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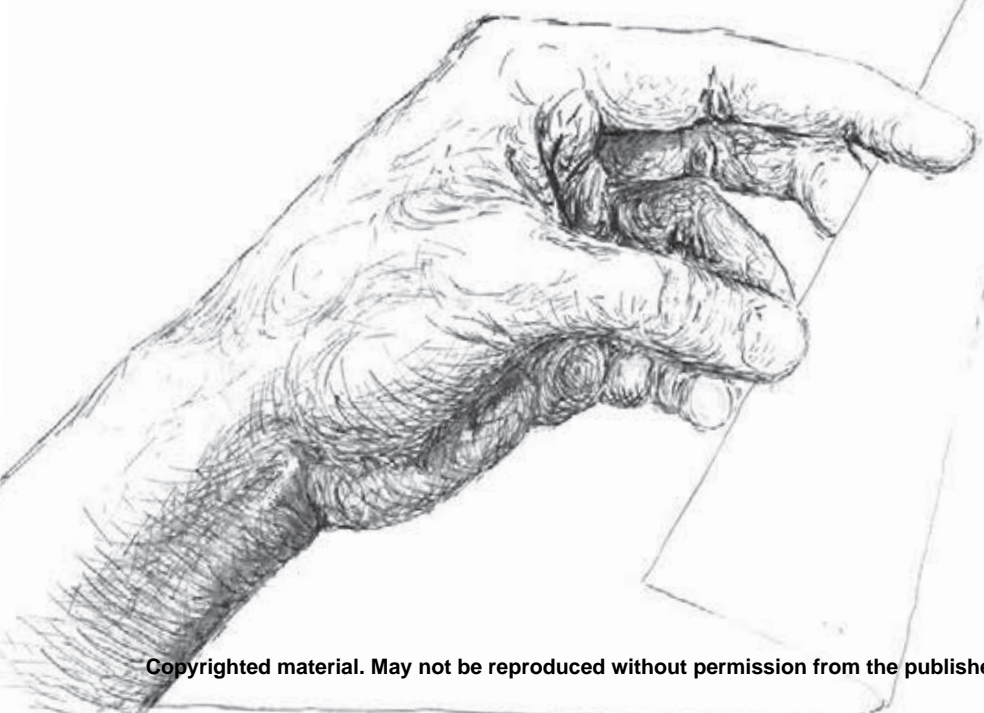
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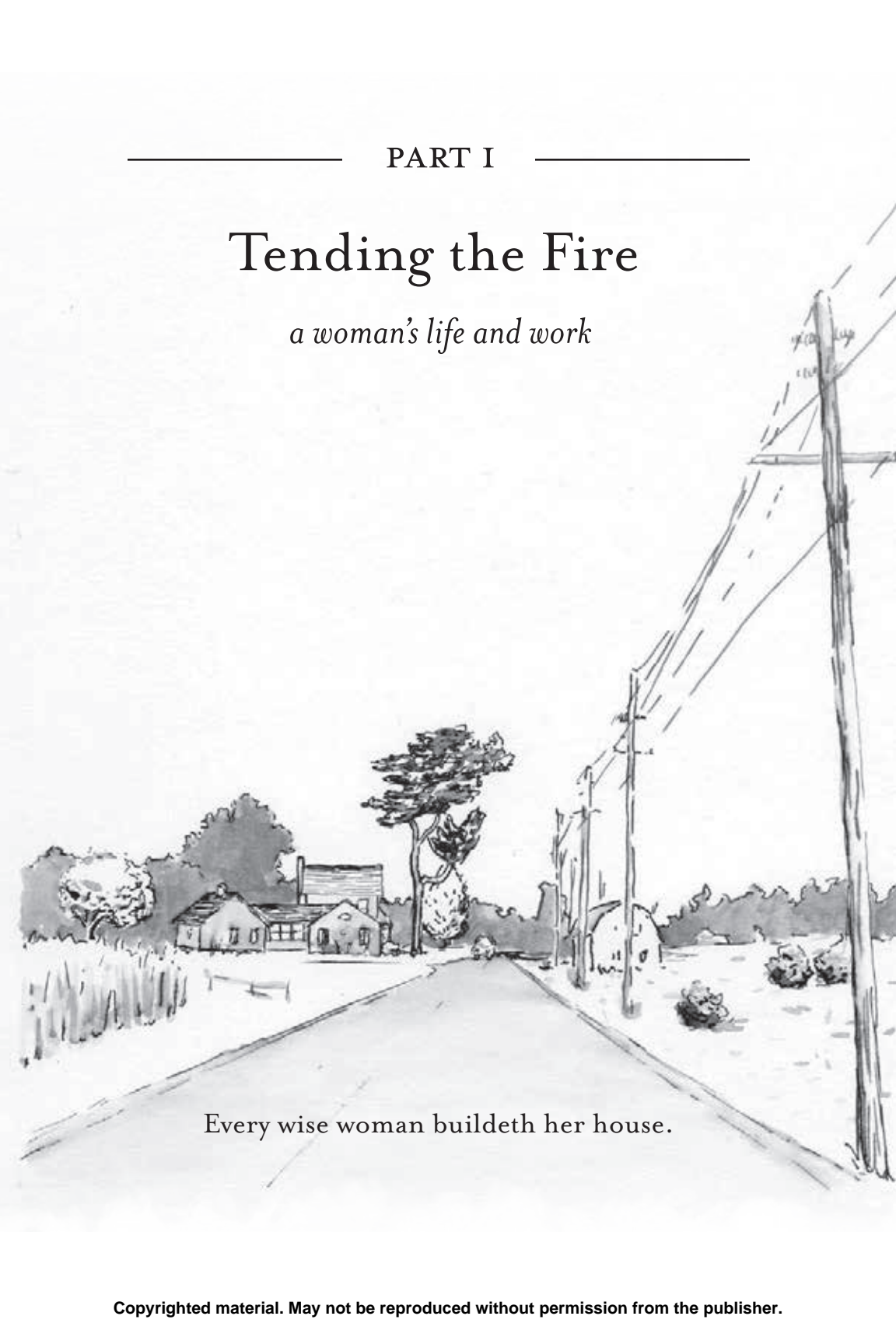
To the Alchemist

