

THE LETTERS  
1932 – May 1934

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Excerpt  
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January 1932

**To John Dos Passos, [c. 4 January 1932]**

Box 406  
Key West.

Dear Dos,

How the hell are you? Everybody is in fine shape here. Greg weighs 13 lbs. Big husky deep voiced slob. Been wonderful weather here. Warm as tarpon weather. No northers yet. Have been too damned busy going over this book<sup>1</sup> to try for tarpon but they say there are thousands everywhere. Fishermen say most they ever saw. We got here a week before Christmas. Will be here until May anyway. You guys damned welcome anytime. New house will be swell when get it [a]ll fixed. Have roof, plumbing and lights fixed now.<sup>2</sup> Practically no mosquitoes this year even out on the keys. Overseas just re-opened on a dollar a day every room with bath special weekly rates basis.—<sup>3</sup>

Commercial fishermen havent been catching any mackerel or kings yet as it needs a norther to bring the migratory fish. Bra is in fine shape.<sup>4</sup> Got a new bottom in the boat

Did you go to Gaspé peninsula?<sup>5</sup> What about coming down? Gabrielle, the lady dog we got to look after baby is a malingering homesicker. Probably will be gone. Got to get something else. Wish the hell we had Henriette.<sup>6</sup>

Charles and Lorine are fine and send you their best. No visiting firemen here yet. Wlado claims he's broke. Mike had intended to come down but hasn't said anyth[i]ng more about it. Hope Archie will come.<sup>7</sup> I wrote Gerald when I got your letter about his old man.<sup>8</sup> Haven't heard anything about Canby and Esther.<sup>9</sup>

Why the hell didn't you give me a chance to do something about Scrbners when Harpers haywired on you.? Max will let you say anything about anybody. Anybody else in the outfit is so dumb they don't know what you are saying anyway. Nobody cares what anybody says what the hell has got into Harpers?<sup>10</sup>

Shot 14 snipe yesterday. W[i]sh the hell you were here to eat the mess. Have some swell liquor that had been in a warehouse outside of Matanzas since 1910.<sup>11</sup>

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Am going over the just typed mss. of this last abortion. If it were all as bad as some of it it would be pretty bloody awful but if it were all as ok as some of it would be pretty good. Am trying to excise the larger gobs of shyte. Wish you could read it and tell me. How did you come out with yours?

Thanks for the Nyears wire. We sent you one for Christmas I think but maybe I'm a liar.

Give my best to Bill and to Kate will you and let me know your plans.<sup>12</sup> We might haul a few shellfish.

Pauline sends her love all around— Excuse lousy letter. All yenced out working over reworking of bloody volumne. There is a descriptive glossary that took more damned work and has more hitherto unpublished information than you can assemble between covers and everbody will think oh he must have just copied that out of some spanish book. Christ will I be glad to quit that bloody business and get started failing again on a good novel where when you have a good day you get something to show for it.

Looks as though we might get a norther now. Fishermen hit the mackerel last night at snipe point. Thousands of birds coming down. Been quite a few ducks too. More cranes than I've ever seen. Phoebe, Thompson's jig cook eats buzzard bones. Cook all the meat off then parch the bones. Cures rheumatism. Like to try some? Plenty of buzzards. Did you meet Wm, limited edition, Faulkner?<sup>13</sup> Re[p]orts from Paris are that the better banks ok until Feb anyway. Strongest ones are jake now.<sup>14</sup> Dog having eaten dog. Well had better terminate.—

Best to you always  
 Hem

UVA, TLS

The conjectured letter date is based on EH's comments about the current calm weather and the anticipated "norther" and his remark that fishermen had caught mackerel the previous night. In the following letter, dated 5 January 1932, he would report that the norther had materialized and that the season's first mackerel had been caught "the day before yesterday."

1 *Death in the Afternoon*, EH's nonfiction treatise on bullfighting and writing, would be published by Scribner's on 23 September 1932.

