



# Quiet Dell

A NOVEL

JAYNE ANNE PHILLIPS

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## ***About the Book***

In Chicago in 1931, Asta Eicher, a widow with three children, is lonely and pressed for money after the sudden death of her husband. She begins to receive seductive letters from a chivalrous, elegant man named Harry Powers, who ultimately promises to marry her and to care for her and her children. Asta agrees to go with him to West Virginia to see his house there, and then to bring her children. Weeks later, all are dead.

Emily Thornhill, a bold, independent journalist, one of the few women in the Chicago press, covers the case and becomes deeply invested in understanding what happened to this beautiful family - especially the highly imaginative youngest girl, Annabel - and determined to make sure that Powers is convicted. She also falls in love with the Chicago banker who funds the investigation, wracked by guilt himself for not saving Asta from her tragic end.

*Quiet Dell* is mesmerising, the retelling of a grisly crime at a moment in American history when women were powerless and vulnerable and newspapers were just beginning to make national stories of local crimes. It is a *tour de force* of obsession and imagination.

## ***About the Author***

Jayne Anne Phillips, born and raised in West Virginia, is the author of four previous novels, *Lark and Termite*, *MotherKind*, *Shelter*, and *Machine Dreams*, and two widely anthologised collections of stories, *Fast Lanes* and *Black Tickets*. *Lark and Termite*, winner of the Heartland Prize, was a Finalist for the 2009 National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Prix de Médicis Étranger. Phillips is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, a Bunting Fellowship, the Sue Kaufman Prize and an Academy Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. She is the Distinguished Professor of English and Director of the MFA Programme at Rutgers-Newark, the State University of New Jersey. She divides her time between Boston, New York and New Jersey.

[www.JayneAnnePhillips.com](http://www.JayneAnnePhillips.com).

ALSO BY JAYNE ANNE PHILLIIPS

*Lark and Termite*

*MotherKind*

*Shelter*

*Fast Lanes*

*Machine Dreams*

*Black Tickets*

LIMITED EDITIONS

*The Secret Country*

*How Mickey Made It*

*Counting*

*Sweethearts*

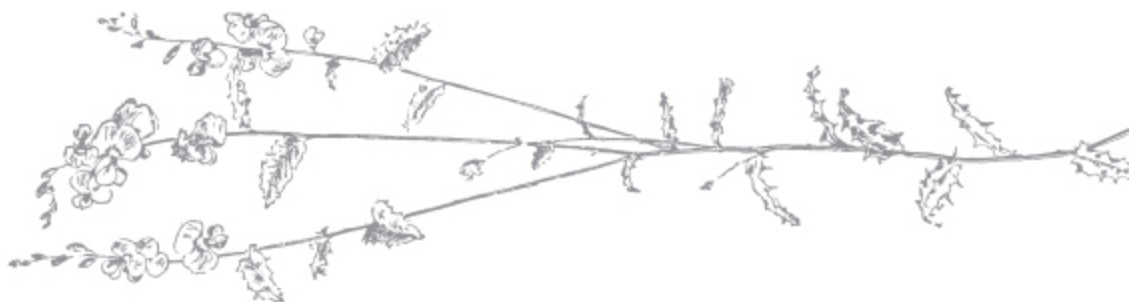
*for Annabel Eicher*



# *Quiet Dell*

A NOVEL

*Jayne Anne Phillips*




Jonathan Cape  
London

# I.


**This book is intended to be of wholesome helpfulness to mankind, and not to engender morbid desire or taint human souls.**

—E. A. Bartlett, *Love Murders of Harry F. Powers (Beware Such Bluebeards)*



**(Special)—In the backyard of the Eicher home at Park Ridge, a suburb of Chicago, stands a little marker, with the inscription, “Graveyard for Animals,” scribbled in the childish handwriting of Annabel Eicher, 9. There the Eicher children had buried a bird, playmates said.**

—*The Clarksburg Telegram*,  
December 9, 1931



## **Cost of Living, 1931**

<b>New house</b>	<b>\$6,796.00</b>
<b>Average income per year</b>	<b>\$1,858.00</b>
<b>New car</b>	<b>\$640.00</b>
<b>Average rent per month</b>	<b>\$18.00</b>

—*Remember When ... 1931, A Nostalgic Look Back in Time*

Christmas Eve  
December 24, 1930  
Park Ridge, Illinois

## ***Annabel Begins***

When the year turns, there are bells on the wind. All the old years fall on the ground in lights. When you walk across those lights, it sounds like walking on all the piled-up leaves of giant trees. But up high the bells are ringing for everyone alive. There are silver and gold and glass bells you can see through, and sleigh bells a hundred years old. My grandmother said there was a whisper for each one dead that year, and a feather drifting for each one waiting to be born.

