

## ADDING ON

The first time the man saw the country house he was still in law school. The woman who was soon to be his wife had told him many times about the place her father had built in the woods: set atop a hill in an opening in the forest, it was like something out of a story-book, it was tiny and intricate and hidden, it was a place she'd loved as a girl.

And when he saw it his first response was that it was magical, a little fairy tale house with white shingles and dark green shutters, dormers peeping out of a roof that was covered with wisteria, and not one but three stone chimneys. Bees were buzzing in the high grass of the uncut lawn and the two of them just stood there a while listening. "Wow!" he said and then she led him to the back where the forest crowded the house like the deep woods of children's stories. Coming inside, he bumped his head on the low kitchen doorway. Everything was built to her father's dimensions, she laughed, and he was several inches shorter than the man who was seeing the place for the first time.

Indoors amid a pleasant musty smell that faintly suggested cedar, the surprises kept coming: though the house had neither a phone nor electricity, there was a tiled fireplace in a room with two built-in single beds(again, she pointed out, no longer than the man who'd built them)and at the other end of the house an elegant little library with a parquet floor that you could cross in four steps, a marble fireplace beneath a gold-lined mirror, all in the Williamsburg style,

as was the rest of the interior.

"Watch this," she said, then twisted a brass handle so that a panel under the bookcase dropped down to make a bed. "Amazing," he exclaimed. To which she responded, "You ain't seen nothin' yet." Going to the bookcase again, she pulled back what had looked like the covers of a pair of books, brought down a wooden handle the false books had hidden, and part of the adjacent wall swung open. Soon they were climbing the smallest of twisting staircases to a tiny space with a pair of many-paned windows. "Our priest-hole," she said. "You could hide up there for weeks and nobody would know you were there."

"Your father is a crazed genius," he said, the two of them breathing the hot musty air of the secret place. "He's half Thomas Jefferson and half Vincent Price." The old man was an engineer but his heart had never been in his job. His passion had gone into family life. He'd had two daughters, one of whom died when she was twelve. A widower, he was planning to give the house to his surviving daughter as a wedding gift.

She showed her future husband the bright little bedroom upstairs, tucked into the peaked angles of the roof, with the inevitable built-in beds and tiny desks and closets that seemed to open out of nowhere--there was a fanatical economy about saving space that suggested the nautical. "You can imagine," she told him, "how much fun this was for a couple of kids." The man, looking at the built-in beds, thought of the dead sister and he felt again that there were places in the woman's heart he'd never know.

When they walked in the woods behind the house afterwards he was amazed to learn that the stone walls they passed had been put there by settlers in the eighteenth century, who'd felled the original trees and established their community, built a church and a school, then strenuously tried to farm this steep land covered with boulders. When the Indians were subdued in the Midwest the farmers, giving up the effort at last, left for the rich black earth of Ohio and beyond, and the silent farms and empty barns they vacated were gradually swallowed up by the returning forest, until finally only these stone walls remained.

"I'm glad you like the place," the old man said back in the city, his hand on his daughter's

back. He was a broad-chested man with a deep voice and a full head of white hair. He always wore a suit and he was trying not to be disturbed by the younger man's beard, his habitual outfit of jeans and his radical ideas. "It's special," the young man said and he watched the woman smile.

"There's so much that's tawdry these days," the old man said. "We have to preserve what's special." History was important to him, and continuity. He talked about those settlers who'd worked so hard with the land. "They left their blood there," he said dramatically. "And they weren't the first ones, either." He talked about his own experience building the house. The young man knew that the woman's father had fought in the First World War and had had some kind of breakdown, that he'd been advised to take up a hobby as therapy and that the house had been that therapy. The old man talked about playing in the woods with his two girls. For a long time he said nothing. Then he declared, "You two plan to have children, of course?"

The young man nodded and looked at the woman. They were going to meet some friends, they were going to go dancing, and they were already late. The old man held his daughter gravely, as if the two of them were posing for a painting. The future son-in-law held his restlessness in check.

When they were married they were very much in love and very poor, so they spent a summer in the country trying to save money. One night by the light of the kerosene lamp they added up their salaries, then what they owed, and it made them very gloomy. Would they ever be able to climb out of debt? One was in despair, the other offered cheer; they switched positions, hiding their true feelings. She was teaching part-time, he had a part-time job too. Law school loomed for another couple of years and he wondered aloud if he was going to be able to finish. They lay on a rock later that night looking at stars through the shaggy encircling mass of trees and she told him, "Don't worry, everything's going to be all right."