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- 2 On 19 December 1931, EH, his wife Pauline (née Pauline Marie Pfeiffer, 1895–1951), and their sons, Patrick (b. 28 June 1928) and seven-week-old Gregory Hancock Hemingway (1931–2001), moved into their new home at 907 Whitehead Street in Key West. They had purchased the house for \$8,000 on 29 April 1931, shortly before leaving to spend the summer in Europe.
- 3 During previous visits to Key West, some of EH's friends, including Dos Passos, had stayed at the Over Sea Hotel, 917 Fleming Street. Recently leased and refurbished by New York hotel magnate Edward Arlington, it had reopened on New Year's Eve ("Oversea Hotel Taken Over by New York Man," *Key West Citizen*, 28 December 1931, 1).
- 4 Edward "Bra" Saunders (1876–1949), a Key West charter boat captain and fishing guide.
- 5 EH's reference is uncertain. In February 1932 Dos Passos would accompany the North Atlantic fleet on a fishing expedition in the waters off Nova Scotia, later writing about it in his travelogue *In All Countries* (1934). In September 1932, Dos Passos and his wife would visit Percé, a village on the Gaspé peninsula of Québec.
- 6 French nanny Gabrielle Jacquot (b. 1892) had replaced Henriette Lechner (b. c. 1895), who worked for the Hemingways from 1929 through the summer of 1931 but decided not to return to the United States with them in September.
- 7 Charles Thompson (1898–1978), Key West marine store owner, and his wife, Lorine (née Louise Epsy Carter, 1898–1985), were close friends of EH and Pauline. A 1919 graduate of Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia, Lorine came to Key West in 1921 to teach at Key West High School and married Charles Thompson in 1923. Lorine found the house on Whitehead Street in Key West that the Hemingways bought in 1931. American painter Waldo Peirce (1884–1970), American painter and illustrator Henry (Mike) Strater (1896–1987), and American writer Archibald MacLeish (1892–1982) had all met EH in Paris in the 1920s and previously visited him in Key West.
- 8 Gerald Murphy (1888–1964), expatriate American painter and mutual friend of EH and Dos Passos since the mid-1920s. Gerald's father, Patrick Francis Murphy (1858–1931), owner of the Mark Cross luxury leather goods company, had died on 23 November. Neither Dos Passos's letter informing EH of the elder Murphy's death nor EH's condolence letter to Gerald has been located.
- 9 William Canby Chambers (1894–1958), American short-story writer, and Esther Andrews (1880–1962), American artist and journalist, were Key West friends of EH and Pauline. Dos Passos had known the couple since the early 1920s, when their residence in Greenwich Village had served as a sort of literary salon. Dos Passos recalled her as a free-spirited modern woman who "utterly repudiated the idea of marriage" (*The Best Times: An Informal Memoir* [New York: New American Library, 1966], 136). Although it is unclear whether the couple ever legally married, she was often referred to as "Esther Chambers," and that is how her name would appear in later census records and on her death certificate.
- 10 Harper & Brothers, publishers of Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), had refused to publish his next book, *1919*, unless he removed its negative portrayal of American financier J. P. (John Pierpont) Morgan (1837–1913), who had saved Harper & Brothers from insolvency in 1896 and assumed its management in 1899. *1919* would be published by Harcourt, Brace in March 1932. Maxwell Perkins (1884–1947) had been EH's editor at Scribner's since 1925.
- 11 During the Prohibition era (1920–1933), rum running from Cuba to Key West was a thriving business. The port city of Matanzas lies on the northern coast of Cuba about 50 miles east of Havana.

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- 12 William B. (Bill) Smith, Jr. (1895–1972) and his sister, Katharine (Kate) Foster Smith (1894–1947), had been close friends of EH since they met as youths summering in northern Michigan. Kate and Dos Passos had married in August 1929 and were living in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where she and Bill had bought a house at 571 Commercial Street in 1928.
- 13 A limited edition of 400 signed, numbered, and specially bound copies of *Idyll in the Desert*, a story by William Faulkner (1897–1962), was published by Random House in 1931. Milwaukee bookseller Paul Romaine (1906–1984) was planning to bring out a limited edition of reprinted poems and prose pieces by Faulkner and had sought EH's permission to include an early poem and prose piece of his in that volume as well. *Salmagundi* by William Faulkner and a Poem by Ernest M. Hemingway (Milwaukee: Casanova Press) would be published in May 1932 in a limited edition of 525 numbered copies.
- 14 Although the source of the reports remains unidentified, EH had similarly written to Maxwell Perkins, "My correspondents in Paris inform me that with the Laval-Hoover agreement the \$ is OK for a while and that no new crisis in Banking world until February" ([c. 20 November 1931], *Letters* vol. 4, 603–4). U.S. President Herbert Hoover (1874–1964) and French Premier Pierre Jean Marie Laval (1883–1945) had met in Washington, D.C., 22–25 October 1931, to discuss disarmament, France's war debts, Germany's reparation payments, the gold standard, and other economic concerns. They agreed to preserve the gold standard, which Great Britain had abandoned, but were unable to establish firm policies in other areas. *Jake*: slang term for "fine."

