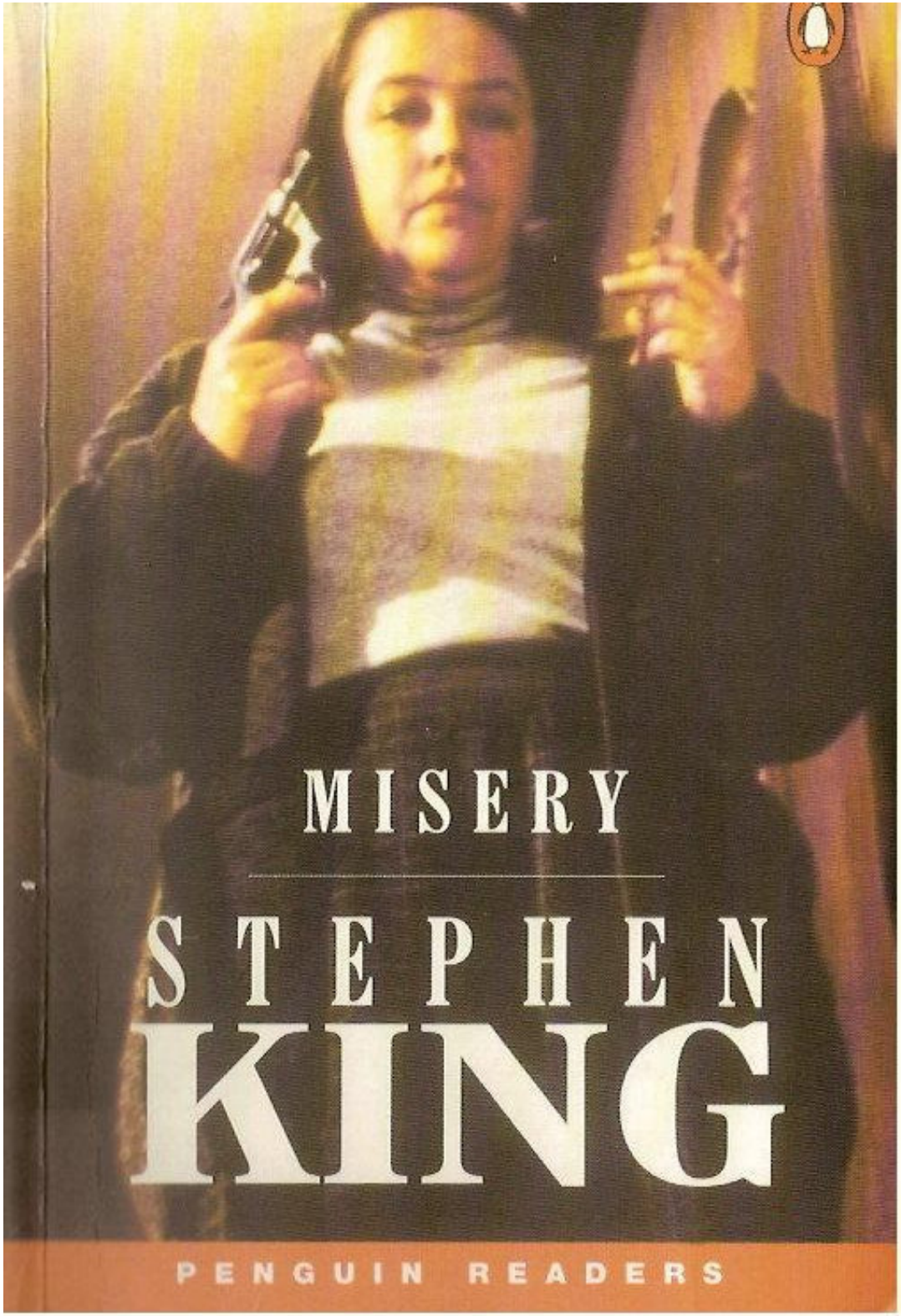


Misery

He tried to turn over, as if he could get away from her, but his broken legs and drugged body refused to obey. Annie poured some of the liquid on to his left ankle and some more onto the blade of the axe.

'There won't be much pain, Paul. It won't be bad.'

It's no good screaming – no one can hear. And if you think things are as bad as they can get, just listen to the 'nurse'.

Paul Sheldon is a world-famous writer. On his way to deliver the typewritten pages of his latest book, he has an accident on a snow-covered road. When he wakes up, he's in bed . . .

But it's not a hospital bed. And though the woman who saved him is one of his greatest admirers, she's also dangerously insane. And in her lonely country house, she has Paul, his legs badly broken and in extreme pain, completely in her power. When she learns what he has just done to Misery Chastain, her favourite character from his books, Paul knows he's in trouble, *deep* trouble.

The one thing you don't do with Annie Wilkes is make her angry. She knows how to cause pain. The only question is, how much can a man stand?

Stephen King is probably the most popular author now writing. There are over 150 million copies of his novels in print and he makes $2 million a month from his books and the films of his books.

He was born in 1947 in Portland, Maine, USA and became a full-time writer after his first novel, *Carrie* (1973), was sold for $400,000. Many of King's books have been made into films. The screen version of *Misery* was one of the most popular films of 1990. Kathy Bates won an Oscar for playing Annie Wilkes. James Caan played Paul Sheldon.

You can also read Stephen King's *The Breathing Method* and *The Body* in Penguin Readers.

To the teacher:

In addition to all the language forms of Levels One to Five, which are used again at this level of the series, the main verb forms and tenses used at Level Six are:

- future perfect verbs, passives with continuous or perfect aspects and the 'third' conditional with continuous forms
- modal verbs: *needn't* and *needn't have* (to express absence of necessity), *would* (to describe habitual past actions), *should* and *should have* (to express probability or failed expectation), *may have* and *might have* (to express possibility) *could have* and *would have* (to express past, unfulfilled possibility or likelihood).

Also used are:

- non-defining relative clauses.

Specific attention is paid to vocabulary development in the Vocabulary Work exercises at the end of the book. These exercises are aimed at training students to enlarge their vocabulary systematically through intelligent reading and effective use of a dictionary.

To the student:

Dictionary Words:

- As you read this book, you will find that some words are in darker black ink than the others on the page. Look them up in your dictionary, if you do not already know them, or try to guess the meaning of the words first, and then look them up later, to check.

CHAPTER ONE

Memory was slow to return. At first there was only pain. The pain was total, everywhere, so that there was no room for memory.

Then he remembered that before the pain there was a cloud. He could let himself go into that cloud and there would be no pain. He needed only to stop breathing. It was so easy. Breathing only brought pain, anyway.

But the peace of the cloud was spoiled by the voice. The voice – which was a woman's voice – said, 'Breathe! You must breathe, Paul!' Something hit his chest hard, and then **foul** breath was forced into his mouth by unseen lips. The lips were dry and the breath smelled of the stale wind in the tunnel of an underground railway; it smelled of old dust and dirt. He began to breathe again so that the lips would not return with their foul breath.

Along with the pain, there were sounds. When the pain covered the shore of his mind, like a high tide, the sounds had no meaning: *'Bree! Ooo mus bree Pul!'* When the tide went out, the sounds became words. He already knew that something bad had happened to him; now he began to remember.

He was Paul Sheldon. He smoked too much. He had married twice, but both marriages had ended in divorce. He was a famous writer. He was also a good writer. But he was not famous as a good writer; he was famous as the creator of Misery Chastain, a beautiful woman from nineteenth-century England, whose adventures and love life now filled eight volumes and had sold many millions of copies.

He felt trapped by Misery Chastain, so he wrote *Misery's Child*. In the final pages of this book Misery died while giving birth to a daughter. Her death made Paul free, and he immediately started to write a serious novel, about the life of a young car-thief in New York.

He finished the novel late in January 1987. As usual he

finished it in a hotel in the mountains of Colorado; he finished all his books in the same room, in the same hotel. Now he could drive to the airport and fly to New York for the publication of *Misery's Child*, and at the same time he could deliver the **typescript** of the new novel, which was called *Fast Cars*.

The weatherman on the radio said that the storm would pass to the south of Colorado. The weatherman was wrong. Paul was driving along a mountain road, surrounded by pine forest, when the storm struck. Within minutes a thick layer of snow covered the road. The car's wipers were unable to keep the windows clear and the tyres couldn't grip the surface of the road. Paul had to fight to keep the car on the slippery road . . . then on a particularly steep corner he couldn't control it. He had time to notice that the sky and the ground changed places in an unbelievable way. Then the dark cloud descended over his mind.

He remembered all this before he opened his eyes. He was aware of the woman sitting next to his bed. When he opened his eyes he looked in her direction. At first he couldn't speak: his lips were too dry. Then he managed to ask, 'Where am I?'

'Near Sidewinder, Colorado,' she said. 'My name is Annie Wilkes.' She smiled. 'You know, you're my favourite author.'

CHAPTER TWO

There was a question Paul wanted to ask. The question was, 'Why am I not in a hospital?' But by the time his mind was clear enough to form the question, he already knew better than to ask it.

For two weeks Paul drifted on the tide of pain. When the tide was out he was aware of the woman sitting beside his bed. More often than not she had one of his books – his Misery books – open on her lap. She told him she had read them all many times and could hardly wait for the publication of *Misery's Child*.

He soon learned that it was Annie Wilkes who controlled the tides. She was giving him regular doses of a pain-killing drug called Novril. When Paul was conscious more than he was unconscious or asleep, he knew that Novril was a powerful drug: he knew because he could no longer live without it. She was giving him two tablets every four hours and, by the time three or three-and-a-half hours had passed, his body was screaming for the relief which only the drug could bring.

The most important thing he learned, however, during these first few weeks when the tide of pain rolled in and out was that Annie Wilkes was insane. Some part of his mind knew this even before he opened his eyes.

Everybody in the world has a centre. Whatever mood a person is in, whatever clothes he or she is wearing, we recognize that person because he or she has a solid basis. Even if we haven't seen someone for many years, we can still recognize him: something inside him is permanent and the same as it always was and always will be. All a person's other qualities turn round this centre.

Annie Wilkes occasionally lost her centre. For periods of time which could last only a few seconds or longer, there was nothing solid in her. Everything about her was in motion, with no basis on which to rest. It was as if a hole opened up inside her and swallowed every human quality she possessed. She seemed to have no memory of these times. In contrast, however, her body was very solid and strong, especially for a middle-aged woman.

