

Thirteen

Now it's hours later. Paul sits working. There are several pages on the table beside him.

Annie enters—she holds papers in her hands.

ANNIE. I'm sorry, Paul, but this is not right. You'll have to do it over again.

PAUL. (*Stunned.*) You don't like it? What happened to "I'll treasure whatever you do"?

ANNIE. Like it? Of course I like it—it's beautiful! But it's not right. Throw it all out. Except for the part of naming Gravedigger Wilkes after me, you can leave that in.

PAUL. Maybe you're being a little hasty here?

ANNIE. Paul—what you've written just isn't fair.

PAUL. Fair? How is it not fair? It's Misery, alive, just like you asked for!

ANNIE. Remember, Ian did ride for Dr. Cleary at the end of the last book, that's okay, but his horse fell jumping that fence and Ian broke his shoulder and he never reached the doctor. So this book can't start with an "experimental blood transfusion" that saves her life, because she was dead and buried in the ground. You cheated.

PAUL. I wouldn't call that cheating—

ANNIE. When I was growing up in Bakersfield my favorite thing in the whole wide world was to go to movies on Saturday afternoons for the chapter plays—

PAUL. (*Cutting in.*) —cliffhangers—

ANNIE. (*Suddenly angry.*) —I know that Mister Man! They also call them chapter plays—I'm not stupid, you know.

Beat.

Anyway, my favorite was *Rocket Man* and once it was a no-brakes chapter—the bad guys stuck him in a car on a mountain road and knocked him out and—

She is back in her childhood more strongly now.

—and welded the doors shut and tore out the brakes and started him to his doom and he woke up and tried to steer and tried to get out but the car went off a cliff before he could escape and it crashed and burned—

She's remembering it all so clearly.

—and I was so upset and excited and the next week you better believe I was first in line and they always start with the end of the last week and there was Rocket Man trying to get out and here came the cliff and JUST BEFORE the car went off he jumped free and all the kids cheered— (*More powerful now.*) — but I didn't cheer, I stood right up and started shouting, "This isn't what happened last week—have you all got amnesia? Are you too stupid to remember?—THEY JUST CHEATED US—THIS WASN'T FAIR—" (*Shouting now.*) "He was in the car when it went over! HE DIDN'T GET OUT OF THE COCKADOODIE CAR!"

PAUL. —they always cheated like that in cliff— (*Stops himself.*) — in chapter plays.

ANNIE. But not you. Not with my Misery. Misery was buried in the ground at the end of the last book, Paul, so you'll have to start from there.

Pause.

Do you understand?

PAUL. Yes.

He does understand; she is right.

Yes.

ANNIE. Then you know what's wrong?

PAUL. I do. But I don't know if I know how to fix it.

There is a long pause, as Annie heads toward the door. She hesitates, then turns around.

ANNIE. Well, put your thinking cap on. This is exciting, don't you think so?

PAUL. I think if it was easy to write a book, everybody would do it.

ANNIE. Maybe it was a bee.

PAUL. What?

ANNIE. Maybe it was a bee.

Paul looks at her. She blushes red.

I saw it once at the hospital. Sometimes a beesting can cause a comatose condition which can make a person seem dead. Similar to a cataleptic state.

She is embarrassed.

Oh gosh, you're the writer, not me. Just forget I said anything. I'm sorry.

PAUL. Don't be sorry—

But she closes the door and is gone, her footsteps hurrying towards to the kitchen.

Long pause as he considers this, rejects it, considers it again, turning over ideas in his head, rejecting, combining, connecting. Then, it hits.

Holy shit. Goddamnit, Annie.

Paul reaches for the paper. Puts it in the machine. Still working through his thought, he begins to type, slowly. It feels different than when he started earlier. His typing gets a bit faster. He removes his sling with some pain and continues typing, faster now, with both hands. It gains some momentum. He types and types, as the sun begins to rise.

Fourteen

Now it's bright sunlight. Paul sits at the table. He is very tired and very nervous. Annie sits across the room studying some typed pages. Now she looks at him—hard to tell what she's thinking.

PAUL. Well? Should I keep going?

Annie suddenly looks as joyous as we've yet seen her.