O God who can take up the common
To draw from its depth what is Thine,
Give grace to these watery verses
And pour them out strengthened to wine.
We hesitate even to praise Thee,
For words seem presumptuous and weak,
And yet must Thy servants attempt it,
Or else would the mountaintop speak.
Complete all my feeble inventions,
O God who invented the world;
Empower the words I have chosen,
And be every sandgrain impearled.

PART I

Tending the Fire

a woman's life and work



Every wise woman buildeth her house.

Early Rising

The world was waking—waking cold—
Her covers kicked aside.
A thieving wind was making bold
To blow them far and wide.

The dilatory, ashen sun
Had made the morning wait.
It is the winter fashion: one
May sleep a little late.

But some, who had not feared the freeze,
Nor dark's imagined horrors,
Before the sun had cleared the trees,
Were coming in from chores.

Flawed Ruby

Thoughts on Proverbs 31

I've never liked tapestry covers.
I'm a little ashamed to confess
That I wouldn't know spindle from distaff,
Though at least I can sew up a dress.

You may as well know that my candle
Is allowed to go out all the time.
An arbor of grapes I can handle,
But a vineyard is out of my line.

We don't wear a whole lot of scarlet,
And yet have no fear of the snow;
Our hand-me-down coats are sufficient
To ward off the bitterest blow.

My knowledge of flaxes and linens
Is also exceedingly slight,
But here is one verse I can cling to:
“She riseth while it is yet night.”

My mornings are silent and peaceful
As I set out the bread and the meat.
When I wake up my dear sleepy children,
Their breakfast is ready to eat.

My strength is by no means impressive.
My husband sits not in the gate,
But must—as I peddle no weavings—
Still labor both early and late.

Lord, help me to claim one great virtue
That ought to belong to a wife:
May I live that my husband may trust me
Every day, every hour of my life.

