

Cleveland, Ohio  
April 9th, 1940

Mr. David Smart  
c/o Esquire  
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Dave:

In view of world events today, it almost seems a matter of foolishness that we take our affairs too seriously. We see proof the world over that if one wishes to believe wrongly of a fellow being, he will justify his right to do so. Perhaps there is no such thing as absolute right or wrong; therefore, the most we can hope for is understanding. It is sad to me that a relationship begun with such a high promise must end on a note of untruth and bitterness. Life is far too short, Dave, and the world too full of trouble that we should add our little bit. I find no place in my heart where I want to harbor any resentment against you or anyone.

I will try to set down a few of the truths as I see them, hoping it may clarify things in your mind also. If not - well, I am sorry. I have done all I can do. If I had it to do over again, I would not walk so innocently into your hands - you have not dealt ~~so~~ fairly *fairly*, Dave.

Let's see, first of all, how it started. You came to me, I did not come to you. You had a burning desire to do some experimental movie work. It was a beautiful dream - "the trouble with Hollywood today was that everything was considered from the box-office angle. No one was doing any experimental work; there had been nothing new since Walt Disney; nothing new in the way of cultural development or artistic. It was high time some company was devoting itself to the beautiful task of creating new ideas and new form for movies." How eagerly I listened, for it was exactly what I believed. You were a big talker, Dave, and how was I to know that you did not mean what you said? If you remember, Mr. Dorr was not so enthusiastic, I think he knew even then that the box-office would present a very strong pull, but you were very clever; you painted a beautiful picture; you fairly glowed with enthusiasm, and begged me, against obstacles, to try out this new experiment. I was to be the first one to try - well, you won!

I believe money was scarcely mentioned between us. You said: "Of course I will pay all your expenses and Betty's too, if she will only come, etc., etc." Nothing was put down in black and white - we had faith in each other. It was all in the great spirit in which ideas are born and beautiful things can and do happen.

You promised on your part that you would have the best camera man and light man possible, as my work heretofore had been entirely with the still camera. The story, characters, set, music, direction, and everything else was to be left to me. Then what?



Betty and I came to Chicago. "I must not stay at the Stevens Hotel - I must stay at the Drake - we must take a suite - we must have everything of the very best - and everything would be taken care of." Instead, I took two modest rooms, for which I paid about \$193.00. I note everything you say about the cost, Dave, and I can't help but wonder what you had expected when you undertook this great plan of yours. Certainly it was no fault of mine how much your lights cost per hour, nor your men per day, nor your colored movie film per foot. It was no fault of mine either that you built your studio so far in the country, it made it a problem to get people back and forth and arrange about food. This was all a part of your original planning and I cannot be expected to take the blame. As for my own expenses and Betty's and Mr. Dorr's, and our railroad fares, I paid all. I paid also in long hours and in heart-breaking work. I put my whole heart into the thing, gave you all my ideas and my talent, without receiving to date, even a gracious thank you. The last week that I spent in your home was the most difficult week I ever put in in my life. I never before have been put in such a position.

Grace and Kurt Graff did the same. Since the studio was so difficult to commute, it meant that Grace and Kurt practically gave up their own work for two weeks, which they could ill afford to do, used their own car, besides giving you their very real abilities. I think perhaps they have never been treated with so little appreciation either. We did pay the group a minimum wage, - I think it was around \$125.00. I planned a set which would have nothing but a load of sand. You paid for no scenario rights, no music rights, no director, or assistants - will you please tell me, Dave, just where my part in the cost was so unreasonable? If you remember, I even offered to put \$1,000 into the picture with you. It has never been my way of working to see how much I could get out of a thing - down in your heart I think you know this.

The first shock was when I found the camera man and light man had a very definite undercurrent of antagonism toward me, which Fred afterwards admitted in front of Grace and Kurt and regretted, but after all, how was he to know that I was not after his job? Those first days I found that instead of doing experimental movie, I was expected to follow all the old Hollywood stuff. But even Hollywood can light up a back-drop without showing all its seams, which they did not seem able, or willing, to do. I was told from the first: "You can't do it that way, because it has always been done this way." It was a half-hearted cooperation to say the least, and the tests came back, the result of their failure - not mine.

But Fred and Larry by this time were becoming enthusiastic over the possibilities and during the making of the rest of the film, as far as I know, there was only the happiest of relationships between us. If, now, they give you any other impression, I can easily understand and forgive them, for after all, it is your side of the bread that has the butter on it.



