



Artist at Home, William Faulkner

Artist at Home

ROGER HOWES WAS a fattish, mild, nondescript man of forty, who came to New York from the Mississippi Valley somewhere as an advertisement writer and married and turned novelist and sold a book and bought a house in the Valley of Virginia and never went back to New York again, even on a visit.

For five years he had lived in the old brick house with his wife Anne and their two children, where old ladies came to tea in horsedrawn carriages or sent the empty carriages for him or sent by Negro servants in the otherwise empty carriages shoots and cuttings of flowering shrubs and jars of pickle or preserves and copies of his books for autographs.

He didn't go back to New York any more, but now and then New York came to visit him: the ones he used to know, the artists and poets and such he knew before he began to earn enough food to need a cupboard to put it in.

The painters, the writers, that hadn't sold a book or a picture — men with beards sometimes in place of collars, who came and wore his shirts and socks and left them under the bureau when they departed, and women in smocks but sometimes not: those gaunt and eager and carnivorous tymbesteres of Art.

At first it had been just hard to refuse them, but now it was harder to tell his wife that they were coming. Sometimes he did not know himself they were coming. They usually wired him, on the day on which they would arrive, usually collect.

He lived four miles from the village and the book hadn't sold quite enough to own a car too, and he was a little fat, a little overweight, so sometimes it would be two or three days before he would get his mail. Maybe he would just wait for the next batch of company to bring the mail up with them.

After the first year the man at the station (he was the telegraph agent and the station agent and Roger's kind of town agent all in one) got to where he could recognize them on sight.

They would be standing on the little platform, with that blank air, with nothing to look at except a little yellow station and the back end of a moving train and some mountains already beginning to get dark, and the agent would come out of his little den with a handful of mail and a package or so, and the telegram. "He lives about four miles up the Valley. You can't miss it."

"Who lives about four miles up the valley?"

"Howes does. If you all are going up there, I thought maybe you wouldn't mind taking these letters to him. One of them is a telegram."

"A telegram?"

"It come this a.m. But he ain't been to town in two-three days. I thought maybe you'd take it to him."

"Telegram? Hell. Give it here."

"It's forty-eight cents to pay on it."

"Keep it, then. Hell."

So they would take everything except the telegram and they would walk the four miles to Howes', getting there after supper. Which would be all right, because the women would all be too mad to eat anyway, including Mrs. Howes, Anne. So a couple of days later, someone would send a carriage for Roger and he would stop at the village and pay out the wire telling him how his guests would arrive two days ago.

So when this poet in the sky-blue coat gets off the train, the agent comes right out of his little den, with the telegram. "It's about four miles up the Valley," he says. "You can't miss it. I thought maybe you'd take this telegram up to him. It come this a.m., but he ain't been to town for two-three days. You can take it. It's paid."

"I know it is," the poet says. "Hell. You say it is four miles up there?"

"Right straight up the road. You can't miss it."

So the poet took the telegram and the agent watched him go on out of sight up the Valley Road, with a couple or three other folks coming to the doors to look at the blue coat maybe. The agent grunted. "Four miles," he said. "That don't mean no more to that fellow than if I had said four switch frogs.

But maybe with that dressing-sacque he can turn bird and fly it."

Roger hadn't told his wife, Anne, about this poet at all, maybe because he didn't know himself. Anyway, she didn't know anything about it until the poet came limping into the garden where she was cutting flowers for the supper table, and told her she owed him forty-eight cents.

“Forty-eight cents?” Anne said.

He gave her the telegram. “You don’t have to open it now, you see,” the poet said. “You can just pay me back the forty-eight cents and you won’t have to even open it.” She stared at him, with a handful of flowers and the scissors in the other hand, so finally maybe it occurred to him to tell her who he was. “I’m John Blair,” he said. “I sent this telegram this morning to tell you I was coming. It cost me forty-eight cents. But now I’m here, so you don’t need the telegram.”

So Anne stands there, holding the flowers and the scissors, saying “Damn, Damn, Damn” while the poet tells her how she ought to get her mail oftener. “You want to keep up with what’s going on,” he tells her, and her saying “Damn, Damn, Damn,” until at last he says he’ll just stay to supper and then walk back to the village, if it’s going to put her out that much.

