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FIELD AVENUE
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Christmas Day, 1971

Dear, dear Marge:

You must certainly forgive me for the absenteeism. The person you are, you will certainly do so, I know. The usual excuse, which, being the kind of person you are, you do not need to hear, suffice it to say that I think of you very, very often, as I do this rather special day. I say special because the religiousosity seem to mean much to me, nor the gain or loss of presents nor that of family. The family is too distant, the presents are symbolic exchanges between Ruth and me. The specialness of Christmas is just mystical for me to explain. I guess I have simply been programmed to feel it as special and to feel good about it. Although there is a depressing element lurking about too which is also hard to explain. A newspaper psychologist announced that Christmas was very depressing for lonely people. I suppose it underlines things or something, I don't know. In the past, other people's seeming millions of close friends, etc. Well, it ebb and flow through elements of sadness and gladness. When people are in and that I feel very fine. Other times the bleakness sets in. But I come to the conclusion, finally, about the sadness of getting old, this is the price you pay for being sentient. If you don't know you are alive you are not as lonely which is grand but the catch is that you know you are not lonely. If you are a thoughtful person you can be superior as hell to that other loud ~~unhappy~~ but the price you pay is unhappiness. I don't think our mutual friend was much different from a lot of other discerning people when he became enveloped in gloom at the end. He had a peculiar, vulgar phrase for it. He called it bla. I suppose he meant by that that chemistry was more or less to blame for the waves of depression that overwhelmed him. Others have called it a prelude to his loss of sanity, and perhaps it was, but I think other people have suffered in like manner, and those who do not are the lucky pollyannas who smile their way to the grave without really understanding what life is all about. I don't really believe that last. I think the happiest state is to be unknowing and relatively happy. For what can a man do. No man can understand the puzzlement of life and there would be nothing he could do about it. What can a noodle do about being in the soup. Perhaps it is best not to realize one is a noodle in the soup. Perhaps that is what they mean by nirvana. What I am getting at is that I believe the thing that most disturbs people like Papa is to depart the ballgame before the score is known. This is very vexing to a thoughtful man. I remember reading once that one should not think too much about the future. This seemed silly at the time, but now I am not so certain. I delay all this once more.....

The books continue to possess us and now, if possible, even more. Ruth and I went to Brandon, Vt. and bid on some nice books, about owned by a spinster lady by the name of Shirley Farr and by God we up, getting over our head and winning the boodle. Paid about \$700 more than we planned to. Great bunch of books though, no fiction except of the classic, 1st ed. kind, many Vermont books, which are sought after, and quite a few great pieces of Americana; French books telling contemporaneously about the Revolution, etc. Also a complete National Geographic bound in Morocco. The auctioneer loaned me a big truck and Ruth and I hired four boys to help load it with our books. What a job. Then I drove the truck home, while the auctioneer drove his car to his home. We got home ok and hired some more boys to help unload. Then the next day we had to drive the truck down to Hillboro to retrieve our car. It was all very exciting. Ruth loved it. And it is to go over the booty looking for sleepers. Probably we will be lucky to break even but at least we are having fun. Of course at home, I had to go out on a Sunday and borrow some boards from a friendly contractor so that I could put up temporary cases into which we will pile our books. All a big, big job, and the trouble is that it is a time and thought consuming that I find myself doing little else, not writing or letter writing, etc. On to p of this I am under obligation to produce another Hem article by Feb. and I haven't even picked a subject yet. I go into all this at this length just to give you a sense of what it is that makes up my life at this time.

I continue to see Harold Loeb. At age 80 he is off to Arizona for the winter. He is a great guy and seems fond of me. Our Hem relationship has of course gotten off to a simple case of friendship. As I have told you, he likes me since I am the only one left that he knows and can talk about the old days -- even though I wasn't there. He tried to sell me a bunch of his books to make way for others but his wife vetoed the kibosh on that.

It is 4:30 pm. now. In half an hour we go to Dr. Potter's for Christmas dinner and exchange of presents and we will have a go with their kids and a few drinks. Dr. Potter is a gp from Belmont, has just, is just now completing, a new home in Sugar Hill, and we are grown quite close. They are much younger, though, around 47-ish. It is nice to have the loan of part of their family Christmas. I hope the letter doesn't sound too sad. I am really fine and I hope you are too. I do hope the new year will give us a chance to meet again. Ruth is in wishing you love and all the rest,