At first Paul was only aware that something was wrong with her, without knowing exactly what. His first direct experience of the hole came during a seemingly ordinary conversation.

Annie was, as usual, going on about how proud she was to have Paul Sheldon – *the* Paul Sheldon – in her own home. 'I knew your face,' she said, 'but it was only when I looked in your wallet that I was sure it was you.'

'Where is my wallet, by the way?' asked Paul.

'I kept it safe for you,' she answered. Her smile suddenly turned into a narrow suspiciousness which Paul didn't like: it was like discovering something rotten in a field of summer flowers. 'Why do you ask?' she went on. 'Do you think I'd *steal* something from it? Is that what you think, Mister Man?'

As she was speaking, the hole became wider and wider, blacker and blacker. In the space of a few seconds she was spitting words out viciously instead of politely. It was sudden, shocking, violent.

'No, no,' said Paul, disguising his shock. 'It's just a habit of mine to know the whereabouts of my wallet.'

Just as suddenly as it had opened, the hole in Annie closed up again and the smile returned to her face. But from then on Paul was careful about what he said or did. So he didn't ask about hospital, and he didn't ask to ring his daughter and his agent on the phone. In any case he wasn't worried. His car would be found soon. Even if his car was covered with snow for weeks or months, he was a world-famous writer and people would be looking for him.

But there were still plenty of questions which Paul could ask. So he gradually found out that he was in the guest-room on Annie's small farm. Annie kept two cows, some chickens – and a pig called Misery! Her nearest neighbours, the Roydmans, were 'some miles away', which meant that the town of Sidewinder was even further away. The Roydmans never visited, because – according to Annie – they didn't like her. As she said this Paul caught another quick flash of that darkness, that gap.

Day after day Paul listened for visitors, but no one came. Day after day he listened for the phone, but it never rang. He began to doubt that there was one in the house. He was completely helpless; he could not move his legs at all.

All information about her neighbours and the town had to be squeezed out of Annie without making her suspicious. It was easier to get her to talk about the day of the storm.

'I was in town,' she smiled, 'talking to Tony at the shop. In

fact I was asking him about the publication date of *Misery's Child*. He told me a big storm was going to strike, so I decided to make my way home, although my car can manage any amount of snow. I saw your car upside down in the stream bed. I dragged you out of the wreck and I could see straight away that your legs were a mess.'

She had pulled back the blankets the day before to show him his legs. They were broken and twisted, covered in strange lumps and bruises. His left knee was swollen up to twice its normal size. She told him that both legs were broken in about seven or eight places and that they would take months to heal. She had tied **splints** firmly and cleanly on to both legs. She seemed to know what she was doing and to have an endless supply of medicine.

Paul swam in and out of consciousness, riding on waves of drugged half-pain, as Annie continued with her story.

'It was a struggle getting you to the car, I can tell you. I'm strong, but the snow was waist deep. You were unconscious, which was a good thing. I got you home and put you on the bed. Then you screamed, and I knew you were going to live. Dying men don't scream. But twice over the next few days you nearly died – once when I was putting your splints on and once you just nearly slipped away. I had to take emergency steps.'

She **blushed** at the memory, and Paul too remembered. He remembered that her breath smelled foul, as if something had died inside her.

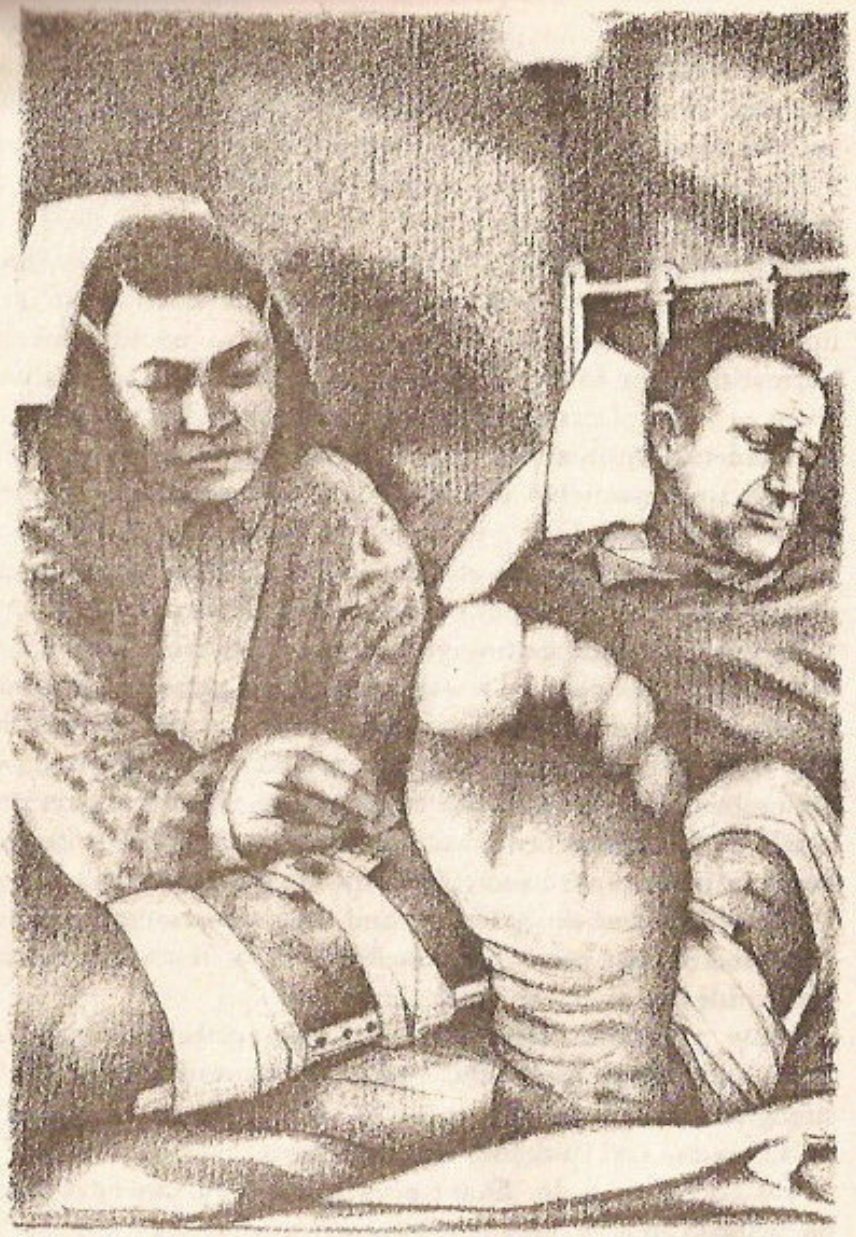
'Now you must rest, Paul,' she said, getting up off her bedside chair to leave the room. 'You must regain your strength.'

'The pain,' said Paul. 'My legs hurt.'

'Of course they do. Don't be a baby. You can have some medicine in an hour.'

'Now, please. I need it now.' He felt ashamed to beg, but his need for the drug made him do it.

'No,' she said firmly. 'In an hour.' Then, as she was leaving



She had tied splints firmly and cleanly on to both legs.

the room, she turned back towards him and said: 'You owe me your life, Paul. I hope you remember that. I hope you'll keep it in mind.'

Then she left.

CHAPTER THREE

The hour passed slowly. He could hear her watching television. She reappeared as soon as it was eight o'clock, with two tablets and a glass of water. Paul eagerly lifted himself up on to his elbows when she sat down on his bed.

'At last I got your new book, two days ago,' she told him. '*Misery's Child*. I love it. It's as good as all the others. Better, in fact. It's the best.'

'Thank you,' Paul said. He could feel the sweat on his forehead. 'Please . . . my legs . . . very painful . . .'

'I *knew* she would marry Ian,' she said, smiling dreamily, 'and I believe Ian and Geoffrey will become friends again. Do they? No, no, don't tell me. I want to find out for myself.'

'Please, Miss Wilkes. The pain . . .'

'Call me Annie. All my friends do.'

She gave him the glass, but kept the tablets in her hand. Then she brought them towards his mouth, which he immediately opened . . . and then she took her hand away again.

'I hope you don't mind,' she said, 'but I looked in your bag.'

'No, of course I don't mind. The medicine –'

The sweat on his forehead felt first cold and then hot. Was he going to scream? He thought perhaps he was.

'I see there's a typescript in the bag,' she went on. She idly rolled the tablets from one hand to the other. Paul followed them with his eyes. 'It's called *Fast Cars*. It's not a Misery novel.' She looked at him with faint disapproval – but it was mixed with love. It was the kind of look a mother gives a child. 'Would you let me read it?'

'Yes, of course.' He tried to smile through the pain.

'I wouldn't do anything like that without your permission, Paul, you know,' she said. 'I respect you too much for that. In fact, Paul, I love you.' She blushed again, suddenly. One of the tablets dropped on to the blankets. Paul grabbed at it, but she was quicker. Then she went vacant and dreamy again. 'Your mind, I mean. It's your mind I love, Paul.'

'No, please read it,' Paul said in desperation. 'But . . .'

'You see,' Annie said, 'you're good. I knew you must be good. No one bad could create Misery Chastain and breathe life into her.'

Now she suddenly put her fingers in his mouth and he greedily sucked the tablets out of her hand, without waiting for the water.

'Just like a baby,' she said, laughing. 'Oh, Paul. We're going to be so happy here.'

And Paul thought: I am in so much trouble here.

CHAPTER FOUR

The next morning she brought him a bowl of soup, which was his usual food these days. She told him she had read forty pages of his typescript. She told him she didn't think it was as good as his others.

'It's hard to follow,' she complained. 'It keeps jumping from one time to another.'

'Yes,' said Paul. 'That's because the boy is confused. So the changes in time reflect the confusion in his mind.' He thought she might be interested in a writer's ways.

'He's confused, all right,' replied Annie. She was feeding him soup automatically and wiping the corner of his mouth with the tip of a cloth, like a true professional; he realized that she must once have been a nurse. 'And he swears all the time. Nearly every word is a swear-word.'

'That's true to life, Annie, don't you think?' Paul asked. 'People do talk that way in real life.'

'No, they don't,' she said, giving him a hard look. 'What do you think I do when I go shopping in town? Do you think I say, "Now, give me some of that swear-word bread, and that swear-word butter"? And does the shopkeeper say, "All right, Annie. Here you swear-word are"?'