“Walk?” she said, looking him up and down. “You walk? Up here from the village? I don’t believe it. Where is your baggage?”

“I’ve got it on. Two shirts, and I have an extra pair of socks in my pocket. Your cook can wash, can’t she?”

She looks at him, holding the flowers and the scissors. Then she tells him to come on into the house and live there forever. Except she didn’t say exactly that. She said: “You walk? Nonsense. I think you’re sick. You come in and sit down and rest.” Then she went to find Roger and tell him to bring down the pram from the attic. Of course she didn’t say exactly that, either.

Roger hadn't told her about this poet; he hadn't got the telegram himself yet. Maybe that was why she hauled him over the coals so that night: because he hadn't got the telegram.

They were in their bedroom. Anne was combing out her hair. The children were spending the summer up in Connecticut, with Anne's folks. He was a minister, her father was.

"You told me that the last time would be the last. Not a month ago. Less than that, because when that last batch left I had to paint the furniture in the guest room again to hide where they put their cigarettes on the dressing table and the window ledges.

And I found in a drawer a broken comb I would not have asked Pinkie (Pinkie was the Negro cook) to pick up, and two socks that were not even mates that I bought for you myself last winter, and a single stocking that I couldn't even recognize any more as mine. You tell me that Poverty looks after its own: well, let it. But why must we be instruments of Poverty?"

"This is a poet. That last batch were not poets. We haven't had a poet in the house in some time. Place losing all its mellifluous overtones and subtleties."

"How about that woman that wouldn't bathe in the bathroom? who insisted on going down to the creek every morning without even a bathing suit, until Amos Crain's (he was a farmer that lived across the creek from them) wife had to send me word that Amos was afraid to try to plow his lower field? What do people like that think that outdoors, the country, is? I cannot understand it, any more than I can understand why you feel that you should feed and lodge—"

“Ah, that was just a touch of panic fear that probably did Amos good. Jolted him out of himself, out of his rut.”

“The rut where he made his wife’s and children’s daily bread, for six days. And worse than that. Amos is young. He probably had illusions about women until he saw that creature down there without a stitch on.”

“Well, you are in the majority, you and Mrs. Crain.” He looked at the back of her head, her hands combing out her hair, and her probably watching him in the mirror and him not knowing it, what with being an artist and all. “This is a man poet.”

“Then I suppose he will refuse to leave the bathroom at all. I suppose you’ll have to carry a tray to him in the tub three times a day. Why do you feel compelled to lodge and feed these people? Can’t you see they consider you an easy mark? that they eat your food and wear your clothes and consider us hopelessly bourgeois for having enough food for other people to eat, and a little soft-brained for giving it away? And now this one, in a sky-blue dressing-sacque.”

“There’s a lot of wear and tear to just being a poet. I don’t think you realize that.”

“Oh, I don’t mind. Let him wear a lamp shade or a sauce pan too. What does he want of you? advice, or just food and lodging?”

“Not advice. You must have gathered at supper what his opinion of my mentality is.”

“He revealed pretty clearly what his own mentality is. The only thing in the house that really pleased him was Pinkie’s colored head-rag.”

“Not advice,” Roger said. “I don’t know why he shows me his stuff. He does it like you’d give caviar to an elephant.”

“And of course you accept his dictum about the elephant. And I suppose you are going to get them to publish his book, too.”

“Well, there’s some good stuff in it. And maybe if he sees it in print, he’ll really get busy. Work. Or maybe someone will make him mad enough to really write something. Something with an entrail in it. He’s got it in him. It may not be but one poem. But it’s there. Maybe if he can just stop talking long enough to get it out. And I thought if he came down here, where he will have to walk four miles to find somebody to talk to, once Amos comes to recognize that blue coat.”

“Ah,” Anne said. “So you wrote him to come. I knew you had, but I’m glad to hear you admit it of your own free will. Go on to bed,” she said. “You haven’t done a stroke of work today, and Lord only knows now when you will.”

