



C H A P T E R 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.”