ANNIE. I'll kill you if you don't, Mister Man! (*Building into a fervor.*) —Oh, Paul, when Ian realized that the reason they'd buried Misery alive was because a beesting had put her in a temporary coma—

Nineteen

*In the dark, thunder and lightning. Then, lights up on Paul's room. It is a beautiful day. The storm is over. "Moonlight Sonata" plays. Liberace has never been more romantic.**

Paul sleeps.

Annie is standing there by his bed. Paul blinks, tries to move—

—but he's groggy—

—helpless—

—He has been strapped to his bed.

Annie stands there, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed.

ANNIE. Hi, Punkin.

Paul manages a nod.

Guess what?—I know you've been out.

PAUL. What... What are you talking about? What's going on?

ANNIE. You've been out of your room.

PAUL. No I haven't. Annie, what is this?

ANNIE. You've been out at least twice. I warned you not to try to trick me, Paul.

Paul says nothing, just stares at her, waiting. Annie walks slowly back to the foot of the bed.

PAUL. I don't know what you're talking about.

ANNIE. You left marks with the wheelchair the first time you got out. I know there's Novril missing. And you shouldn't have turned off the timer, Paul. At first I was so confused as to how in the world you got out, then last night I found your key.

Now she holds up the typewriter key.

PAUL. Okay, I went out the two times, once because YOU left me here in pain and I needed pills, and the other to get water so I didn't die of thirst.

* See Note on Songs/Recordings at the back of this volume.

ANNIE. I suppose you never tried the doors, or the phone?

PAUL. Sure I did, but you know the phone doesn't work and the doors are locked, and where am I going?

ANNIE. So you went out twice, once for pills and once for water.

PAUL. Yes, Annie, that's it, I swear.

ANNIE. You're lying to me. But that's okay, Paul.

Beat.

Looking for this?

Annie pulls out the knife. Paul knows the jig is up.

I found this right in the bed before I gave you your pre-op shot.

PAUL. Pre-op?

ANNIE. Last night it became so clear. Would you ever really want to stay? I had to ask myself that. And as much as I wanted to pull the wool over my own eyes, I suppose I knew the answer even before I found your key.

She holds up the typewriter "n" key.

Paul, do you know about the early days at the Kimberly Diamond Mine? Do you know what they did to the native workers who stole diamonds? Now don't you worry, they didn't kill them—that would be like junking a Mercedes just because it had a broken spring.

She is building to climax now.

No, if they caught them, they had to make sure they could go on working—but they also had to make sure they could never run away. What they did was called hobbling.

And with that she reaches down out of sight and comes up holding a block of wood.

PAUL. Annie—whatever you're thinking about doing, please don't do it.

Annie wedges the block firmly between his legs just above the ankles, secures it and adjusts his feet.

ANNIE. Now don't fuss. I gave you a shot of Fentanyl to relax you.

PAUL. Why would I run away? I'm a writer, Annie—it's all I am—and I've never written this well—even you said that this is my best,

didn't you? Didn't you? Why would I leave a place where I'm doing my best work? It doesn't make any sense.

ANNIE. Now, don't fuss.

Annie picks up a sledgehammer.

PAUL. Annie, I promise I'll never leave my room again. I'll stay here forever. Annie, I'll be good, I swear, I'll be good! Please, PLEASE, please, I'm begging you, don't do this. I'll be good!

She pulls the sledgehammer back—

ANNIE. Darling trust me, it's for the best.

—gets ready to strike.

PAUL. Annie, for God's sake please!

ANNIE. Darling, relax... I'm a trained nurse.

And with that, she swings the sledgehammer against his right ankle—

—there is the sound of metal crushing bone—

Paul's scream is terrifying.

Almost done—just one more.

She swings the sledgehammer against his other ankle.

God I love you.

Paul cannot stop screaming. The set rotates.

Twenty

A week later. Annie's front porch. It's spring now. Annie opens the door, and the TV is on loudly in the background.

ANNIE. Sheriff?

BUSTER. Hope I'm not interrupting. I tried calling but there was never an answer, phone just rang and rang.

ANNIE. Oh goodness, I turn the TV up full volume, my hearing is not what it used to be—I'll never hear the phone when M.A.S.H. is on! Do you like M.A.S.H.?

didn't you? Didn't you? Why would I leave a place where I'm doing my best work? It doesn't make any sense.

