

June 25
1951

Dear lad: [Hugo Butlee]

I must say that I've never been so discouraged about a community as I have been from the descriptions sent by you and Jean. We're thinking of sending you CARE packages to supplement your diet of fish and bread. Really, neither of you writes about anything but fish and bread and beer. The limitations of the place stand out in stark relief by reason of those things you don't write about. Fish and bread and beer and beach. Jean gave us an enchanting picture of the beach, but when the grammar was pared away, what was it? A long, desolate roll of the sea upon sand, with six figures standing out against the shore. Alone. A few gulls, perhaps, but they weren't mentioned. Just this vast stretch of loneliness which you monopolize. I can see you returning from this grandeur in the evenings to lobster and bread and beer. I can see you rising in the mornings, scraping dried kelp from the stoop as you set bravely out for the wasteland once more. And the conversations with the accountant. And an occasional fiesta when some large turtle dies and is beached. Really!

You need have no fear that the delights you mention will bring the Lardners---or anyone else, for that matter. Frances is determined to stay in So. Cal. so that she can pick up some work, and the Indian forsooth has no choice. They have taken another house in town. As for us, I am engaged in buying a new car and turning loose of the Mercuries. When this is accomplished and the new car broken in, we are going to come down with a load of lamb, beef and tartar sauce and see for ourselves how you are making out. How about medicines---cortisone, bendedrine, sulphas, penicillen? And God in Heaven, man---how many sleeping pills will you need to wear out the long summer ahead? Just ask and we'll bring it. I know just how you must feel.

It is our plan to spend a day and a high night, then leave the kids and fly to Mexico City, look it and Cuernavaca over, come back about three days later, reclaim our kids, commiserate briefly with you, and depart north.

If we sell this place as soon as we hope to, our plans for the future are by no means definite. If the cost of living is really appreciably cheaper down there, we would be strongly tempted to move down. But not to your fishy little community. To Mexico City, where a man can walk outside his front door and see the blessed sight of another man. Where there are lights, music, gaiety, and no more fish than anywhere else.

Now since you and an accountant live practically in each other's laps, if you were a good fellow you would get some practical information, both for yourself and for me. For example, the answers to the following questions:

1. Is it true that as an immigrante one has to pay only Mexican income taxes? 2. Is it true that such taxes, in their highest bracket, run only 8%? 3. Is it true that to become an immigrante, one must undertake to do some work, in movies or so forth, which will be of benefit to the country? 4. Is it true that if one comes into the country with \$40,000 in cash, one becomes a capitalisto, and therefore finds it much easier to assume the immigrante status? 5. How long does one have to live in the country before one can become an immigrante? 6. How much does it cost to send a child to an American school? 7. On that Mexican income tax business, does being an immigrante mean that one pays the Mexican tax only on income derived from Mexico? 8. If one goes down, succeeds in becoming an immigrante, and thereupon proceeds to earn money by sales of literary material in the United States, does he have to pay an American income tax on such moneys? 9. If he does, could not this be solved by setting up a Mexican Corporation, putting oneself in the employ of which corporation, transferring to it title to all one's literary work, then sell the said work in the U.S., have the money paid to the Mexican Corporation, receive it in one's own turn from the corporation (or a reasonable portion thereof), and thereby absolutely come under the Mexican tax laws? Maliz tells me he pays \$147.00 per month for an enormous house and grounds and pool---much larger than his family needs---furnished, of course; and that he pays 80 pesos a week which is above the average, for two servants. Is this kind of thing true? If so, then are you not taking a screwing at \$90 a month rent and a fish die and shoveling all that kelp off the step each morning?

How these are the important things, lad. You must forget the dreariness of your situation, and look to ways out of it. Speak to that accountant---accountants are the most important people in the world---and quit gorging on bread and beer. If you learn a very great deal from the accountant, you won't have to fight kelp from here on out. There are better ways of life, lad, and you who are on the spot, must look into them. I think you owe this much research to me, but if you think differently, then I know goddam well you owe it to yourself. And your family! God, man---have their little bellies begun to swell yet? We thought we saw a suspicion of it in the pictures, but Cleo told me not to mention it, so don't reply to the inquiry.

Now here, in brief, is my point of view. I'm not married to this country---although the next session of the Grand Jury may make the tie closer than I wish. I doubt the foregoing, it's only a witticism. I'm perfectly willing to go anywhere that

I can live not let us say in peace, but certainly in luxury. If I could see where I could spend the next five or ten years in Mexico City or its environs and earn say forty or fifty thousand a year, which isn't at all improbable, and pay Mexican income taxes, and stash enormous sums of cash away---hell, I'd go for it instantly. And here is my thought, purely for speculation:

1. I, too, have a fronteronomi, and an absolute beauty, although it will cost the usual third. You have a name. Jean, in fiction, at least, and just possibly in moves too, still has her own. Good. Three names. We all know this racket. We are in business!

2. We establish headquarters near to each other in some arts-toeratic section of Mexico City or its suburbs. Either separate quarters or a real palazzo shared together.

3. We become immigrantes, either by finding employment, or by reason that we are capitalistos. I should expect to come down with something more than what I'm told is the \$40,000 capital-isto classification. In any event we become immigrantes. Now if that puts us under Mexican tax laws, fine. We are made men and women. If it doesn't---that is if we should still have to pay American taxes on American earnings---then we set up a corporation, with a Mexican national as partner. And we write for that corporation, and the money paid to us out of the US is paid to that corporation. And by Guadalupe, then we pay only those lovely Mexican taxes. And we live on ten thousand dollars a year each, and we put away thirty thousand dollars a year each in the bank at that lovely 6%, and by ~~sa~~ Joseph and Mary, we have three or four hundred thousand dollars apiece in ten years, and we laugh and laugh and laugh. We have all of our bread flown to Mexico City from Ensenada, and we don't have to eat fish unless we really want to.

Now please find out about these things. Stop driving yourself wild on that lonely stretch of sea and sand and discuss practical matters with senior el accounte. Pesos above poy! Richness and luxury. Money in the bank. Those are the things to look forward to. You're not stuck there forever, lad. And your friends are coming in five or six weeks with adequate supplies. All will be well.

Hasta luego or some such thing. O Pioneer, my gender endings are bad but I still have my wits about me. Gather yours and between lobsters jot down a little of the realistic. Wish you could be with us this summer---the fish in the lake are all about ten inches long, and so fresh that the little devils are still snapping when they hit the skillet. Bread's lousy. Better times are coming for us if you'll only get your mind off your troubles. ~~We all send you~~ ~~comisereres y~~ ~~no penurias.~~ ~~comisereres y~~ ~~misereres y~~ fraternitades y