My mother says that's just a story, but I always do hear the bells, even in my sleep, and everything in front of me is all white and open like a field. Then I start dreaming.

The trees in my dream sparkle. It's quiet in the dark, and I'm indoors, on a stage. The trees are behind me but they are alive, touching limbs and stirred just so. A silent spirit seems to move among them, and the light has found me. It's a large theater, rows and rows before me, and a balcony I glimpse through a gleam that dazzles me. The audience is quiet, waiting for me to speak. Perhaps they are watching a play, my play, or a play in which I perform. I can't make out faces beyond the footlights, but I see the tilt of heads and the shapes of ladies' hats, and a glow seems to float amongst them. There's a hum of admiration or excitement, and a swell of whisper like applause. Then the lights on the stage darken. I hear people weeping, so moved are they by the production.

Grandmother used to say that I might find myself upon a stage one day, as an actor (“don’t say ‘actress,’ ” she told me, “the word garners no respect”), or the author of a play. Grandmother admired the suffragettes and said they would open all fields of endeavor to women. If she were younger, she said, and not required at the bosom of her family, she would have joined their movement, to help them fight their war of argument and reason. She was required because Heinrich died. Her “beloved Heinrich” was my father, an only child. We called him Papa. He called Grethe “Miss” or “Missy,” and he called me “little Nell,” though my name is Annabel. I try very hard to remember him, but I don’t, not really. Papa is his portrait, in the gold frame over the parlor mantel (“That is not a photograph, my dear, that is a portrait in oils”), and he is the man in the wedding picture with Mother. One day he didn’t come home. I was four years old. Nothing was said that evening to alarm the children. Betty, our nursemaid, sat with us at dinner and put us to bed, for the police had summoned Mother and Grandmother.

Papa was struck by a streetcar in the Loop, just after dusk. He was walking from his club to the station.

I believe there was a crowd, jostling and shoving, distracted by the siren of a passing fire truck, or startled by sudden rain. He was a fine designer of silver in our own backyard workshop, and an actuary for Metropolitan Insurance and Casualty Company of Chicago. He advised on odds and probabilities. This was the irony, Grandmother said, for no one could ever have predicted the sudden death of a man so strong and healthy, who never smoked or drank and was well liked and much respected. He did business at his club because that was where business was done, and was an artist at evenings and weekends, a man known for his talent and easeful charm. He performed in theatricals at university and sang a fine tenor, but pursued mathematics. One job his entire working life, Grandmother

says, and head of actuaries when he died, as well as Mother's adviser and manager in the art of silver design. One home from the time Grethe was born, and Grandmother sold their Chicago apartment to relocate with the family. Papa wanted fresh air for the children, and fine schools, and a garden with a barn for his workshop, and a stable for a pony, and the park nearby, where we float our boats and walk through forest paths to the meadow. The meadow is high in spring and mown in summer, and Papa helped us fly kites.

I think I do remember the kites.

Grethe was eight then, and he told her to take off her glasses and run, run straight out and follow the tug of the string; there was no one in the meadow but us and the wind was high. I was little and he held me on his shoulders, clasping my knees, while the kite went up and up. The string played out in his hand against my leg.

I felt so tall, with the grass so far below me, and the kite so far above, dipping and bounding. I was holding on to Papa's hair, which was dark and thick and combed straight back, but blowing that day, blown up like the wide collar of my dress and the ribbons on the kites. I can't see Papa's face, or his eyes near mine, but sometimes, when I'm alone and I think hard, I can feel his hair in my fingers, cold and coarse, and I clench my fists to hold on.

