

## Misery

Side #1: Paul

*(Some time later. A timer is heard ringing, beyond the door.)*

PAUL

Ms. Wilkes. Ms. Wilkes!

*(Annie enters.)*

ANNIE

*(Kindly.)* Well you don't have to scream your head off, you know I'm on the other side of the door.

PAUL

Could I please have my pills now? My legs, very painful...

ANNIE

Oh poor dear, it's like clockwork how your pain comes. I have your pills right here. *(She reaches into her pocket and takes out the pills. She holds them. Then sweet, almost shy.)* Could I ask you a favor? I took the liberty of peeking inside your leather case. You don't mind, do you?

PAUL

Ms. Wilkes...

ANNIE

Please, call me Annie. All my friends do.

PAUL

Annie. Please.

ANNIE

Anyway, I see there's a manuscript in there.

*(Beat.)*

PAUL

And you want to read it?

ANNIE

You don't mind, do you? You wouldn't mind if I read it? I wouldn't presume to do such a thing without your permission. I respect you too much.

*(Paul pauses.)*

PAUL

Sorry, but I have a hard and fast rule about who can read my work at the early stage. Only my agent, my editor, and anyone who saves me from freezing to death in a car crash.

Annie realizes this answer is yes. And it's a big moment for her.

ANNIE

Oh my, you'll never know what a rare treat you're giving me. *(Beat.)* Heavens! Forgive me for prattling away and making you feel all oogy. *(She gives him the pills. He eagerly swallows them.)* There you go. You'll feel better in a few minutes. I just can't believe that my hero is recovering in my very own home. The man who gave the world Misery Chastain. And here he is: Paul Sheldon himself!

*(He breathes a sigh of relief, and puts his head back on the pillow to rest. Annie exits to get the manuscript.)*

PAUL

*(To her offstage.)* I guess it was kind of a miracle... you finding me.

ANNIE

*(From off.)* Not a miracle at all—in a way, I was following you.

PAUL

Following me?

*(Annie reenters with the leather case.)*

ANNIE

Well, seeing as how I'm your number one fan and all, it wasn't any secret to me you were staying at the Silver Creek Lodge these past five weeks. You finish all your new books there, any good fan knows that. So some nights, I'd just tool on down there and look up at the light in your cabin. And I'd try to imagine what was going on in the room of the world's greatest writer.

PAUL

*(Can't help but smile.)* Say that last part again—I couldn't quite hear you.

ANNIE

*(Smiles back.)* The world's greatest writer. Well, the other afternoon I was on my way home from town, racing 'cause I'd heard that the storm was coming in hard, and there you were leaving the Lodge. And I wondered why in the world would a literary genius go for a drive when there was this monster storm coming?

PAUL

The literary genius didn't know there was a storm coming.

**Side #2: Annie**

*(And now Annie and Paul are back in his room. Annie stands alone, staring out at the early sunset. Her tone is different than we have yet heard from her—lost in very deep thought. Paul lies in bed, his hands under the covers.)*

ANNIE

I was married, you know. Years ago. In Denver. That did not work out. That was very, very hard. I was a nurse at a big hospital, so I threw myself into work just to get through the days. I worked nights too. Night shifts can be slow at a hospital so I had a lot of time to read. That was when I first discovered Misery. She came right at the point I needed her most. And after her horrible childhood, her miserable stepfather, to keep fighting like she does, she's always been a fighter.

The whole world can be against her, but she knows that there's a justice higher than that of man, that God rewards the good in us. She makes me know I'm not alone in the world. *(Paul lies in bed, his hands under the covers.) (A realization.)* Though I realize you had a little something to do with that too. *(Another realization.)* And you must be a good man, or you could never have created a wondrous, loving creature like Misery Chastain.

PAUL

I'm...

ANNIE

All done?

PAUL

Yeah, thanks.

ANNIE

No problem. *(Paul brings his hand into view as she comes to the bed—he holds a bottle—he has been urinating into it. Annie takes it from him, and holds it during the following.)* I might have saved you from the car, Paul, but for all these years, you've saved me.

PAUL

You may be giving the books too much credit, Annie. I bet you would have been all right no matter what.

ANNIE

I don't know. I don't think I'll get married again.

PAUL

Me neither.

ANNIE

No?

PAUL

I wasn't very good at it.

ANNIE

Why not?

PAUL

Oh, um... I can get pretty obsessed when I'm working... I wasn't great about looking up from the typewriter. And the more success I had... I just wasn't there for my wife. Or my daughter.

ANNIE

But you dedicated Misery's Child, "To my daughter, Chloe, with love."

PAUL

Yeah, well, she's not really talking to me right now. I hope to make it up to her when I get home.

*(Beat.)*

ANNIE

Well. I hope you don't think I can stay here chatting all night, I have got to finish the book! I may not be out of my room for a while, I get so caught up. Here's a glass of water, and your next Novril, and here's a Reader's Digest, it's not from this year but they don't go bad... I can't wait to get to the end!

PAUL

Don't you want to make it last?

ANNIE

Don't worry about that, the minute I finish I'll just start it over again.

PAUL

Annie...

ANNIE

What is it?

PAUL

It may not be what you expect, the ending. It was mostly unexpected to me.

ANNIE

But you wrote it, silly.

PAUL

I really hope you like it.

*(Annie moves to the door, turns.)*

ANNIE

Of course I'm going to like it, I've never been more excited! Misery's about to have her child.  
What's it going to be, a boy or a girl-? *(Interrupts herself.)* —No don't tell me. Mwah!

*(Now she puts her hand to her mouth-and throws him a kiss. Paul reaches out, makes a smile, catches it.)*

**Side #3: Buster**

*(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.?

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.)*