Her face was as dark as a thunderstorm now, and she was shouting. It wasn't at all amusing that she couldn't bring herself to say the real words; this made the situation all the more threatening. Paul lay back, frightened. The soup bowl was at an angle in her hands and soup was starting to spill out.

'And then do I go to the bank and say, "Here's one big swear-word cheque and you'd better give me fifty swear-word dollars"? Do you think that when I was in court in Denver –'

A stream of soup fell on to the blanket. She looked at it, then at him, and her face twisted. 'Now look what you've made me do!'

'I'm sorry.'

'I'm sure you are!' she screamed, and she threw the bowl into the corner. It broke into tiny pieces and soup splashed up the wall. Paul gasped in shock.

She turned off then. She just sat there for maybe thirty seconds. During that time Paul's heart seemed to stop. Gradually she came back.

'I have such a temper,' she confessed like a little girl.

'I'm sorry,' he said out of a dry throat.

'You should be. I think I'll finish *Misery's Child* and then return to the other book afterwards.'

'Don't do that if it makes you angry,' he said. 'I don't like it when you get angry. I . . . I do need you, you know.'

She did not return his smile. 'Yes, you do. You do, don't you, Paul?'

She came back into the room two hours later. 'I suppose you want your stupid medicine now,' she said.

'Yes,' said Paul, and then remembered. 'Yes, *please*.'

'Well, you're going to have to wait for me to clean up this mess,' she said. 'The mess *you* made.' She took a bucket of water and a cloth over to the corner and started to clean up the soup. 'You dirty bird,' she said. 'It's all dried now. This is going to take some time, I'm afraid, Paul.'

Paul didn't dare to say anything, although she was already late with his medicine and the pain was terrible. He watched in horror and fascination while she cleaned the wall. She did it slowly, deliberately. Paul watched the stain disappear. He couldn't see her face, but he was afraid that she had gone blank and would stay there for ever, wiping the wall with the cloth. At last, after half an hour of growing pain, she finished. She got up. *Now*, thought Paul. *Now give me the medicine*.

But to his amazement she left the room. He heard her pouring the water away and then refilling the bucket. She came back with the bucket and cloth.

'Now I must wash all that soap off the wall,' she said. 'I must do everything right. My mother taught me that.'

'No, please . . . the pain. I'm dying.'

'Don't be silly. You're not dying. It just hurts. In any case it's your fault that I have to clean up this mess.'

'I'll scream,' he said, starting to cry. Crying hurt his legs and hurt his heart.

'Go ahead, then,' she replied. 'Scream. No one will hear.'

He didn't scream. He watched her endlessly lift the cloth, wipe the wall and squeeze the cloth into the bucket. At last she got up again and came over to his bed.

'Here you are,' she said tenderly, holding out his two tablets. He took them quickly into his mouth, and when he looked up he saw her lifting the yellow plastic bucket towards him.

'Use this to swallow them,' she said. Her voice was still tender.

He stared at her.

'I know you can swallow them without water,' she said, 'but

if you do that I will make you bring them straight back out. Please believe me when I say that I can make you do that.'

He looked inside the bucket and saw the cloth in the grey water and soap floating on the surface. He drank quickly. His stomach started to move as if he was going to be sick.

'Don't be sick, Paul,' she said. 'There'll be no more tablets for four hours.' She looked at him for a moment with her flat, empty face, and then smiled. 'You won't make me angry again, will you?'

'No,' he whispered.

'I love you,' she said, and kissed him on the cheek.

Paul drifted into sleep. His last conscious thoughts were: *Why was she in court in Denver? And why would she want to take me prisoner?*

CHAPTER FIVE

Two days later she came into his room early in the morning. Her face was grey. Paul was alarmed.

'Miss Wilkes? Annie? Are you all right?'

'No.'

She's had a heart attack, thought Paul, and the alarm was replaced by joy. *I hope it was a big one*.

She came and stood over his bed, looking down at him out of her paper-white face. Her neck was tense and she opened her hands and then closed them into tight fists, again and again.

'You . . . you . . . you *dirty bird*!' she stammered.

'What? I don't understand.' But suddenly he did understand. He remembered that yesterday she was three-quarters of the way through *Misery's Child*. Now she knew it all. She knew that Ian and Misery could not have children; she knew that Misery gave birth to Geoffrey's child and died in the process.

'She can't be dead!' Annie Wilkes screamed at him. Her hands opened and closed faster and faster. *'Misery Chastain cannot be dead!'*

'Annie, please . . .'

She picked up a heavy jug of water from the table next to his bed. Cold water spilled on to him. She brought it down towards his head, but at the last second turned and threw it at the door instead of breaking his head open.

She looked at him and brushed her hair off her face. Two red marks had appeared on her cheeks. 'You dirty bird,' she said. 'Oh, you dirty bird, how could you do that? You killed her.'

'No, Annie, I didn't. It's just a book.'

She **punched** her fists down into the pillows next to his head. The whole bed shook and Paul cried out in pain. He knew that he was close to death.

'I didn't kill her!' he shouted.

She stopped and looked at him with that narrow black expression – that gap.

'Oh no, of course you didn't. Well, just tell me this, then, Mister Clever: if you didn't kill her, who did? Just tell me that. You tell lies. I thought you were good, but you're just dirty and bad like all the others.'

She went blank then. She stood up straight, with her hands hanging down by her sides, and looked at nothing. Paul realized that he could kill her. If there had been a piece of broken glass from the jug in his hand, he could have pushed it into her throat.

She came back a little at a time and the anger, at least, was gone. She looked down at him sadly. 'I think I have to go away for a while,' she said. 'I shouldn't be near you. If I stay here I'll do something stupid.'

'Where will you go? What about my medicine?' Paul called after her as she walked out of the room and locked the door. But the only reply was the sound of her car as she drove away.

He was alone in the house. Soon the pain came.

CHAPTER SIX

He was unconscious when she returned, fifty-one hours later. She made him sit up and she gave him some drops of water to heal his cracked lips and dry mouth. He woke up and tried to swallow a lot of water from the glass she was holding, but she only let him have a little at a time.

'Annie, the medicine, please . . . now,' he gasped.

'Soon, dear, soon,' she said gently. 'I'll give you your medicine, but first you have a job to do. I'll be back in a moment.'

'Annie, *no*!' he screamed as she got up and left the room.

When she came back he thought he was still dreaming. It seemed too strange to be real. She was pushing a **barbecue** stove into the room.

'Annie, please. I'm in terrible pain.' Tears were streaming down his face.

'I know, dear. Soon.'

She left and came back again with the typescript of *Fast Cars* and a box of matches.

'No,' he said, crying and shaking. 'No.' And the thought burned into his mind like acid: everyone had always said that he was crazy not to make copies of his typescripts.

'Yes,' she said, her face clear and calm. She held out the matches to him. 'It's foul, and it's no good. But you're good, Paul. I'm just helping you to be good.'

'No. I won't do it.' He shut his eyes.

When he opened them again she was holding a packet of Novril in front of them.

'I think I'll give you four,' she said, as if she was not talking to him but to herself. 'Yes, four. Then you'll feel peaceful and the pain will go. I bet you're hungry, too. I bet you'd like some toast.'

'You're bad,' said Paul.

'Yes, that's what children always say to their mothers. But mother knows best. I'm waiting, Paul. You're being a very stubborn little boy.'

'No, I won't do it.'

'I'm not sure that you'll ever wake up if you lose consciousness again,' she remarked. 'I think you're close to unconsciousness now.'

One hundred and ninety thousand words. Two years' work. But more importantly, it was what he saw as the truth. 'No.'

The bed moved as she got up. 'I can't stay here all day. I hurried back to see you, and now you behave like a spoiled little boy. Oh well,' she sighed. 'I'll come back later.'

'*You* burn it,' he shouted.

'No, it must be you.'

When she came back an hour later he took the matches. He remembered the joy of writing something good, something real. 'Annie, please don't make me do this,' he said.

'It's your choice,' she answered.

So he burned his book – a few pages, enough to please her, to show her that he was good. Then she pushed the barbecue out again, to finish the job herself. When she came back she gave him four tablets of Novril and he thought: *I'm going to kill her.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

When he woke up from his drugged sleep he found himself in a **wheelchair**. He realized that she was very strong: she had lifted him up and put him in the wheelchair so gently that he had not woken up. It hurt to sit in the wheelchair, but it was nice to be able to see out of the window; he could only see a little when he was sitting up in bed. The wheelchair was in front of a table by the window of his room. He looked out on to a small snow-covered farm with a **barn** for the animals and equipment. The snow was still deep and there was no sign that it was going to melt yet. Beyond the farm was a narrow road and then the tree-covered mountains.

He heard the sound of a key in the lock. She came and fed him some soup.

So he burned his book – a few pages, enough to please her, to show her that he was good.

'I think you're going to get better,' she said. 'Yes, if we don't have any more of those arguments, I think you'll get healthy and strong.'

But Paul knew she was lying. One day his car would be found. One day someone – a policeman perhaps – would come and ask her questions. One day something would happen which would make Annie Wilkes frightened and angry. She was going to understand that you can't kidnap people and escape. She was going to have to go to court again, and this time she might not leave the court a free woman. She was going to realize all this and be afraid – and so she was going to have to kill Paul. How long was it before the snow melted? How long before his car was found? How long did he have to live?

'I bought you another present, as well as the wheelchair,' she was saying. 'I'll go and get it for you.' She came back with an old black typewriter. 'Well?' she said. 'What do you think?'

'It's great,' he said. 'A real antique.'

Her face clouded over. 'I didn't get it as an antique,' she said. 'I got it second-hand. It was a bargain, too. She wanted forty-five dollars for it, but I got it for forty because it has no "n".'

She looked pleased with herself. Paul could hardly believe it: she was pleased at buying a broken old typewriter!

'You did really well,' he said, discovering that flattery was easy.

Her smile became even wider. 'I told her that "n" was one of the letters in my favourite writer's name.'

'It's *two* of the letters in my favourite nurse's name,' replied Paul, hating himself. 'But what will I write on this typewriter, do you think?'