I know all of Grandmother's stories about Papa, but the kites are not her story. Her stories are in the photograph box that she kept on her dressing table. It's a tall wooden box and the sides are four glass frames: the photographs slide right in. Heinrich, a baby in a blousy dress. Heinrich, ten years old, with Grandmother and Grandfather Eicher ("Like you, Annabel, he read the dictionary, and wrote out new words"). Heinrich in his graduation portrait. Heinrich in military uniform ("To have survived the Great War, and be killed by a streetcar in his prime"). The carved top of the

box lifts up, and the other photos fit neatly, each thick card snug in the velvet-lined inside.

The box is mine now. Grethe never looks at photographs. The faces are too small for her to see, and she doesn't care for stories. She had measles and a high fever when she was two. They nearly lost her, Grandmother said, and the crisis affected her eyes and concentration ("Due to her limitations, it's best she's not imaginative. Grethe can learn to run a home and she will marry. Until then we must protect her"). Grethe doesn't go to school any longer; she is quite as tall as Mother and goes with her to the shops and the bank. She helps plan meals, and Mother instructs her on etiquette.

Grethe is delicate. Her hair is dark like Papa's. If she doesn't remember things, I must remember for her. She plays the princess or the pilgrim in my plays and dioramas. I say the lines and she acts them out, for she has a calm slow way of moving and can hold quite still. Hart ruins the dioramas and rouses Duty to barking and running about. My brother Hart is very quick and I must give him long speeches and grave actions. He must be the hero or the villain, and lay flowers at Mother's feet by the end.

Duty is our Boston terrier that follows Hart everywhere and sleeps on our beds by turns. Betty brought him from the pound and Mother let him stay. The pony had been sold by then, to a family on a farm. Duty was already trained, Betty said, because he'd lost his family in a tornado, and a boy needed a dog. Hart wanted to call him Topper because he has a white spot around one eye like a gentleman with a monocle. But Duty wore a collar with letters sewn on and wouldn't answer to any other name. Just as well, Mother said. A pet needs walking and feeding, and his name will serve to instruct. Duty knows to sit, and Hart taught him to fetch and dance. When Grandmother was sick, Duty lay at her door. The nurse was coming and going with trays and said that dog would trip her, he must be shut up.

Duty is in my dream. I stand upon the stage before the trees and Duty is there, sitting just at the edge of the light. His little legs are stubby and his chest is broad and his short brown coat shines like a mirror. Duty's eyes are wide apart and he can seem to gaze in two directions, but he only looks off toward the wings, to where no one can see.

Grandmother always told me that our dreams are wishes or fancies, gifts of the dream fairies that guide and care for us in our sleep. She said that poems and stories are the whisperings of angels we cannot see, beings once like you and me, who know more than we can know while we are here. "Address me in your mind when I am gone," Grandmother told me. "I will hear you always, and will send a reply in the sounds of the grass and the wind, and other little signs, for we no longer speak in words when we have slipped away."

The nurse didn't come on Thanksgiving. I think Grandmother was glad. Mr. Charles O'Boyle, our former roomer, would come for dinner, and the Verbergs from next door, who were bringing the turkey and the chestnut dressing. Mother was making the vegetables and her gelatin surprise, and Charles would bring the pies. Charles is a great one for making pies. He baked them every Sunday, the years he roomed with us, before the Dunnegan Company posted him back to Chicago. Grethe was setting table with the Haviland china and Hart was to lay fires in the dining room and parlor grates. We roast marshmallows on the long forks at Thanksgiving, and figs with chocolate. It was my turn to sit with Grandmother. I brought up tea for one.

"My dear," she said. "You gladden every heart."

I fed her with the teaspoon. She could not hold the cup.

She talked about the silken cord that binds her soul to mine. She slept and woke and slept and woke.

