

Aandp by john updike



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Updike's short story "A & P"; Sammy is a nineteen-year-old boy working at a local supermarket, when he is confronted with a distraction of the three girls freshly off the beach "in nothing but bathing suits" (Updike 16). As he reveals minute details about the girls' appearances and the way they carry themselves, he begins to speculate about their personalities. While Sammy leans on his register waiting for the arrival of the girls in his slot, he starts to comment on the conformity of the customers in the store. He also admits that his co-worker, Stokesie, who is twenty-two and married, has surrendered to a life working at the supermarket.

When the girls approach Sammy's slot, the policy-biding manager, Lengel, confronts the girls due to their indecent exposure. Sammy is affected by the embarrassment his manager has caused the girls and quits his job. The three girls are a catalyst that propels him out of convention. The girls are a distraction from the lawful life at A & P. Although the town is just five miles from the beach, Sammy is usually surrounded by a school of "woman with six children and varicose veins mapping their legs" (18), but these girls "with a good tan and a sweet broad soft-looking can" snagged his attention.

The leader of them, deemed Queenie, was the most arousing to him. Updike uses specific details to bring sensual allurements to these young girls and to prove how unwelcome their presence is in the store. He notes the customers are not pleased, "when Queenie's white shoulders dawned on them, kind of jerk, or hop, or hiccup, but their eyes snapped back to their own baskets and on they pushed" (17-18). This was a break for Sammy from the habitual fish swimming around the A & P. The girls also symbolized an escape from the monotonous daily ritual of the life working at the supermarket.

Updike refers to Sammy's co-worker, Stokesie, to illustrate how standardized his work has become and how Sammy is yearning to detached him from that. Sammy announces " Stokesie's married, with two babies chalked up on his fuselage already" (18), implying that, although older and having more responsibility, Stokesie is going to be stuck working at A & P for quite some time and Sammy does not see that future beneath him. The girls represent free spirit and youthful will. Sammy has been restrained by policy and wants to escape it. Updike exemplifies this by how Sammy views his Manager, Lengel.

Sammy states Lengel is " pretty dreary" (19) and makes note that after Lengel confronts the girls about their attire he gives them a " sad Sunday-school-superintendent stare" (19), inferring that Sammy thinks Lengel takes things too seriously and is weighed down by a policy-driven life. Lengel proclaims, " after this come in here with your shoulders covered. It's our policy" (19), Sammy snickers back with a derisive reply " that's policy for you" (19). Sammy is bored rigid with his job and Updike exposes this through Sammy's remarks about the customers.

He has been working the check out line long enough to have noticed the " cash-register-watchers" (16), one of which is " a witch about fifty with rouge on her cheekbones and no eyebrows" (16). He continues by labeling the customers as " houseslaves" (18) and " sheep" (17) and Sammy can see himself joining the shepard's herd, which is something he does not want to happen. In result Sammy quits his job, not only to impress his girls, but also to exercise his independence that separates him from the A & P banal.

Although Sammy knew by quitting his job he would “ feel this for the rest of his life” (20) he stuck with his decision to quit.

At this moment Updike takes Sammy’s character and develops him into an adult, taking responsibility for his actions even though the three girls “ flicker across the lot to their car” (20) without even noticing Sammy’s unanticipated heroic act. However, this decision to quit his job was not such a heroic act but merely an exodus from the mundane at A & P. Sammy is awfully dissatisfied with his job at the supermarket. The customers are witches that should have been burnt at Salem, his closest co-worker has submitted to the A & P monotony and his boss is an over bearing, policy ridden, “ kingpin” (19).

The girls are the incentive to change and Sammy is aware of this the moment they walked into the store in bathing suits and barefooted. The very youthful and couth domineer of the girls drove Sammy to evaluate his job, propelling him out the convention he has been trapped in. As he exits A & P after his decision to quit his job he looks back to see Lengel in his place “ checking the sheep through” (20). Sammy feels the uncertainty of what the future holds for him but is relieved he has taken a stand and made a decision for what he believes is right.