Letter from Linda Grace Hoyer to John Updike, January 15, 1951

Linda Grace Hoyer

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January 16, 1951

Dear John:

Hollis Hall has excellent telephone connections. I mean the relay team that announces the telephone calls. But the really cute guy is the one at the head of the line who says "Harvard" when the call first comes into the yard. That was the first time I had heard a native say Harvard and I still doubt my ears. It was almost as though I had been allowed to hear Archimedes say "Eureka." But not quite. The word, as I heard it, had a muted sexuality and a youthful assurance that Archimedes couldn't possibly have put into two syllables. Altogether it was the most beautiful one-word speech I've ever heard and when I reach the pearly gates I hope that, instead of saying "Welcome" or "Hi there" or "Come in", the angel at the gate will say "Harvard" just like your switchboard man says it.

You didn't sound too bad yourself either. And I'm glad the Abelard paper is finished. Did you do him justice? What did you finally decide about his difficulties? Be sure to bring the paper along when you come home. I've been reading Cellini's autobiography. If you ever get a chance to do a paper on him, do it. He probably was one of the sanest men who ever lived, certainly few have enjoyed life so much without as you say "making their own consciences hurt."

We have had another heavy rain and the wind roars now like it does in March. The fish man says that spring will be four weeks early this year because Easter is. I'd rather believe it because we have already had seven weeks of cold weather. But, being very lady like, I did not argue with him.

The book progresses slowly and pleasantly. The only distraction now is Hemingway's Across the River and into the Trees. It is another of Stella's stumbling blocks to my success. I add read it with more interest than I've ever seen him give to a novel. So I'll have to read it to see what held his interest. The first three chapters are uninspired and forced, none of the fine art that went into the Acomber affair. Have you ever seen his son, by the way? He should be a junior I think.

The dinner at Anna and Elmer's was very good: chicken, baked macaroni with cheese, carrots, raspberry sherbet and angel food with celery, nuts, pickles, and coffee. They asked about you and kept the extra copy of the Lampoon. Next to Mary and your father, they probably are most proud of your going to Harvard. I, being a blunt-edged tool, expected you to go as a matter of course. The Lampoon possibility does, however, surprise and impress me a good bit. Good luck.

[Signature]