

CORONET

JUNE, 1945

The Story of

Nan



by NAN WOOD GRAHAM

Grant Wood painted the portrait of Nan as a gift to his sister shortly after she had posed for American Gothic. The latter painting, which portrayed a gaunt Iowa farm couple, brought fame to the artist but did not present a flattering view of his sister. Mrs. Graham consented to sell the portrait to the Encyclopaedia Britannica so that Grant Wood might be represented in its collection of contemporary paintings, now on a national tour of museums. In the following letter, Mrs. Graham furnishes a backdrop for the portrait.

AFTER GRANT painted *American Gothic*, I was kidded so much about it that he thought I might be hurt, so he decided to paint a portrait of me.

Grant wanted me to wear a polka-dot waist, but polka-dot cloth wasn't on the market then. Grant cut a potato stamp with the lid of a baking powder can. He dipped the potato stamp into black enamel and made polka-dots at even intervals on an old sheet. Under Grant's directions, I made the waist. Grant wanted something to repeat the color of my hair. I was always bringing home baby chicks from the ten-cent store and happened to have one in my hand. Also, I was eating a plum. Grant said the chicken would repeat the color of my hair and the plum would repeat the background.

When Grant was on a painting spell he would work way into the night. The chicken almost grew up before the portrait was done. It got used to Grant's hours and made a fuss if we tried to put it to bed before two in the morning. It never got up before ten when we usually had breakfast, and became very choosy about its food.

Sometime after the painting was finished, when Grant bought a house in Iowa City, his living room was built around the painting. The wallpaper, furnishings and rug repeated its colors. Even the fireplace was designed to set off the portrait.

It makes me very humble to think that of all the paintings Grant ever did, my portrait was the only painting he had in his home.

