CHAPTER 3

I can see the farm yet, with perfect clearness; I can see all its belongings, all its details; the family room of the house, the vast fireplace, piled high on winter nights with flaming logs; the lazy cat spread out in front of it; the sleepy dogs; my aunt in one chimney corner, knitting; my uncle in the other, smoking his pipe; the shiny and carpetless floor faintly mirroring the dancing flames; half a dozen children playing in the background.

Along outside of the front fence ran the country road, dusty in the summertime and a good place for snakes—they liked to lie in it and sun themselves. Beyond the road was a thick young woods and through it a dim-lighted path led a quarter of a mile. Down the forest slope to the left were the swings. They were made from young trees. When they became dry they were dangerous. They usually broke when a child was forty feet in the air and this was why so many bones had to be mended every year. I had no ill luck myself, but none of my cousins escaped. There were eight of them and at one time and another they broke fourteen arms among them. But it cost next to nothing, for the doctor worked by the year—twenty-five dollars for the whole family.

Doctors were not called in cases of ordinary illness; the family grandmother attended to those. Every old woman was a doctor and gathered her own medicines in the woods.
Doctor Meredith was our family physician and saved my life several times. Still, he was a good man and meant well. Let it go.

I was always told that I was a sickly and weak and tiresome and uncertain child and lived mainly on medicines during the first seven years of my life. I asked my mother about this, in her old age—she was in her eighty-eighth year—and said:

“I suppose that during all that time you were uneasy about me?”
“Yes, the whole time.”
“Afraid I wouldn’t live?”

After a thoughtful pause she said, “No—afraid you would.”