Thus life went along in its old pleasant way. Because poets are all different from one another, it seemed; this one, anyway. Because it soon developed that Anne doesn’t see this poet at all, hardly. It seems that she can’t even know he is in the house unless she hears him snoring at night. So it took her two weeks to get steamed up again. And this time she is not even combing her hair. “Is it two weeks he’s been here, or just two years?”

She is sitting at the dressing table, but she is not doing anything, which any husband, even an artist, should know is a bad sign. When you see a

woman sitting half dressed before a dressing table with a mirror and not even watching herself talk in the mirror, it's time to smell smoke in the wind.

“He has been here two weeks, but unless I happen to go to the kitchen, I never see him, since he prefers Pinkie's company to ours. And when he was missing that first Wednesday night, on Pinkie's evening off, I said at first, ‘What tact.’ That was before I learned that he had taken supper with Pinkie's family at her house and had gone with them to prayer meeting.

And he went again Sunday night and again last Wednesday night, and now tonight (and though he tells me I have neither intelligence nor imagination) he would be surprised to know that I am imagining right now that sky-blue dressing-sacque in a wooden church full of sweating niggers without any incongruity at all.”

“Yes. It's quite a picture, isn't it?”

“But apart from such minor embarrassments like not knowing where our guest is, and bearing upon our patient brows a certain amount of reflected ridiculousness, he is a very pleasant companion. Instructing, edifying, and selfeffacing.

I never know he is even in the house unless I hear your typewriter, because I know it is not you because you have not written a line in — is it two weeks, or just two years? He enters the room which the children are absolutely forbidden and puts his one finger on that typewriter which Pinkie is not even permitted to touch with a dust-cloth, and

writes a poem about freedom and flings it at you to commend and applaud. What is it he says?"

"You tell. This is fine."

"He flings it at you like — like . . . Wait; I've got it: like flinging caviar at an elephant, and he says, 'Will this sell?' Not, Is this good? or Do you like it? Will this sell? and you—"

"Go on. I couldn't hope to even compete."

"You read it, carefully. Maybe the same poem, I don't know; I've learned recently on the best authority that I am not intelligent enough to get my poetry at first hand. You read it, carefully, and then you say, 'It ought to. Stamps in the drawer there.'" She went to the window.

"No, I haven't evolved far enough yet to take my poetry straight; I won't understand it. It has to be fed to me by hand, when he has time, on the terrace after supper on the nights when there is no prayer meeting at Pinkie's church. Freedom.

Equality. In words of one syllable, because it seems that, being a woman, I don't want freedom and don't know what equality means, until you take him up and show him in professional words how he is not so wise, except he is wise enough to shut up then and let you show both of us how you are not so wise either." The window was above the garden. There were curtains in it. She stood between the curtains, looking out. "So Young Shelley has not crashed through yet."

"Not yet. But it's there. Give him time."

“I’m glad to hear that. He’s been here two weeks now. I’m glad his racket is poetry, something you can perpetrate in two lines. Otherwise, at this rate . . .” She stood between the curtains. They were blowing, slow, in and out. “Damn. Damn. Damn. He doesn’t eat enough.”

So Roger went and put another cushion in the pram. Only she didn’t say exactly that and he didn’t do exactly that.

Now get this. This is where it starts. On the days when there wasn’t any prayer meeting at the nigger church, the poet has taken to doping along behind her in the garden while she cut the flowers for the supper table, talking to her about poetry or freedom or maybe about the flowers.

Talking about something, anyway; maybe when he quit talking all of a sudden that night when he and she were walking in the garden after supper, it should have tipped her off. But it didn’t. Or at least, when they came to the end of the path and turned, the next thing she seemed to know was his mug all set for the haymaker. Anyway, she didn’t move until the clinch was over. Then she flung back, her hand lifted. “You damned idiot!” she says.

He doesn’t move either, like he is giving her a fair shot. “What satisfaction will it be to slap this mug?” he says.

“I know that,” she says. She hits him on the chest with her fist, light, full, yet restrained all at the same time: mad and careful too. “Why did you do such a clumsy thing?”

But she doesn't get anything out of him. He just stands there, offering her a clean shot; maybe he is not even looking at her, with his hair all over the place and this sky-blue coat that fits him like a short horse-blanket. You take a rooster, an old rooster. An old bull is different.