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BUSTER. I don't watch much TV.

ANNIE. Oh, well...

She closes the front door.

What can I do for you, Sheriff?

BUSTER. I felt I should come by, ma'am. When I was here in February, you told me Paul Sheldon was your hero.

ANNIE. Is my hero. (*Excited.*) Oh my God—you're here to tell me you found him?

BUSTER. No ma'am. We didn't find him, but we did find his car. Crashed it off the side of a hill, just a few miles from here. The snow's all melted that way now. Looked like it sat at the bottom of the hill for months.

ANNIE. Are you telling me he's dead?

BUSTER. Well, I can't say for sure, ma'am, but the FBI is one hundred percent sure. They found his car and told me he must have crawled out after the crash and died.

ANNIE. But you don't think so?

BUSTER. Oh most likely they're right. They're the FBI. I thought the car door looked like it may have been pried open, but that didn't add up to them. They think—he couldn't have gotten too far if he was injured, and the body would have to be close by. But since we haven't found a body, I figured there's really only one explanation.

He lets that hang there a moment.

ANNIE. What's that?

BUSTER. The coyotes got to him.

ANNIE. No! Please, please no!

BUSTER. I hate being the one to tell you all this. Pete at the general store tells me you really are Paul Sheldon's biggest fan. Says you have him set the first copy aside for you every time a new novel comes out.

ANNIE. I told you as much.

BUSTER. Well, at least you got to see him in town.

ANNIE. I never saw him. I'd certainly remember if I had.

BUSTER. That's right, you said that.

ANNIE. I'm sure he came here for peace and quiet and not to be bothered by the likes of us.

BUSTER. It's strange, both of them coming to an end at the same time.

ANNIE. Both of them?

BUSTER. Paul Sheldon and Misery.

She keeps looking at him.

Oh... I picked up Mr. Sheldon's last Misery book. Read the whole thing.

ANNIE. You did? What did you think?

BUSTER. Sure came as a shock to me, Misery dying like that at the end. Didn't see that coming.

ANNIE. Misery's not dead.

BUSTER. How's that?

ANNIE. Misery's not dead, Sheriff. I just know it.

Pause.

BUSTER. Well, I don't think there'll be any more books, Ms. Wilkes.

ANNIE. There already is.

Buster looks back at her.

As his number one fan, I know he would never have left the Lodge unless he'd finished a new book. So when he turns up, or when you find his body, you'll find the next Misery.

BUSTER. I hope you're right about that.

ANNIE. I'm certain. And you should read the whole series. From the beginning.

BUSTER. Well maybe I'll do that. You stay out of trouble now.

She turns and goes into the house.

Twenty-Two

The set turns. Annie opens the door to find Buster there, all business.

BUSTER. May I come in?

ANNIE. You must think I've got no manners. Please—

Buster enters with her to the kitchen.

I made some coffee—let me get you some.

BUSTER. There's something I forgot to ask you. When I was talking to Pete at the general store he also mentioned you've become the biggest customer he ever had for typing paper. I'm hoping you can explain that to me.

Annie looks away from Buster for a moment. Then she starts to speak, very quietly.

And so sad.

ANNIE. You must never tell anyone what I'm about to tell you.

BUSTER. Depends if you're breaking the law.

ANNIE. *(Fighting back tears.)* When you told me that Paul Sheldon was missing, that he was most likely out there frozen to death or worse, I got down on my knees and I prayed. *(Shaking her head.)* And while I was down on my knees, God answered me.

Buster is caught up in her story—this is not what he'd been expecting.

God told me to get ready.

BUSTER. For what?

ANNIE. To try and be Paul Sheldon's replacement. He said he has given so much pleasure to so many people and there's a shortage of pleasure on this planet these days, in case you hadn't noticed.

Annie is fighting back tears but she manages to get her words out.

God told me that, "Since you are his number one fan in all the universe, you should make up new stories as if you were Paul Sheldon." *(Harder to speak.)* I said to God, "I don't think I can do

that. I've never once in my life thought I could tell stories." And God said to me, "You must try."

She is so moved now.

So I've been trying. I went to town and I bought the same kind of paper that Paul Sheldon wrote on. And a clunky old typewriter that didn't even have an "n"—and every day, Buster, I have been working so hard. I know the kind of words he used. I know the kind of stories he told. (*Heartbreaking.*) But I have no talent!