They did save money that summer, they lived simply, they read, they swam, they took hikes. The man looked through an old photo album and saw that the hillside below the lawn had once been bare of trees, so that you could see the conjunction of three distant hills from the

house. He knew what he wanted to do: while his wife read British comic novels and took notes for a dissertation she planned to write one day, he set out to hack his way through the forest, to recover the view. He only had an old axe, and he whacked away at trees small and large, pushing very slowly into the forest. Thorns from bushes cut him, limbs slashed across his bare back, his hands were blistered, they bled, at times he was almost blind with exhaustion. When he gripped a cold can of beer between his raw fingers and flayed palm there was a satisfying pain. He was a man of talent and energy, unrecognized by the world, determined to drive back the woods.

They got some old boards from a lumberyard for nothing and, since the wife had learned the finer points of carpentry from her father, they were able to build a little shack in the modest clearing. Like Peter the Great's putting his new capital on the Baltic, this was a statement. The man called the shack a study. Though he was in law school he didn't feel all possibilities were closed off, he was ambitious. He believed he had some literary talent and he started to write a novel about a group of radicals who'd gone down south, as he had, to help with voter registration. Chopping trees, he'd be excited by his ideas: whack, whack--a scene was coming clear. Alone in the little study at the edge of the woods, he was often elated, like an astronaut in his capsule seeing a world that those back on earth couldn't glimpse. After the first three chapters the work got much more difficult: he revised, he rethought, he got stalled. Finally he abandoned the novel and when he cut down trees he thought about other things.

The father-in-law came for frequent visits that summer--too frequent, they sometimes thought, but how could they refuse the man who'd built the place and generously given it to them? He'd arrive in his suit and change into his work clothes, then set about digging in the garden--he was still vigorous. When he'd stop for a rest his daughter would give him a cold drink. Seeing his son-in-law shirtless, sweating, an axe in his hand, he'd urge him: "Sit down for a while. You'll kill yourself doing that. Everybody has to rest." But the young man was relentless and soon they heard the thud of the axe striking the trees deep in the woods he was clearing.

His wife showed him the old photo album: tiny black and white pictures tinged with brown. Here was a skinny mustached man with an axe in his hand, shirtless, baggy pants, a look of comic determination on his face. "It's you," she teased, "your imp." The old man studied the picture a long time. The mustached woodsman, he told them, was later killed in the Second World War. At night while the kerosene lamps burned the man and woman would huddle over books, she interrupting to read aloud amusing passages from British novels; then the two of them would step out into the darkness, facing the wall of trees: already, the man pointed out, what he'd cleared allowed them to see more stars. "Two," she said, "for sure." He protested. "I see at least four." And, with a kiss, they compromised on three.

The next summer there was more of the same. One afternoon, though, the man drove up from the village where he'd made a phone call and learned he'd got the job he wanted. He was ecstatic, he bought a bottle of wine. Driving up the hill through the dry smell of fallen needles that formed the floor of a stand of pines, he saw the grandiose stone pillars and then the little house: it had brought him luck. The old man was visiting that weekend. "It's so far away," he said, though it was only a couple of hours' drive further from where they lived. He suddenly looked older.

Now for a change there was enough money but there was less time for the country place: the extra hours of driving took up much of their precious weekends; the long summers of school vacation were already lost in the past. When they invited friends over they all joked about the beds: not only were they limited to the size of the maker but, built in as they were, and single, they seemed to conform as well to the maker's puritanical notions. If you wanted pleasure, the weekend visitors would say, you needed ingenuity and a capacity for a certain amount of suffering. The man laughed with them but he was getting more restless. When visitors were late he wished there were a phone in the house. What if their friends were lost, needed directions? "It was a great idea for the 30's," he said, "but a phone's a necessity nowadays." His wife agreed but her father had always held off, she said, because he was afraid the poles and wires would spoil the view, the special serenity of the place. "It wouldn't be so bad," the man

said. "And with the baby coming, I think we'd both feel better."

