

EB:

Dear Cal,

It has been very pleasant at Hemingway's house but I really couldn't get to work at all of course and am just beginning. The swimming pool is wonderful—it lights up at night—I find that each underwater bulb is five times the voltage of the *one* bulb in the light house across the street, so the pool must be visible to Mars—it is wonderful to swim around in a sort of green fire, one's friends look like luminous frogs. I received a very obscene letter in verse from Dylan Thomas—A Street Car Named Desire is referred to as A Truck Called Fuck. I still think it would be nice if you could visit here sometime—maybe Christmas—if turtle soup can attract you...

Affectionately yours,
Elizabeth

RL:

Dear Elizabeth,

I tried swimming—was nearly drowned and murdered by children with foot-flippers and helmets and a ferocious mother doing the crawl. Then came down with a cold.

Had a fine weekend with William Carlos Williams. He took me to see his old Spanish mother—91—and was like a Dickens character patting her hands and making her laugh saying "Mama, would you rather look at us or 20 beautiful blonds?"

I heard Anais Nin read—pretty thin stuff, though not unattractive personally.

Key West tempts me.

18. 630 Dey Street, Key West, Florida, January 1st, 1948

EB:

Happy New Year!

I'm sorry not to have written before, I've been sick most of the last month—asthma—it doesn't completely incapacitate one but it is a nuisance. I am feeling much better, maybe the drugs, maybe two new hats, or maybe just getting away from my friends who are so full of solicitude.

RL:

So sorry to hear about your asthma—how I thank God that my imaginary asthma was cured by a chiropractor.

Here's my poem, in time I hope to cheer you.

EB:

I've read your poem. I like it more than I can say. In fact I can shed tears over it very easily and I hardly ever do that except over trash, frequently, and over something at the other extreme, very rarely. I think one weeps over two kinds of embarrassment—and this is so embarrassing in the right way one wants to read it without really looking at it directly. That damned celluloid bird... I made the mistake of reading it when I was working on a poem and it took me an hour or so to get back into my own meter. There are only about 3 words I'd take objection to, at my most carping...

I'm going back to New York in April and hope to stop off in Washington to see a couple of friends—including you—will you be there then?

RL:

I'm delighted you liked my poem. I was afraid you'd find it violent and dry.

I won't mail you any more poems, if they take you from writing your own.

How would August be for a visit? Do you think you might have room for my friend Carley? Her little boy is here now, an angelic child, I think, and I'm not soft on children.

EB:

I really feel you should *struggle* against your feeling about children, I suppose it's better than drooling over them like Swinburne. But I've always loved the stories about Shelley going around Oxford peering into baby-carriages, and how he once said to a woman carrying a baby, "Madame, can your baby tell us anything of pre-existence?"

RL:

My feeling about babies is *mostly* a joke.

At last my divorce is over. While I was in New York, I saw Jean—all very affectionate and natural, thank God. It's funny at my age—all the rawness of learning, what I used to think should be done with by twenty-five. Sometimes nothing is so solid to me as writing. I suppose that's what vocation means—at times a torment, a bad conscience, but all in all, purpose and direction, so I'm thankful, and call it good.

EB:

Thank you for your letter which did me a great deal of good.

It's very hot today, and I guess I must hike down to that so-called beach and get into that icy water for a while. Having just digested all the *New York Times* and some pretty awful clam-chowder, I don't feel the slightest bit literary, just stupid. Or maybe it's just too much solitude. Wiscasset is beautiful and dead as a door-nail. I think its heart beats twice a day when the train goes through.

I think almost the last straw here is the hairdresser—a nice big hearty Maine girl. She told me: 1) that my hair “don't feel like hair at all” 2), I was turning gray practically “under her eyes.” And when I'd said, yes, I was an orphan, she said “Kind of awful, ain't it, ploughing through life alone.” So now I can't walk downstairs in the morning or upstairs at night without feeling I'm ploughing. There's no place like New England.

RL:

I know the solitude that gets too much. It doesn't *drug* me, but I get fantastic and uncivilized. Tell me how to get to your house. Are you sure one more visitor won't be too many? In Maine your friends pour in like lava—hot from their cities. I'll understand if you want a rest.

P.S. There's something haunting and nihilistic about your hair-dresser