

PHILIP

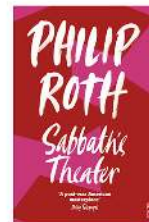
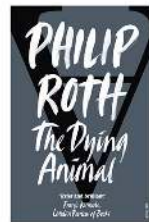
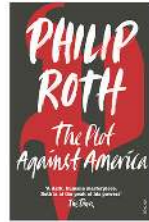
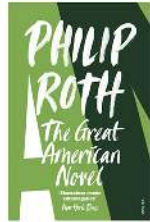
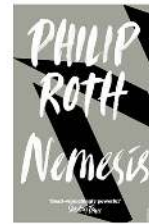
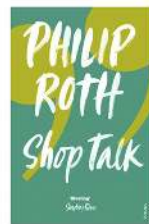
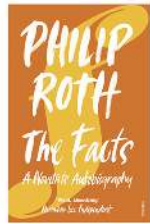
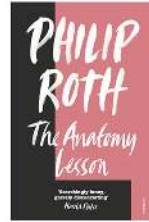
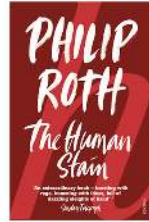
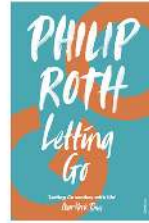
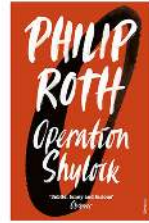
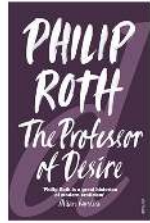
ROTH

The Anatomy
Lesson

**'Scorchingly funny,
gravely disconcerting'**

Harold Pinter

VINTAGE



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ABOUT THE BOOK

With his fortieth birthday receding into the distance, along with his hairline and his most successful novel, the writer Nathan Zuckerman comes down with a mysterious affliction - pure pain, beginning in his neck and shoulders, invading his torso, and taking possession of his spirit. Zuckerman, whose work was his life, finds himself physically unable to write a line.

He treks from one doctor to another, but none can find a cause for the pain and nobody can assuage it. Could it be, he wonders to himself, that the cause of the pain is nothing less than the books he has written? As he grapples with this possibility, he tries an onslaught of painkillers, then vodka, and finally marijuana. He contemplates threatening the pain with suicide, attempting to scare it out of his system. He toys with the prospect of a dramatic career change. What will it take for the pain to finally leave him alone?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In 1997 Philip Roth won the Pulitzer Prize for *American Pastoral*. In 1998 he received the National Medal of Arts at the White House, and in 2002 the highest award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Gold Medal in Fiction, previously awarded to John Dos Passos, William Faulkner and Saul Bellow, among others. He has twice won the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. He has won the PEN/Faulkner Award three times. In 2005 *The Plot Against America* received the Society of American Historians' Prize for 'the outstanding historical novel on an American theme for 2003-2004'.

Recently Roth received PEN's two most prestigious prizes: in 2006 the PEN/Nabokov Award 'for a body of work ... of enduring originality and consummate craftsmanship' and in 2007 the PEN/Saul Bellow Award for Achievement in American Fiction, given to a writer whose 'scale of achievement over a sustained career ... places him or her in the highest rank of American literature'. In 2011 Roth won the International Man Booker Prize.

Roth is the only living American writer to have his work published in a comprehensive, definitive edition by the Library of America.

ALSO BY PHILIP ROTH

Zuckerman Books

The Ghost Writer

Zuckerman Unbound

The Prague Orgy

The Counterlife

American Pastoral

I Married a Communist

The Human Stain

Exit Ghost

Roth Books

The Facts

Deception

Patrimony

Operation Shylock

The Plot Against America

Kepesh Books

The Breast

The Professor of Desire

The Dying Animal

Nemeses: Short Novels

Everyman

Indignation

The Humbling

Nemesis

Miscellany
Reading Myself and Others
Shop Talk

Other Books
Goodbye, Columbus
Letting Go
When She Was Good
Portnoy's Complaint
Our Gang
The Great American Novel
My Life as a Man
Sabbath's Theater

‘America’s greatest living novelist’
Sunday Times

‘There aren’t supposed to be degrees or intensities of uniqueness, and yet Roth is somehow inordinately unique. He is bloodmindedly himself, himself, himself’
Martin Amis