The cord is a real cord and I keep it under my pillow. Not all of it. Once it was very long, the last of the silk braid

Mother used on the sofa pillows and parlor drapes, and Grandmother made a game of it for walking through the park. She invented games for us after Papa died, and took us everywhere, to the circus and the moving pictures, but always to the park (“So near it is like our own backyard”). Betty was seeing to Mother and Mother was settling accounts. We children went, afternoons, with Grandmother, single file, holding to the cord. She used to say there was one of her and three of us, we children must hold to the cord just so. She fashioned one large knot for each right hand, and I was first behind her. Then came Grethe, and then Hart, our gentleman protector, with Duty at his heels. We walked two blocks to the park and the arched gates, past the fountain and the pools, into the woods where the trees grow close. We held to the cord in silence, for Grandmother liked us to hear small sounds—the cricket and the mantis, and grasses moving in the meadow beyond the pines. Sound travels even in the cord we hold, Grandmother said, for the heart beats in the hand.

The cord that’s left is but a curl wrapped round a knot and tied in double bows. Now if we go to the park, I tie it round Mrs. Pomeroy, who is only a rag doll, no bigger than my two hands, so the cord goes round her waist four times like a golden belt. She was a gift from Papa. We all have our beloved companions, Grandmother said. Where I found such a name she did not know, as I could barely lisp the words when I was two.

Hart says Papa brought him to the park to ride the pony on winter Sundays, and led him all around the meadow. Grethe has asthma and the air was too cold, but Papa and Hart dressed warmly, like explorers on an expedition. Their breath was white as smoke and the afternoons were blue.

I was too young to ride. I don’t remember the pony, but he was dear to Grethe, to Hart, and all his friends. A Shetland, Hart says, small as a big dog, with his mane in his eyes, and long eyelashes like Mrs. Pomeroy’s, though



hers are sewn in thread. One could lead him about the yard with a carrot ("A farmer's son brought hay and feed, cleaned the stall, exercised the animal in bad weather. Your father would have that pony, but the expense was too much, you see, after he died"). There were fine parties at birthdays and May Day, with mimes and jugglers, pony rides and rolling hoops.

Now we have balloons and Mother makes ice cream.

There wasn't ice cream on Thanksgiving.

It was understood I would sit for the blessing. Then Charles carried my plate upstairs. Mother brought a clear broth for Grandmother, but Grandmother was asleep.

"You are not like others," Grandmother liked to tell me. "Your dreams see past us."

Once she bade me close my eyes and touch my forehead to her cool, dry mouth. She kissed me and blessed me and said, whispering, not to ponder the pictures I see, but to hear and see and feel them. Their stories are truths, she told me, for each foretells the eternal garden in which we'll all walk together.

I wonder if that garden is earth or air, if one hungers there, or feeds on nurture that renews itself, like the dew and the wind, like the bells, ringing the old year into the dark, snow swelling every sound.

I asked Grandmother, did she remember Denmark. *Min lille svale*, she said, and slept.

I ate my dinner. Snow fell past the windows like a picture in a book.

Duty does not really dance. Hart calls it dancing and taught him with bits of meat. Duty stands and moves forward, then back, holding his front paws up before him. Like a suitor at a soiree, Grandmother said. Not such an old dog, Mother said, if he can learn new tricks.

The trees in my dream shine like trees on a glittery valentine. The sparkle looks like snow, catching light, or drops of rain held fast. It is a wonderful effect. Living trees

could stand upon a stage in pots of earth, and the limbs might move on wires, gently, as though stirred by a breath.

Grandmother woke and said, "I fear your mother has not been entirely provident."

Then she slept.

Betty has been gone some time now, as we are too old for a nurse. Mrs. Abernathy was a medical nurse, and very strict. She wore a uniform and kept me out of the room. Grandmother told everyone I was the only nurse she needed, but I was not allowed. I could hold her hand at certain times, or read aloud the speeches from my plays.

Mrs. Pomeroy is old and soft. Her arms and legs are mended. She will wear the silken cord in my Christmas play and I will voice her words. She will be Grandmother and speak as Grandmother speaks.

We took turns at Grandmother's bedside on Thanksgiving. I stayed longest, and scarcely left her side. Grandmother told me, when she was still up and sitting in her chair, that she would sleep longer and longer, and then not wake up. She said her death would be a blessed death and one she wished for me when I am very old. She told me a poem to write down, and I wrote each line exactly. I read the poem out for her two times. Then she told me to put the paper in her bedside table, and to open it again when she was gone ("Death is not sad if one has lived a long life, and been of service").