It was no longer the old man's place, of course, but there was a legacy, it really seemed appropriate to discuss these things with him. His daughter broached the subject. Her father talked for a while about the old times, his voice broke when he mentioned his dead daughter's name. Yes, he agreed it would be a convenience but hadn't they all been able to function without it? The woman hinted that they'd be less likely to come up there with the child if there were no means of quick communication. At last he shook his head. "It's your place," he said, making a gesture with his hand. "You can do what you want, you know that." The first time he saw the poles, though, and the cleared area that had been required for them, the scar of dirt on the lawn from the trenching where the wire went underground to the house, he stood a long time looking at them, shaking his head, like a man standing at the grave of a friend. They both noticed that he went around limping that weekend, as if he'd stubbed his toe on one of the poles.

Soon enough, though, he was cheerfully phoning to announce his visits. Meanwhile his son-in-law kept after the clearing, axe strokes ringing through the woods, then the sound of fiber shredding and at last the fall of the tree, stripping limbs on the way down and hitting the earth with a crash that sent a shudder all the way to the house.

When they came to the country after their son was born the small house was smaller, especially since the old man, who'd recently retired, visited them more often, both in the city and out in the woods. He worked in the garden for shorter periods now, he reminisced more, he talked of his wife--sometimes it seemed he believed she was still alive. When he dozed off in the middle of the day his face looked as if it had been dusted with flour. The presence of four people in the close quarters was producing a combusive force, the walls pressed against the young man, the built-in beds were like straitjackets for sleepers. He'd wake up at night thinking about his job, trying to devise strategies to defend people the system was built to exclude; and his small, narrow bed seemed like part of that system. He'd come up with a plan in the middle of the night: if they moved the door of the narrow bedroom they could tear out the beds from under their canopies and create the space to put in one larger double bed; but to do that would be to cut

off the view of the herb garden from the living room when the bedroom door was open; and he knew the old man, nominally a guest and not the owner, cherished that view. The young man tossed and turned in bed.

He dreamed of another plan, more radical still. "We could build on," he told his wife, "push out the whole back end of the house ten feet and we'd gain--a world, especially upstairs." They were on the front lawn, their son asleep in his playpen like a hound at a rabbit hole, lying on his stomach, his bottom lifted. The air was crisp, white clouds scudded across the blue sky. The man could see the excitement in his wife's eyes as she contemplated the vision of the enlarged house but she knew what her father's objections were likely to be. "The lines," she said. "He'll tell us it would destroy the lines." The lines would still be the same in the front of the house, the man insisted, his voice rising as if he'd hit his head again on the low kitchen doorway. He suddenly heard himself. He didn't want to be arguing with his wife and he took her hand. There was a bright, steely clarity to the air, as if it had been wire-brushed clean. "I'm sorry," he said. She worked her hand free. "Do you know what it's like living with somebody else's dream?" she said. "Especially if you're part of that dream?" She was near tears. "Sometimes I wish he hadn't given us this house, I wish we could just sell it."

"Hey," he said, taking her hand gently, "it's O.K., it'll be O.K." This time she held on and the two of them were silent, realizing they had so much, they had each other, they had their son; while the old man was holding on desperately to an idea. The silence continued and each of them knew this was one of those special moments they wouldn't forget, that would come unbidden into the memory a dozen years and a thousand miles from this wooded hill.

Over the winter, though, the battle resumed. "Once the phone's up," he told his wife, "not to have electricity is crazy. They use the same poles, they don't have to do any extra cutting." And once more they were thinking of the child: as he grew up and started crawling around, the thought of those kerosene lamps could make them nervous. "Let's do it," she said. "Let there be light," he declared.

And so there was light and the electric toaster, the vacuum cleaner, an iron--what luxury!

Even the old man didn't complain on his frequent lengthy stays, except to remark occasionally and in a minor key on the harshness of electric light compared to the warm glow of the kerosene. Mostly, though, he told stories about the old days in the woods: papa, mama and the two little girls. His shoulders drooped, he stood for long periods just looking at a cabinet he'd built years ago, a door. But the house kept getting smaller whenever the four of them were within its walls, rain shrunk it to nothing. The tension was growing, the two men kept getting into arguments about history, about politics, about matters of taste. Since the carpenter ants had got to the kitchen roof it had to be repaired. The man seized the opportunity to extend the kitchen a scant eighteen inches, just enough to enable them to install a new door that required no bowing of the head for him to enter. Savagely he continued to work at his clearing, renting a chain saw that brought down with a snarl trees it would have taken him days to fell. In a moment of triumph he glimpsed at last the feline curve of one of the hills he'd seen in the old photo.

But now it was the old man's turn. Even as he dandled his grandson on his knee, he was thinking, often he was squirreled away in a corner, working something out on paper. Then one day he announced that he wanted to build another room.

