

## Rope

Katherine Anne Porter

This short story was written by Katherine Anne Porter, an American writer who is generally considered as one of the leading modern writers of short stories. Katherine Anne Porter's stories are not cute. They are not clean. Rather, she allows her stories to live in a more sincere world, where life continues past the last page of a story and resolutions of the characters' maladies come after "The End" if ever. Ms. Porter's communication to us is that there is life to be found before, during, and after climax- and we must steer clear of false resolution or find no resolution at all.

Throughout this short story, we do not have any names. It is all written in the form of generalizations. This indicates that there is no understanding between all people. The heroine of this story has some emotional needs which her husband cannot understand; he has no logic or reason.

In the very beginning of the story, we are told that the couple does not come originally from the country. They have moved to the country in recent times. So, it is the beginning of a new life. The husband comes back from the village after buying things that they need. He has bought groceries and a twenty-four-yard coil of rope. His wife comes to see what he has bought. When he sees her, he says that she looks like a "**country woman**". When she sees him, she says that he looks like "**a rural character in a play**". We laugh at the way they receive each other. It is clear that there is a lack of understanding between them.

We soon learn that the husband has forgotten to buy her the coffee she had wanted. The wife gets very upset and asks him to go back and buy it for her. She accuses him of being selfish because if he had been the one who likes coffee, he would never have forgotten to buy it for himself. She then wonders why he has bought that long rope, "**she asked him if he thought they were going to run a laundry**". They already had a fifty-foot line hanging right in the house. However, he felt that it was necessary to have around. The wife makes him feel

guilty for spending a lot of money on useless things. She then starts to be more aggressive and pushes him into a quarrel. The wife gets angrier when she learns that he has broken all the eggs because he has put the rope on them and thus all the eggs were squeezed. The husband reacts in a very cold way.

It is obvious that the kind of love he gives her is not what she wants. He has no clear logical answer and this is what aggravates her. **“Sometimes, when they were playful, he would rub her shoulder and she would arch and purr. This time she hissed and almost clawed”**. It is ironical that the wife is described as if she was a cat who would feel happy when he takes care of it. This means that he is the one who is mistaken because he makes her angry. The wife is not nervous all the time. There are times when she appears very loving and understanding. So, the fault lies with the husband. The husband was getting ready to say that they could surely manage somehow when **“she returned on him and said, if he told her they could manage somehow, she would certainly slap his face”**. Just then, the husband’s face gets red and he becomes very upset. He takes the rope and puts it on the top shelf. This makes the wife angrier because it will take all the space she needs. He then accuses her of “her insane habit of changing things around and hiding them. **“She even accuses him of putting the hammer and nails in the middle of the bedroom floor where they could step on them in the dark”**. They quarrel over nasty things but the wife seems to have the right in all her accusations. There were seven rooms in the house and an only one kitchen. Thus, the husband should not have used the kitchen for putting his things, **“had he stopped to consider there were seven God-forsaken rooms in the house, and only one kitchen?”** The husband begins to be rude and insults her. He wished God she could have children to take it out on. The tension between them begins to increase. The wife is angry since they are leading a very poor life.

Women can express their feelings and talk while men cannot. The wife looked **“so lost and despairing he couldn’t believe it was only a piece of rope that was causing all the racket”**. This indicates that he does not understand that he is the source of her annoyance rather than the rope. We also get to know that he was ready to go away

forever. He used to go to town to do extra work and stayed there for a long time. She knows perfectly well that he had to do that to bring them money. She also knows that a man who is left alone in town will be kidnapped by women.

The wife does not really hate him. She only wants him to get that rope away from her and also wanted him to go to the village to get her coffee. **"The country was so beautiful ! She doubted they'd have a moment to enjoy it"**. Then, the narrator says, **"well, he was merely going to get her coffee. A four-mile walk or two pounds of coffee was ridiculous, but he was perfectly willing to do it"**. Yet, he could not understand why she could not wait till tomorrow. She reminds him that she is working hard at home as he does at work.

The wife believes that housekeeping is not an easy thing. **"She knew as well as he did that his work brought in the regular money, hers was only occasional"**. All this shows the pressure in their life. After all that, he goes to get the coffee. It becomes symbolic of her emotional needs and the fact that he neglects her. She is also economically uncomfortable; this is what aggravates her. It is also clear that the answers of the husband are not direct. He brings out the worst in her. There is a big gap between them.

The wife finally starts to cry. He tries to calm her but she begs him to **"take his rope and go to hell"**. The husband gets to get the coffee, but he soon discovers a blister on his heel and feels that his shirt is on fire. He begins to think how terrible she is about getting things done. Now, he has to take back the rope and exchange it for something else. He feels that all things are accumulating upon his shoulders. He feels that she has no right to treat him like that; **"he remembered all the useless, meaningless things she bought for herself"**.

He finally stops and selects a large stone by the road and hides the rope behind it. When he comes back, she is waiting for him. We are given a description of the wife, **"her face was young and smooth and fresh-looking"**. He has brought her the coffee, but she could see something in his other hand. It is the rope again. He says that he had meant to exchange it but he forgot. She wants to know why he has

wanted to exchange it if it is something he really needs. He feels as if he is bringing her a present and she is happy. While sitting together, there is a whippoorwill sitting on a tree. She loves to hear its singing. She thinks that maybe the girl of that bird stands him up. The story ends with uncertainty and doubts. Maybe the bird knows what its girl wants. The wife asks her husband, **“he knew how she was, didn't he? / Sure, he knew how he was”**.

The irony is that we all know that the peace between the husband and the wife is only temporary. They will probably quarrel over one thing or the other very soon. We are also sure that he does not know what she wants contrary to the ending words of the story. The story shows a psychological insight and technical excellence.