

Oct. 22, 1968

Dear Marge:

I don't know why I put off writing you when I answer the candlestick maker quickly enough. I think it's because I want something to say and that is not always easy to come by.

First. Thank you so much for the great pictures. I agree with Sidney about the innocence. Without going back through my letters I wonder if that is about the time you saw so much of Hem that one summer. If so, I agree with you, you could hardly have been that knowing girl in the story. Not that she was so knowing, but she was more knowing than that picture. It is really a delightful study or work of art or whatever you want to call it and I'll tell you something that may surprise you: it reminds me very much of you as I saw you at the retirement hotel a couple of years later. There is such an intangible quality about the picture that I am having it copied by a very good professional because I am afraid my own work would deprive it of the somewhat mystic quality that it possesses. Also, that is a great picture of Sidney, although he looks a little bit older than I had imagined he looked when you first saw him but then I keep forgetting about the age difference. The odd thing is that Sidney is not such a different type from Hemingway. Both were certainly handsome, very masculine fellows with strong, incisive features. But the dark intense quality reminds me much of Hem, and then of course, as my mind goes back, I remember your saying how Sidney's interests were similar to Hem's in respect to outdoor things and that he liked Hem's work. I am having that picture copied professionally too, and will send both back when the work is finished or when I am satisfied that I have a good copy.

I'm glad you liked my comments on impulsive writing. It is a very tricky subject, I think. If this ability could be perfectly harnessed a great deal of the barriers to communication would be lowered I'm sure. I don't think Hem's greatest short stories would have been possible without this mystic help from outside himself, although he would always cry nonsense to this type of talk. He never wanted to be considered a primitive writer (that is, one who achieved his effects without technique or insight) or an automatic writer, which he considered akin to spiritualism and therefore was non-art. And yet when asked the secret he always included luck as a necessary ingredient, and need I labor the point that luck is an outside force? I think, to put it crudely, that the smarter and wiser Hemingway became, the more he knew about his subject, the less effective he became, and this is not really a criticism of him, it is the way things have to be in the human equation. Whenever the left hand starts looking at the right the effect I guess is self-conscious, and the public (dumb though it is) always senses this and knows when the magic is missing.

Here there are no changes. Danny continues about the same, perhaps stabilizing his debility a bit. The weather has been the most magnificent fall in my memory. Friends have come and gone. And now we sit and button up ~~and shiver and go~~ ~~have to pay~~ ~~the~~ bitter winter price we will have to pay

with an unconscious key. He kept trying to understand the key and often he sounded rather pretentious about it and I don't think he ever did really understand it. That is proven to some extent by his inability later on to extend his own method in any way much superior to that of his imitators, although I will give him considerable credit for trying to go "far out" beyond his depth rather than sticking to the tried and true formula as does an O'Hara for example. If you can think of a perfect "story" existing somewhere and someone being able to tell that story without flawing it, then you have the phenomenon of Hemingway. I used to envy him so and try to emulate him but later I realized that he was in a sense chosen as a kind of sport of nature to tell these stories. As Faulkner said in another but related connection, "if I hadn't written those stories somebody else would have." I know this gets pretty metaphysical after a while but what I am trying to say is that no one can dictate who is to be this instrument of nature, and it isn't really a great and rewarded honor as a matter of fact, as witness the relatively sad lives lived by these "gifted" people. So how much this relates to your theory of automatic writing, I don't know, but I insist the Hem factor is not unrelated. Nancy Hale, the famous essayist, more or less subscribes to this theory when she says the writer must let his mind rest, must let it renew its batteries so to speak, so that it can continue to function at a high level. Now isn't this like saying the mind has a life of its own and isn't that a kind of automatic thing? YOU've heard me talk about the head man and the stomach man in the past and I think this theory too is related. What I mean to say is that, ironically enough, the stomach man (the automaton) is apt to be smarter in many ways than the head man because the governor of the stomach man is in some way more etherially controlled, that is to say controlled outside the human framework. Now I know all this is very goopy and hope you will forgive me for it and if there is a fatal flaw in my reasoning or articulation it is that I have simply done too much limited cerebrating about it... Why is it that I write to you this way for heaven's sake? In a recent letter, Harold Loeb wrote me about Hem, Ford Madox Ford and a lady, all of whom, he said, prevaricated about the facts of the twenties. "I suppose all three of them are seeking a truth truer than the true, some kind of esthetic truth. I don't like it. Perhaps I'm old fashioned but I still think that one should try to convey what is sometimes called reality." So you see what is happening to the so-called truth. That dear old world we loved so, the world of absolute right and wrong is long gone I'm afraid.

I would dearly love to see those pictures.

Danny is getting no better. In fact there is something almost mathematically remorseless and progressive about his ability to get around. This is the ticket one pays for the heavenly puppy days; and I think one should be prepared to pay for everything he gets out of this world. Of course Danny may be a symbol of future me, the mind being what it is, I don't think so, but who knows about these things.

All my love,

Margie's two pix'

"I am thinking of sending on two pictures for you to see. Georgie had them. One is of Sidney, the way he looked when I first saw him. The other is of me. Fourteen or fifteen. Sidney called it the age of innocence. "