‘Opening the first page of any Philip Roth is like hearing the ignition on a boiler roar into life. Passion is what we’re going to get, and plenty of it’
Guardian

‘He is a writer of quite extraordinary skill and courage; and he takes on bigger enemies in every book he writes’
Frank Kermode

‘Philip Roth is a great historian of modern eroticism’
Milan Kundera

‘There is a clarity, almost a ruthlessness, to his work, which makes the experience of reading any of his books a bracing, wild ride’
The Times

‘He is skilled, witty, energetic and performs like a virtuoso’
Saul Bellow

‘Nobody writes about the American family with more tenderness and honesty’
New Statesman

‘Roth is a living master’
Harold Bloom

For Richard Stern

Philip Roth

THE ANATOMY LESSON

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

The chief obstacle to correct diagnosis in painful conditions is the fact that the symptom is often felt at a distance from its source.

Textbook of Orthopaedic Medicine
JAMES CYRIAX, M.D.

1 The Collar

WHEN HE IS sick, every man wants his mother; if she's not around, other women must do. Zuckerman was making do with four other women. He'd never had so many women at one time, or so many doctors, or drunk so much vodka, or done so little work, or known despair of such wild proportions. Yet he didn't seem to have a disease that anybody could take seriously. Only the pain—in his neck, arms, and shoulders, pain that made it difficult to walk for more than a few city blocks or even to stand very long in one place. Just having a neck, arms, and shoulders was like carrying another person around. Ten minutes out getting the groceries and he had to hurry home and lie down. Nor could he bring back more than one light bagful per trip, and even then he had to hold it cradled up against his chest like somebody eighty years old. Holding the bag down at his side only worsened the pain. It was painful to bend over and make his bed. To stand at the stove was painful, holding nothing heavier than a spatula and waiting for an egg to fry. He couldn't throw open a window, not one that required any strength. Consequently, it was the women who opened the windows for him: opened his windows, fried his egg, made his bed, shopped for his food, and effortlessly, manfully, toted home his bundles. One woman on her own could have done what was needed in an hour or two a day, but Zuckerman didn't have one woman any longer. That was how he came to have four.

To sit up in a chair and read he wore an orthopedic collar, a spongy lozenge in a white ribbed sleeve that he fastened around his neck to keep the cervical vertebrae aligned and to prevent him from turning his head unsupported. The support and the restriction of movement were supposed to diminish the hot line of pain that ran from behind his right ear into his neck, then branched downward beneath the scapula like a menorah held bottom side up. Sometimes the collar helped, sometimes not, but just wearing it was as maddening as the pain itself. He couldn't concentrate on anything other than himself in his collar.

The text in hand was from his college days, *The Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse*. Inside the front cover, above his name and the date inscribed in blue ink, was a single penciled notation in his 1949 script, a freshman aperçu that read, "Metaphysical poets pass easily from trivial to sublime." For the first time in twenty-four years he turned to the poems of George Herbert. He'd got the book down to read "The Collar," hoping to find something there to help him wear his own. That was commonly believed to be a function of great literature: antidote to suffering through depiction of our common fate. As Zuckerman was learning, pain could make you awfully primitive if not counteracted by steady, regular doses of philosophical thinking. Maybe he could pick up some hints from Herbert.

... Shall I be still in suit?
Have I no harvest but a thorn
To let me blood, and not restore
What I have lost with cordiall fruit?
 Sure there was wine
Before my sighs did drie it: there was corn
Before my tears did drown it.
Is the yeare only lost to me?
Have I no bayes to crown it?

No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?
All wasted?
... But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde
At every word
Me thought I heard one calling, *Childe*:
And I reply'd, *My Lord*.

As best he could with his aching arm, he threw the volume across the room. Absolutely not! He refused to make of his collar, or of the affliction it was designed to assuage, a metaphor for anything grandiose. Metaphysical poets may pass easily from trivial to sublime, but on the strength of the experience of the past eighteen months, Zuckerman's impression was of proceeding, if at all, in the opposite direction.

