



John Updike (1932), a well-known American novelist and short-story writer, whose rich language creates a vivid picture of the world as he explores the problems of contemporary American society.

The son of a high-school mathematics teacher, John Updike attended Harvard University and graduated in 1954. From 1955 to 1957 he was on the staff of *The New Yorker*, which published his first story when he was 22 and continued to publish much of his work.

Updike's successful first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959), tells of elderly people who live in an old folks' home, fighting for dignity. *Rabbit, Run* (1960) has as its hero a man whose youthful ideas conflict with the realities of the 1950's. Rabbit's story is continued in *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981). *The Centaur*¹ (1963), a National Book Award winner, uses the Greek myth of Chiron [ˈkairən] to explore the relationship of a boy and his father, who, like Updike's, was a high-school teacher. His other novels *Couples* (1968), *A Month of Sundays* (1972), *The Coup* (1978), *The Witches of Eastwick* comment on many cultural and personal crises of the modern world. Updike's short stories tend to reveal deep human emotions. Collections of his stories include *The Same Door*, *Pigeon Feathers*, *A Book and Problems*.

John Updike also writes essays, poetry and children's books.

JOHN UPDIKE

Cultural Note:

Empire State Building, also **Empire State** (the) — an office building in New York City which has 102 floors (over 1,000 feet high), built in the 1930s and was for many years the tallest in the world.

The Chrysler [ˈkraɪzlə] **Building** — a sky scraper in New York; (Chrysler — one of the three largest American car makers);

The Woolworth [ˈwʊlwəθ] **Building** — a skyscraper in New York (Woolworth's — one of a group of shops, found in many British and American towns, selling many different kinds of goods at low prices).

Broadway [ˈbrɔːdweɪ] — a street in Manhattan, in New York City, which is known for its theatres.

Chicago [ˈtʃɪkɑːɡoʊ] — a city in the US state of Illinois [ˌɪlɪnoɪ] located on Lake Michigan [ˈmɪʃɪɡən].

52 Read the story *The Lucid² Eye in Silver Town* and answer the following question:

- Was the boy's first visit to New York successful or did it turn out to be a disappointment?

The Lucid Eye in Silver Town

The first time I visited New York City, I was thirteen and went with my father. I went to meet my Uncle Quin and to buy a book about Vermeer³. The Vermeer book was my idea, and my mother's; meeting Uncle Quin was my father's. A generation ago my uncle had vanished⁴ in the direction of Chicago and become rich; in the last week he had come east on business and I had finished the eighth grade with perfect marks. My father felt that now was the time for us to meet. New York in those days was seven dollars away; we measured⁵ everything, distance and time, in money then. World War II was almost over but we were still living in the Depression. My father and I set off with the return tickets and a five dollar bill⁶ in his pocket. The five dollars were for a book.

My mother, on the railway platform, suddenly exclaimed, "I hate the Augusts⁷." This surprised me, because we were all Augusts — I was an August, my father was an August, Uncle Quincy was an August, and she, I had thought, was an August.

My father said, "You have every reason to. I wouldn't blame you if you took a gun and shot us all. Except for Quin and your son." Nothing was more unpleasant about my father than this way of agreeing.

Uncle Quin didn't meet us at Pennsylvania Station. If my father was disappointed, he didn't reveal it to me. By walking what seemed to me a very long way on pavements⁸ only a little broader than those of my home town, and not so clean, we reached the hotel. After the clerk had phoned Quincy August that a man who said he was his brother was at the desk, an elevator took us to the twentieth floor. Inside the room sat three men.

"Gentlemen, I'd like you to meet my brother Marty and his young son," Uncle Quin said.

"The kid's name is Jay," my father added, shaking hands with each of the two men. I imitated my father, and one of the men not expecting my firm handshake, said, "Why, hello there, Jay!"

"Marty, would you and the boy like to freshen up⁹? The facilities are through the door and to the left."

"Thank you, Quin. I believe we will. Excuse me, gentlemen."

"Certainly."

¹ **Centaur** [ˈsentɔː] — миф. Кентавр

² **lucid** [ˈluːsɪd] — ясный, светлый

³ **Jan Vermeer** [jæn vɜːmə] — Ян Вермеер, знаменитый голландский художник (1632–1675)

⁴ **to vanish** [ˈvæɪnɪʃ] — исчезать

⁵ **to measure** [ˈmeɪʒə] — измерять, мерить

⁶ **bill** — амер. банкнота; **a five dollar bill** — банкнота в пять долларов, пять баксов

⁷ **the Augusts** — все члены семьи Аугустов

⁸ **pavement** — тротуар

⁹ **to freshen up** — освежиться

"Certainly."

