beach were Mr. and Mrs. Phil Adams, tourists, from Cincinnati. He is a curator of art; she, then a Mrs. Clark, knew Hem in Bimini, so you see what happens without my even really searching. Also with us was an English unattached lady, Jan Murrey, An American millionaire by the name of Eugene Grossman, who is a unitarian and carries a Marine Corps emblem in his lapel, but is really a nice guy and I actually wormed it out of him that he was rich. And Ruth and I. Fun what. Ruth loves this sort of thing. Personally I preferred the horses.

Harold Loeb and his wife, Barbara left Saturday for a slow drive up the Italian peninsula for Rome and then a flight back to America in time for him to plant his peas. I regret to say that Harold and I didn't hit it off toward the end and I really am not absolutely sure what happened. Either we began to bore each other or else Harold began to suffer a little brain damage or else it was something else, but he became quite peckish and I was simply unable to cope anymore, not that I am the most sedate person in the world, and Harold utterly depressed me with his complete self-centeredness. I keep telling myself this is the assault of age and the accumulation of little strokes and of course he has a bad angina condition, but I could not escape feeling that Harold had always been selfish and that this tendency within himself would inevitably have brought down the wrath of another self-centered person by the name of Hemingway - although in all honesty I do not think Hem was ever selfish or totally egotistical which is the condition I must unhappily ascribe to Harold. I don't know, Harold always talks about the treachery of Hem, but I think their friendship could not stand Harold's conspicuous boredom at the bullfights and his total self-relating. You can imagine how poorly it would have set with the Pamplona panthers for Harold to waltz off with one of the panthers girls and to keep attacking the raison d'etra of the meet, namely the bullfighting. It would have been extremely obnoxious to anyone and since I have observed Harold's bullying of his wife and his total unconcern for others here in Taormina I cannot but conclude, even with allowances for age, that what happened in THE SUN ALSO RISES was something he definitely asked for himself..... I got tired one night listening to Harold talk about Hem's war phoniness to a casual bystander and had to put my oar in since Harold fought his war, ww 1, in New York City, whereas Hemingway was lucky not to have been killed in at least three wars, one of the Spanish bit. Oh well, we had a good time for a while, Harold was a nice philosophical fellow and we would talk and Harold would make fair statements and then, binbo, it was all over. Of course it could be me, I know, but that wouldn't explain the fact that he never dressed presentably once while he was here, that he railed at Barbara for not getting him Social Security medicare assistance from the government - I mean over and over in front of people - and that he was less than gallant to Ruth. I guess maybe he is a baby and is bluffing and I do him wrong to expect normal conduct. At least we had a civilized parting, which I insisted on for Barbara's sake if for no other. But the taste is bad and that is sad. And I will not belabor this anymore.

Both Ruth and I send our very best to you and G,

All you need is love
Love is all you need,