I wanted to look at the poem, but I knew the words.

*What lies behind is not myself  
But a shell or carapace  
Cast off, an earthly taste.  
I have gone on you see  
To make a place for thee.*

Grandmother can hear me. I do believe so. And I hear her voice in the words of her poem, and in other words that

come to me.

Perhaps she has sent me the dream about the trees. I could hear a sigh in the branches, a bare whisper. No doubt there was a fan offstage, blowing a breath of motion.

Grandmother used to say, so little can move so much.

## II.

**In the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. Other forms were near.... He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence.... His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly....**

—James Joyce, “The Dead”

} Christmas Day }  
} December 25, 1930 }  
} Park Ridge, Illinois }

### ***Charles O'Boyle Considers***

He woke at dawn, certain of a course of action.

They understood one another. Asta was not like others, and would never condemn him. She was the sister he'd wished for, sensible, stalwart, and they were the family he returned to, every holiday, and nearly once a month. The boxes in the garage, his tools, books, drawing implements, the archery set he planned to pass on to Hart, held his place. His job and promotion at Dunnegan were secure; he could put most of his salary toward keeping the family afloat. He must convince her, plead his suit gravely, lovingly, for he could not live as he did forever, and she could not go on as she was. Anna, Asta, Anna! It was madness to sell the house in the middle of winter, in this grim economic climate that showed no signs of abating. What she'd said last night had really quite disturbed him. To move the children from their neighborhood, their schools, and with what means of support? And in the aftermath of Lavinia's death, which had surely wakened memories of the sudden loss of their father, memories nearly unconscious for Annabel, who was so young at the time, and clearly a highly imaginative child.

Asta was not thinking such. Early in their friendship, she'd offered him the privilege of addressing her by her pet name, Anna. It was that girl within the woman he must now protect.

He lay back in bed, considering. The air at the windows was white and mist obscured any view. He felt marooned and comforted, afloat in the fairy-tale world he associated with this home in which art and music quietly underscored the players: Lavinia, old world grandmother, matriarch of dwindling fortune; Asta, artist widow, aging Cinderella abandoned by any prince; innocent Grethe, whose steadfast gaze belied her lost acuity; intrepid Hart, equally adept at playing the clown or the explorer; and Annabel, recording all in her childish tableaux and plays, reciting and remarking, strewing her bright optimism before her like bread crumbs across a frozen steppe.

This Park Ridge enclave of Lutherans was so determinedly American; the Eichers no longer referenced their Northern European heritage, but Andersen and Grimm had originated their horrific tales in Denmark and Germany. Grim indeed, Charles considered them: seductive trickery, leading little children to the slaughter like fattened lambs. Make-believe encouraged the fantasy that virtue was finally rewarded: Charles knew it was not.

His own mother's innocence had victimized them both. Had she not possessed her small inheritance, they'd have lived in penury. Undeterred by the approaching birth of his child, her husband had left her, disappearing almost professionally when he realized his lawyers could not break the terms of her trust. Devoted to son and church, she taught Charles her own father's belief in ambition, hard work, husbandry, for poverty was the end of safety, a casting upon the waters. Her trust assured her a decent life and protected her into middle age; she sold bonds to pay for Charles' education at Notre Dame: engineering—solid, architectural, eminently useful. His fine arts instructors encouraged him, invited him into their circles, but he demurred, consciously denying the father whose chiseled profile, stylistic flair, and dark good looks were his only legacy. Charles modeled his behavior, if not his meticulous

dress, on the portly maternal grandfather who'd provided for him even in death. He went to work immediately after graduation, easily supporting his mother and himself until her last illness depleted all. Charles borrowed to assure that she was privately nursed and died in her own bed. Then he broke up the house, sold everything to cover the debt, accepted Dunnegan's transfer to Park Ridge. He'd begun again, and found rooms with the Eichers.

Lavinia had opened the door to him, smilingly remarking that he resembled the Arrow collar man just then familiar from advertisements. No, he'd assured her, he made an honest living with the respected Dunnegan Company, and he held before him the newspaper in which Asta's notice had appeared. "I am Charles O'Boyle," he told Lavinia, "the gentleman roomer you seek."