Buster says nothing, just studies her.

I spend day after day trying—I've written two hundred pages and it's agony.

BUSTER. That many?

ANNIE. Want to read them? Maybe you could help me.

BUSTER. (*Slow shake of his head.*) Never been much of a critic. But you sure are Paul Sheldon's number one fan. Maybe I could pay you a visit again sometime?

ANNIE. I'd be delighted.

She shows Buster out.

And now at last, Paul is awake—

—He sees the water pitcher—

—grabs the water pitcher—

bangs it loudly against the window. From outside, Buster's voice is heard.

BUSTER. (*Shouting.*) Ms. Wilkes? (*Louder.*) Annie—answer me. Are you all right?

PAUL. (*Doing his best to shout.*) In here. In here. IN HERE—

Buster throws the door open—

—and is stunned to see the man lying in bed.

BUSTER. Oh my God—it's you—Paul Sheldon—you're alive—
—but too late.

There is a sudden incredibly loud explosion—

—and Buster, blood-covered and very dead, falls to the floor.

ANNIE. (*Shakes her head, visibly upset.*) I don't think God would let anything bad happen to Paul Sheldon.

BUSTER. Yeah, I don't know that he's been gone long enough to worry. I told his agent when she called, maybe he decided to make a stop on his way home. Or maybe he had enough of this damn winter, went to Florida instead. But she insists he would have been in touch.

ANNIE. I have to believe he's safe. Will you let me know if you hear anything, Sheriff?

BUSTER. Oh, I think everyone will hear about it if we find him. And please, call me Buster, everyone does.

ANNIE. All my fingers are crossed for you, Buster.

Buster nods.

Annie closes the porch door—very softly.

Ten

The following dawn. But things have changed—a lot! Paul is not in bed. He is sitting—sitting in a wheelchair. A table has been set up in the corner of the room.

ANNIE. (*So excited.*) Like it so far?

PAUL. (*Manages a nod.*) I'll say—I've always wanted to visit the other side of the room.

ANNIE. Now don't poke fun—I promised you the biggest surprise of your life, remember?

PAUL. If I knew a wheelchair was my surprise I would have burned all my books.

ANNIE. That chair was expensive, even if it was secondhand. But that's only part of the surprise.

PAUL. Can I have my pills?

ANNIE. It's not time yet. Now you just sit tight while I set everything up.

Annie hurries out the door.

PAUL. I don't know how long I can sit in this chair without my Novril, Annie.

ANNIE. (*Off.*) I know it hurts now, but there will come a day—and sooner than you think—when it hurts less.

PAUL. Yeah, well, that's not today.

ANNIE. Don't be a crybaby. This is one of the most important days of your life. This is the surprise.

And she returns with an old-model typewriter.

Well? What do you think?

PAUL. It's a real antique.

ANNIE. I didn't get it for an antique. (*Indicating the table.*) It's your new studio—writers need a place to work, right?

She clunks the typewriter down on the table.

PAUL. Work? You mean write? What in the world do you think I'd write?

She has never been more excited.

ANNIE. Oh but Paul, I don't think, I know. Now that you've gotten rid of that piece of filth, you can go back to doing what you're great at—you're going to write a new novel—your greatest achievement ever— (*Big.*) MISERY'S RETURN.

Hard for Paul to answer. He just sits there.

PAUL. Annie, Misery is dead.

ANNIE. No, she's not. Even when I was so mad at you, I knew you didn't mean it when you killed her. And now you'll make it right.

An almost religious fervor now.

And this will be a book in my honor. Dedicated to me for saving your life and nursing you back to health. I'll be the very first person to read it. Oh, Paul, you're going to make me the envy of the world!

She hurries to the door again.

PAUL. (*Calling out to her.*) You just expect me to whip something off?

ANNIE. I absolutely do—I expect nothing less than your masterpiece.

PAUL. I don't have any of my notes. I have two big binders keeping

track of characters, timelines, places. I don't even have any of the books.

Now she's back—this time she carries typing paper, pens, pencils, a sharpener. And all of the Misery books.

ANNIE. I have all the books, silly. Plus paper, pens, pencils, a sharpener, anything you need.

PAUL. Somehow I don't think Tolstoy wrote this way.