My father and I went to the bedroom. The furniture was new. On the bed was an open suit-case, also new. The clean expensive smells of leather¹ were beautiful to me. I washed my face and hands and wanted to make for the living room, to rejoin Uncle Quin and his friends.

"Hold it," my father said. "Let's wait in here."

"Won't that look rude?"

"No, it's what Quin wants."

"Now, Daddy, don't be ridiculous². He'll think we've died in here."

"No, he won't, not my brother. He's working. He does not want to be bothered³. I know how my brother works: he got us in here so we'd stay in here."

I looked around the room for something to read. There was nothing, not even a newspaper, except a shiny little pamphlet⁴ about the hotel itself. I wondered when we would get a chance to look for the Vermeer book. I wondered what the men in the next room were talking about. I wondered why Uncle Quin was so short when my father was so tall. By leaning out of the window, I could see taxi-cabs which looked like toys.

My father came and stood beside me. "Don't lean out too far."

"Look at the green cab cut in front of the yellow," I said. "Should they be making U-turns⁵ on that street?"

"In New York it's OK. Survival of the fittest⁶ is the only law here."

"Isn't that the Chrysler Building?"

"Yes, isn't it graceful though? It always reminds me of the queen of the chessboard."

"What's the one beside it?"

"I don't know. The one deep on back, from the window, is the Woolworth Building. For years it was the tallest building in the world.

As, side by side at the window, we talked, I was surprised that my father could answer so many of my questions. As a young man, before I was born, he had travelled, looking for work; this was not his first trip to New York. Excited by my new respect, I wanted to say something to please him.

"Do you really think he meant for us to stay out here?" I asked.

"Quin is a go-getter⁷," he said. "I admire him. Anything he wanted, from little on up, he went after it. Slam. Bang. His thinking is miles ahead of mine."

"Sure, sure." I was irritated⁸ that he considered Uncle Quin so smart⁹. At that point in my life I was sure that only stupid people took an interest in money.

When Uncle Quin entered the bedroom, he said, "Martin, I hoped you and the boy would come and join us."

"Hell, I didn't want to bother you. You and those men were talking business."

"Now, Marty, it was nothing that my own brother couldn't hear. Both these men are fine men. Very important in their own fields. I'm disappointed that you couldn't see more of them. Believe me, I hadn't meant for you to hide here."

As I remember it, I asked if we were going to spend all afternoon in this room. Uncle Quin didn't seem to hear, but five minutes later he suggested that the boy might like to take a look around the city. My father said that that would be a once-in-a-lifetime treat¹⁰ for the kid. He always called me "the kid" when I was sick or had lost something or was angry — when he felt sorry for me, in short. The three of us went down in the elevator and took a taxi ride from Broadway, or up Broadway — I wasn't sure. The trip didn't seem so much designed¹¹ for sightseeing as for getting Uncle Quin to a small restaurant. I remember we stepped down into it and it was dark inside.

A waiter in a red coat came up. "Mr. August! Back from the West? How are you, Mr. August?"

"Getting by, Jerome, getting by. Jerome, I'd like you to meet my kid brother, Martin."

"How do you do, Mr. Martin. Are you paying New York a visit? Or do you live here?"

"I'm just up for this afternoon, thank you. I live in a small town in Pennsylvania you never heard of."

"I see, sir. A quick visit."

"This is the first time in six years that I've had a chance to see my brother."

"Yes, we've seen very little of him these past years. He's a man we can never see too much of, isn't that right?"

Uncle Quin interrupted. "This is my nephew Jay."

"How do you like the big city, Jay?"

"Fine."

"Why, Jerome," Uncle Quin said. "My

¹ **leather** ['liðə] — кожа (в предметах мебели, одежды и т.п. изделиях)

² **ridiculous** [ri'dikjuləs] — смешной

³ **to bother** ['bɒdə] — надоедать, беспокоить

⁴ **pamphlet** ['pæmfli:t] — брошюра

⁵ **U-turn** ['ju:tə:n] — разворот (автомобильный термин)

⁶ **survival** [sə'vaɪvəl] **of the fittest** — выживание наиболее приспособленных, сильнейших

⁷ **go-getter** ['gou'getə] — предприимчивый делец, энергичный и удачливый человек

⁸ **to irritate** ['ɪrɪteɪt] — раздражать

⁹ **smart** — ловкий

¹⁰ **treat** [tri:t] — *эд.*: удовольствие, наслаждение

¹¹ **designed** [dɪ'zaind] — *эд.*: предназначенный

brother and I would like to have a Scotch¹. And the boy would like ice-cream."