"What?" asked the son-in-law. "Where?" asked his wife. And then he told them: it was going to be at the top of the secret staircase, which would be the only way of getting there. Crazy, the man thought, absolutely mad. But his father-in-law was serious. "Jesus," the man said to his wife, "he's old. What if he gets sick up there, has a stroke? How would we get him down?" His wife shook her head. They knew he'd better not get sick up there, that was all. But what could they do to forbid it?

So the old man went ahead, with a surprising, ruthless energy. Had he sold his soul for this spurt of force? White hair bristled on his chest, there was white hair on his head. Leaning heavily over a board with a hammer poised, he looked like a polar bear about to reach through the icy water for an unsuspecting fish. What he conjured at last was quirkier than any of the house's other quirks: up at the top of the secret stairs there was by the end of the summer the

tinest of rooms, with a built-in bed, of course, a writing desk, an armoire and even a pair of French windows that opened on to a small balcony with a wrought iron railing. This balcony faced the back woods, "in case, like St. Francis," his daughter said, "he wants to preach to the animals." The couple tried to look at the funny side of this latest project and finally wrote it off as part of the price they'd had to pay for the electricity, not to mention the taller kitchen door. They put their feet down, though, on the woodburning stove the man wanted to cram into his tiny room at the top of the secret stairs. He conceded amiably, content with having made his point; but once the room was built he seemed to age markedly: he'd spend long hours there nodding over a book.

There was more to the son-in-law's world than the summer house. He'd gone into law to change the world and he was finding that he had to make compromises all the time. Was the world changing him? He was beginning to make more money but he was tense all the time, embattled. He often wondered if he was doing any real good. After taking time off when their son was born, his wife went back to teaching, declaring that she was still going to get her Ph.D. some day. She had her frustrations, her husband knew. One Saturday the man woke up, went to the bathroom and shaved off his beard. "Who are you, mister?" his wife asked when she saw him but the beard stayed off. To his surprise, he looked more serious now.

When he thought about the country place the son-in-law kept coming back to his plan. Why did they have to endure the discomforts that they could so easily heal? He appreciated the old man's sense of the past but history wasn't memory, history moved forward. His clearing the woods was history.

One day he and his wife walked in the clearing he'd made. It was spacious and breezy, grass rippled in the wind where for decades trees had covered the ground. At last you could see from the house all three of the hills coming together. Here in the midst of what he'd wrought he told his wife they could afford to get a real builder to work on the back of the house. Once more he talked about pushing it back ten feet. "We'd have an upstairs room of our own where I can actually stand up, we can have a double bed. It will be a house grown-ups can live in." She

caught his enthusiasm, she had ideas of her own. "It would give us a lot more space in the kitchen too. At last we could fit enough cooks to spoil the soup."

"It would be the perfect solution," he insisted. "The lines of the house would be maintained, it would look pretty much the same from the front. The little nooks and quirks would be there, all the fancy fixtures, we'd still have the secret door, his little room, so everything that's special about the house would be preserved and at the same time it would be much more livable. It seems to me very rational."

She looked at him. "This isn't a rational matter, though, is it?"

He shook his head and glanced toward the shuttered house where both the child and the man were napping. It seemed from this vantage point in the clearing, at this stage of his career, as if all those changes were within their grasp at last: the full-sized beds, the full-sized rooms. Yet both of them knew that the old man who'd built the house would think that was a betrayal. His daughter didn't want to go against him and the son-in-law wasn't going to drag his wife into a battle with her father. The two of them stood in the clearing. There was a buzz of insects, a sudden smell of wild apples seemed to bring a sadness to both of them, as if they'd each realized they'd lost something. "I guess," she said, "that's one of the burdens of adulthood. You have the power to do something that you know can hurt someone and there's nobody to stop you anymore but you."

They looked at the little house for a long time, aware that it hummed with electricity now, that it was connected to the phone system by wires that had been brought up from the road on poles and buried under the grass of the lawn; that it had changed during their ownership just as it had during the old man's, he having built it in stages, not adding the elegant little library until almost twenty years after the main section of the house had been constructed; and that, of course, even more recently he'd put up his tiny room above the library. They believed they could argue convincingly that to change it even more was in the house's tradition; but they knew that in the old man's mind decades of evolution had brought the house to its destined form, the last "i" had been dotted with his building of the little room above the secret staircase. And they knew

that, though they could bully their way to what they wanted, they weren't going to go ahead with those plans.