## To Mary Pfeiffer, 5 January [1932]

January 5

Dear Family;

I have been very remiss in writing but it has not been because I have not thought about you very much and the wonderful time I had in Piggott. It was a splendid trip and I enjoyed every minute of it. You were awfully good to me and I never had a finer time. Once back in Kansas City things were pretty complicated for those few days with Pauline unable to go out and many things to do. Then the trip down here and the new house that Jinny had done miracles to make habitable.<sup>1</sup>

You sent us wonderful christmas presents. Thank you very much. I will have something useful for Pauline's father to show up us younger men with when he comes down. It is grand that we will see you in March. Things should be going well and smoothly by then. The present situation here would offer a wonderful opportunity for a man with real directorial ability to show how creative writing could be done at the same time as running

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a carry them by hand elevator service, and superintend plumbers, the re-doing of a leaking roof, wiring of house, installation of water system, carpenters etc. while trying to keep someone under doctors orders not to walk upstairs from walking upstairs etc. A wonderful directorial job wasted on someone that doesn't appreciate it. The minute I quit trying to write the rest of it is easy.

Gabrielle took one look at the house and took to her bed. She hadn't thought Florida was going to be like this. She has been in and out of her bed a good deal since but has done little else. At first she declared she didn't know what it was made her sick since she had never been sick a day in her life before. "It must be someding about dees house." But after the Dr. had made a thorough examination and found she has been opened up several times and all of her organs not completely essential to eating and sleeping re-moved she said she had been sick just before taking this job and that her Dr. said she probably would be again but that a trip to Florida might do her some good. The Dr. says her present trouble may have been brought on by over-eating.

Have taken every care of her—she has had to do no housework, gets a 2½ hour nap, we have taken nearly all our meals out and she tells the Dr. she feels very badly that she cannot be on her feet or do much work because we have treated her very well but she thinks she had better be near her own Dr. in New York.

For a while were faced with the problem of carrying her upstairs but fortunately the stairs were too narrow so after a good rest in the library and much moaning she was able to regain her bed safely. She was really sick the first two days, threw up and had bad indigestion. But since, in her worst attacks, she has never thrown up nor had a degree of fever. Dr. Warrren and Dr. Gayley<sup>2</sup> both examined her for appendicitis and declared she had not one single symptom but had a possibility of adhesions from her old trouble brought on by increasing obesity; but that her principal trouble was homesickness.

So imagine it won't be long now.

Everything else going very well except writing. The house is a grand house and getting better all the time. The two niggers are fine, the

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gardener, yard man, etc. is excellent and the nigger girl, who has been doing all Gabrielle's work, is splendid.<sup>3</sup>

Went out fishing New Years afternoon with Carol and found the gulf stre[a]m fish starting to come in, tell Jinny.<sup>4</sup> Today there is a norther blowing and that is just what they have needed to bring the migratory fish. The commercial fishermen struck the Kingfish yesterday for the first time and the Spanish mackerel the day before yesterday.

Pauline was in bed a couple of days from doing too much but if can keep her from over-doing or rather from doing a few forbidden things like hurrying upstairs, lifting etc. through this week believe she will be safe. It is impossible to scare her about the possibility of bringing on a condition that she has never experienced. It is so very important that she take care of herself that I was awfully pleased you wrte about it in your Christmas letter as that had a good effect for a while.

The mechanics of it is that if she hurries up stairs and finds she is still whole at the top of the flight she believes anyone trying to keep her from doing that is an old fogey. There is no way a woman can be more completely and utterly ruined than by not being careful for eight weeks after a baby is born. [*EH insertion: until the placental site is healed.*] They ought all to be shown, in school, or when their minds are at an impressionable age women who have so ruined their bodies so it would be impressed on them.

Well, Mr. Hemingway if you have any other schemes for changing femenine psychology please let us hear them at a later date. I haven't so it is all right.

If this book is punk it won't do any good to take the readers if there should be any, aside and say, "But you ought to see what a big boy Gregory is and just look at the big scar on my arm and you ought to see our wonderful water-work system and I go to church every sunday and am a good father to my family or as good as I can be."

I happen to be in a very tough business where there are no alibis. It is good or it is bad and the thousand reasons that interfere with a book being as good as possible are no excuses if it is not. You have to make it good and a man is a fool if he adds or takes hindrance after hindrance



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after hindrance to being a writer when that is what he cares about. Taking refuge in domestic successes, being good to your broke friends etc. is merely a form of quitting.

All right, you're a fool Mr. Hemingway. What are you going to do about it. Nothing.

