



C H A P T E R 1 5

IN 1845, WHEN I WAS TEN YEARS OLD, THERE WAS AN OUTBREAK OF **measles** in the town and it made a most alarming killing among the little people. There was a funeral almost daily and the mothers of the town were nearly mad with fright. My mother was greatly troubled. She worried over Pamela and Henry and me and took constant and extraordinary pains to keep us from coming into contact with the disease. I believed that her judgment was at fault. I cannot remember now whether I was frightened about the measles or not but I clearly remember that I grew very tired of being continually under the threat of death. I remember I got so weary of it and so eager to have the matter settled one way or the other and promptly that this worry spoiled my days and nights. I had no pleasure in them. I made up my mind to settle this matter one way or the other and be done with it.

Will Bowen was dangerously ill with the measles and I thought I would go down there and catch them. I entered the house by the front way and slipped along through rooms and halls, keeping sharp watch against discovery, and at last I reach Will's bedroom in the rear of the house on the second floor and got into it uncaptured. But that was as far as my victory reached. His mother caught me there a moment later and gave me a lecture and drove me away. I saw that I must manage

better next time and I did. I hung about the lane at the rear of the house and watched through cracks in the fence until I was convinced conditions were favorable. Then I slipped through the back yard and up the back way and got into the room and into the bed with Will Bowen without being observed. I don't know how long I was in the bed. I only remember that Will Bowen, as society, had no value for me, for he was too sick to even notice that I was there. When I heard his mother coming, I covered up my head, but it was summertime—that cover was nothing more than a sheet, and anybody could see that there were two of us under it. It didn't remain two very long. Mrs. Bowen pulled me out of that bed and took me home herself, with a hold on my collar which she never loosened until she delivered me into my mother's hands along with her opinion of that kind of boy.

It was a good case of measles that resulted. It brought me within a shade of death's door. It brought me to where I no longer felt any interest in anything, but instead felt a total absence of interest—which was sweet and delightful. I have never enjoyed anything in my life any more than I enjoyed dying that time.