Letter from Linda Grace Hoyer to John Updike, November 21, 1950

Linda Grace Hoyer

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Dear John:

I apologize for mentioning strawberries and congratulating you prematurely. The later simply proves how much confidence I have in your ability to cope with difficult undertakings. Strawberries should be a safe subject. Indeed, without them to work on and talk about, I might have harped on some of the more unpleasant things that inhabit Plowville. The various aspects of growing old bother me a good deal more than the weeds in our strawberry patch. And, unfortunately, I can't lay these aspects out in the sun to dry with the weeds. They surround me at the table, in bed, and make both the day and the night one long dance with death. I consider them, wondering what I could do, should do, must do, and get no further than a half-hearted plea for strength to endure. The older generation has, luckily, developed no new aspects. But the elderly generation has not done so well. The annual school examination found your father's hearing in need of attention. So, he went, at the school board's request, to the doctor who relieved us of our tonsils. His diagnosis is malnutrition. It seems pretty sad to me that with six college diplomas and eighty acres of fairly good land, we should not have managed to feed our breadwinner well. Of course your father does have some food prejudices that I can hardly take credit, or blame, for and I'm going to copy a list of the low-carbohydrate foods from my cook book for him to buy or ignore. A predilection for sweet foods seems to be part of being an Updike and every Updike seems to be quite willing to take the consequences. Now, don't you wish I had told you about those twenty rows of clean and happy strawberry plants?

I certainly wish you had bought a Florida "magazine of Verse for us. But don't trust the precious thing to the mails. Bring it home at Christmas time. In connection with Christmas, would it embarrass you very much to bring your red blanket along? You'll have no cover unless you do I fear. Tell me whether you'd mind carrying it. Perhaps we can think of something else.

The turnpike extension was opened to traffic yesterday and we're going to ride on it when we go to Trenton on Saturday. We're not staying over night, thank goodness. I don't really think we should be going at all.

Daddy is not, you may be glad to know, the only undernourished creature on the place. Kennel heifers look like caricatures of cows. And the meadow looks like the grass had been cut with a "chick. He came to the back door yesterday with his check and a note announcing his intention to use the meadow again next year at the same price. Either he or I need instruction in arithmetic. (Both and would have been easier. What is wrong with this sentence anyway? Please correct and return to me.) Honestly, I don't know whether that meadow is one of our assets or a liability.

How did you enjoy the victory on Saturday?

From the old and the elderly.