When their Scotch and my ice-cream came, Uncle Quin asked, "Is there anything especially you'd like to do?"

"The kid'd like to get into a bookstore," my father said.

"A bookstore. What sort of book, Jay?"

I said, "I'd like to look for a good book of Vermeer."

"Vermeer," Uncle Quin pronounced slowly. "Dutch School."

"He's Dutch, yes."

"For my own money, Jay, the French are the people to beat. We have four Degas ballet dancers³ in our living room in Chicago, and I could sit and look at one of them for hours. I think it's wonderful, the feeling for balance the man had."

"Yes, but don't Degas' paintings always remind you of coloured drawings? For actually looking at things in terms of paint, for the lucid eye, I think Vermeer makes Degas look sick."

Uncle Quin said nothing, and my father, after an anxious look across the table, said, "That's the way he and his mother talk all the time. It's all beyond me⁴. I can't understand a thing they say."

"Your mother is encouraging you to be a painter, is she, Jay?"

"Sure, I suppose she is."

"Your mother is a very wonderful woman, Jay," Uncle Quin said.

When we left, Uncle Quin signed the check with his name and the name of some company. It was close to five o'clock.

My uncle didn't know much about the location⁵ of book-stores in New-York — his last fifteen years had been spent in Chicago — but he thought that we should find something.

"If you stand here," my father said, "you can see the Empire State Building." I went and stood beneath my father's arm and followed with my eyes the direction of it. Something sharp and hard fell into my right eye. I bobbed⁶ my head and blinked⁷; it was painful.

"What's the trouble?" Uncle Quin's voice asked.

My father said, "The poor kid's got something in his eye. He has the worst luck that way of anybody I ever knew."

The thing seemed to have life. It bit. "Ow," I said, angry enough to cry.

"If we can get him off of the wind," my father's voice said, "maybe I can see it."

"No, no, Marty, use your head. Never fool with the eyes or ears. The hotel is within two blocks. Can you walk two blocks, Jay?"

"I'm blind, not lame," I said.

"He has a ready wit," Uncle Quin said.

We walked fast to the hotel.

"Poor kid got something in the eye," Uncle Quin said to the man at the desk when we came into the hotel, and called, "Send up a doctor to Twenty-eleven."

"You shouldn't have done that, Quin," my father said in the elevator. "I can get it out, now that he's out of the wind. This is happening all the time. The kid's eyes are too far front."

"Never fool with the eyes, Martin. They are the most precious tool in life."

Up in the room, Uncle Quin made me lie down on the bed.

The doctor came soon. He rolled my lower eyelid⁸ on a thin stick and showed me an eyelash⁹. He dropped three drops of yellow fluid¹⁰ into the eye to remove any chance of infection. I shut my eye, glad it was over. When I opened them, my father was passing a bill into the doctor's hand. The doctor thanked him and left. Uncle Quin came out of the bathroom.

"Well, young man, how are you feeling now?" he asked.

"Fine."

"It was just an eyelash," my father said.

"Just an eyelash! Well I know an eyelash can feel like a razor blade¹¹ in there. But, now that the young invalid is recovered, we can think of dinner."

"No, I really appreciate your kindness, Quin, but we must be getting back."

"I'm really sorry to hear that."

"Could you possibly come over one some day?" my father asked. "It would be a pleasure to see you again."

Uncle Quin put his arm around his younger brother's shoulders. "Martin, I'd like that better than anything in the world. But I have a lot of appointments¹², and I have to go West this Thursday. They don't let me have a minute's rest. Nothing would please my heart better than to share a quiet day with you and your wife in your home. Please give her my

¹ Scotch — разг. шотландское виски

² Dutch School — голландская школа (живописи)

³ Degas ballet dancers — картина Дега, изображающая балерин

⁴ It's all beyond me — это выше моего понимания

⁵ location [lou'keiʃn] — местонахождение

⁶ to bob — делать резкое движение, зд.: встряхнуть

⁷ to blink — мигать

⁸ He rolled my lower eyelid — он завернул мое нижнее веко

⁹ eyelash — ресница

¹⁰ fluid ['flu:ɪd] — жидкость

¹¹ razor ['reɪzə] blade — лезвие бритвы

¹² appointment [ə'pɔɪntmənt] — условленная встреча, свидание

love, and tell her what a wonderful boy she is raising. The two of you are raising."

