

Dec. 5, 1974

Dear Marge:

Thanks for the good letter. Even though it wasn't full of smiles and other pollyanna stuff, it was thoughtful & interesting and, as usual, a bit of a literary gem. I refer particularly to:

I have always had a happy-feeling inside, no matter how bad the circumstances. Now that it has left me, I am truly lost.

There is only one catch to the truth of that statement. The fact that you have articulated this human condition somehow takes the curse off of it. I know it would be nice to feel happy inside; nothing takes the place of that. And I think you felt that way even after your husband died. I could see the happy place shining in your eyes that first time in the lobby of your hotel. So a few years took away some from that feeling. I doubt anyone hangs totally onto that feeling unless he's an idiot and then, as I have said, heaven gets even with him too by not letting him know that he is happy. He doesn't know it, that's the great joke. I think in your case you held onto the happy feeling longer than most. Once down at Hanover about ten years ago I complained to the doctor that I didn't really feel good. I couldn't put my finger on it, but I must have had that feeling you summed up so well. "Hell, son," he said, "the last time I really felt good was when I was nine years old and they let us off early from school." He went on to say that after awhile nobody felt good in the unknowing way of youth and that it becomes a matter of accommodation. I didn't believe a word of it, but I've had my ups and downs since then, and that is all right with me just so long as a few of those ups are stuck in there. It's too bad, as I have said before, that it isn't the way the poets would have it. It isn't the snow or the rain or the broken heart or the rejected manuscript as I so long thought. It is some kind of a mysterious, tidal thing inside that disregards all the exterior stimuli and somehow tells our bodies that this is going to be a dreary or happy day. I wish this wasn't so, and sometimes I suspect there are people who are never down, but I can't imagine God being able to arrange it any other way. Suppose he had us up all the time. How would we know it or enjoy it or have any point of reference? It has to be this tidal business. It can't even be steady badness because if it were this too we would get used to and shrug off in time. No, the good Lord figured out these tides as a way of keeping us sentient or whatever the word is. Unfortunately we can't cut out the troughs, no more than a director of a play can cut out all the places between the laughs. I hate this when I'm down. My do I get gloomy, and I think Ruth does too. And the trouble is I can't philosophize with my condition when I feel this way the way I am doing now. When I am down I know I am the sorriest critter in the world and I almost hate the happy carefree laughing people in the supermarket and the postoffice. Well isn't this great talk. So the page is ended and my love onces