He became Asta's confidant, her trusted friend.

They knew one another's secrets. Asta was German, not Danish, brought up in London and schooled in Copenhagen. She'd met Heinrich at the Artists League and married into his secular Jewish family. The Eichers were moneyed, assimilated intellectuals, all of them passed away, save Lavinia, who managed an inheritance at the behest of her only son. They'd emigrated in luxury on the *Queen Mary*, a wedding trip: husband, wife, and the husband's elegant mother, a kindly dowager whose every remonstrance to her new daughter was couched in compliments. Lavinia had purchased the Chicago apartment, then the Park Ridge Victorian with the expansive barn; she supported the growing family with deepest pleasure. The children didn't know they were half-Jewish. It was collusion Heinrich had framed and sealed in his marriage to a Lutheran. Asta insisted on Lutheran religious education for her children; they'd chosen Park Ridge for its Lutheran community and the artisans' collective husband and wife immediately joined, as much as for Heinrich's ongoing insurance employment in Chicago. The inheritance wouldn't last

forever, though it might have ensured good schools for the children had Heinrich lived.

He had not. The Eichers were a charmed and beautiful village on which dark stars fell. Misfortune was common, of course, but the family persevered with such well-bred patience, and made of pretense a brave and moral art.

The holidays made much of celestial markers. Wonder. Light. *Royal beauty bright*. Charles had spent every Christmas Day, the past four years, in this house. Yes, it was that long now. Usually he arrived for tea, arms laden, and stayed for dinner. Good he'd allowed more time this year. Yesterday was calmer, time alone with Anna to talk, observe. He hadn't seen them since Thanksgiving. Lavinia had died that night, and he'd canceled his appointments, stayed on to help with arrangements, sleeping in the room he'd left two years ago. Yesterday, on his arrival, Anna made a point of directing Hart to "the guest room" with Charles' bag. Annabel of course followed, carrying the parcels of presents, except for the very large one, which he'd left on the porch behind the wicker swing. Anna watched approvingly as the children clambered up the stairs. He'd glanced at her, surprised, and she nodded, indicating that yes, he would sleep in Lavinia's room, undoubtedly the first "guest" to occupy it.

"Charles," she said, and took his arm. "Let Hart settle you in. I'll take your overcoat, and that lovely white scarf. There's tea in the dining room."

Perhaps, when they'd come to their arrangement, she would address him differently. My dear, she would say, and he would answer, My darling Anna, my dear Anna, for she was very dear to him. Making money, flying as though driven, he'd lost sight of what mattered, including her, and this home, even the idea of home. Sending the children souvenirs, postcards, valentines, from Mexico, Canada, California, as though to reserve what he couldn't embrace,



he knew his attentions pleased Anna; his every remembrance of the children was a gift to her.

He rose now from Lavinia's bed, a strange thought, though everything in the room was changed. The closets were empty. Anna had told him she'd discarded the sheets and bedding, even the curtains and rug, warning Annabel days in advance. Her grandmother no longer needed a room; she did not need earthly things; a room was not a shrine. The floor was bare, the bedspread a simple muslin coverlet. Wooden half-shutters afforded privacy. The room could house a maid or cook. Or not yet. Let them all first adjust to other changes: to his permanent residence, to a marriage and sacred contract, and the easing of financial burdens. He would free Anna, fund her work, upgrade the studio barn behind the house, which was now so shabby and run-down.

Charles had resources. Yes, he must make that point strongly. He'd prospered, invested well, risen in his profession, and he wanted to protect this family, cosset them, as much for his own sake. Theirs was the only unspoiled world he'd ever encountered. He would give generously, gladly. Money should mean more than discretion and foreign hotels. Far from home, he pursued his indulgences voraciously but avoided youth who might attach themselves, and anyone who spoke English, never revealing personal information, or even his name. He returned dazed and satiated from these sojourns, plunging into a work schedule grueling enough to provoke exhaustion and dreamless sleep.

This Christmas was bitterly cold. The radiators hissed.

