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Letter from Linda Grace Hoyer to John Updike, February 5, 1951

Linda Grace Hoyer

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February 5, 1951

Yes, I am seated firmly in the age of self pity and I can't translate the words of pious Aeneas. I had thought of taking the problem to John Schrack. But why confess my ignorance to him? It will be less surprising to you. There is a mutual measuring of limitations going on anyway at the Shillington High school. Last year Mr. McElroy discovered to his shame that the University of Pennsylvania did not consider him able to complete his studies for a doctorate in education. More recently, Mr. Freed was turned down on a master's degree. So Mr. Lewis makes the statement that no one on the entire faculty is intelligent enough to earn a doctor's degree. Daddy, still convinced that a super woman lurks in every kitchen, replied that at least three of the women could become PhD's almost any time. These three, in Daddy's opinion, are Thelma, Stella, and Margaret. But I have my doubts about Thelma. He probably was afraid to name his Miss Taylor. Among many things, I suspect her of being intelligent, don't you? But why this sudden concern about learning ability? Where is the first rate mind that would submit to Mr. Hemmig's heckling? Your father? Well yes, but he likes to suffer and dream of revenge. And don't tell a soul, but on the day he heard about Mr. Freed's disappointment, he said: "And if you hadn't helped me, I'd never have gotten my degree either." So you see they're all getting properly humble and I don't want to build up their egos by letting them know I can't translate six Latin words. With an A in calculus to your credit, I can't imagine what must be happening to your ego when it faces so much ignorance in its elders. Ceteris paribus, I shiver to think of it.

Like the Shillington High school faculty, I feel very humble. If persons with mathematical ability were not notoriously non-aggressive I might even admit that I'm afraid of so much learning. At any rate, congratulations are very much in order and you have the congratulatory gratitude of all the family. I suppose a gift would be in order too. Is there anything you would like to have us get? Daddy sent a few handkerchiefs on Saturday and got a brown belt at a bargain, horse hide, very plain and good looking. I appropriated it for my own use but might part with it if I thought you really wanted it.

We are looking forward to Kit's visit and hope nothing will discourage him. I like to think of Plowville as a pretty uncomfortable place but after living with its chief monster all these months, he should be able to take it with ease.

Mother