Writing the last page of a book was as close as he'd ever come to sublimity, and that hadn't happened in four years. He couldn't remember when he'd written a *readable* page. Even while he was wearing the collar, the spasm in the upper trapezius and the aching soreness to either side of the dorsal spine made it difficult to type just the address on an envelope. When a Mount Sinai orthopedist had ascribed his troubles to twenty years of hammering away at a manual portable, he at once went off to buy an IBM Selectric II; however, when he tried at home to get to work, he found that he ached as much over the new, unfamiliar IBM keyboard as he had over the last of his little Olivettis. Just a glimpse of the Olivetti stowed away in its battered traveling case at the back of his bedroom closet and the depression came rolling in—the way Bojangles Robinson must have felt looking at his old dancing shoes. How simple, back when he was still healthy, to give it a shove and make room on his desk for his lunch or his notes or his reading or his mail. How he'd loved to push them around, those silent uncomplaining sparring partners—the pounding he'd been giving them since he was twenty!

There when he paid his alimony and answered his fans, there to lay his head beside when overcome by the beauty or ugliness of what he'd just composed, there for every page of every draft of the four published novels, of the three buried alive—if Olivettis could talk, you'd get the novelist naked. While from the IBM prescribed by the first orthopedist, you'd get nothing—only the smug, puritanical, workmanlike hum telling of itself and all its virtues: I am a Correcting Selectric II. I never do anything wrong. Who this man is I have no idea. And from the look of things neither does he.

Writing manually was no better. Even in the good old days, pushing his left hand across the paper, he looked like some brave determined soul learning to use an artificial limb. Nor were the results that easy to decipher. Writing by hand was the clumsiest thing he did. He danced the rumba better than he wrote by hand. He held the pen too tight. He clenched his teeth and made agonized faces. He stuck his elbow out from his side as though beginning the breast stroke, then hooked his hand down and around from his forearm so as to form the letters from above rather than below—the contortionist technique by which many a left-handed child had taught himself how not to smear his words as he proceeded across the page from left to right back in the era of the inkwell. A highly recommended osteopath had even concluded that the cause of Zuckerman's problems was just this: the earnest left-handed schoolboy, straining to overcome the impediment of wet ink, who had begun microscopically to twist the writer's spine off the vertical axis and screw it down cockeyed into his sacrum. His rib cage was askew. His clavicle was crooked. His left scapula winged out at its lower angle like a chicken's. Even his humerus was too tightly packed into the shoulder capsule and inserted in the joint on the bias. Though to the untrained eye he might appear more or less symmetrical and decently

proportioned, within he was as misshapen as Richard III. According to the osteopath, he'd been warping at a steady rate since he was seven. Began with his homework. Began with the first of his reports on life in New Jersey. "In 1666 Governor Carteret provided an interpreter for Robert Treat and also a guide up the Hackensack River to meet with a representative of Oraton, the aged chief of the Hackensacks. Robert Treat wanted Oraton to know that the white settlers wished only peace." Began at ten with Newark's Robert Treat and the euphonious elegance of *interpreter* and *representative*, ended with Newark's Gilbert Carnovsky and the blunt monosyllables *cock* and *cunt*. Such was the Hackensack up which the writer had paddled, only to dock at the port of pain.

When sitting upright at the typewriter became too painful, he tried leaning back in an easy chair and doing the best he could with his imperfect longhand. He had the collar to brace his neck, the firm, uncushioned, back of the upholstered chair to support his spine, and a piece of beaverboard, cut to his specifications, laid across the arms of the chair to serve as a portable desk for his composition books. His place was certainly quiet enough for total concentration. He'd had his big study windows double-glazed so that nobody's television or phonograph would blare through from the building backing onto his brownstone apartment, and the ceiling had been soundproofed so he wouldn't be disturbed by the scratching of his upstairs neighbor's two Pekinese. The study was carpeted, a deep copper-brown wool, and the windows were hung to the floor with creamy velvet curtains. It was a cozy, quiet, book-lined room. He'd spent half his life sealed off in rooms just like it. Atop the small cabinet where he kept his vodka bottle and his glass were favorite old photographs in Plexiglas frames: his dead parents as newlyweds in his grandparents' backyard; ex-wives blooming with health on Nantucket; his estranged

brother leaving Cornell in 1957, a magna cum laude (and a tabula rasa) in a cap and gown. If during the day he spoke at all, it was only small talk to those pictures; otherwise, enough silence even to satisfy Proust. He had silence, comfort, time, money, but composing in longhand set off a throbbing pain in his upper arm that in no time at all made him sick to his stomach. He kneaded the muscle with his right hand while he continued to write with the left. He tried not thinking about it. He pretended that it wasn't *his* upper arm hurting but somebody else's. He tried to outwit it by stopping and starting. Stopping long enough helped the pain but hurt the writing; by the tenth time he'd stopped he had nothing left to write, and with nothing to write, no reason to be. When he tore off the neck collar and threw himself to the floor, the ripping sound of the Velcro fastener coming undone could have been emitted by his guts. Every thought and feeling, ensnared by the selfness of pain.

