

2/11/71-later

Dear Jerry,

When you phoned I was about to eat lunch and then get to other work. I had spent the day until that moment in correspondence, had just put the enclosed letter to Graham in the envelope when the phone rang. I told you then that I would have nothing further to add to what I had written. But there are, it now seems, without time for reflection, that there are things that, in your interest, I should. This does not include everything I could, for some of the obvious that has escaped you or that you will not see would have an opposite effect.

One of the things I said is that you should have the most serious doubts about those of your elders who have said nothing but good of your Times piece. I also said that Sylvia should have noted your serious factual error. And somebody, sure as hell, should have told you of what will turn off responsible editors who might read this, people with more maturity and knowledge of the realities of newspaper life than you do. As I also said, basically it is a fine job. But I did do what others did not, gave you serious criticism it requires. And I go further and tell you that although I said what I knew you would not like, I was, as the others you named were not, honest with you. That Sylvia did not tell you of the serious factual error ought make you think and think hard. Not only in terms of your understanding of the fact of the assassination, which is second-hand and relatively slight, not only in terms of how this could hurt your chances of publication for what can be a worthwhile thing, not only in terms of your not being subjected to legitimate criticism which would do as much good as enticing Belin into what he was able to accomplish with the Times, but in terms, but in terms of why they do not tell you the unpleasant. Can they have reason? If so, what is it? You very well know, for you have often heard me express it in the most sincere ways, that I regard Sylvia as far and away the best and the most responsible of the original critics. This does not, however, mean that I regard her as perfect, any more than I do myself. I will go only this far, and you can take it from there or not, as you see fit (and if you have the regard for her you should have and that she deserves, you will think about it and reach your own understandings and opinions): she had to know of at least some of the error that is easily eliminated, or the errors in approach that are unessential if not, as I think, counterproductive and wrong. Yet she did not tell you of them. And, like you and me and everyone else, she has her own hangups. You should have detected at least one by now. The sooner you do, the better off you will be and the better the friend you can be to her.

Now when I asked you who was responsible for the Wolff footnote you said, without a moment's hesitation, "Harris". When I asked you the less uncomfortable form of the obvious question, "Why didn't you say so?", you were silent. The correct form is "Why did you lie?" When you can answer this question honestly and to yourself—not to me—I couldn't care less for personal reasons—you will, perhaps, have begun to understand something about what is in your mind that I am not really going to take the time to try. I have a few opinions that may not be valid and I'm not going to discuss them. But the fact is that knowing better you did lie, and the effect of that lie was to be hurtful to me. It could not have had any other effect, could it? So what was your intent? Why would you lie? The only times I have known you to do it are to yourself, in childish ways, like in why it is cheaper to buy a car you really do not need and in a special way.

There is one other thing. I told you nothing today that I did not tell you before about your handling of the Steve Roberts business. Yet you went ahead and did what was wrong. Now that it is done, now that everyone else has failed to tell you it is wrong when Sylvia at least should have known it, if not others you did not name, you suddenly realize it. This says your mind was closed, and not until I got through to you on other things, like Harris and the footnote would you even consider it. Then you admitted it! But I said less than before and nothing I had not said before.

Believe me or not, the only reason I went further and send anything once I came to the part on Frame-UP is you, not me. I will not waste this time again. You know about horses and drinking, and I have too much to do. I haven't even unpacked from my trip. Best,

Howard- the enclosed and this are in strictest confidence, please

Not until you are here and, should you then decide, go through my Times and Wolff files will you be able to evaluate the basic dishonesty of what Jerry has done in that part of his piece. The enclosed is something I threw at him off the top of my head when he called, unexpectedly.

He did, readily, admit that he knew I was not responsible for the Wolff footnote. And he could not explain why he said I was. Nor did he think about it. This is quite unlike him.

He said two other things I will mention. One is that Sylvia did make one suggestion, that he shorten the part on Mudd-UP and reduce the Wolff thing to a single sentence in which he would say only that the Times should have sent the letter to me in advance of publication. I leave it to you to evaluate this and its effect in the piece if published. I think you should think about it. But there is a fact you should know: all my notes were contemporaneous and dated, intended for a book NICK DARING IN THE HARBOR, OR HOW I GOT NICK IN THE HARBOR. The internal dating is not just in the typed dates. It is in the obvious age of some of the paper, the use of a typewriter long since junked, etc. and what I really wrote Wolff is that as I had told him, the net effect of the order to him to assign no reviews of any assassination books (forgotten, may I add, as soon as the pro-Commission stuff came out-that was also serialized in the Post) was that all except the first and the only underground one would be the only one not reviewed in the Post, that all the rest would be by syndication. In fact, Epstein's, Mark's and Sylvia's were first-page reviews in Book Week, Now Book World. Wolff never answered this letter, Leonard never sent the original carbon to him of Kaplan or they ignored it, and Wolff's account to Jerry is identically the same as mine except that Wolff told Jerry the name he did not tell me, that of Ben Bradlee. You might also form your own evaluation of where cuts might well be made, especially as compared with this treatment.

The other thing is typical of Jerry. He said I was crazy to write George McMillan the letter I had. I said he really meant that on the basis of what he knew, it seemed crazy to him. He argued strenuously, only later to return to it and say exactly what I had begun by saying. He did that voluntarily, and I pointed out how vigorously he had disputed me only to come to that same conclusion. The point never really got through to him. I asked him if he had any idea what I might be responding to. He did not. I asked him if I needed to arm my enemies, were they not practised in inventing enough? He avoided answer. I asked him could I have had objectives and purposes unknown to him, had he seen or was he in any way aware of what he had written to which that, without telling me I had, I was addressing myself? In all cases, he knew nothing. But he had the inflexible position that I should not have written the letter. Now I did have objectives Jerry cannot possibly know. McMillan, so you can understand a collateral one, has not yet finished his book and he is hung up on a literary zero. He also is secretly hung up on having had nothing but wealthy wives while he does not himself produce (not my objective, by the way). His current one is Priscilla Johnson. Of course, it may turn out that this was not a good letter to write, as I told Jerry. But that McMillan might produce it in a confrontation is hardly one. If I sent you a copy, do you think a proud man dare? But what the hell, suppose he does? What do I produce? Jerry doesn't know, but he knows all the answers.

As I told you earlier, I am now more convinced than ever that now that a few people have paid slight and productionless attention to him, and now that he has written something, he suddenly becomes, in his own eyes, an important person. He is getting too high for those briches. I, however, will not again waste the time to remind him of his real size. Despite my liking for him, I have too much work to do. If I can give up some of the pleasure of life for it, I can also give up trying to help straighten out a fine young man who resists it too much. And, of course, I do know that at some point in the future he may have an entirely different view of all of this and what he did or almost did...another thing he told me I evaluate other than he did. Sylvia sent him the current Esquire, which she acknowledged is lifted from Mudd-UP at least in part. He says it is so he can copy it and circulate. But could I not have read it first? Should I not have? I was told of it three days ago by a

reporter friend some distance from New York. He had an advance press copy. Jerry had it by mail not later than today. If the reporter told me that it was largely cribbed from FRAME-UP, can I consider that critics are unaware of it? Of course, the reporter may be wrong, but Sylvia did tell Jerry at least one thing was, because he told me that.

I find myself more and more perplexed, and more and more inclined to withdraw more. It is now almost 3 am. and except for the Graham and one other letter and a brief skimming of the paper, the entire time has been spent unproductively.

I think it possible that you may learn some things from this. If you do, I leave that to you, without suggestion or guidance.

Best,