My father promised, "I'll do that." And after a little more fuss, we left.

When we got outside, I wondered if there were any book stores still open.

"We have no money."

"None at all?"

"The doctor took five dollars. That's how much it costs in New York to get something in your eye."

"I didn't do it on purpose. Do you think I pulled out the eyelash and stuck it in there myself? I didn't tell you to call the doctor."

"I know that."

"Couldn't we just go into a bookstore and look for a minute?"

"We haven't time, Jay."

But when we reached Pennsylvania Station, it was over thirty minutes until the next train left. As we sat on a bench, my father smiled. "Boy, he's smart, isn't he? His thinking is sixty light-years ahead of mine."

"Whose?"

"My brother. Notice the way he hid in the bathroom until the doctor was gone? That's how to make money. The rich man collects dollar bills like the stamp collector collects

stamps. I knew he'd do it. I knew it when he told the clerk to send up a doctor that I've pay for it."

"Well, why should he pay for it? You were the person to pay for it."

"That's right. Why should he? That's why he's where he is now, and that's why I am where I am."

"Well, why'd you bring along only five dollars? You might have known something would happen."

"You're right, Jay. I should have brought more."

"Look. Right over there is an open bookstore. Now if you had brought ten dollars —"

"Is it open? I don't think so. They just left lights in the window on."

"What if it isn't? What does it matter to us? Anyway, what kind of art book can you get for five dollars? Colour plates¹ cost money. How much do you think a good book on Vermeer costs? It'd be cheap at fifteen dollars, even second-hand."

Only when we were on the homeward train, my anger ended. Years passed before I needed to go to New York again.

53 *Read and translate:*

- 1 My father said, "You have every reason to. I wouldn't blame you if you took a gun and shot us all."
- 2 By walking what seemed to me a very long way on pavements only a little broader than those of my home town, and not so clean, we reached the hotel.
- 3 "Quin is a go-getter," my father said. "I admire him. Anything he wanted, from little on up, he went after it. His thinking is miles ahead of mine."
- 4 My father said that that would be a once-in-a-lifetime treat for the kid.
- 5 The trip didn't seem so much designed for sightseeing as for getting Uncle Quin to a small restaurant. I remember we stepped down into it and it was dark inside.
- 6 "For my own money, Jay, the French are the people to beat."
- 7 "Actually looking at things in terms of paint, for the lucid eye, I think Vermeer makes Degas look sick."
- 8 The doctor rolled my lower eyelid on a thin stick and showed me an eyelash. He dropped three drops of yellow fluid into the eye to remove any chance of infection.
- 9 "You might have known something would happen." — "You're right, Jay. I should have brought more."

54 *Answer the questions:*

- 1 Did Jay and his father often have an opportunity to visit New York? What plans did they have once they made up their minds to go there?
- 2 What was the first disappointment they met with when they arrived in New York?
- 3 How did the two brothers meet? Did they show much affection for each other?
- 4 What surprised Jay in his father's behaviour?
- 5 When did Jay suddenly begin to feel a new respect for his father?
- 6 How did Jay's father speak about his brother Quin?
- 7 How much of New York did Jay see? Could their trip be called a sightseeing trip?
- 8 What happening finally spoil Jay's visit to New York?
- 9 How much did the doctor's visit cost?
- 10 What emotions was Jay experiencing when he was leaving New York?

¹ colour plate — цветная иллюстрация



Discussing the Characters

55

The following sentences describe things that Jay, his father and his uncle Quin said, felt or did. How does each item characterize them?

Jay

- ◆ It was Jay's idea to go to New York to buy a book about Vermeer.
- ◆ Jay finished the eighth grade with perfect marks.
- ◆ Jay was surprised that his father could answer so many questions. Excited by his new respect for his father, he wanted to say something to please him.
- ◆ Jay was irritated that his father considered Uncle Quin smart. At that point in his life he was sure that only stupid people took an interest in money.
- ◆ When Uncle Quin mentioned Degas, the topic immediately found an appeal in Jay's heart. He was impatient to express his point of view saying, "Yes, but don't Degas's paintings always remind you of coloured drawings? For actually looking at things in terms of paint, for the lucid eye, I think Vermeer makes Degas look sick."
- ◆ "Couldn't we just go into a bookstore and look for a minute?" said Jay when he already knew that the last five dollars had gone to the doctor.