'Oh, Paul! I don't think – I know! You're going to write a new novel. It'll be the best yet. *Misery's Return!*'

Paul felt nothing, said nothing; he was too surprised. But her face was shining with great joy and she was saying: 'It'll be a book just for me. It'll be my payment for nursing you back to health. The only copy in the whole world of the newest Misery book!'

'But Annie, Misery's dead.'

'No, she's not. Even when I was angry at you I knew she wasn't really dead. I knew you couldn't really kill her, because you're good.'

'Annie, will you tell me one thing?'

'Of course, dear.'

'If I write this book for you, will you let me go when I've finished?'

For a moment she seemed uncomfortable, and then she looked at him carefully. 'You talk as if I was keeping you prisoner, Paul.'

He didn't reply.

'I think,' she said, 'that when you've finished you should be ready to meet other people again.'

But she was lying. She knew that she was lying, and Paul knew she was lying too. The day he finished this new novel would be the day of his death. She started locking the door of his room whenever she left it.

Two mornings later she helped him into his wheelchair and fed him a bigger breakfast than usual. 'You'll need your strength now, Paul. I'm so excited about the new novel.'

He rolled over to the table by the window – and to the waiting typewriter. Thick snow was falling and it was difficult to recognize objects outside. Even the barn was just a snow-covered lump.

She came into the room carrying several packets of typing-paper. He saw straight away that the paper was Corrasable Bond and his face fell.

'What's the matter?' she asked.

'Nothing,' he said quickly.

'Something is the matter,' she said. 'Tell me what it is.'

'I'd like some different paper if you could get it.'

'Different from this? But this is the most expensive paper there is. I *asked* for the most expensive paper.'

'Didn't your mother ever tell you that the most expensive things are not always the best?'

'No, she did *not*. What she told me, Mister Clever, is that when you buy cheap things you get cheap things.' She was defensive now and Paul guessed that she would get angry next.

Paul was frightened, but he knew that he had to try to control her a little. If she always won, without any resistance from him, she would get the habit of being angry with him, and that would be worse. But his need for her and for the drug made him want to keep her happy; it took away all his courage to attack her.

Annie was beginning to breathe more rapidly now, and her hands were pumping faster and faster, opening and closing.

'And you'd better stop that too,' he said. 'Getting angry won't change a thing.'

She froze as if he had slapped her, and looked at him, wounded. 'This is a trick,' she said. 'You don't want to write my book and so you're finding excuses not to start. I knew you would.'

'That's silly,' he replied. 'Did I say that I was not going to start?'

'No, but . . .'

'I *am* going to start. Come here and I'll show you the problem.'

'What?'

'Watch.'

He put a piece of the paper into the typewriter and wrote: '*Misery's Retur* by Paul Sheldo '. He took the paper out and **rubbed** his finger over the words. The words immediately became indistinct and faint.

'Do you see?'

'Were you going to rub every page of your typescript with your finger?'

'The pages rubbing against one another would be enough.'

'All right, Mister Man,' she said in a complaining voice. 'I'll get your stupid paper. Just tell me what to get and I'll get it.'

'But you must understand that we're on the same side.'

'Don't make me laugh,' she said sarcastically. 'No one has been on my side since my mother died twenty years ago.'

'You can think what you like,' he said. 'At any rate you must believe that I'm on the book's side. If I type it on Corrasable Bond, in ten years' time there'll be nothing left for you to read.'

'All right, all right,' she said. 'I'll go *now*.'

Paul suddenly remembered that it was time for his medicine soon and he began to get nervous. Had he gone too far? Would she disappear for hours and hours? He needed his medicine.

'Tell me what kind of paper to get,' she said. Her face had turned to stone. He told her the names of some good kinds of paper.

She smiled then – a horrible smile. 'I'll go and get your paper,' she said. 'I know you want to start as soon as you can, since you're *on my side* –' These last words were spoken with terrible sarcasm. 'So I'm not even going to put you back into your bed. Of course it will hurt you to sit in the wheelchair for so long at first. Perhaps the pain will be so great that you have to delay starting to write. But that's too bad. I have to go, because you want your precious, stupid, Mister-Clever special paper.'

Suddenly her stony face seemed to break into pieces. She was standing at the door on her way out, and she rushed across the room at him. She screamed and punched her fist down on to the swollen lump which was Paul's left knee. He threw his head back and screamed too; the pain streamed out from his knee to every part of his body.

'So you just sit there,' she said, her lips still pulled back in that horrible grin, 'and think about who is in charge here, and all the things I can do to hurt you if you behave badly or try to trick me. You seem to think I'm stupid, but I'm not. And you can cry and shout all you want while I'm away, because no one will hear you. No one comes here because they all think Annie Wilkes is crazy. They all know what I did, although the court did say that I was innocent. There wasn't enough evidence, you see.'

She walked back to the door and turned again. He screamed again because he expected another rush and more pain. That made her grin more widely.

She left the room, locking the door behind her. A few minutes later he heard the roar of her car engine. He was left with his tears and his pain.

CHAPTER EIGHT

His next actions might seem heroic, he imagined, if someone looked at just the actions without seeing inside his mind. In immense pain he rolled the wheelchair over to the door. He slid down in the chair so that his hands could touch the floor. This caused him so much pain that he fainted for a few minutes. When he woke up he remembered what he was trying to do. He looked at the floor and saw the hairpins which he had noticed earlier. They had fallen out of Annie's hair when she had rushed at him. Slowly, painfully, he managed to pick them up. There were three of them. Sitting up again in the chair brought fresh waves of pain.

While writing *Fast Cars* he had taught himself to open locks with things like hairpins. It had helped him write abour a car-thief. It was surprisingly easy. Now he was going to open the door and go out into the house.

What made him overcome all his pain and do this? Was it because he was a hero? No, it was because he needed some Novril tablets and was afraid that Annie would not return for hours or would not give them to him when she did return. And he felt he needed an extra supply, to help him during those periods when she was too angry with him to give them to him.

It was an old, heavy lock. One pin sprang out of his hands, skated across the wooden floor and disappeared under the bed. The second one broke – but as it broke, the door opened.

'Thank you, God,' he whispered.

A bad moment followed – no, not a bad moment, an awful moment – when it seemed as if the wheelchair would not fit through the door. *She must have brought it into the room folded up*, he realized. In the end he had to hold on to the **frame** of the door and pull himself through it. The wheels rubbed against the frame and for one terrible moment he thought the chair was going to stick there. But then he was suddenly through the door.

After that he fainted again.

When he woke up, the light in the corridor was different. Quite some time had passed. How long did he have before she returned? Fifty hours, like the last time, or five minutes?

He could see the bathroom through an open door down the corridor. Surely she would keep the medicine there. He rolled down the corridor and stopped at the bathroom door. At least this door was a little wider. He turned himself round so that he could go into the bathroom backwards, ready for a quick escape if necessary.

Inside the bathroom there was a bath, an open cupboard for storing towels and blankets, a basin – and a medicine cupboard on the wall over the basin! But how could he reach it from his wheelchair? It was too high up the wall. And even if he could reach it with a stick or something, he would only make things fall out of it and break in the basin. And then what would he tell her? That Misery had done it while looking for some medicine to bring her back to life?

Tears of anger – and of shame at his need for the medicine – began to flow down his cheeks. He almost gave in and started to think about returning to his room. Then his eye saw something in the towel cupboard. Previously his eye had only quickly noticed the towels and blankets on the **shelves**. But there on the floor, underneath all the shelves, were two or three boxes. He rolled himself over to the cupboard. Now he could see some words printed on one of the boxes: MEDICAL SUPPLIES. His heart leapt.

He reached in and pulled one of the boxes out. There were many kinds of drugs inside the box – drugs for all sorts of diseases – but no Novril. He just managed to reach a second box. Again he was faced with an astonishing collection of medicines. She must have taken them from hospitals day after day. Most of the drugs were in small quantities. She had been careful: she hadn't taken a lot at once because they would have caught her.

He searched through the box. There at the bottom were a great many packets of Novril tablets; each packet contained eight tablets. He chewed three tablets straight away, hardly noticing the bitter taste.

How many packets could he take without her realizing that he had found the store? He took five packets and placed them down the front of his trousers, to leave his hands free for pushing the wheels. He looked at the drugs in the box. They had not been in any particular order before he searched the box and he hoped that Annie would not notice any difference.

Then, to his horror, he heard the noise of a car.

He straightened in the chair, eyes wide. If it was Annie he was dead. He couldn't get back to the bedroom and lock the door in time, and he had no doubt that she would be too angry to stop herself killing him immediately. She would forget that she didn't want to kill him before he had written *Misery's Return*. She would not be able to control herself.

The sound of the car grew . . . and then faded into the distance on the road outside.

OK, you've had your warning, he thought. *Now it's time to return to your room. The next car really could be hers.*

He rolled out of the bathroom, checking to make sure that he had left no tracks on the floor. How wide open had the bathroom door been? He closed it a little way. It looked right now.

The drug was beginning to take effect, so there was less pain now. His immediate need was satisfied. He was starting to turn

the wheelchair, so that he could roll back to his room, when he realized that he was pointing towards the sitting-room. An idea burst into his mind like a light. He could almost see the telephone; he could imagine the conversation with the police station. Would they be surprised to learn that crazy Annie Wilkes had kidnapped him?

But he remembered that he had never heard the phone ring. He knew it was unlikely that there even was a phone in the house. But the picture of the phone in his mind drove him on; he could feel the cool plastic in his hand, hear the sound of the phone in the police station. He rolled himself into the sitting-room.

He looked around. The room smelled stale and was filled with ugly furniture. On a shelf was a large photograph, in a gold frame, of a woman who could only be Annie's mother.

He rolled further into the room. The left side of the wheelchair hit a table which had dozens of small figures on it. One of the figures – a flying bird of some kind – fell off the edge of the table. Without thinking, Paul put out his hand and caught it – and then realized what he had done. If he had thought about it he would not have been able to do it. It was pure instinct. If the figure had landed on the floor it would have broken. He put it back on the table.

On a small table on the other side of the room stood a phone. Paul carefully made his way past the chairs and sofa. He picked up the phone. Before he put it to his ear he had an odd feeling of failure. And yes – there was no sound. The phone was not working. Everything *looked* all right – it was important for Annie to have things looking all right – but she had disconnected the phone.