Charles went to the window in his nightclothes, glimpsing the backyard outbuildings through denuded trees. The playhouse windows were partially shuttered. The studio behind, an expanded barn, sagged visibly. Quite an operation in its time, a thriving, part-time cooperative, numerous artisans forging Eicher designs marked with the

lovely inverted EAE. He remembered Anna working when he'd roomed with the family, small pieces, but she couldn't support her design business after she was widowed.

He'd thought Lavinia's death a release for the family, as well as a sorrow, that her resources would go to Anna and the children. Now he knew that Lavinia's funds were exhausted. Years ago, she'd purchased the Cedar Street property with the understanding that her son would support her. Anna had mortgaged the house to pay expenses, and used Lavinia's savings to pay for medical bills and private nursing those last months. Charles should have known. He'd worked from home half a year, supervising his mother's care. But Anna had no income. And so this decision to sell her house, the only home her children had known, and do what?

His breath fogged the glass, and he placed his hand upon it. Instantly, the condensation withdrew and the laden pines appeared, their limbs piled with snow near the window. A few strands of metallic tinsel, tangled in the branches, blowing wildly, no doubt bespoke Annabel's attempts to decorate the playhouse. Heinrich had built it when Grethe was a baby, anticipating the lively daughter she might have been. Now the starlike fissures in the playhouse window glittered with ice. Heinrich's death, yes. Sudden. Away from home, Charles recalled. An accident—a streetcar, a rail station. Exactly as might happen to anyone, to Charles, tomorrow or in ten years' time, and no one to care or bury him, unless he made a change.

He opened Lavinia's window wide and leaned forward onto the sill, chest deep in cold suspended air. The silence seemed doleful, eerie and total, the air very still. He fancied he heard, distantly, the jingling of bells. No, it was the dog, the skittering click of the terrier's nails as Duty made his way across floor and carpet runner, from Grethe's room to Hart's, to Charles' room, the guest room, for Charles was a guest.

The dog nudged his door, waiting. Charles shut the window and admitted his visitor. Duty walked briskly to the bed and jumped up, settling against the pillows before peering at him attentively. The baleful, slightly walled gaze seemed disconcertingly human. Charles leaned down to stroke the dog's short, alert ears and wondered guiltily if his leave-taking two years ago, necessary as it was, had contributed to Anna's present financial crisis. Selfishly, visiting on the odd weekend, he hadn't noticed the leaner look of things. Anna had sold most of the silver, Heinrich's designs and her own. The clocks from the mantels were gone, the German music box with the bell jar casing, and the lovely Danish cabinet with the blue tiles. Charles himself had purchased a tea set with classic, masculine lines, an early piece of Anna's she obviously valued, when he moved back to Chicago. He would bring it home; it belonged here. He could not restore what Anna had surrendered, but he could assure her safety.

He must shave. Go down early and speak with Anna, before the children wakened. The dog yipped at him once as though in reproof, and settled closer against the pillows.

Charles lathered his face, regarding himself in the mirror. Hart had arranged Charles' mug and shaving brush, just so beside the soap, as though to make him welcome. It wasn't ideal, a lone boy among women. And Hart, so aware he was the man of the house, would struggle in future to mitigate the needs of three females whose characters and requirements were so disparate.

Charles understood, especially on this day. Christmas moved, saddened, excited him. He'd loved the holiday as a child. All of Chicago lit up. Mother took him skating before Christmas tea at one of the fine hotels, and he was confirmed near Christmas, an altar boy whose priest spoke of "our Father who will never forsake us." Mother adored Father Kerrigan and urged her son toward him, the better

to supply Charles with good and holy influence. Innocently, Charles accepted the priest's attentions; he learned subterfuge, hypocrisy, secrecy at Father Kerrigan's knee, at his hands. He learned to hate the man's diminutive physical stature, his peppermint smell. The sound of his footsteps, the rustle of his vestments and surplice, provoked a sick, gnawing shame. Charles left the Church at fourteen, embraced academics, track, archery. Later, throughout the years at Notre Dame, he avoided services except at Advent and the Festival of Epiphany. The words of the Latin hymns, so familiar from childhood, made betrayal seem universal, his own confusions relative and unimportant.

