

*A timer is heard ringing beyond the door.*

**PAUL.** Ms. Wilkes. Ms. Wilkes!

*Annie enters.*

**ANNIE.** *(Kindly.)* Well you dont 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, its 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 cant 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, Id 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 Id 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.

**ANNIE.** Lucky for you I did. *(Very sincere.)* Lucky for me too, because now you're alive and you can write more books. Because the world needs more Misery books.

*Paul says nothing but he is moved by her sincerity.*

Oh Paul, I know all of the Misery novels by heart, and I swear that's true. All eight of them. I just treasure them so.

*Annie opens the case with anticipation and looks at the title page. Her face falls.*

**PAUL.** This one's not a Misery.

**ANNIE.** *(Deeply disappointed.)* Well, I gather as much because I don't see her name in the title. "Broken Places."

**PAUL.** Last week that title was a metaphor. But yes, this is a different kind of book. It's not set in the 19th century, or the English country-side. It's not even a romance...

**ANNIE.** So what is it then?

**PAUL.** My agent would say it's an esoteric, pseudo-autobiographical character study that no one will want to read... But that's just her sense of humor.

**ANNIE.** I don't... Is that funny?

**PAUL.** *(Considering the question, then, wryly.)* Not really, no.

*Beat.*

But since you asked... it's not like anything I've ever written before. It's about the world I live in, New York. It's about a man who had everything and then crashed and burned and lost his way.

**ANNIE.** Well, I can't help but wish it was about Misery. But you wrote it. And so I want to read it. I want to read every word you write.

**PAUL.** That means a lot to me"

**ANNIE.** Though... if I had your gift, if I could breathe life into Misery Chastain, that's all I would write. I'd want to write as much of her life as I could.

**PAUL.** That's all I've been doing for twenty years! Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining.

**ANNIE.** It sounds like you are, just a little.

**PAUL.** Don't misunderstand me. Misery is responsible for all of my success, and I'm grateful for that. But there's another writer in me-a serious writer, of serious books.

**ANNIE.** Misery is serious. All eight of your Misery books are serious.

**PAUL.** Yes, of course they are. I just hope my readers will like it as much as they like Misery.

**ANNIE.** Well, I'm sure we will.

*There is a nice beat between them.*

**PAUL.** Did you say there were eight Misery books?

**ANNIE.** Eight Misery books? Yes-Misery, Misery's Quest, Misery's Trial, Misery's Lover, Misery's Gift, Misery's Challenge, Misery's Triumph, Misery's Dilemma. That's eight!

**PAUL.** Secret?

**ANNIE.** What?

**PAUL.** Nine.

**ANNIE.** Nine? Oh! Nine?? Why didn't you say?! When? WHEN? Please say "soon."

**PAUL.** Very soon.

**ANNIE.** *(So excited.)* Has it got a name? How stupid can I get? Of course it has a name. What is it, what is it?

**PAUL.** Misery's Child.

**ANNIE.** Misery's CHILD?! Im going to have a heart attack! Oh Paul, I want to read it tonight.

**PAUL.** Maybe not quite that soon, but it'll be in bookstores any day.

*Beat.*

How long do you think before the phone lines are back up? Id like to let my agent know Im still breathing. And my daughter... my daughter must be worried about me.

**ANNIE.** It's the pass, Paul-it's closed, so no repair trucks can get through. But if you give me their phone numbers, I can try them for you as soon as it's possible.

**PAUL.** Okay. Thank you. For everything. It's... well, ironic, to say the least.

**ANNIE.** What is?

**PAUL.** When I finished this book the morning of the storm I felt more alive and more free than I had in years. And then later that day I almost died.

**ANNIE.** But I was there.

**PAUL.** Yes.

**ANNIE.** Oh Paul. We are going to be so happy here.

*Paul isn't sure what to make of this, but this is a moment for Annie.*

I better get to feeding the animals, they don't like it when I am gone too long.

*(Smiling.)* Just like someone else I know.

**PAUL.** Animals?

**ANNIE.** Just a half-dozen laying hens, the two cows, and Misery.

**PAUL.** Misery?

**ANNIE.** My pig. For a while I was so lonely here on the farm. Then I bought Misery and she's a real companion. Sometimes I have my morning coffee right in her sty, and she just chatters away. *(Sincere.)* I hope I didn't offend you by naming her after the brave and beautiful woman you made up. I told you I was your number one fan.

**PAUL.** I'm starting to believe you.

**ANNIE.** Do you know what she said when I told her Paul Sheldon was here? *(Imitating the pig-and brilliantly.)* Whoink!-Whoink! Whuh-Whuh-WHOINK!!!

*And she is gone.*

**PAUL.** *(Shaking his head.)* Wow.