ANNIE. I couldn't say, you're the only genius I've ever had in this house. I have total confidence in your brilliance.

Annie opens the curtains.

Besides, the view will inspire you.

Paul looks out the window: sky, mountain, barn, open land. Desolate.

PAUL. I guess you don't get bothered by neighbors much.

ANNIE. Which is so good for you, because you can have total solitude.

PAUL. Great.

ANNIE. This is the most expensive typing paper anywhere. And I got a great deal on this fifty-pound clunker on account of the "n" key is broken—it came loose, see.

She wiggles the "n" key. Paul's eyes light up.

PAUL. Came loose, huh?

ANNIE. So she gave me five dollars off.

PAUL. Gave you? You mean you didn't dicker?

ANNIE. I might have. *(Smiles, letting him in on a secret.)* I told the saleslady "n" was one of the letters in my favorite writer's name, Paul Sheldon.

Paul smiles too.

PAUL. It's two of the letters in my favorite nurse's name—An-nie.

ANNIE. You fooler.

PAUL. *(Embarrassed—blushing.)* I'm not. Not at all.

ANNIE. *(Really wanting to please.)* Did I do good?

PAUL. You did great.

Delighted, she puts paper in the typewriter and her fingers do a little dance on the keys.

Except for just one little thing. This is Corrasable Bond—it smudges. Maybe you wouldn't mind going back into town and getting me some white, long-grained mimeo?

Pause.

ANNIE. It's a trick. You don't want to write my book so you're making up excuses not to start.

PAUL. Bring that over here, I'll show you the problem.

ANNIE. This paper cost the most so I don't see how it can smudge.

She hands him the paper and he runs his thumb over the typing.

Well, it does smudge after all—how fascinating is that?

PAUL. I thought you'd be interested. I'd like you to be in on everything, Annie—not just the finished book but how it's written.

ANNIE. I'm so touched you're thinking of me.

A wonderful smile now.

Anything else I can get for you while I'm in town? Any other crucial requirements that might need satisfying?

PAUL. Just the paper will be fine.

The smile goes—she's agitated now.

ANNIE. Are you sure? I could bring you a tape recorder—or maybe you'd like a handmade pair of writing slippers. 'Cause if you want, I'll bring back the whole store for you.

PAUL. Annie, what's the matter?

ANNIE. What's the matter? I'll tell you what's the matter. I go out of my way for you. I do everything I can to try and make you happy. I feed you, I clean you, I dress you. And what thanks do I get? "You brought the wrong paper, Annie. I can't write on this paper, Annie." Well, I'll get you your stupid paper, but you better start showing me a little more appreciation around here, Mister Man.

Suddenly she is in a rage, charging at him. She takes the ream of paper and slams it on his damaged knees. Paul's pain is both sudden and shocking, and he cries out.

You may think you can trick me. I know I look slow and stupid to you. But I am not stupid, Paul. And I am not slow.

Annie storms to the door, opens it, slams it shut, locks it.

Eleven

Paul does nothing. But now we realize he is doing a lot more than nothing. Paul is listening intently for any sounds from Annie. He hears the crucial sound—a car motor starting, gunning away. Paul takes a breath, gets as comfortable as he can in his wheelchair. He stares at the typewriter. He moves to it, takes a deep breath. He jiggles and removes the “n” key.

PAUL. Ha!

This is a moment of triumph—he has gotten her out of the house, and now he can try to get himself out of the room.

The key tightly in his hand, Paul wheels to the door, gets close to the lock, inserts the key, begins to unlock the door—or tries to. But the key slips from his fingers, falls to the rug.

Paul is starting to breathe more deeply now. But in something closing in on a rage, he bends way over, grabs for the key—and the gods are smiling. He lifts it, holds it tightly, inserts it back into the lock. But it’s just a bitch, getting it to turn. Paul tries like hell. No good.

Harder. Still won’t get it to turn. Tries again. The key turns in the lock. Paul opens the damn door.

(Stunned.) Sonofabitch.

And with great care he wheels out the door—the door is almost too narrow for him to make it. But he does. And as he goes through the door, for the first time...

The set changes.

Paul finds himself wheeling along a dark corridor. Ahead, it’s brighter. Paul wheels toward the brightness. But slowly.