Before we even began to shoot the picture on that fateful Monday morning, you said to me: "Can you be finished with this thing by Wednesday night?" It was such a shock to me, Dave, that I was on the point of saying: "It is finished now." Only somehow, one doesn't just quit. Instead, I said: "The boys in the group can't come until Thursday, so that we could not possibly finish before Thursday night." You said: "Well, I want it definitely finished by then." This was before it was even begun. It sounds fantastic that in four days the picture was finished, before we had had a chance to see one rush of the work we had done, to see whether we were getting the effects we were striving for! If there had been time allowed to see these rushes, or any allowance for re-takes, I would have been most happy to talk things over. But after I saw your reaction to the first test, I knew that I could not count on you for understanding or knowledge of the thing I was after, no, not even for faith; you seem to feel that because the first tests were not right that we had failed. You did not seem to know that any experimental work is carried on by experimenting - many times failing and trying again - that is how new ideas are born. No good creative work of any kind can be done under the pressure and the conditions under which we were forced to work. Yours was a clear case of misrepresentation - you ~~went back on every promise that you had made to me.~~ *you had asked me.*

Now, as to talking it over and taking advisement, etc. With whom was I to talk it over, and from whom was I to get advice? With Bet? Well, in all her sweet young life, Bet has never yet offered me one idea about pictures, and she would be the first one to say, "Well, don't ask me, I don't know."

I admit that I had hoped to be able to count on Kit. We love the same kind of things - we often see things together, but from the moment she arrived I saw that she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. As Larry's wife would say, "She was having husband trouble." That Sunday in Chicago, while Mr. Dorr was there, he can tell you about the telephone calls between New York and Chicago, lasting 3 hours at a time. Unfortunately for me, I allowed Kit to draw me into it too, but that is neither here nor there. The result was, however, that Kit was in no shape to be of any help to anybody. She was on the edge of the precipice herself, poor kid. It hurts like the devil to see someone you love burning the candle at both ends and drinking as much as she did. She seldom made her appearance at the studio until after lunch, and was in no condition to have any grasp on what we had done, or were doing, and there was no time to lose.

With Fred and Larry, I discussed every slightest detail and we worked painstakingly and happily to get the different effects of morning and evening, lightening and thunder, and of rain.

It was Grace and Kurt with whom I could build and mould the thing into being. It was they who understood the language and who helped me in every possible way. I think even a magazine, like Coronet, could not be put out under such conditions and certainly much

Since this was not to be allowed me - I insisted that I be allowed to cut it and put it in to some kind of sequence before you see it, you know nothing about dance form - especially without music or sequence and since it was already completed I had to assume it before this was any thing to talk over - afterward had you been so generous, we could have discussed many things happily



less an experiment in this field. The whole conception of the dance symphony<sup>"</sup> was closely knit with music and with poetry, and it is very important that all three be perfectly recorded before it should be judged. The day the titles came and the lines of poetry, if you will remember, was the very day that I must leave for New York at 2:30. We had been working every night until 2:00 and 3:00 A.M. We had cut the final bit of film that morning. The car was waiting for me outside to take me to Chicago. I have to smile when you say that I did not talk it over and that I did not take advice on this. One hour is not very long to shoot an entire movie sequence. Instead of being an experimental question, or trying to get the most beautiful effect, it had become like one of those marathon dances where everyone is dead on their feet but the man at the ticket office is still selling tickets. If you think that I could have left these lines for Fred to photograph, it only shows how little appreciation you have of the thing I was trying to do and of the difficulties under which I was compelled to work. Fortunately for me, under normal and happy conditions, I could easily re-take these things. You must remember that you are judging something before I myself have seen it, which even you must admit is hardly fair. ~~also before the music is recorded - or the final picture is taken~~

As to the music, this entire venture of mine was to create a new form for the dance - a kind of dance symphony, and it would have been inconceivable to have done it in the way you insisted it should have been. I will admit that it was a departure, that it was unheard of, that it was new, but isn't that exactly what we started out to do? It is not impossible and some day I shall prove it to you. I had not asked for an orchestra or any expensive musical score - the composer himself was donating the music. Well, it's all over - it was a beautiful dream and it could have been a beautiful reality. If you had kept the faith and simply said, "I'm getting in deeper than I had planned to go", it would have had a different ending. But instead, you killed it. Now you do not want it, and added to that, you bear me some kind of a grudge. But why? After all, Dave, I meant you no harm and I want to believe that you meant none to me. The kindest thing I can say is that we see life differently. You see it as a business and I see it as an art. Your mistake was to try to change me - ~~also to change me.~~

it is cited in ending.

Perhaps you are right and that I should go back to my old amateur standing. Well, I was happy at it, and even you seemed to like some of the things I did. It is the only way I know how to work - with faith and patience and love. If you will send me my "Singing Earth" I will try to put it together and make it sing.

I hope that the Mayo Brothers have been able to help you over your headache trouble. I hope that somehow you will believe in me again. My very best to Gabby, she is a real person.

Believe me,

Sincerely,