See him where the herd has run him out, blind and spavined or whatever, yet he still looks married. Like he was saying, "Well, boys, you can look at me now. But I was a husband and father in my day."

But an old rooster. He just looks unmarried, a born bachelor. Born a bachelor in a world without hens and he found it out so long ago he don't even remember there are not any hens. "Come along," she says, turning fast, stiff-backed, and the poet doping along behind her. Maybe that's what gave him away. Anyway, she looks back, slowing. She stops. "So you think you are the hot shot, do you?" she says. "You think I'm going to tell Roger, do you?"

"I don't know," he says. "I hadn't thought about it."

"You mean, you don't care whether I tell him or not?"

"Yes," he says.

"Yes what?"

It seems she can't tell whether he's looking at her or not, whether he ever looked at her. He just stands there, doping, about twice as tall as she is. "When I was a little boy, we would have sherbet on Sunday," he says. "Just a breath of lemon in it. Like narcissus smells, I remember.

I think I remember. I was . . . four . . . three. Mother died and we moved to a city. Boarding-house. A brick wall. There was one window, like a

one-eyed man with sore eyes. And a dead cat. But before that we had lots of trees, like you have. I would sit on the kitchen steps in the late afternoon, watching the Sunday light in the trees, eating sherbet.”

She is watching him. Then she turns, walking fast. He follows, dopping along a little behind her, so that when she stops in the shadow of a clump of bushes, with her face all fixed, he stands there like this dope until she touches him. And even then he doesn't get it.

She has to tell him to hurry. So he gets it, then. A poet is human, it seems, just like a man.

But that's not it. That can be seen in any movie. This is what it is, what is good.

About this time, coincident with this second clinch, Roger happens to come out from behind this bush. He comes out kind of happen-so; pleasant and quiet from taking a little stroll in the moonlight to settle his supper. They all three stroll back to the house, Roger in the middle. They get there so quick that nobody thinks to say goodnight when Anne goes on in the house and up the stairs.

Or maybe it is because Roger is doing all the talking himself at that moment, poetry having gone into a slump, you might say. “Moonlight,” Roger is saying, looking at the moon like he owned it too; “I can't stand it any more. I run to walls, an electric light. That is, moonlight used to make me feel sad and old and I would do that. But now I'm afraid it don't even make me feel lonely any more. So I guess I am old.”

“That's a fact,” the poet says. “Where can we talk?”

“Talk?” Roger says. He looked like a head-waiter, anyway: a little bald, flourishing, that comes to the table and lifts off a cover and looks at it like he is saying, “Well, you can eat this muck, if you want to pay to do it.” “Right this way,” he says.

They go to the office, the room where he writes his books, where he doesn't even let the children come at all. He sits behind the typewriter and fills his pipe. Then he sees that the poet hasn't sat down. “Sit down,” he says.

“No,” the poet says. “Listen,” he says. “Tonight I kissed your wife. I'm going to again, if I can.”

“Ah,” Roger says. He is too busy filling the pipe right to look at the poet, it seems. “Sit down.”

“No,” the poet says.

Roger lights the pipe. “Well,” he says, “I'm afraid I can't advise you about that. I have written a little poetry, but I never could seduce women.” He looks at the poet now. “Look here,” he says, “you are not well. You go on to bed. We'll talk about this tomorrow.”

“No,” the poet says, “I cannot sleep under your roof.”

“Anne keeps on saying you are not well,” Roger says. “Do you know of anything that's wrong with you?”

“I don't know,” the poet says.

Roger sucks at the pipe. He seems to be having a little trouble making it burn right. Maybe that is why he slams the pipe down on the desk, or

maybe he is human too, like a poet. Anyway, he slams the pipe down on the desk so that the tobacco pops out burning among the papers.

And there they are: the bald husband with next week's flour and meat actually in sight, and the home-wrecker that needs a haircut, in one of these light blue jackets that ladies used to wear with lace boudoir caps when they would be sick and eat in bed.

"What in hell do you mean," Roger says, "coming in my house and eating my food and bothering Anne with your damned . . ." But that was all. But even that was pretty good for a writer, an artist; maybe that's all that should be expected from them. Or maybe it was because the poet wasn't even listening to him.

