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April 30, 1971

L. Friedman, PhD  
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Dear Dr. Friedman,

In answer to yr. letter of May April 24th about S. Jackson, I'll send you a few remarks now. If you will write me again after July 1st, I can take more time to send more during the summer. It so happens that I did sit in on S. Hyman's Myth and Ritual course, so do know quite a bit about it. I also sold him my edition of the GOLDEN BOUGH, (I know that S. Jackson read it. In fact, I heard her say once in a seminar, or rather after a reading, that she had. Maybe not all though she was an omnivorous reader. This was in answer to some question about "The Lottery."

One time when she was showing my husband and me the large collection of letters and clippings she had re "The Lottery," my husband asked her something or other about what she had meant. She said, with some sort of dismissing introductory phrase -- maybe even a drawn-out Welllll -- "I haven't read it." I do not think the introductory remark was as blunt as "I don't know; I haven't read it." But that was the playful implication, echoing other writers who have also said things like: "I don't know; I haven't read it; I only wrote it," or: "Don't ask me -- I only wrote it." Her daughter Sarah must know lots of remarks like this. I don't know where she is; she is traveling around the world. More seriously, her daughter would know just what S.J. did say about writing. There are lectures she gave at summer workshops, and I think Sarah took part in one or two.

S.J. had a large collection of witchcraft books, and things like that. It has been sold now. Both she and S.E.H. <sup>collected</sup> ~~had~~ hundreds of books.. The house was lined with bookcases. S.J. was particularly interested in 18th C. novels, especially second-rate English novels. She had a lot of these and was always pleased when someone found a new one to give her. She loved EVELINA and all that stuff.

Yes. Life among the S. and Raising Demons do reflect her own life. But this is the way it worked. Something would happen, or a human situation in all its emotional complexity would suddenly seem clear to S.J. This would send her to her typewriter, and she would begin. If, as in one instance I remember, it sprang to mind as the result of a little insignificant collision of cars, S. would in her mind start narrating it in terms essentially fictional. To her and S.E.H.. In these terms always included "that it make some general point of general significance about life." The narration I remember about the insignificant collision was based on the blustering protestations of the other woman about how S.J. had ruined her car (small scratch), would pay and pay, and all such threats. The slight degree of exaggeration made the scene already very funny, and the general point about people and their possessiveness and attachment to material things as well as the point about making big scenes about little events. Probably the woman never stopped to ask whether one of S.'s children had been hurt. The story CHARLES, I can imagine, about Laurie, was based on one in--



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stance of Laurie's blaming something on someone else -- possibly imaginary, perhaps not. But I can imagine its snapping into Shirley's mind as a great narrative shape, when she thought of a series of blaming on an imaginary boy.

One time S. wrote the dialogue of two women in competitive friction in a week-end situation. She read it aloud to S.E.H. and me, and it was marvelous dialogue. Gave exactly the right tone, rhythm, tension for the situation she was making. Stanley said: Yes, but what point does it make about human life, or some such words. I think she threw it away, or buried it in a bottom drawer.

Another time, during the evening, a lot of us were playing the game MONOPOLY. S. was good at it, as at most games she played. Suddenly she began to sell off her property. Then when it was gone, she got up and went into the study and we all went on and forgot to notice what she was doing. After a while she came out again with a story. (I am sorry I have forgotten which one it was, but it may have been the one about the girl doing her Latin lesson, and coming down to the kitchen and talking to the man about the A-bomb. But I really forget.) What I do clearly remember is that she read it aloud to us, listened to the comments of the half dozen people there, went back to the study and retyped what she decided to change. By the time we left to go home, it was in an envelope ready to go to her agent. She did not like to send things out herself, and wanted to get them out of the house, and out of mind, as it were, as soon as she had finished writing something.

I cannot shed any light "on the extent of S.J.'s interest in demonology." I can't take anything like that myself seriously, and don't think others in the 20th C. do, either. I do know that both S. and S.E.H. were very keen observers of the inner tickings of people, believed in various psychological compulsions and were well acquainted with Freud. In many ways S. was very nervous, as you can gather from stories about ~~not~~ being too scared to cross a street. Naturally she built these up for fictional purposes, but in later years she hated to go to N.Y. and rode everywhere she had to go in taxis, once she was there.

You know, I suppose, what James Joyce said about his interest in Vico, when someone asked whether he believed Vico's theories of history. He answered: "Vico, I find, stimulated my imagination." Maybe that is the role the demonology and witchcraft books played in Shirley's life. She did learn, I have heard, to be pretty good at reading the Tarot cards for someone she decided to read them for. Have you ever done this? Or read palms or anything like that? I have, and I know that if you are a bit intuitive, and observant of how the subject is reacting, and know a few basic points or tricks, you can have quite a lot of success. The real magic is in how some people can intuit so much about some other people. They usually know a great deal about themselves, don't you find?

Sincerely yours,

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