

A HUSBAND FOR EMILY DICKINSON

Building a staircase for the Colemans

Those were his best years.
He had become almost the quieted man
they thought him to be.

Setting forms for a sidewalk along Main Street

Unsuspected,
looking after his mother in the old place,
he was endowed with a scrutiny
for the revivals, the College,
the traveling shows, the Ornamental Tree Association,
the dogs, the hills,
the child coughing deep in her chest.

Spading the Fowlers' garden

He did not go to the War.
Did not say why.
Did not go West.
Did not say why.

Erecting posts for the gas lamps

Was the keeper, house to house,
of the town memory,
the restless lore of bright dresses,
orioles, cabbage patches,
the levers and hinges of things,
the warping and thriving of things,
bells ticking to call the firemen,
frogs on the swampy Commons.

Carting off the printer's waste

But he had a vagrant kind of privacy, some thought.

Roofing the First Congregational Church

In the journal he did not keep,
he might have taught himself
how the whippoorwill calls to anyone.
How on the hottest night, winter is coming,
and water persists in what it can only do.
How things practice to be what they are,
the oleander in its tub,
crumbling bread.
The runner of a sleigh.
A sleeping woman.

Fitting a marble mantel in the Dudleys' parlor