"He's not even here," Roger says to himself; like he had told the poet, he used to write poetry himself, and so he knew them. "He's up there at Anne's door now, kneeling outside her door." And outside that door was as close to Anne as Roger got too, for some time. But that was later, and he and the poet are now in the office, with him trying to make the poet shut his yap and go up to bed, and the poet refusing.

"I cannot lie under your roof," the poet says. "May I see Anne?"

"You can see her in the morning. Any time. All day, if you want to. Don't talk drivel."

"May I speak to Anne?" the poet says, like he might have been speaking to a one-syllable feeb.

So Roger goes up and tells Anne and comes back and sits behind the typewriter again and then Anne comes down and Roger hears her and

the poet goes out the front door. After awhile Anne comes back alone. "He's gone," she says.

"Is he?" Roger says, like he is not listening. Then he jumps up. "Gone? He can't — this late. Call him back."

"He won't come back," Anne says. "Let him alone." She goes on upstairs. When Roger went up a little later, the door was locked.

Now get this. This is it. He came back down to the office and put some paper into the typewriter and began to write. He didn't go very fast at first, but by daylight he was sounding like forty hens in a sheet-iron corn-crib, and the written sheets on the desk were piling up. . . .

He didn't see or hear of the poet for two days. But the poet was still in town. Amos Crain saw him and came and told Roger. It seems that Amos happened to come to the house for something, because that was the only way anybody could have got to Roger to tell him anything for two days and nights. "I heard that typewriter before I crossed the creek," Amos says. "I see that blue dressing-sacque at the hotel yesterday," he says.

That night, while Roger was at work, Anne came down the stairs. She looked in the office door. "I'm going to meet him," she said.

"Will you tell him to come back?" Roger said. "Will you tell him I sent the message?"

"No," Anne said.

And the last thing she heard when she went out and when she came back an hour later and went upstairs and locked her door (Roger was

sleeping on the sleeping-porch now, on an army cot) was the typewriter.

And so life went on in its old, pleasant, happy way. They saw one another often, sometimes twice a day after Anne quit coming down to breakfast. Only, a day or so after that, she missed the sound of the typewriter; maybe she missed being kept awake by it. "Have you finished it?" she said. "The story?"

"Oh. No. No, it's not finished yet. Just resting for a day or so." Bull market in typewriting, you might say.

It stayed bullish for several days. He had got into the habit of going to bed early, of being in his cot on the sleeping-porch when Anne came back into the house. One night she came out onto the sleeping-porch, where he was reading in bed. "I'm not going back again," she said. "I'm afraid to."

"Afraid of what? Aren't two children enough for you? Three, counting me."

"I don't know." It was a reading lamp and her face was in the shadow. "I don't know." He turned the light, to shine it on her face, but before it got to her face she turned, running. He got there just in time to have the door banged in his face. "Blind! Blind!" she said beyond the door. "Go away! Go away!"

He went away, but he couldn't get to sleep. So after a while he took the metal shade off the reading lamp and jimmied the window into the room where the children slept. The door from here into Anne's room wasn't locked. Anne was asleep. The moon was getting down then, and

he could see her face. He hadn't made any noise, but she waked anyway, looking up at him, not moving. "He's had nothing, nothing."

The only thing he remembers of his mother is the taste of sherbet on Sunday afternoon. He says my mouth tastes like that. He says my mouth is his mother." She began to cry. She didn't move, face-up on the pillow, her arms under the sheet, crying. Roger sat on the edge of the bed and touched her and she flopped over then, with her face down against his knee, crying.

They talked until about daylight. "I don't know what to do. Adultery wouldn't get me — anybody — into that place where he lives. Lives? He's never lived. He's—" She was breathing quiet, her face turned down, but still against his knee — him stroking her shoulder. "Would you take me back?"

"I don't know." He stroked her shoulder. "Yes. Yes. I'd take you back."

And so the typewriting market picked up again. It took a spurt that night, as soon as Anne got herself cried off to sleep, and the market held steady for three or four days, without closing at night, even after Pinkie told him how the telephone was out of fix and he found where the wires were cut and knows where he can find the scissors that did it when he wants to.

