

Schmidt's wife had not been dead more than six months when his only child, Charlotte, told him she had decided to get married. He was finishing breakfast at the kitchen table. The "Metropolitan" section of the *Times* was in his left hand; as on every Saturday, he had been poring over the mutual fund quotation table to check the prices of two investments, one in small capitalization companies and the other in international equities, both of which he had bought on his own initiative, out of conviction, and had come to regard, irrationally, because the rest of his money was managed with reasonable success by a professional whom he left quite alone, also out of conviction, as the weather vane of his financial standing. The small capitalization fund was down, by ten cents. He thought that made it a loss of about fifty cents for the week. The international stocks were down too. He put aside the paper, looked at his daughter, so tall and, it seemed to him, painfully desirable in her sweat-soaked running clothes, said I am very happy for you, when will it be? and began to cry. He had not cried since the afternoon when the specialist confirmed the advice he had previously given to him over the telephone: Don't think of an operation, why mutilate Mary, it won't give her even one good year, we'll keep her as comfortable as possible. Meanwhile, you two try to have a good time. He held Mary's hand until they were out in the street.

The morning sunlight was blinding. He put Mary into a taxi—ordinarily, she would have walked home, but he saw that she was shaken, almost disoriented—caught one himself, proceeded to the office, told his secretary he didn't want to be disturbed, shut the door, called David Kendall, the family doctor who was also their friend, heard that he and the specialist had discussed the advice before it was given, and, lying facedown on the couch, wept like a boy, the parade of his life with Mary passing on the screen of his burning eyelids like some refurbished newsreel. That day he had been mourning the end of his happiness. But today it was the imminent collapse of a bearable existence he had thought he might be able to sustain. He didn't need to ask Charlotte who the man was: Jon Riker had been around for a long time before Mary began to die. That very minute he was probably shaving, in Charlotte's bathroom.

In June, Dad. We want to talk to you about picking the day. Why are you crying like this?

She sat down and stroked his hand.

From happiness. Or because you are so grown-up. I'll stop now. Promise.

He blew his nose elaborately, using a piece of paper towel he tore off the roll on the upright holder next to the sink. Of late, he was finding himself reluctant to use the handkerchief he always carried in the pocket of his trousers, saving it for some unspecified emergency when having a clean handkerchief would save him from embarrassment. Then he kissed Charlotte and went into the garden.

Jim Bogard, the new gardener he had hired at the beginning of the season, and his crew had been at work all week. He noted once more with satisfaction that dead leaves and broken branches had been raked, even from the mulched flower beds around the house and the more inaccessible spaces beneath the azalea and rhododendron bushes. The wilted yellow tops of Mary's lilies had been cut so close to the ground that one could not suspect the presence of the bulbs underneath; the Montauk daisies looked like topiary porcupines; the hedges of honeysuckle that enclosed the property on three sides, leaving it open only to the saltwater pond that lay beyond a stretch of fields beginning to turn light green with winter rye in this mild weather, had a prim and angular look. If his neighbor Foster decided to subdivide, or a developer finally got to him, it would not be difficult to plant out whatever monstrosities they might build: at worst, they could put up two or three houses. Of course, the feeling of open space and the view would be lost. This was a subject of worry for him each year, when the potatoes had been taken in and farmers had time to turn their minds to money and taxes. He had been thinking of it during his last visit to the tree nursery, and noted the great number of mature bushes for sale and their prices, which weren't so high as he had expected. Should he take the initiative and talk to Foster about his plans? Mary had never wanted to tie up such a large part of her own money in the Bridgehampton property, and she didn't want him to use his money, but Charlotte, really Charlotte and Jon—he would have to accustom himself to that formulation—might see the problem differently. One never regretted a purchase of land made to protect one's property.