The son-in-law, standing in the clearing he'd hacked out of the forest with actual blood and sweat, had the sense that he'd come against some kind of ultimate limit. He wasn't a barbarian, he wasn't going to challenge the old man on this. He took his wife's hand and they stood there in what had once been thick forest. The clearing around them was now bright with sunlight, the breeze moved through the rippling grass in waves. The man's little study, now used as a tool shed, was partially hidden in the deep shade of a maple, the weathered, unpainted wood giving it the look, only a few years after it had been built, of something that belonged to the forest. All at once he embraced his wife and they held each other for a long time.

When he looked at her he was sure his eyes told her what he was thinking: it was time to put his energies into other things. God knew there were plenty of demands from his job--his father-in-law wasn't the only old man who was standing in his path: there was a certain judge who took unsavory delight in frustrating him and everything he believed to be important. More than once the man had awakened in his narrow bed out of a dream of his nemesis, the black-robed judge, smiling obscenely at him from the bench while he, hands tied, mouth gagged, was trying to yell, "Objection."

Husband and wife stepped back, yet continued to hold each other. The man faintly remembered being out here while he was in law school and poor. It had seemed then as if his problems couldn't be solved, and yet he'd solved them, hadn't he? Now there were others that seemed insoluble.

She looked back at him and he could see she understood. He could see something else in her look, a sadness that tinged her understanding, a sadness that said yes, we're waiting for him to die, we're waiting for my father to die.

The old man had awakened from his nap and was now reading in his little room from a book about cathedrals, the child was asleep downstairs, dreaming he was a giant, walking the world with a giant's strides; husband and wife were standing in the clearing and a warm wind

rustled the trees, bringing the smell of wild apples. There was a bright sadness about things and, holding each other, they shared it.

The old man died a few years later but by then everything had changed: the husband and wife weren't together anymore. How did it happen? The man, waiting in a shiny airport lounge in a strange city, watching anonymous crowds pass by, would sometimes ask himself that question and he had no good answers. Once he'd felt he could dominate life, now he knew better. Within a few years he and the woman were living on different coasts and eventually the two of them married different people. The man, watching the sky turn to lavender, then peach, above mountains that suddenly went black and became two-dimensional, listened to the hiss of a different ocean than the one he grew up on, realizing that he'd become successful after all, in the way success is usually measured. He had two children by his second wife, a girl and a boy, and the force of his love for them surprised him. He loved his first son too, though there was tension and sometimes distance and a residue of pain between them that never quite went away.

On one of his visits the son told his father that his ex-wife was going to sell the place in the woods.

"That's sad," the man said. "Do you remember it? I mean, when we were there."

Yes, the boy remembered the secret passage and his grandfather's little room, he remembered playing in the woods with the old man but he was growing now and obviously embarrassed to be asked to talk about it.

The woman was happy, her ex-husband knew, though since he too was happy he knew that was a most complicated and fragile state and if he'd have been a believer he'd have said prayers of thanks for his blessings every day. His second wife, he learned, could be courageous, venturesome and clear-sighted, she could fall into melancholy states for no particular reason, all of which had been true of his first wife. He knew he was a better person because he loved her and she loved him. He watched his children grow, which was marvelous and exasperating and mysterious.

Time was more mysterious still: between the laying-down of his head on a pillow and his lifting of his head in the morning years were stolen. His ex-wife finished her Ph. D. and her dissertation was later published. Their son had grown into a fiercely intelligent young man with a touch of his father's temper. The man saw old friends and was surprised by how much they'd aged. They found him more conservative and he admitted that yes, he might be, a little, or maybe more than a little. Once he found an old photo of himself in the woods, bearded, shirtless and sweating, an axe in his hand. The expression in the eyes of the man in the photo scared him: it was like opening the door and seeing the assassin who'd been hired to kill you.

He wasn't given much to nostalgic musings, though, and changed as he might have been, he still tried to make his life more than just an accumulation of wealth, he was hard on himself and, never forgetting his frustration with a certain autocratic judge, he kept working for justice in the courtrooms. He wrote articles on the subject that brought changes, he was respected by his colleagues and one day, incredibly, he saw himself on television in judicial robes, surrounded by a proud family.