He doesn't go to the village at all, even when he had a free ride. He would spend half a morning sitting by the road, waiting for somebody to pass that would bring him back a package of tobacco or sugar or something. "If I went to the village, he might have left town," he said.

On the fifth day, Amos Crain brought him his mail. That was the day the rain came up. There was a letter for Anne. "He evidently doesn't want my advice on this," he said to himself. "Maybe he has already sold it." He gave the letter to Anne. She read it, once.

"Will you read it?" she said.

"I wouldn't care to," he said.

But the typing market is still steady, so that when the rain came up this afternoon, he had to turn on the light. The rain was so hard on the house that he could watch his fingers (he used two or three of them) hitting the keys without hearing a sound. Pinkie didn't come, so after a while he quit and fixed a tray and took it up and left it on a chair outside Anne's door. He didn't stop to eat, himself.

It was after dark when she came down the first time. It was still raining. He saw her cross the door, going fast, in a raincoat and a rubber hat. He caught her as she opened the front door, with the rain blowing in.

"Where are you going?" he said.

She tried to jerk her arm loose. "Let me alone."

"You can't go out in this. What is it?"

"Let me alone. Please." She jerked her arm, pulling at the door which he was holding.

"You can't. What is it? I'll do it. What is it?"

But she just looked at him, jerking at her arm and at the door knob. "I must go to the village. Please, Roger."

"You can't do that. At night, and in all this rain."

“Please. Please.” He held her. “Please. Please.” But he held her, and she let the door go and went back up stairs. And he went back to the typewriter, to this market still going great guns.

He is still at it at midnight. This time Anne has on a bathrobe. She stands in the door, holding to the door. Her hair is down. “Roger,” she says. “Roger.”

He goes to her, fast for a fat man; maybe he thinks she is sick. “What? What is it?”

She goes to the front door and opens it; the rain comes in again. “There,” she says. “Out there.”

“What?”

“He is. Blair.”

He draws her back. He makes her go to the office, then he puts on his raincoat and takes the umbrella and goes out. “Blair!” he calls. “John!” Then the shade on the office window goes up, where Anne has raised it and carried the desk lamp to the window and turned the light outdoors, and then he sees Blair, standing in the rain, without any hat, with his blue coat like it was put on him by a paper-hanger, with his face lifted toward Anne’s window.

And here we are again: the bald husband, the rural plute, and this dashing blade, this home-wrecking poet. Both gentlemen, being artists: the one that doesn’t want the other to get wet; the other whose conscience won’t let him wreck the house from inside. Here we are, with Roger trying to hold one of these green silk, female umbrellas over himself and the poet too, jerking at the poet’s arm.

“You damned fool! Come in the house!”

“No.” His arm gives a little as Roger jerks at it, but the poet himself doesn’t move.

“Do you want to drown? Come on, man!”

“No.”

Roger jerks at the poet’s arm, like jerking at the arm of a wet saw-dust doll. Then he begins to yell at the house: “Anne! Anne!”

“Did she say for me to come in?” the poet says.

“I — Yes. Yes. Come in the house. Are you mad?”

“You’re lying,” the poet says. “Let me alone.”

“What are you trying to do?” Roger says. “You can’t stand here like this.”

“Yes, I can. You go on in. You’ll take cold.”

Roger runs back to the house; they have an argument first because Roger wants the poet to keep the umbrella and the poet won’t do it. So Roger runs back to the house. Anne is at the door. “The fool,” Roger says. “I can’t—”

“Come in!” Anne calls. “John! Please!” But the poet has stepped out of the light and vanished. “John!” Anne calls. Then she began to laugh, staring at Roger from between her hair brushing at her hair with her hands. “He — he looked so f — funny. He I — looked so—” Then she was not laughing and Roger had to hold her up. He carried her upstairs and put her to bed and sat with her until she could stop crying. Then he

went back to the office. The lamp was still at the window, and when he moved it the light went across the lawn and he saw Blair again.