*Gaudete! Gaudete!*  
*Christus est natus ex Maria virgine!*  
*Gaudete!*

He could, almost, rejoice, and his mother stood beside him, proud of his success, his excellent marks, his athletic prowess. A sprinter, he sailed over hurdles at all-conference meets, an acknowledged champion whose long legs flashed like blades. His mother had relocated to Bloomington and displayed his trophies there before their return to Chicago and the start of his career. But that home was gone, and Charles' apartment was not a home.

He ran the water hot, filling the small room with steam and shaving the lather from his face. He was needed here. He could have children. Not squalling infants but these very well-brought-up girls and boy with their European manners and courtesy, children whom he already regarded as family, like nieces and nephews. He would never interfere, of course, or presume to take their father's place, but Charles was not a stranger. Surely they'd accept him as their mother's husband, someone to care for her, and he did, truly. Grethe, at fourteen, was adolescent now; she would need protection, someone to see she met the right

sort of man someday, or no man. Let the three of them go on happily, Asta, Charles, and Grethe, as Hart went off to school, and Annabel, the charming minx, opened a theater company. Joking. Perhaps she could become a librarian, settle her head-in-the-clouds sensibility. She was still young, chunky and solid, but would grow slender and tall, like Grethe, who was plain, thank God. Annabel, though, would be lovely, quick: that round, catlike face and high cheekbones, and sparkling hazel eyes.

Charles leaned into the mirror. He was still virile, attractive, but he'd torn himself on one shoal after another these last years, and righted the wreckage, never obvious, considerate of his job, his position, yet he'd aged, his face was fleshier, while Anna looked exactly as she'd looked five years ago. As she would look five years hence.

The age difference was not so great. He was nearly thirty-seven. Anna was forty-five.

He bent to wash off the last of the soap in the basin and thought of Hart, learning to shave soon, taught by whom? Charles knew the reality of widows and children, families drawn closer by the dampened fire. Perhaps it was why the Eicher home had so appealed. He'd recognized the tenor of feeling immediately. Intent on becoming a man of means, he'd arrived on Anna's doorstep, an aging orphan whose inclinations set him apart.

Inclinations: Anna's word. She saw his desires, his compulsions, as inclination, nothing more. Years ago, she'd spoken to him frankly, understanding all he didn't say. *Charles, you're getting older. The senses bank their fires. Other things grow more important.* Her dear, good face, her strength, her lovely gray eyes! And then she'd touched his wrist and whispered, beseeching him: *You must be careful. Promise me you'll be cautious.*

Amazing what women knew if they cared for one.

Anna, what depths were yours? What tortured you? He would know. She would tell him as they lay side by side, her

hands in his. He would install his gramophone on the large corner table in her room, his record collection on the shelf below, and play for her all those sweeps and phrases that set his mind aflame. He was certain he could perform if called upon. Yes, why not? If that was what she wanted.

A man was not one thing.

The pathology of hiding and shame was the harmful element. The Greeks had not regarded love and morality within modernity's narrow frame. And he carried Catholicism's weight. He'd not told his mother of his experience, his helpless anger, but she knew or suspected, or she'd never have accepted his lapse of faith, his refusal to enter any sacristy. He'd walk her to confession if he was at home, and sit smoking outside on the broad bench beside the street. He imagined that boys coming and going from services glanced at him, and once a tall young priest met his eyes openly, then turned away without speaking. Charles' temples burned, thinking of it.

The risks he'd allowed himself. The devastation he'd narrowly escaped, or not entirely. But that was past, must all be past.

He bathed his eyes in the water once more and toweled his moist skin dry. He'd taken care. None of it would follow him, but he could not combat his tendencies alone, nor trace the confusion to one cause. He must gain focus, stability, reason to live differently.

Now he stood at the bedside, listening. The dog yawned and stretched on the coverlet, watching him. Charles chose a pleated shirt with French cuffs from his open suitcase and dressed carefully in a suit made for him in the Loop by a London tailor. He thought of Anna in her room, awake, he was certain, lying still before the tumult of the day. Snow was falling steadily. Last night, after Anna went up, he'd placed his presents for them under the lavishly ornamented tree, retrieving the large one from the porch. He'd purchased a fine gold locket for Anna, and a set of