You may find the following words helpful in describing Jay:

imaginative	intelligent
enthusiastic	open-hearted
emotional	frank
modest	eager to learn
having a lucid eye for things and people	

Uncle Quin

- ◆ Uncle Quin did not meet Jay and his father at the station.
- ◆ "Vermeer," Uncle Quin pronounced slowly. "Dutch School." "We have four Degas ballet dancers in our living room in Chicago, and I could sit and look at one of them for hours. I think it's wonderful, the feeling for balance the man had."
- ◆ Uncle Quin came out of the bathroom only after the doctor had left.
- ◆ I have a lot of appointments. They don't let me have a minute's rest," Uncle Quin said apologising that he could not find an opportunity to come and see his brother's family.

You may find the following words helpful in describing Uncle Quin:

smart	energetic
quick-witted	careful
money-making	indifferent
businessman	successful
interested in art	

Jay's father

- ◆ It was Jay's father's idea to meet Uncle Quin in New York.
- ◆ If Jay's father was disappointed when he saw that Quin August had not come to meet them at the station, he did not reveal it to his son.
- ◆ When Jay was going to rejoin Uncle Quin and his friends in the living-room, his father stopped him. "Hold it," he said to his son. "Let's wait in here. My brother is working. He does not want to be bothered. I know how my brother works: he got us in here so we'd stay in here."
- ◆ Jay was surprised that his father could answer so many of his questions. As a young man Martin August had travelled, looking for work; this was not his first trip to New York.
- ◆ Jay's father admired his brother's ability to make money. Even in the episode with the doctor when he had to pay his only five dollars for the visit, he was not hurt by his brother's disappearance. "Notice the way he hid in the bathroom until the doctor was gone?" he asked Jay. "That's how to make money. I knew he'd do it. That's he's where he is now, and that's why I am where I am."

You may find the following words helpful in describing Martin August:

sincere	reserved
modest	honest
common	unsuccessful
understanding	sensitive

56 Say how you imagine Jay. What were his interests and attitudes?

57 How do you think the two August brothers were different?

58 *Express your opinion:*

- 1 What do you think Jay knew about his Uncle Quin before that visit to New York? Do you think he was hurt by the way his uncle received them?
- 2 Making business was more important for Quin August than having a chance to spend more time with his brother and his nephew whom he had not seen for several years. Which episodes in the story characterise him as a man who only cared for business?
- 3 What do you think Jay's father meant when he said that anything his brother wanted, from little on up, he went after it?
- 4 Do you think Quin August was sincere when he said that it would be a pleasure for him to see his brother again and that nothing would please his heart better than to share a quiet day with his brother's family in his home?
- 5 What values do you think Quin August considered most important?
- 6 Quin certainly understood that it was the boy's first visit to New York and he might like to take a look around the city. Why do you think he was indifferent to the boy's plans?
- 7 Do you think Jay and his uncle would remain strangers to each other?
- 8 Was there anything that Jay didn't like in his father? Did Jay's attitude towards his father change in New York? What, in your opinion, was the reason?
- 9 Could Quin August pay for the doctor's visit? Was he rich enough for that, the more so because it was his initiative to call the doctor? Do you think Martin August wouldn't have allowed his brother to pay in a similar situation?
- 10 What do you think were the brothers' attitudes towards each other?
- 11 What do you think it was that made Jay's mother exclaim, "I hate the Augusts"?
- 12 Jay did not even get to the bookstore though his main aim was to buy a book he had been for so long dreaming about. Do you think it was the only reason for his anger and dissatisfaction?
- 13 What do you think Jay and his father expected from their visit to New York? Why did their visit turn out to be a failure?

59

The central episode of the story concerns Jay's getting something in his eye and consequently not being able to buy the Vermeer book.

How does this episode reveal the characters' personalities? Which character do you think has the "lucid eye"?

60

John Updike's story is concerned with complex emotional relationships and with a "lucid eye", an eye that sees these relationships clearly.

What scenes suggest that Jay feels he sees things clearly?