Why had she done it? He guessed that when she had arrived in Sidewinder she had been afraid. She thought that people would find out about whatever had happened in Denver and would ring her up. *You did it, Annie! We know you did. They let you go, but you're not innocent, are you, Annie Wilkes?* They were

all against her – the Roydmans, everyone. No one liked her. The world was a dark place full of people looking at her with suspicion and hatred. So it was best to silence the phone for ever – just as she would silence him if she discovered that he had been in this room.

Fear suddenly overcame him and he turned the wheelchair around in order to leave the room. At that moment he heard the sound of another car, and he knew that this time it was Annie.

CHAPTER NINE

He was filled with the most extreme terror he had ever known, and he felt as guilty as a child who has been caught smoking a cigarette. He rolled the wheelchair out of the room as quickly as he could, pausing on the way only to look and make sure that nothing was out of place. He aimed himself straight at his bedroom door and tried to go through it at speed, but the right wheel crashed into the door-frame. *Did you scratch the paint?* his mind shouted at him. He looked down, but there was only a small mark – surely too small for her to notice.

He heard the noise of her car on the road and then turning in towards the house to park. He tried to move the wheelchair gently through the door without hurrying, but again he had to hold on to the frame and pull himself through it. At last he was in the room.

She has things to carry, he told himself. *It will take her time to get them out of the car and bring them to the house. You have a few minutes still.*

He turned himself round, grabbed the handle of the door and pulled it nearly shut. Outside, she switched off the car's engine.

Now he had only to push in the tongue of the lock with his finger. He heard a car door close.

The tongue began to move – and then stopped. It was stuck. Another car door shut: she must have got the groceries and paper out of the passenger seat.

He pushed again and again at the lock, and heard a noise inside the door. He knew what it was: the broken bit of the hairpin was making the lock stick. 'Come on,' he whispered in desperation and terror. 'Come on.' He heard her walking towards the house.

He moved the tongue in and out, in and out, but the broken pin stayed in the lock. He heard her walking up the outside steps.

He was crying now, sweat and tears pouring together down his face. 'Come on . . . come on . . . come on . . . please.' This time the tongue moved further in, but still not far enough for the door to close. He heard the sound of the keys in her hand outside the front door.

She opened the door and shut it. At exactly the same time the lock on Paul's door suddenly cleared and he closed his door. *Did she hear that? She must have.* But the noise of the front door covered the noise of his door.

'Paul, I'm home,' she called cheerfully. 'I've got your paper.'

He rolled over to the table and turned to face the door, just as she fitted her key into the lock. He prayed that the broken pin would not cause any problems. It didn't. She opened the door.

'Paul, dear, you're covered in sweat. What have you been doing?' she asked suspiciously.

'I think you know, Annie. I've been in pain. Can I have my tablets now?'

'You see,' she said. 'You really shouldn't make me angry. I'm sure you'll learn, and then we'll be very happy together. I'll go and get your pills now.'

While she was out of the room Paul pushed the packets of Novril which he had taken as far as he could under the **mattress** of his bed. They would be safe there as long as she didn't turn the mattress.

She came back and gave him three tablets, and within a few minutes he was unconscious. He'd had six tablets now and he was exhausted. When he woke up, fourteen hours had passed and it was snowing again outside.

CHAPTER TEN

It was surprisingly easy to start writing about Misery again. It had been a long time and these were hardly ideal circumstances; but Misery's world was cheap, and returning to it felt like putting on an old, familiar glove.

Annie put down the first three pages of the new typescript.

'What do you think?' Paul asked.

'It's not right,' she said.

'What do you mean? Don't you like it?'

'Oh, yes, I love it. When Ian kissed her . . . And it was very sweet of you to name the baby after me.'

Clever, he thought. *Not sweet, but maybe clever.*

'Then why is it not right?'

'Because you cheated,' she explained. 'The doctor comes, when he couldn't have come. At the end of *Misery's Child* Geoffrey rode to fetch the doctor, but his horse fell and broke a leg, and Geoffrey broke his shoulder and lay in the rain all night until the morning, when that boy found him. And by then Misery was dead. Do you see?'

'Yes.' *How am I going to please her? How can I bring Misery back to life without cheating?*

'When I was a child,' Annie was saying, 'I used to go to the cinema every week. We lived in Bakersfield, California. They used to show short films and at the end the hero – Rocket Man or somebody – was always in trouble. Perhaps the criminals had tied him to a chair in a burning house, or he was unconscious in an aeroplane. The hero always escaped, but you had to wait until the next week to find out exactly what happened. I loved those films. If I was bored, or if I was looking after those horrible children downstairs, I used to try to guess what happened next. God, I hated those children. Anyway, sometimes I was right and sometimes I was wrong. That didn't matter, as long as the hero escaped in a fair way.'

Paul tried to stop himself laughing at the picture in his mind of young Annie Wilkes in the cinema.

'Are you all right, Paul? Are you going to sneeze? Anyway, what I'm saying is that the way the hero escaped was often unlikely, but always fair. Then one week Rocket Man was in a car. He was tied up and the car had no brakes. He didn't have any special equipment. We saw him in the film struggling to get free; we saw him still struggling while the car went off the edge of a mountain and burst into flames. I spent the whole week trying to guess what would happen, but I couldn't. How could he escape? It was really exciting. I was the first in the queue at the cinema the next week. And what do you think happened, Paul?'

Paul didn't know the answer to her question, but she was right, of course. He had cheated. And the writing had been wooden, too.

'The story always started by showing the ending from last week. So we saw Rocket Man in the car again, but this time, just before the car reached the edge, the side-door flew open and Rocket Man fell out on to the road. Then the car went over the edge. All the other children in the cinema were cheering because Rocket Man was safe, but I wasn't cheering. No! I stood up and shouted, "This is wrong! Are you all stupid? This isn't what happened last week! They cheated!" I went on and on, and then the manager of the cinema came and asked me to leave. "All right, I'll leave," I told him, "and I'm never coming back, because this is just a dirty *cheat*."'

She looked at Paul, and Paul saw clear murder in her eyes. Although she was being childish, the unfairness she felt was absolutely real for her.

'The car went over the edge and he was still in it. Do you understand that, Paul? *Do you understand?*'

She jumped up and Paul thought she was going to hurt him because he was another writer who had cheated in his story.

'Do you?' She seized the front of his shirt and pulled him forward so that their faces were almost touching.

'Yes, Annie, yes, I do.'

She stared at him with that angry, black stare. She must have seen in his eyes that he was telling the truth, because she let go of him, quietened down and sat back in her chair.

'Then you know what to do,' she said, and left the room.

How could he bring Misery back to life?

When he was a child he used to play a game called 'Can You?' with a group of other children. An adult would start a story about a man called Careless Corrigan. Within a few sentences Careless Corrigan would be in a hopeless situation – surrounded by hungry lions perhaps. Then the adult would pass the story on to one of the children. He would say, 'Daniel, can you?' And then Daniel – or one of the other children – had to start the story again within ten seconds or he had failed.

Once Daniel had told his story, explaining how Careless Corrigan escaped from the lions, the adult asked the other question: 'Did he?' And if most of the children put their hands in the air and agreed that Careless Corrigan *did* – that what Daniel had said was all right – then Daniel was allowed to stay in the game.

The rules of the game were exactly the same as Annie's rules. The story didn't have to be *likely*, but it did have to be *fair*. As a child, Paul had always been good at the game.

So can you, Paul? Yes, I can. I'm a writer. I live and earn money because I can. I have homes in New York and Los Angeles because I can. There are plenty of people who can write better than I can, but when the question is 'Did he?', sometimes only a few hands go up for those people. But the hands go up for me, or for Misery, which is the same thing I suppose. Can I? Yes, you bet I can. I can't mend cars or taps, I can't be an electrician; but if you want me to take you away, to frighten you, to make you cry or make you smile, then yes, I can.

Two hours later Annie came and stood at the entrance to his room. She stood for a long time, watching him work. He was typing fast and he didn't even notice her standing there. He was too busy dreaming Misery back to life. When he was working well a hole seemed to open in the paper in front of him; he

would fall through the hole into the world of Misery Chastain and her lovers.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

'Well?' he asked several days later, when she interrupted him. 'Is it fair?'

Annie sat on his bed, holding the first six chapters of the typescript. She looked a bit pale.

'Of course,' she said, as if they both already knew the answer – which he supposed they did. 'It's not only fair, it's also good. Exciting.'

'Shall I go on?' he asked.

'I'll kill you if you don't!' she replied, smiling a little. Paul didn't smile back. This common remark would once have seemed ordinary to him; when Annie Wilkes said it, it didn't seem ordinary at all.

'You won't have to kill me, Annie,' he said. 'I *want* to go on. So why don't you leave me to write?'

'All right,' she said. She stood up and quickly dropped the typescript on his table, and then moved away. It was as if she was afraid of being burned by him. She was thinking of him now as the famous author, the one who could capture her in the pages of his books and burn her with the heat which his words made.

'Would you like to read it as I write it?' he asked.

Annie smiled. 'Yes! It would be almost like those films when I was young.'

'I don't usually show my work before it's all finished,' he said, 'but this is a special situation, so I'd be glad to show it to you chapter by chapter.' *And so began the thousand and one nights of Paul Sheldon*, he thought. 'But will you do something for me?'

'What?'

'Fill in all those "n"s,' he said.

She smiled at him with real warmth. 'That would make me very proud,' she said. 'I'll leave you alone now.'

But it was too late: her interruption closed the hole in the paper for the rest of the day.

Early the next morning Paul was sitting up in bed with his pillows piled up behind him, drinking a cup of coffee and looking at those marks on the sides of the door. Suddenly Annie rushed into the room, her eyes wide with fear. In one hand she held a piece of cloth; in the other, some rope.

'What –?'

It was all he had time to say. She seized him with frightened strength and pulled him forward. Pain – the worst for days – ran through his legs, and he screamed. The coffee cup flew out of his hand and broke on the floor. His first thought was that she had seen the marks on the door and now she was going to punish him.

'Shut up, stupid!' she whispered urgently. She tied his hands behind him with the rope, and just then he heard the sound of a car turning off the road and towards her house.

He opened his mouth to say something and she pushed the cloth into it. It tasted foul.

'Keep completely quiet,' she said with her head close to his. 'I warn you, Paul. If whoever this is hears something – or even if *I* hear something and *think* he might have heard something – I will kill him, then you, then myself.'