Bra and the Thompsons are all in fine shape and everybody sends their love. Gregory weighed 13½ lbs. His great, great uncle—my grandmothers brother, Benjamin Tyley Hancock, now 84, sent Greg his pedigree back to 1600 copied out of the family bible so with Uncle Gus's researches into genealogy Greg should be able to trace his ancestry through as many generations as Hoolie anyway.<sup>5</sup>

Thanks very much for sending the children's accounts.<sup>6</sup> Things very slow here. Now the fishermen will get fish they may pick-up. Government has slapped a prohibitive duty on Cuban pineapples just after Thompson builds big canning plant. Doubtless at instigation of Hawaaiian interests.<sup>7</sup>

Best love to you all and a happy New Year.

Ernest

PUL, TLS; postmark: KEY WEST / FLA., JAN 5 / 4 <sup>30</sup>PM / 1932

EH addressed the envelope to "Mrs. P. M. Pfeiffer / Piggott / Arkansas."

- 1 While Pauline was still convalescing in the hospital in Kansas City, Missouri, after the difficult Caesarean birth of Gregory on 12 November 1931, EH had spent the first week of December in Piggott, Arkansas, visiting her family and hunting quail with her brother, Karl Gustavus Pfeiffer (1900–1981). EH rejoined Pauline in Kansas City on 8 December, and on 14 December they embarked with Gregory on the three-day train journey to Key West, picking up Patrick and Gabrielle en route in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Pauline's sister, Virginia Ruth Pfeiffer, nicknamed "Jinny" (1902–1973), had gone ahead to Key West to help prepare the Hemingways' new house for their arrival.
- 2 William Richard Warren (1876–1944), noted Key West physician and surgeon; Harry Charles Galey (1886–1947), also a physician, served as City Health Officer of Key West.
- 3 The household staff included Jimmy (or Jimmie) Smith, who cared for the yard, and Ina Hepburn, who did washing and ironing. Patrick Hemingway recalled her as "a thrifty, hard worker [who] sent all of her children to college from her earnings as a laundress" (Carol Hemingway, "907 Whitehead Street," *Hemingway Review* 23, no. 1 [Fall 2003]: 15).
- 4 Carol Hemingway (1911–2002), EH's youngest sister, a sophomore at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, had spent her Christmas vacation in Key West, arriving on 21 December and leaving on 2 January.
- 5 Benjamin Tyley Hancock (1848–1933), EH's great-uncle, brother of EH's maternal grandmother, Caroline Hancock Hall (1843–1895). Gustavus Adolphus Pfeiffer (1872–1953),

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- Pauline's paternal uncle. Hoolie, Jinny Pfeiffer's Irish setter, who sometimes accompanied EH on hunting trips in Piggott.
- 6 Pauline's parents, Mary and Paul Mark Pfeiffer (1868–1944), had established bank accounts for each of the Hemingway children, presumably at the Piggott State Bank, of which they were co-presidents.
  - 7 In an effort to protect American business interests, the Smoot–Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 raised import fees on thousands of foreign goods, and the duty on Cuban pineapples more than doubled. In Key West, the Thompson family-owned pineapple canning plant, the only one in the continental United States, began operations in June 1931 (“Pineapple Plant Opens,” *Key West Citizen*, 1 June 1931, 1). That October, the city's Chamber of Commerce, with the support of the Florida East Coast railroad, sent a delegate to Washington, D.C. to protest that the pineapple tax was excessive, burdening the local operation with unwarranted fees and hindering employment (“Local Chamber Is Fighting For 300 Jobs and \$48,000,” *Key West Citizen*, 16 October 1931, 1). In December 1931, President Hoover announced adjustments to specific tariffs, but the fees on Cuban pineapple remained fixed (“Hoover Approves 7 Tariff Changes,” *New York Times*, 3 December 1931, 11).

### To Maxwell Perkins, 5–6 January [1932]

Jan 5—

Dear Max:—

The reason you have not received the Mss is that the typist sprained his ankle— Playing basketball—<sup>1</sup> Pauline got sick—or rather overdid and had to rest in bed— The nurse has been laid up practically ever since weve been here— I had ulcerated throat— But he has it all typed now and I have been over 1/2 of it and you should have it by 1st part of next week if nothing else comes up—

Write this while staying up all night with Patrick who ate as near as we can figure 1/2 grain of arsenic in form of an Ant Button—<sup>2</sup> Been vomiting etc since 6—its around 11 pm now— Done every thing that can be done— Hope to Christ he comes out all right— Dr. says he wont be safe for 60 hours—

A great life Max—a great life— But you will get your Mss—never have any doubts about that— If they should feed me ant buttons you could publish it as it is by having someone check up on spelling and let MacLeish correct proofs— Dos could go over Spanish— If anything should happen to me by any bad luck get it out with only a few illustrations— No color plates—give Pauline the money they would cost— Pauline could pick the illustrations and write very short captions— Am sending the glossary and 2 appendices with the Mss.—others will follow—