

## **Ernest Hemingway's to F. Scott Fitzgerald about Tender Is The Night**

**The spelling and punctuation are Hemingway's**

Key West,  
28 May, 1934

Dear Scott:

I liked it and I didn't. It started off with that marvelous description of Sara and Gerald (goddamn it Dos took it with him so I can't refer to it. So if I make any mistakes — ). Then you started fooling with them, making them come from things they didn't come from, changing them into other people and you can't do that, Scott. If you take real people and write about them you cannot give them other parents than they have (they are made by their parents and what happens to them) you cannot make them do anything they would not do. You can take you or me or Zelda or Pauline or Hadley or Sara or Gerald but you have to keep them the same and you can only make them do what they would do. You can't make one be another. Invention is the finest thing but you cannot invent anything that would not actually happen.

That is what we are supposed to do when we are at our best — make it all up — but make it up so truly that later it will happen that way.

Goddamn it you took liberties with peoples' pasts and futures that produced not people but damned marvellously faked case histories. You, who can write better than anybody can, who are so lousy with talent that you have to — the hell with it. Scott for gods sake write and write truly no matter who or what it hurts but do not make these silly compromises. You could write a fine book about Gerald and Sara for instance if you knew enough about them and they would not have any feeling, except passing, if it were true.

There were wonderful places and nobody else nor none of the boys can write a good one half as good reading as one that doesn't come out by you, but you cheated too damned much in this one. And you don't need to.

In the first place I've always claimed that you can't think. All right, we'll admit you can think. But say you couldn't think; then you ought to write, invent, out of what you know and keep the people's antecedents straight. Second place, a long time ago you stopped listening except to the answers to your own questions. You had good stuff in too that it didn't need. That's what dries a writer up (we all dry up. That's no insult to you in person) not listening. That is where it all comes from. Seeing, listening. You see well enough. But you stop listening.

It's a lot better than I say. But it's not as good as you can do.

You can study Clausewitz in the field and economics and psychology and nothing else will do you any bloody good once you are writing. We are like lousy damned acrobats but we make some mighty fine jumps, bo, and they have all these other acrobats that won't jump.

For Christ sake write and don't worry about what the boys will say nor whether it will be a masterpiece nor what. I write one page of masterpiece to ninety one pages of shit. I try to put the shit in the wastebasket. You feel you have to publish crap to make money to live and let live. All write but if you write enough and as well as you can there will be the same amount of masterpiece material (as we say at Yale). You can't think well enough to sit down and write a deliberate masterpiece and if you could get rid of Seldes and those guys that nearly ruined you and turn them out as well as you can and let the spectators yell when it is good and hoot when it is not you would be all right.

Forget your personal tragedy. We are all bitched from the start and you especially have to hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt use it — don't cheat with it. Be as faithful to it as a scientist — but don't think anything is of any importance because it happens to you or anyone belonging to you.

About this time I wouldn't blame you if you gave me a burst. Jesus it's marvellous to tell other people how to write, live, die etc.

I'd like to see you and talk about things with you sober. You were so damned stinking in N.Y. we didn't get anywhere. You see, Bo, you're not a tragic character. Neither am I. All we are is writers and what we should do is write. Of all people on earth you needed discipline in your work and instead you marry someone who is jealous of your work, wants to compete with you and ruins you. It's not as simple as that and I thought Zelda was crazy the first time I met her and you complicated it even more by being in love with her and, of course you're a rummy. But you're no more of a rummy than Joyce is and most good writers are. But Scott, good writers always come back. Always. You are twice as good now as you were at the time you think you were so marvellous. You know I never thought so much of Gatsby at the time. You can write

twice as well now as you ever could. All you need to do is write truly and not care about what the fate of it is.

Go on and write.

Anyway I'm damned fond of you and I'd like to have a chance to talk sometimes. We had good times talking. Remember that guy we went out to see dying in Neuilly? He was down here this winter. Damned nice guy Canby Chambers. Saw a lot of Dos. He's in good shape now and he was plenty sick this time last year. How is Scotty and Zelda? Pauline sends her love. We're all fine. She's going up to Piggott for a couple of weeks with Patrick. Then bring Bumby back. We have a fine boat. Am going good on a very long story. Hard one to write.

Always your friend,

Ernest