She ran out of the room and Paul heard her putting on her coat and boots.

Through the window he saw an old Chevrolet stop and an elderly man get out. Paul guessed that he was here on town business, because he could think of no other reason for anyone to come. The man looked like a local official, too.

Paul had often imagined someone coming to the house. In his mind there were several versions of what happened, but one thing was the same in every version: the visit shortened Paul's life.

Annie hurried out of the house to meet the man. *Why not invite him inside, Annie?* thought Paul, trying not to **choke** on the cloth. *Why don't you show him what you keep inside the house?*

The man pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket and gave it to Annie. He seemed to be apologizing. She looked quickly at the paper and began to speak. Paul couldn't hear what she was saying, but he could see the clouds of mist which formed in the cold air in front of her mouth. She was talking fast and waving her finger in the man's face.

She led the man a little way from his car, so that Paul could no longer see them, only their shadows. He realized that she had done it on purpose: if he couldn't see the man, then the man couldn't see him. The shadows stayed there for five minutes. Once Paul heard Annie's voice; she was shouting angrily, although he couldn't hear the actual words. They were five long minutes for Paul: the cloth in his mouth was making him feel sick.

Then the man was walking back to his car, with Annie behind him. She was still talking. He turned to say something before getting into the car, and Paul could see some emotion on his face. It wasn't quite anger: he was disgusted. It was obvious that he thought she was crazy. The whole town probably regarded her as crazy and he didn't like having the job of visiting her.

But you don't know the extent of her madness, do you? thought Paul. *If you did, you wouldn't turn your back on her.*

Now the man got into the car and started to reverse towards Annie's gate. Annie had to shout even louder so that he could hear her over the noise of the engine, and Paul heard her words too: 'You think you're so clever, don't you? You think you're such a big wheel, helping the world to turn round. Well, I'll tell you something, Mister Big Wheel. Little dogs go to the toilet all over big wheels. What do you think about that?'

When the man had driven away, Annie rushed back into the house. She shut the front door with a loud bang and Paul knew

that she was extremely angry. He was frightened that her anger with the man would become anger with him.

She came into his room and began to walk around, waving the piece of paper in her hand. 'I owe them five hundred dollars' tax, he says. I haven't been paying the tax on my house, he says. Dirty tax! Dirty lawyers! I hate lawyers!'

Paul choked and tried to speak through the cloth, but she didn't seem to notice. She was in a world of her own.

'Five hundred and six dollars!' she shouted. 'And they send someone out here to visit when they know I don't want anyone here. I told them. Now he says they'll take my house away from me if I don't pay soon.'

She absent-mindedly pulled the piece of cloth from his mouth and Paul swallowed great mouthfuls of air in relief, trying not to be sick. 'My hands . . .' he gasped.

'What? Oh, yes. Sometimes you're such a baby.' She pulled him forward again – which hurt again – and untied his hands. 'I pay my taxes,' she protested. 'I just . . . this time I just . . . You've been keeping me so busy.'

You forgot, didn't you, Annie? You try to make everything seem normal, but you forgot. This is the first time you've forgotten anything this big, isn't it? In fact, Annie, you're getting worse, aren't you? You're starting to get a little worse every day. Your blank periods are getting longer and happening more often. Mad people can usually manage their lives, and sometimes – as I think you know – they get away with some very nasty actions. But there's a border between manageable madness and unmanageable madness, and you're getting closer to it every day . . . and part of you knows it.

Paul had a brilliant idea. 'I owe you my life,' he said, 'and I'm just a nuisance to you. I've got about four hundred dollars in my wallet. I want you to have it.'

'Oh, Paul, I couldn't.' She was looking at him in confusion and pleasure.

Paul smiled and tried to look as sincere as possible. 'It's yours,' he said. 'You saved two lives, you know – Misery's as well as

mine. And you showed me that I was going wrong, writing other kinds of books. Four hundred dollars is nothing for all that. If you don't take the money you'll make me feel bad.'

'Well, if you say so . . . All right,' she said, with a shy smile. 'They all hate me, you know. They're all against me, Paul.'

'So you must pay their dirty taxes today,' Paul said. 'That'll show them. I bet there are other people in the town – the Roydmans, for example – who haven't paid their taxes for years. They're just trying to make you go, Annie.'

'Yes, I'll pay their stupid taxes,' she said. 'That'll teach them a lesson. I'll stay here and spit in their eyes!'

She went and fetched his wallet. The money was still in it, but everything which showed that it belonged to Paul Sheldon had gone. He remembered going to the bank and taking the money out. The man who had done that had felt good. He had just finished *Fast Cars* and was feeling younger than his age. His legs were not useless sticks.

He gave Annie the money and she bent over and kissed him on the lips. He smelled the foul smell which came from the rotten places inside her. 'I love you,' she said.

'Would you put me in the wheelchair?' he said. 'I want to write.'

'Of course, my dear,' she replied. Then she left to go to town.

While she was out Paul unlocked the door – he now had four hairpins under the mattress, next to the tablets – and tried to clean the marks on the door-frame.

Three weeks passed. Although there were times when he felt close to tears, Paul was on the whole curiously happy. He was enjoying writing the book. Usually the most he could write was two or three pages a day, but he was sometimes writing twelve pages of *Misery's Return* in a day! He was living such a regular and healthy life. Annie was cooking him three meals a day. He wasn't drinking any alcohol or smoking cigarettes; he suffered from none of his usual headaches. He woke up in the morning, ate breakfast, worked, had lunch, slept for a while, worked

again, ate again and then slept like a baby all night long. There was nothing else for him to do – nothing to interrupt the routine. Ideas for the book were flooding into his mind. *Can you? Yes, I can.*

Then the rain came, and everything changed.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The beginning of April was fine. The sun shone from a clear blue sky and it was warm enough to melt some of the snow. Mud and grass began to appear in Annie's field. Annie sometimes took Paul in his wheelchair out of the house at the back, and let him sit in the sunshine and read a book. She sang while she worked around the house, and laughed at jokes she heard on the TV. She left his door unlocked and open while she was in the house. Paul tried not to think of the snow melting and uncovering his car.

The morning of the fifteenth, however, was windy and dull, and Annie changed. She didn't come into his room with his tablets until nine o'clock, and by then he needed them quite badly – so badly that he nearly got some from under the mattress. Then, when she came, she was still in her night-clothes and she brought him only the tablets, no breakfast. There were red marks on her arms and cheeks, and her clothes were messy with spilled food. She dragged her feet along the corridor. Her hair was untidy and her eyes were dull.

'Here.' She threw the pills at him and they fell into his lap. She turned to go, dragging her feet.

'Annie?' She stopped without turning round. 'Annie, are you all right?'

'No,' she said carelessly, and turned to face him. She looked at him in that same dull way. She began to pinch her lower lip between her finger and thumb. She pulled it out and twisted it, while pinching it hard. Drops of blood began to fall down her

chin. She turned and left without speaking another word, before his astonished mind could persuade itself that he had really seen her do that. She closed the door and locked it.

He heard her sit down in her favourite chair. There was silence. She didn't switch on the TV as usual. She was just sitting there – just sitting there being not all right.

Then there *was* a sound – a single, sharp sound which was unmistakable: she had hit herself, hard, in the face.

He remembered reading that when mad people start to become deeply, seriously depressed, they hurt themselves. This signals the start of a long period of depression. He was suddenly very frightened.

She hadn't returned by eleven that morning, so Paul decided to try to get into the wheelchair by himself; he wanted to try to work. He succeeded, although it hurt him a lot, and he rolled himself over to the table.

He heard the key in the lock. Annie was looking in at him and her eyes burned black holes in her face. Her right cheek was swelling up and she had been eating jam with her hands. She looked at him and Paul looked back at her. Neither of them said anything for a while. Outside, the first drops of rain hit the window.

'If you can get into that chair by yourself, Paul,' she said at last, 'then I think you can fill in your own stupid "n"s.'

She closed the door and locked it again. Paul sat looking at it for a long time, as if there was something to see. He was too surprised to do anything else.

He didn't see her again until late in the afternoon. After her visit work was impossible. At two in the afternoon the pain was bad enough for him to take two tablets from under the mattress. Then he slept on the bed.

When he woke up he thought at first that he was still dreaming; what he saw was too strange for real life. Annie was sitting on the side of his bed. In one hand she held a glass full of Novril tablets, which she placed on the table next to his bed. In

In her other hand was a rat-trap. There was a large grey rat in it. The trap had broken the rat's back.

her other hand was a rat-trap. There was a large grey rat in it. The trap had broken the rat's back. There was blood around its mouth, but it was still alive. It was struggling and **squeaking**.

This was no dream. He realized that now he was seeing the real Annie. She looked terrible. Whatever had been wrong with her this morning was much worse by now. The flesh on her face seemed to hang as loosely as the clothes on her body. Her eyes were blank. There were more red marks on her arms and hands, and more food spread here and there on her clothes.

She held up the trap. 'They come into the cellar when it rains,' she explained. 'I put down traps. I always catch eight or nine of them. Sometimes I find others –'

She went blank then. She just stopped and went blank for nearly three minutes, holding the rat in the air. The only sounds were the rat's squeaks. *You thought things couldn't get worse, didn't you? You were WRONG!*

'– drowned in the corners. Poor things!' She looked down at the rat and a tear fell on to its fur. 'Poor, poor things.'

She closed one of her strong hands around the rat and began to squeeze. The rat struggled and whipped its tail from side to side. Annie's eyes never lost that blank, distant look. Paul wanted to look away, but couldn't; it was disgusting, but fascinating. Annie's hand closed into a fist. Paul heard the rat's bones break and blood ran out of its mouth. Annie threw the crushed body into a corner of the room. Some of the rat's blood was on her hand.

'Now it's at peace,' she said, and laughed. 'Shall I get my gun, Paul? Maybe the next world is better for people as well as for rats – and people are almost the same as rats anyway.'

'Wait for me to finish,' he said. It was hard to speak; his mouth felt thick and heavy. *I'm closer to death than I've ever been in my life*, he thought, *because she means it. She's as insane as the husband who murders his whole family before killing himself – and who thinks he is being a good husband and father.*

'Misery?' she asked, and Paul thought – or hoped – that there was a tiny sign of life in her eyes.