In a children's furniture store on Fifty-seventh Street he had bought a soft red plastic-covered playmat that was permanently laid out in his study now, between his desk and his easy chair. When he could no longer bear sitting up, he stretched supine upon the playmat, his head supported by *Roget's Thesaurus*. He'd come to conduct most of the business of his waking life on the playmat. From there, no longer laden with an upper torso or saddled with fifteen pounds of head, he made phone calls, received visitors, and followed Watergate on TV. Instead of his own spectacles, he wore a pair of prism glasses that enabled him to see at right angles. They were designed for the bedridden by a downtown optical firm to which he'd been referred by his physiotherapist. Through his prism glasses he followed our President's chicanery—the dummy gestures, the satanic sweating, the screwy dazzling lies. He almost felt for him, the only other American he saw daily who seemed to be in as much trouble as he was. Flat out on the floor,

Zuckerman could also see whichever of his women was seated upright on the sofa. What the woman in attendance saw were the rectangular opaque undersides of the protruding glasses and Zuckerman explaining Nixon to the ceiling.

He tried from the playmat to dictate fiction to a secretary, but he hadn't the fluency for it and sometimes went as long as an hour without a word to say. He couldn't write without seeing the writing; though he could picture what the sentences pictured, he couldn't picture the sentences unless he saw them unfold and fasten one to the other. The secretary was only twenty and, during the first few weeks particularly, got too easily caught up in his anguish. The sessions were torture for both of them, and generally ended with the secretary down on the playmat. Intercourse, fellatio, and cunnilingus Zuckerman could endure more or less without pain, provided he was supine and kept the thesaurus beneath his head for support. The thesaurus was just the right thickness to prevent the back of his skull falling below the line of his shoulders and setting off the pain in his neck. Its inside cover was inscribed "From Dad—You have my every confidence," and dated "June 24, 1946." A book to enrich his vocabulary upon graduation from grade school.

To lie with him on the playmat came the four women. They were all the vibrant life he had: secretary-confidante-cook-housekeeper-companion—aside from the doses of Nixon's suffering, they were the entertainment. On his back he felt like their whore, paying in sex for someone to bring him the milk and the paper. They told him their troubles and took off their clothes and lowered the orifices for Zuckerman to fill. Without a taxing vocation or a hopeful prognosis, he was theirs to do with as they wished; the more conspicuous his helplessness, the more forthright their desire. Then they ran. Washed up, downed a coffee, kneeled to kiss him goodbye, and ran off to disappear in

real lives. Leaving Zuckerman on his back for whoever rang the bell next.

Well and working, he'd never had time for liaisons like these, not even when he'd been tempted. Too many wives in too few years to allow for a consortium of mistresses. Marriage had been his bulwark against the tremendous distraction of women. He'd married for the order, the intimacy, the dependable comradeship, for the routine and regularity of monogamous living; he'd married so as never to waste himself on another affair, or go crazy with boredom at another party, or wind up alone in the living room at night after a day alone in his study. To sit alone each night doing the reading that he required to concentrate himself for the next day's solitary writing was too much even for Zuckerman's single-mindedness, and so into the voluptuous austerity he had enticed a woman, one woman at a time, a quiet, thoughtful, serious, literate, self-sufficient woman who didn't require to be taken places, who was content instead to sit after dinner and read in silence across from him and his book.

Following each divorce, he discovered anew that unmarried a man had to take women places: out to restaurants, for walks in the park, to museums and the opera and the movies—not only had to go to the movies but afterwards had to discuss them. If they became lovers, there was the problem of getting away in the morning while his mind was still fresh for his work. Some women expected him to eat breakfast with them, even to talk to them over breakfast like other human beings. Sometimes they wanted to go back to bed. *He* wanted to go back to bed. It was certainly going to be more eventful in bed than back at the typewriter with the book. Much less frustrating too. You actually could complete what you set out to accomplish without ten false starts and sixteen drafts and all that pacing around the room. So he dropped his guard—and the morning was shot.

No such temptations with the wives, not as time went by.