He was sitting on the ground, with his back against a tree, his face raised in the rain toward Anne's window. Roger rushed out again, but when he got there, Blair was gone. Roger stood under the umbrella and called him for a while, but he never got any answer. Maybe he was going to try again to make the poet take the umbrella. So maybe he didn't know as much about poets as he thought he did. Or maybe he was thinking about Pope. Pope might have had an umbrella.

They never saw the poet again. This one, that is. Because this happened almost six months ago, and they still live there. But they never saw this one. Three days later, Anne gets the second letter, mailed from the village. It is a menu card from the Elite Café, or maybe they call it the Palace. It was already autographed by the flies that eat there, and the poet had written on the back of it. Anne left it on Roger's desk and went out, and then Roger read it.

It seems that this was the shot. The one that Roger had always claimed to be waiting for. Anyway, the magazines that don't have any pictures took the poem, stealing it from one another while the interest or whatever it was ate up the money that the poet never got for it. But that was all right, too, because by that time Blair was dead.

Amos Crain's wife told them how the poet had left town. And a week later Anne left too. She went up to Connecticut to spend the rest of the summer with her mother and father, where the children were. The last thing she heard when she left the house was the typewriter.

But it was two weeks after Anne left before Roger finished it, wrote the last word. At first he wanted to put the poem in too, this poem on the menu card that wasn't about freedom, either, but he didn't.

Conscience, maybe he called it, put over the old haymaker, and Roger took it standing, like a little man, and sent off the poem for the magazines to jaw over, and tied up the papers he had written and sent them off too. And what was it he had been writing?

Him, and Anne, and the poet. Word for word, between the waiting spells to find out what to write down next, with a few changes here and there, of course, because live people do not make good copy, the most interesting copy being gossip, since it mostly is not true.

So he bundled the pages up and sent them off and they sent him the money. It came just in time, because the winter was coming and he still owed a balance on Blair's hospital and funeral. So he paid that, and with the rest of the money he bought Anne a fur coat and himself and the children some winter underwear.

Blair died in September. Anne and the children were still away when he got the wire, three or four days late, since the next batch of them had not arrived yet. So here he is, sitting at his desk, in the empty house, with the typewriting all finished, holding the wire in his hand. "Shelley," he says. "His whole life was a not very successful imitation of itself. Even to the amount of water it took."

He didn't tell Anne about the poet until after the fur coat came. "Did you see that he . . ." Anne said.

"Yes. He had a nice room, in the sun. A good nurse. The doctor didn't want him to have a special nurse at first. Damn butcher."

Sometimes when a man thinks about them making poets and artists and such pay these taxes which they say indicates that a man is free, twenty-one, and capable of taking care of himself in this close competition, it seems like they are obtaining money under false pretenses. Anyway, here's the rest of it, what they did next.

He reads the book, the story, to her, and her not saying anything until he had finished. "So that's what you were doing," she said.

He doesn't look at her, either; he is busy evening the pages, getting them smooth again. "It's your fur coat," he said.

"Oh," she says. "Yes. My fur coat."

So the fur coat comes. And what does she do then? She gave it away. Yes. Gave it to Mrs. Crain. Gave it to her, and her in the kitchen, churning, with her hair in her face, brushing her hair back with a wrist that looked like a lean ham. "Why, Miz Howes," she says. "I caint. I reely caint."

"You'll have to take it," Anne says. "We — I got it under false pretenses. I don't deserve it. You put bread into the ground and reap it; I don't. So I can't wear a coat like this."

And they leave it there with Mrs. Crain and they go back home, walking. Only they stop in broad daylight, with Mrs. Crain watching them from the window, and go into a clinch on their own account. "I feel better," Anne says.

"So do I," Roger says. "Because Blair wasn't there to see Mrs. Crain's face when you gave her that coat. No freedom there, or equality either."

But Anne is not listening. “Not to think,” she says, “that he . . . to dress me in the skins of little slain beasts. . . . You put him in a book, but you didn’t finish it. You didn’t know about that coat, did you? God beat you, that time, Roger.”

“Ay,” Roger says. “God beats me lots of times. But there’s one thing about it. Their children are bigger than ours, and even Mrs. Crain can’t wear my underclothes. So that’s all right.”

Sure. That was all right. Because it was Christmas soon, and then spring; and then summer, the long summer, the long days.

The End