People were eager now to hear what he had to say on the subjects on which he'd written and he made frequent visits to the other coast. Usually he went from the airport to one hotel or another, then to the banquet or the college campus and back to the hotel and then the airport; but once a colleague urged him to spend an extra day and stay with him in the country. It was fall, late in the season for the summer residents, most of whom had shut up their country houses and gone back to the city, but the weather was warm. They were playing tennis at his host's as if it were July.

He hadn't realized when he'd accepted the invitation how close the place he was staying at was to the house his former father-in-law had built and when it occurred to him he was excited. He was determined to take a peek at it, to see what it looked like now; and he announced to the tennis players that he was going for a drive by himself, to look at the foliage that he didn't get a chance to see at home. He assured his host he'd be back in plenty of time for the cocktail party at which the actor, the senator and the pro football player were supposed to put

in an appearance.

Soon he was on familiar roads, passing through tiny villages he'd once known, turning at remembered intersections that were overlooked by the brilliantly colored wooded hills. Before long he came to the mailbox--there was a different name, of course. But everything else, he marveled, was exactly as he'd remembered it, even to the subtle smell of rotting grapes that was faintly discernible as he drove off the paved road. He considered the amusing possibilities of a judge being charged with trespassing but that wasn't what made his heart beat faster as he drove up the winding dirt road. Up at the top where it leveled off there was the stand of pines on his right, the dry smell of the fallen pine needles, then the stone pillars that his father-in-law had put up decades ago, and at last the shuttered house, which had recently been painted but which looked very much as he'd last remembered seeing it.

He got out of the rented car and walked across the lawn that was just beginning to get shaggy, toward the house, noticing as the angle shifted that there was something different about it; and then he realized: the new owner had pushed out the back to create more space. It had evidently been done long enough ago so that the grass and trees had grown to accommodate it. But there looked to be an enormous upstairs room now. And, yes, as he'd always insisted, the house's main lines had been preserved. He kept looking at the house, waiting for a complicated emotion to untangle. The truth was, he couldn't make up his mind whether or not he liked it.

Really, he couldn't identify an authentic response because it wasn't the house he was thinking about, it was himself. There was a strangeness about being here, he felt like one of the ghosts from the photograph album. He walked around the back of the building. There was good workmanship in the addition but he was curious about the older parts of the house. Yes, there at the other end was his father-in-law's crazy little balcony, though something had been done to the room, he couldn't tell what. The back woods were thick, as they'd always been, though the leaves had started to fall; under their bright cover he could make out the mold-covered stone walls put there hundreds of years ago.

He went around to the front and looked for the first time at what had been his clearing: it

was no longer there. Brilliantly colored leaves stopped the view. If you looked carefully you could tell that the trees in that patch were not as old as the others but the clearing was overgrown. The study was gone; he assumed it had simply fallen of its own weight and been taken over by the forest.

He walked to the stone wall that marked the end of the lawn, he stepped through the gate and made his way through trees about as old as his older son, who was in law school now--the man carried a picture in his wallet of a bearded face looking defiantly into the camera. He was trying to reach the spot where he and his wife had held each other and looked at the house on the day they knew they'd have to wait for her father to die before they could effect any more changes; but the trees and the undergrowth were too much of an obstacle, and then, he wasn't quite as agile as he'd been.

He stopped instead, just a short way into the forest, and looked through a picket of trees at the shingled house with the green shutters. From here it seemed identical to the house he'd spent a summer in, the place where his first wife had assured him he was going to make it through law school, where later the two of them read in separate parts of the room to the flickering glow of the kerosene lamps until at the same moment both of them looked up from their books, eager to turn from reading to other pleasures. He remembered showing his son the secret staircase for the first time and remembered the old man in his room upstairs, an owl in the house.

The dry leaves rustled in the breeze that carried a smell of rotting apples and the man was moved by a sudden emotion. He tried to imagine he was a stranger seeing it all for the first time: the gables, white shingles and dark green shutters. What if he were young, and in love, and ambitious, and had just come upon this fairy tale house in the middle of the woods? He'd have no way of guessing about the hidden panel that led to the secret passage, about the small, intricately wrought rooms smelling of cedar. How could he know about the tiny library with a parquet floor, the marble fireplace beneath a gold-lined mirror? With so much hidden from him, what would that stranger imagine? Would he ask himself what kind of people lived here, would

he wonder if they were happy?

The man looked for a long time at the house he'd once known so well. At last he admitted to himself that he wasn't that stranger, he could never be that stranger; and he made his way back through the trees that were covering all traces of what had been his clearing. As he drove down the hill, he had no reason to look in the rear view mirror.