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Letter from Linda Grace Hoyer to John Updike, October 11, 1950

Linda Grace Hoyer

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Dear John:

All admonitions to the contrary, it continues to be easier for me to say: "Dear John" than "Dear Juan". Your father suggests that I move with Dear Juan into the rat den or milk house. I mentioned it first as a bitter joke and he took it very straight-faced and assures me I ought to waste no time in getting there. Meanwhile, I drink gallons of nescafe, write to you and am generally indifferent to all kinds of work. In theory, like you, I should be very grateful for my fine new life with no heckling about the way the shirts are ironed and no cracker crumbs on the floors (because we haven't had a box of crackers since you are gone). But I am more bewildered than ever and that's pretty bewildered.

"He told them it was useless to murmur; the expedition had been sent by the sovereigns to seek the Indies, and happen what might, he was determined to persevere, until, by the blessing of God, he should accomplish the enterprise. Columbus was now at open defiance with his crew, and his situation became desperate." (October 10, 1492)

Of course this is pure whimsy. No one less like the great Christopher ever existed and Captain Wesley Pinzon has the matter completely in hand, has even found a way to furnish meat for the family at thirty-nine cents a pound. It is frozen cod from Iceland and surprisingly good. But the more executive your father becomes the less reason I seem to have for doing anything.
Even our Thanksgiving meals is taken care of: George and Marian are having us over. Daddy arranged it last summer when they were here. You see that wouldn't have happened if you were here. Yes indeed, I have arrived at that time of life when a woman needs new interests. Every adviser seems to emphasize this point. But none of them ever seem to know what is to be done with the old interests. Exactly how many letters should she write to her son in college? How long should she build up her father's ego by all the foolishness two addled minds can devise? Should she have to go to the barn to spare her family the inconvenience of her presence?

Yes, John, your going has given me more time for the contemplation of old age than I can manage without impatience. My humility is not sufficient to accept my position as a step towards heaven and my courage not great enough to end it. So, I watch the hawks prey upon the little flocks of birds with a smile, enjoy the falling leaves when I should regret these things and wonder if this is the way Fred used to feel when he sat down to write his Chatterbox column. All of this puts a responsibility on you that should not be yours. It is my responsibility even though I no longer seem to be responsible (and I still hope to write a good novel.) You must not feel that you have to do it for me. I am responsible for my own unhappiness and I must earn my freedom from it.

Love,

[Signature]

How is your cold?