But pain had changed it all. Whoever spent the night was not only invited to breakfast but asked to stay on for lunch if she had the time (and if no one else was to turn up till dinner). He'd slip a wet washcloth and a bulging ice pack under his terry-cloth robe, and while the ice anesthetized his upper trapezius (and the orthopedic collar supported his neck), he'd lean back and listen in his red velvet chair. He'd had a fatal weakness for high-minded mates back when all he ever thought about was toiling away; excellent opportunity, immobilization, to sound out less predictably upright women than his three ex-wives. Maybe he'd learn something and maybe he wouldn't, but at least they would help to distract him, and according to the rheumatologist at NYU, distraction, pursued by the patient with real persistence, could reduce even the worst pain to tolerable levels.

The psychoanalyst whom he consulted took a contrary position: he wondered aloud if Zuckerman hadn't given up fighting the illness to *retain* (with a fairly untroubled conscience) his "harem of Florence Nightingales." Zuckerman so resented the crack he nearly walked out. Given up? What could he do that he hadn't—what was left that he was unwilling to try? Since the pains had begun in earnest eighteen months before, he'd waited his turn in the offices of three orthopedists, two neurologists, a physiotherapist, a rheumatologist, a radiologist, an osteopath, a vitamin doctor, an acupuncturist, and now the analyst. The acupuncturist had stuck twelve needles into him on fifteen different occasions, a hundred and eighty needles in all, not one of which had done a thing. Zuckerman sat shirtless in one of the acupuncturist's eight treatment cubicles, the needles hanging from him, and reading *The New York Times*—sat obediently for fifteen minutes, then paid his twenty-five dollars and rode back uptown, jangling with pain each time the cab took a

pothole. The vitamin doctor gave him a series of five vitamin B-12 shots. The osteopath yanked his rib cage upward, pulled his arms outward, and cracked his neck sharply to either side. The physiotherapist gave him hot packs, ultrasound, and massage. One orthopedist gave him “trigger-point” injections and told him to throw out the Olivetti and buy the IBM; the next, having informed Zuckerman that he was an author too, though not of “best-sellers,” examined him lying down and standing up and bending over, and, after Zuckerman had dressed, ushered him out of his office, announcing to his receptionist that he had no more time that week to waste on hypochondriacs. The third orthopedist prescribed a hot bath for twenty minutes every morning, after which Zuckerman was to perform a series of stretching exercises. The baths were pleasant enough—Zuckerman listened to Mahler through the open doorway—but the exercises, simple as they were, so exacerbated all his pains that within the week he rushed back to the first orthopedist, who gave him a second series of trigger-point injections that did no good. The radiologist X-rayed his chest, back, neck, cranium, shoulders, and arms. The first neurologist who saw the X-rays said he wished his own spine was in such good shape; the second prescribed hospitalization, two weeks of neck traction to alleviate pressure on a cervical disc—if not the worst experience of Zuckerman’s life, easily the most humbling. He didn’t even want to think about it, and generally there was nothing that happened to him, no matter how bad, that he didn’t want to think about. But he was stunned by his cowardice. Even the sedation, far from helping, made the powerlessness that much more frightening and oppressive. He knew he would go berserk from the moment they fastened the weights to the harness holding his head. On the eighth morning, though there was no one in the room to hear him, he began to shout from where he was pinned to the bed, “Let me up! Let me go!” and within fifteen

minutes was back in his clothes and down at the cashier's cage settling his bill. Only when he was safely out onto the street, hailing a cab, did he think, "And what if something really terrible were happening to you? What then?"

Jenny had come down from the country to help him through what was to have been the two weeks of traction. She made the round of the galleries and museums in the morning, then after lunch came to the hospital and read to him for two hours from *The Magic Mountain*. It had seemed the appropriate great tome for the occasion, but strapped inert upon his narrow bed, Zuckerman grew increasingly irritated by Hans Castorp and the dynamic opportunities for growth provided him by TB. Nor could life in New York Hospital's room 611 be said to measure up to the deluxe splendors of a Swiss sanatorium before the First World War, not even at \$1,500 a week. "Sounds to me," he told Jenny, "like a cross between the Salzburg Seminars and the stately old *Queen Mary*. Five great meals a day and then tedious lectures by European intellectuals, complete with erudite jests. All that philosophy. All that snow. Reminds me of the University of Chicago."