'Yes.' *What should he say next? How could he stop her killing him?* 'I agree that the world's an awful place. I mean, I've been in so much pain these last few weeks, but –'

'Pain?' She interrupted him. 'You don't know what pain is, Paul. You haven't any idea at *all*.' She looked at him with contempt.

'No, I suppose not – not compared with you, anyway.'

'That's right.'

'But I want to finish this book. I want to see what happens to Misery. And I'd like you to be here too. Don't you want to find out what happens?'

There was a pause, a terrible silence for a few seconds, and then she sighed. 'Yes, I suppose I do want to know what happens. That's the *only* thing left in the world that I still want.'

Without realizing what she was doing she began to suck the rat's blood off her fingers.

'I can still do it, Paul. I can still go and get my gun. Why not now, both of us together? You're not stupid. You know I can never let you leave here. You've known that for some time, haven't you? I suppose you think of escape, like a rat in a trap. But you can't escape. You can't leave here . . . but I could go with you.'

Paul forced himself to keep his eyes looking straight into hers. 'We all go eventually, don't we, Annie? But I'd like to finish what I've started first.'

She sighed and stood up. 'All right. I must have known that's what you'd want, because I've brought you your pills. I don't remember bringing them, but here they are. I have to go away for a while. If I don't, what you or I want won't make any difference. I do things, you see . . . I go somewhere when I feel like this – a place in the hills. I call it my Laughing Place. Do you remember that I told you I was coming back from Sidewinder when I found you in the storm? I lied. I was coming back from my Laughing Place, in fact. Sometimes I do laugh when I'm there, but usually I just scream.'

'How long will you be away, Annie?'

'I don't know. I've brought you plenty of pills.'

But what about food? Am I supposed to eat that rat?

She left the room and he listened to her walking around the house, getting ready to go. He still half expected her to come back with her gun, and he didn't relax until he heard the car disappearing up the road outside.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Two hours later Paul unlocked his door with a hairpin for the last time, he hoped. He was determined to escape. He had blankets and all his tablets in his lap. Sidewinder was downhill from here and, even if he had to slide all the way in the rain, he intended to try.

Why hadn't he tried to escape before? Writing the book had become an excuse. It was true that it kept him alive, because it gave Annie a reason to want him alive; he was her pet writer, producing a book just for her. But it was also true that he was enjoying writing the book and didn't want to leave it. But now he didn't care. Annie could destroy the book if she wanted.

He rolled himself into the sitting-room. It had been tidy before, but now it was a mess. There were dirty dishes piled up on all the surfaces. Empty containers of sweet things of all kinds – jam, ice-cream, cake, biscuits, Pepsi-Cola – were everywhere. There was no sign of any spoons or forks; Annie used her hands when she was in this condition. There were splashes of ice-cream on the floor and the sofa.

The figure of the flying bird was still on the table, but most of the other figures had been thrown into a corner, where they had broken into sharp little pieces. In the middle of the floor was an overturned vase of dead flowers. Underneath a small table lay a photograph **album**. *Don't you know it's a bad idea to think about the past when you're feeling depressed, Annie?*

He rolled across the room. Straight ahead was the kitchen; on the right was the hall leading to the front door. He knew there was a door in the kitchen and he hoped he might get out of the house that way. But first he wanted to check the front door; he might get a surprise.

He didn't. There were three locks on the door. Two of them were Kreigs – the best locks in the world. A thousand hairpins would be useless. And Annie of course had the keys with her.

He reversed down the hall and went into the kitchen. The room was not as much of a mess as the sitting-room, although there was the smell of rotten food. Here it was the same story: the door had the same system of locks. Roydmans, stay out; Paul, stay in. He imagined her laughing.

The windows were too high. Even if he did manage to break one and pull himself through he would probably break his back falling on to the ground. Then he'd have to pull himself through deep mud and crawl up to the road in the hope of being found. It was not a good idea.

Another door in the kitchen had no locks. Paul opened it and saw that it led down some steep stairs to the cellar. He heard the squeaking of rats and smelled the foul smell of rotten vegetables. He quickly closed the door.

Paul felt desperate. There was no way out. For a moment he thought about killing himself. He had found plenty of food in **cans** on the kitchen shelves, and also some boxes of matches. Perhaps he should just burn the whole house down in revenge, and kill himself at the same time?

Maybe I will have to kill myself eventually, but I'll kill her first. That is my promise. I will never give up.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

On his way back through the sitting-room he stopped to pick up the album. He was curious to see photographs of Annie's

family and of Annie herself when she was younger. When he opened the album, however, he found that it was full of stories cut from newspapers.

The first two pages told of the wedding of Annie's parents and the birth of her elder brother, Paul -- another Paul in her life – and of Annie herself. She was born on 1 April 1943. She must have hated being an April Fool.

The next page contained a report of a fire in a house in Bakersfield, California, in 1954. Five people had died in the fire. Three of them had been the children who lived in the ground-floor apartment, downstairs from the Wilkes family (who had been out of the house at the time). The fire had started because of a cigarette in the cellar.

Annie's voice echoed in Paul's mind: *God, I hated those children.*

Paul's blood began to run cold.

But she was only eleven years old.

That's old enough – old enough to let a candle burn down in the cellar so that the flame could light a pool of petrol. It's an old trick but hard to beat. Maybe she just wanted to frighten them and accidentally did more than that. But she did it, Paul. You know she did it.

He turned the page and found a story about the death of Annie's father. He had fallen over a pile of clothes at the top of the stairs in his house and broken his neck. The newspaper called it a 'curious accident'.

On the next page a newspaper from Los Angeles, hundreds of miles from Bakersfield, used exactly the same words – a 'curious accident'. This time it was a student nurse who had fallen over a dead cat at the top of the stairs and broken her neck. The name of the person who shared the student's apartment was Annie Wilkes. The year was 1959.

Paul felt pure terror rise up in him.

The 'accidents' had happened in different places and at different times, and no one had made the connection. Why should they? People were always falling down stairs.

Why had she killed them? He seemed to hear Annie's answers in his mind. The answers were absolutely mad, and Paul knew they were right.

I killed her because she played the radio late at night; I killed her because she let her boyfriend kiss her too much; I killed her because I caught her cheating; I killed her because she caught me cheating. I killed her to see whether I could. What does it matter? She was just a Miss Clever – so I killed her.

The next page of the album showed that Annie had graduated as a nurse and had got a job at St Joseph's Hospital in Pennsylvania. There followed several pages containing short newspaper reports of deaths at the hospital. There was nothing suspicious about any of these deaths. Most of the people were old and had been ill for a long time. Some were young – one was even a child – but they all had serious illnesses or injuries.

And what were these reports doing in Annie's album? She had killed them all. The reports were so short that several could fit on a single page of the album – and the album was thick.

Again Paul asked the question: *Why, Annie? Why kill these people?*

Again he heard Annie's voice echoing in his mind: *Because they were rats in a trap.* And he remembered Annie's tears falling on the rat she held in her hand, while she said: *'Poor, poor things.'*

Over the next few years she had moved from hospital to hospital around the country. The pattern in the album was always the same: first, the list of new hospital staff, with Annie's name among them; then pages of short reports of deaths.

In 1978, nine years ago, she had arrived at a hospital in Denver, Colorado. The usual pattern began again with a report of the death of an elderly woman. Then the pattern changed. Instead of reports of deaths there was a report of Annie's marriage to a man called Ralph Dugan, a doctor. There was a photograph of the house they had bought outside Sidewinder in 1979 – *this* house. Several months had passed without any killings. It was unbelievable, but Annie must have been happy!

Then there was a report, from August 1980, of their divorce. It was clear that *he* had divorced her rather than the other way round. He had understood something about her. Maybe he had seen the cat at the top of the stairs – the one he was supposed to fall over. Annie had torn into this report with a pen as she wrote vicious words across it, so that Paul had difficulty reading it.

Annie moved to a hospital in Boulder, Colorado. It was clear that she was very hurt and very angry, because the killings started again, and more often than before: the newspaper reports came every few days.

God, how many did she kill? Why did nobody guess?

At last, in 1982, Annie made a mistake. She moved to the childbirth department of the hospital. Annie had carefully kept a record of the whole story.

Killing new-born babies is different from killing badly injured or seriously ill adults. Babies don't often die and people notice if they do. Parents care as well. And Annie had started to kill even healthy babies. They must have all seemed to her to be 'poor, poor things' by now – now that she was even crazier than before.

Five babies died between January and March 1982. A hospital investigation found nothing suspicious in their deaths – which was not surprising, thought Paul, since Annie was the chief nurse of the department and was probably doing the investigation herself.

Another baby had died in April. Two in May.

Then at the beginning of June there was a newspaper report with the heading: NURSE WILKES QUESTIONED ON BABY DEATHS. The police were reported as saying that she was not under arrest and they were not accusing her of anything: they were just questioning her. And the next day: NURSE WILKES RELEASED.

She had got away with it. How? Paul couldn't imagine, but she had got away with it. Now, he thought, she will move to another hospital in another town. But no: she was too insane for that now.

The *Boulder News*, 2 July: THE HORROR CONTINUES: THREE MORE BABIES DIE.

Pages and pages of the album contained reports of Annie's arrest and trial. Annie had also included a selection of letters from the citizens of Boulder that had been printed in the newspapers. It was clear that she had chosen the most vicious of the letters – those which reminded her that everyone was against her and that it was *their* fault. The newspapers began to call her 'the **Dragon** Lady'.

But there was not enough evidence. On 16 December the huge heading in the paper read: DRAGON LADY INNOCENT!

There were plenty more pages in the album, but few of them had been used. Annie had kept any further reports that she had seen about the baby deaths, but there were no more killings until 1984. The Sidewinder *Gazette* had reported in November of that year the discovery of the body of a young man called Andrew Pomeroy. What was left of his body – some bits had been cut off with an **axe** – had been found in a stream bed quite a few miles from the town. *How far from here?* Paul wondered.

He turned the page and looked at the last report in the album. For a moment his breath stopped: it was about him! The report was only two weeks old. It had been cut out from *Newsweek* and told how 'famous novelist Paul Sheldon, last seen seven weeks ago in Boulder, Colorado' was missing. The reporter had interviewed Paul's agent, but she had not been worried, probably because she thought Paul was staying with a woman he had met! Well, that was true, thought Paul.

He put the album down carefully so that Annie would not see that it had been moved. He felt sick and close to tears.

