

50. Grandma, Please Don't Come!

Please, grandma, don't come!

I know they have sent you the airplane ticket, and a dress just your size with black and white squares all over the beautiful taffeta silk. But please, grandma, don't come!

They have sent you the photographs of your little darling grandchildren born in New York. True, you have not seen them yet. You would like to leave your tropical sun and mountains and the little rivulet bathing the base of the fence in your backyard and the tall avocado tree right by your kitchen door, just to see and embrace those darling grandchildren. But again, I say, grandma, please don't come!

I know you are not well-to-do. But you have been living on what your sons and daughters send you every month from the states. I know there is need and poverty around you. And discrimination and economic and cultural oppression there. Something called imperialism sees to it that these things are not wiped out. But I think this is not the kind of letter in which I should go all out and try to explain to you why some people are so terribly interested in keeping other people poor and ignorant. Still I think I ought to tell you that the most important men and forces interested in keeping people poor and ignorant and fighting wars one against the other, have their offices in one short street in this New York to which your relatives are trying to bring you. The many companies with offices in that street and their counterparts in other great cities own the United States and of course, Puerto Rico. Eisenhower and Munoz Marin do what they ask them to do. It might sound ridiculously amazing to you. But believe me, grandma, this is nevertheless a fact. But enough of this "deep" stuff for today. All I am asking you, grandma, today, is please don't come!

Yes, it is nice here in a way. It is nice if you are young and

willing and able to go down five flights of stairs two or three times a day. If you can "take it" in a crowded subway where you are squeezed in tight twice a day as if you were a cork in a bottle. It is all right in a way—and remember—I only say in a way—for young strong people. We come to New York young and leave old and tired. All the fun and joy of life extracted from us by the hurry-up machine way of living we are forced to live here. In Puerto Rico, nobody pushes you, you walk slowly as if the day had 48 hours. Persons completely unknown to you say: "Buenos Dias," (Good morning), with a reverence and a calmness in their voices that reveals centuries of a quiescent, reposed, unhurried way of life.

No matter how many photographs they sent you of Times Square at night, or the Coney Island Boardwalk, grandma, please tell them "NO." A forceful, definite "NO." All those things you have not seen are lots of fun. Don't misunderstand me. New York has many things that are grand. But at your age you will not really be able to enjoy them. You know what snow is? What sleet and snow is? The real physical burden of 20 additional pounds of clothing on your body when you have to go out during the winter, when you have been accustomed to two pounds of calico and muslin on your old bones? Puerto Rico's climate doesn't require any more. Grandma, please don't come!

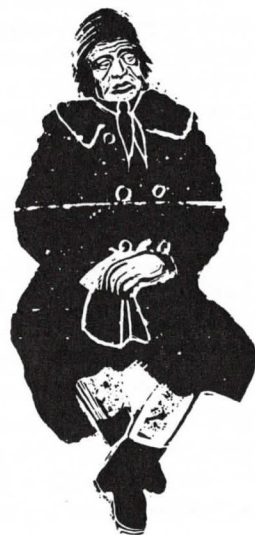
You should see hundreds of Puerto Rican grandmas like you on a wintry snowy day, standing by the window and watching the snow fall, as Ramito our folk singer said when he came here: "Like coconut flakes falling from the sky." At the beginning snow is a novelty. But after you have seen it once or twice, you wish you were back in our Puerto Rico, looking out at your avocado tree and at the tall dignified royal palm piercing the deep blue Caribbean sky with its sheer beauty.

In Puerto Rico you will be chatting your head off in your own language with the other grandmothers. Nobody will shout at you: "Why don't you talk United States?" Or even threaten you with a beating because you are speaking Spanish. It has been done, you know. People have been killed because they are heard speaking Spanish. So, grandma, please, don't come!

You will be looking so sad, so despondent, so alone when everybody goes to work and you are left all by yourself in an apartment peering through a window at the passersby down below as they go back and forth splashing the grey, dirty, cold snow in the street and on the sidewalk!

All people, North Americans and Puerto Ricans alike, are looking to the day when they can spend the last years of their lives on a tropical isle—a paradise on earth surrounded by clear blue sea imprisoned in a belt of golden beaches. A land perfumed with nature's choicest fragrances. For many of us this is a dream that will never be realized. The boasted "American way of life" has taken out of us the best of our energies to reach that dream.

Grandma, you are there on that beautiful isle. You were born there. You have been there all your life. You now have what most people here can only dream about. Don't let sentimental letters and life-colored photographs lure you from your island, from your nation, from yourself. Grandma, please, please! DO NOT COME!



51. She Actually Pinched Me!

New York's reputation must be awful outside of New York. New York's bigness, New York's many fames don't seem to stop people living in other parts from having the most amusing notions about New York and the people who happen to live in it.

A few Sundays ago I was among the fortunate ones to be enjoying, (enjoying?) a seat in the subway. As the door opened at one of the stations a considerable group of Negro women the other side of forty came into the train. They stood by twos and fours, the whole length of the subway car asking each other questions. Evidently they were not from New York.

As the subway stopped at the next station the person sitting beside me got up and left. Two of the Negro ladies were standing in front of me. One sat in the seat just left vacant. The right thing to do was for me to get up and offer my seat to the other lady so that both of them could be sitting and talking together. This I did. I was duly thanked for it.

In order to assure them of the greatest amount of privacy for conversation that you can expect in a subway, I moved a couple of steps to the right changing my strap hanging position from my right hand to my left hand.

Just then, two other ladies belonging to the same party came over and stood in front of the two that just obtained their seats. I was in a half turned position toward them. Half jokingly, half seriously one of them asked the two sitting ladies in a whom-do-you know tone, how come they got seats while they were still standing.

"Well, somebody left the train and I sat in his seat," I heard one of the ladies explain.

"And the gentleman standing beside you got up and offered me his seat," added the other lady.

Perhaps they thought that I was not listening, for the younger