He'd first met Jenny while visiting the retreat of some friends on a wooded mountainside in a village up the Hudson called Bearsville. The daughter of a local schoolteacher, she'd been down to art school at Cooper Union and then three years on her own with a knapsack in Europe, and now, back where she'd begun, was living alone in a wood shack with a cat and her paints and a Franklin stove. She was twenty-eight, robust, lonely, blunt, pink-complexioned, with a healthy set of largish white teeth, baby-fine carrot-colored hair, and impressive muscles in her arms. No long temptress fingers like his secretary Diana—she had *hands*. "Someday, if you like," she said to Zuckerman, "I'll tell you stories about my jobs—'My Biceps and How I Got Them.'" Before leaving for Manhattan, he'd stopped off at her cabin unannounced, ostensibly to look at

her landscapes. Skies, trees, hills, and roads just as blunt as she was. Van Gogh without the vibrating sun. Quotations from Van Gogh's letters to his brother were tacked up beside the easel, and a scarred copy of the French edition of the letters, the one she'd lugged around Europe in her knapsack, lay in the pile of art books by the daybed. On the fiberboard walls were pencil drawings: cows, horses, pigs, nests, flowers, vegetables—all announcing with the same forthright charm, "Here I am and I am real."

They strolled through a ravaged orchard out behind the cabin, sampling the crop of gnarled fruit. Jenny asked him, "Why does your hand keep stealing up to your shoulder?" Zuckerman hadn't even realized what he was doing; the pain, at this point, had only cornered about a quarter of his existence, and he still thought of it as something like a spot on his coat that had only to be brushed away. Yet no matter how hard he brushed, nothing happened. "Some sort of strain," he replied. "From stiff-arming the critics?" she asked. "More likely stiff-arming myself. What's it like alone up here?" "A lot of painting, a lot of gardening, a lot of masturbating. It must be nice to have money and buy things. What's the most extravagant thing you've ever done?" The most extravagant, the most foolish, the most vile, the most thrilling—he told her, then she told him. Hours of questions and answers, but for a while no further than that. "Our great sexless rapport," she called it, when they spoke for long stretches on the phone at night. "Tough luck for me, maybe, but I don't want to be one of your girls. I'm better off with my hammer, building a new floor." "How'd you learn to build a floor?" "It's easy."

One midnight she'd called to say she'd been out in the garden bringing in the vegetables by moonlight. "The natives up here tell me it's going to freeze in a few hours. I'm coming down to Lemnos to watch you lick your wounds." "Lemnos? I don't remember Lemnos." "Where the Greeks put Philoctetes and his foot."

She'd stayed for three days on Lemnos. She squirted the base of his neck with anesthetizing ethyl chloride; she sat unclothed astride his knotted back and massaged between his shoulder blades; she cooked them dinner, coq au vin and cassoulet—dishes tasting strongly of bacon—and the vegetables she'd harvested before the frost; she told him about France and her adventures there with men and women. Coming from the bathroom at bedtime, he caught her by the desk looking into his datebook. "Oddly furtive," he said, "for someone so open." She merely laughed and said, "You couldn't write if you didn't do worse. Who's 'D'? Who's 'G'? How many do we come to all together?" "Why? Like to meet some of the others?" "No thanks. I don't think I want to get into that. That's what I thought I was phasing myself out of up on my mountaintop." On the last morning of that first visit he wanted to give her something—something other than a book. He'd been giving women books (and the lectures that went with them) all his life. He gave Jenny ten \$100 bills. "What's this for" she said. "You just told me that you couldn't stand coming down here looking like a yokel. Then there's the curiosity about extravagance. Van Gogh had his brother, you have me. Take it." She returned three hours later with a scarlet cashmere cloak, burgundy boots, and a big bottle of Bal à Versailles. "I went to Bergdorf's," she said rather shyly, but proudly—"here's your change," and handed him two quarters, a dime, and three pennies. She took off all her yokel clothes and put on just the cloak and the boots. "Know what?" she said, looking in the mirror. "I feel like I'm pretty." "You *are* pretty." She opened the bottle and dabbed at herself with the stopper; she perfumed the tip of her tongue. Then again to the mirror. A long look. "I feel tall." That she wasn't and wouldn't be. She phoned from the country that evening to tell him about her mother's reaction when she stopped by the house, wearing the cloak and smelling of Bal à Versailles, and explained it was a gift from a man.