Letter from Linda Grace Hoyer to John Updike, January 25, 1951

Linda Grace Hoyer
January 25, 1951

Dear John:

We had this afternoon a long visit by Dr. L. R. Rothermel. He arrived just as I was beginning to write to you and stayed about two hours, a long while to listen to the good doctor. He is sixty-nine years old today and your grandparents and I sat practically petrified while he relived what he believes to be the desperate moments of his youth. To this he appended the account of how he broke up Ernest’s high school romance and I nearly had a stroke. Not that I think high school romances should be encouraged, but that I think it is extremely bad taste to boast of it for the rest of one’s life when one has managed to outwit a cute blonde, especially when one is a fat old man. What a fat old woman does is, naturally, less obnoxious.

That is the third unpleasant experience I’ve had this week. First, there was the tooth filling that stopped hurting after about eight hours but has left me with a vague unhappiness. Next, we visited two families of inactive church members who are what your grandpa calls “self-righteous.” One of the persons was an old lady who remembered distinctly that I had not been a very well-behaved child and began to quote from my ancient history. While I have, thanks to you, pretty well outgrown my old guilt complex in connection with childhood’s blunders, I don’t want to be reminded of those blunders when I’m trying to bolster the church’s income. The woman has an intuition for all the things in my life I don’t want to discuss. Of course we didn’t give her a chance at the entire list. But she did very well for one whose memory ought to be failing. The other family blandly ignored all attempts to lead up to a frank discussion of their intentions toward the church and forced me to explain our departure from Shillington, our plans for the farm, grandma’s health, and why my parents do not have the use of television. And between these two calls, your ma and I had had access to large glasses of the hardest cider in the world. Can you see why I was in no shape for Doc’s nonsense? And tomorrow I have another appointment with Dr. Light.

The one bright spot in the whole week was your letter and the news that Kit will be coming home with you in the spring. We are delighted. However, you must prepare Kit for the rigors of Plowville and explain to him that my novel isn’t half as good as it sounds in my letters. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that it in no way resembles the dream of it or that it is dry beyond the stinking stage. Hemingway’s book at least is not afraid to stink and mine is. Good luck and don’t worry about money yet.

[Signature]