

January 6, 1994
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FONDA'S VANISHING WISH

Notes from Marshall Jamison dated September 15, 1993

At the risk of seeming a little deranged I'm going to send you some thoughts about what I hope you'll find to be a situation which can be dramatized effectively. Since these thoughts are random, they may be completely useless to you but I will try to stimulate rather than discourage. If this helps at all I'll try to give you more. Best!

THE CHARACTERS:

Margaret is an incredibly vital and lovely woman; an air of innocence surrounds her; an aura which seems unaffected and genuine, completely real. Shall we tell you now that it is not? No, let's hope that is discovered by the characters who inhabit her world of make-believe and to our audience's surprise. Certainly it is a surprise to the men who feel under her spell of actress charm and loved and married her. Her husky voice, without a trace of insincerity, bespoke honesty and lack of artifice. It is this observer's belief that Margaret was an epitome of what men want and hope their women to be. Except for this and some men want it too. She was a nymphomaniac.

David, I don't know how this will work for you but I do believe that it was true of Sullavan although she herself may not of realized it. But how else can one explain her affair and dalliance with Jed Harris so soon after what seemed to be a perfect coupling with Henry Fonda?

Fonda was a decent, rather unsophisticated human being; good instincts but lacking somehow in sympathetic relationship when dealing with the female psyche. His marital history, as we know, was dismal. We can understand his youthful dismay at the betrayal (I'm sure he considered it that) of Sullavan's affair with Harris. By all reports, his second marriage to Frances Brokaw should have been a successful one. She was a lovely, cultured woman, perhaps too upper class in custom and manner for him to really appreciate at that time of his development as a slowly maturing Nebraskan. His next marriages reveal only the trails of his distraught search for some kind of marital security. He was not to find it until his marriage to Shirlee, his last wife, who was an intelligent, caring and loving mate to him.

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There is no such being as a perfect human and certainly Leland was not even close. But he did have personal magnetism that drew you to him. He was not a handsome man, but the word debonair created his image well. Intuitive, instinctive about values, human, somewhat reserved in dealing with strangers but pretty much the hail fellow well met with those he regarded as fellow passengers to the grave. He had a great gift for appreciation of talent, which often served to inspire those working with him and for him.

He was an appreciator if there is such a person. He liked to fly and was a pilot from his early days. As a young man he drove convertibles but in his sixties preferred to be chauffeur driven. He dressed fastidiously and wore, as I remember, English suits and Italian shoes. He drank one hundred proof Wild Turkey during the day, usually one before lunch and switched to Scotch after six in the evening. He loved and admired true talent; Ed Murrow, Jerome Robbins, Katharine Hepburn, (with whom he had what he called the love of his life), George Abbott, Ethel Merman; he appreciated them all