Outside, the wind suddenly blew heavy rain against the house and Paul jumped in fear.

An hour later, full of Novril, the wind seemed comforting rather than frightening. He was thinking: *So there's no way out. You can't escape, and Superman's too busy making films in Hollywood. But there's one thing you can do. Can you, Paul? Can you do it?* The only way out of this was to kill her. *Yes, I can.*

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The storm continued throughout the next day. The following night the clouds blew away and the temperature dropped. All the world outside froze solid. The roads were pure ice. Annie couldn't come back that day even if she was ready to.

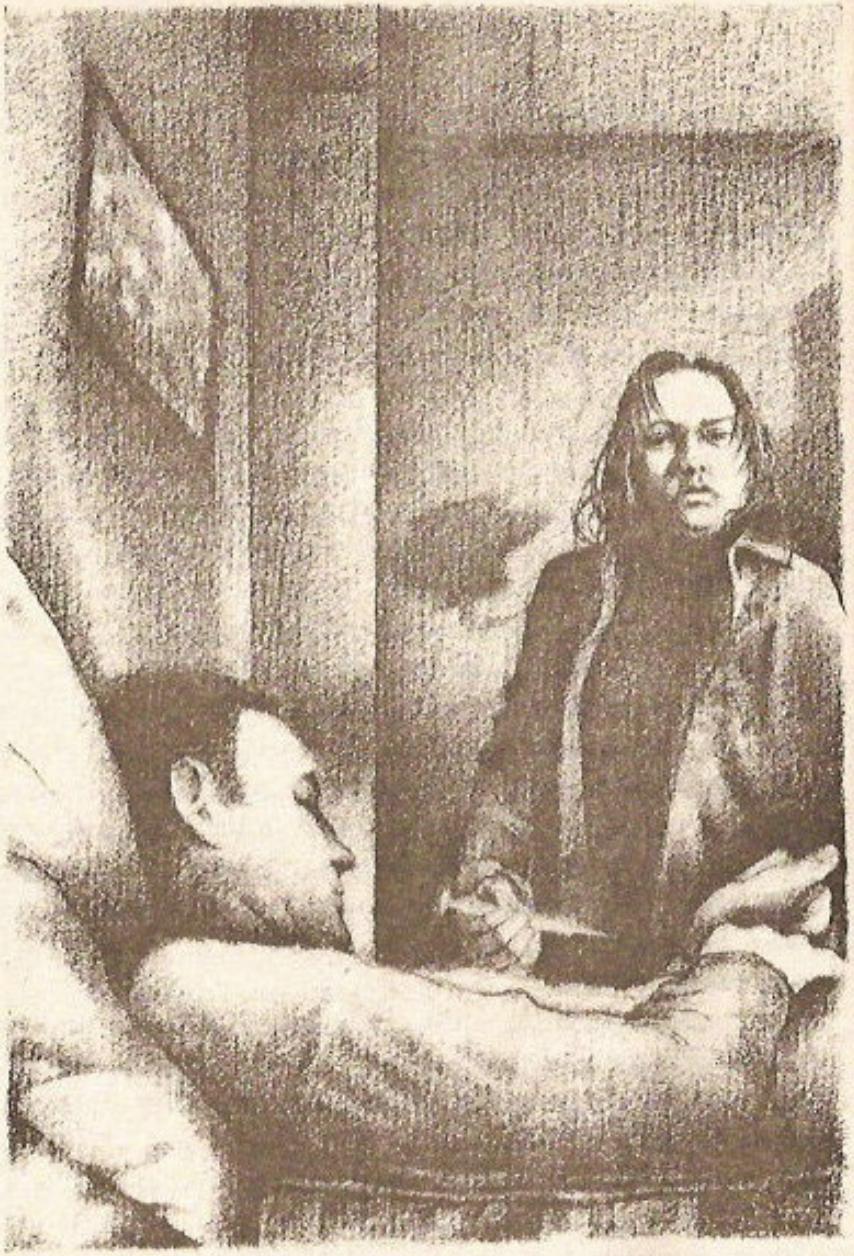
And that was too bad for the animals. He could hear the cows complaining in the barn: Annie hadn't milked them and they were in pain. As the days passed he heard no more noises from them.

Paul's routine was easy. During the daytime he ate food which Annie would not miss from the kitchen. She had stored hundreds of cans of food, and it was easy for Paul to take a few cans from here and a few from there so that Annie would not notice. So he had enough to eat, he took his tablets regularly, slept and wrote his novel; in the evenings he played 'Can You?' with ideas about killing Annie. A lot of ideas came to him, but most of them were impossible or too complicated. This was no game, this was his life. It would have to be something simple.

In the end he went to the kitchen and chose the longest, sharpest butcher's knife he could find. On the way back into his room he stopped to rub at the new marks he was making on the door-frame. The marks were clearer than before. *But it doesn't matter*, he thought, *because as soon as she returns, the first time she comes into my room . . .*

He pushed the knife under the mattress. When Annie came back he was gong to ask her for a drink of water. She would bend over to give it to him and then he would stab her in the throat. Nothing complicated.

Paul closed his eyes and went to sleep. When Annie's car came whispering into the farm at four o'clock that morning, with its engine and its lights switched off, he did not move. It was only when he felt the sting of the **syringe** in his arm and woke to see her face close to his that he knew she was back.



He saw the syringe in her hand and understood that it hadn't been a bee: she had given him an injection.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

In his dream he was stung by a bee, so at first he thought he was dreaming.

'Paul?'

In his dream the bee was dangerous and he wanted desperately to escape.

'Paul!'

That was no dream-voice: it was Annie's voice.

He forced his eyes open. She was standing there in the shadows as if she had never been away, wearing her ugly clothes. He saw the syringe in her hand and understood that it hadn't been a bee: she had given him an injection. But what had she –?

Fear came again, but his mind was too dull to feel it strongly. Whatever drug she had given him was making things unreal for him. He tried to lift his hands and it felt as if there were invisible weights hanging from them.

It's the end, he thought. *The end of the story of Paul Sheldon.* Curiously, the thought almost made him happy. *The end of the thousand and one nights.* Strange, half-formed ideas kept coming into his mind as the powerful drug crept into all the corners of his brain.

'There you are!' Annie said. 'I see you, Paul . . . those blue eyes. Did I ever tell you that I think your eyes are lovely? But I suppose plenty of women have told you that – and bolder women than me.'

She was sitting on the end of his bed. She bent down to check something on the floor and for a moment all he could see was her broad, strong back. He heard the sounds of something metal and something wooden – and the unmistakable sound of a box of matches.

She turned back towards him and smiled. Whatever else might have happened, she was no longer depressed. That must be good, mustn't it?

'What do you want first, Paul?' she asked. 'The good news or the bad news?'

'Good news first.' He managed a big, foolish grin. 'I suppose the bad news is that you don't really like the book. I tried. I thought it was going well.'

She looked at him sadly. 'I *love* the book, Paul. Why do you think I asked you to fill in all the "n"'s yourself? Because I don't want to read any more until the end. I don't want to spoil it.'

Paul's drugged grin widened. If she loved the book she wasn't going to kill him – at least not yet.

Annie smiled back at him, 'The good news,' she said, 'is that your car has gone. I've been very worried about your car, Paul. I knew only a big storm would wash it away. When the snow melted in the spring the water from the mountains was enough to wash away the body of that dirty bird Pomeroy, but a car is much heavier than a man, isn't it? But the storm and the melting snow at the same time did it. Your car has gone. That's the *good* news.'

Alarm bells rang in Paul's mind. Who was Pomeroy? Then he remembered: the young man in Annie's album.

'Don't pretend, Paul,' she said. 'I know you know about Pomeroy. I know you've read my album. I suppose I wanted you to read it; otherwise, why would I have left it out? But I wanted to be sure – and when I came back the hair was broken.'

'Hair?' he said faintly.

'Yes, I read about it somewhere. If you think someone has been looking through your belongings you stick some hair over the drawers or the book or whatever. Then if the hair is broken or moved you know that someone has been there.'

Again she bent over the end of the bed. Again there were the sounds of something metal and something wooden.

'So I crept in this morning,' she said, 'as quiet as a mouse – and yes, all three hairs were broken, so I *knew* you'd been looking at my album.' She paused, and smiled again. 'I wasn't surprised. I knew you had been out of the room. *That*'s the bad news, Paul. I've known for a long, long time.'

He should feel angry or disappointed or something, he supposed, but the drug made it impossible.

'Anyway, we were talking about your car,' she said. 'Early yesterday afternoon I felt a lot better. I spent most of the time up there on my knees, praying to God; and you know, Paul, when you pray sincerely to God he always answers your prayers. I knew what I had to do. I put the special tyres on the car, for driving on ice, and drove slowly down from the hills. It was very dangerous, Paul, but I felt safe in the arms of God.'

'That's very nice, Annie,' Paul tried to say, but the sounds were indistinct: *That'sh very nishe Annie.*

'I stopped on the way down to look for your car. I knew what I would have to do if I saw it. If it was there, visible, there would be questions, and I'd be the first one they'd question because they know about my past. Actually, one of the reasons I rescued you and brought you home was that you crashed there.'

'What do you mean?'

'I parked there, in exactly the same place, when I got rid of that Pomeroy.' She slapped her hand in contempt. 'He said he was an artist, but he was just another dirty bird. He was hitch-hiking and I picked him up. He said he was going to Sidewinder to do a job there. I let him stay here. We were lovers.'

She looked at Paul, challenging him to deny it. He didn't say anything, but he didn't believe her at all.

'Then I found out that he didn't have a job in Sidewinder. I looked at some of his drawings and they were terrible. *I* could have drawn better pictures. He came in while I was looking at them and we had an argument. He laughed at me, so I . . .'

'You killed him,' Paul said.

She seemed uncomfortable. 'I guess it was something like that. I don't remember very well. I only remember him being dead. I remember giving him a bath.'

He looked at her and felt sick, soupy horror. He could see in his mind Pomeroy's body in the bath with no clothes on, eyes open and staring up at the ceiling . . .

'I *had* to,' she said. 'You probably don't know what the police can do with just one hair or a piece of dirt from someone's finger. You don't know, but I do, because I worked in hospitals for ten years. I *know. I know.*' She was making herself angry with that special mad Annie anger which he knew so well by now. 'They're all out to get me, *all* of them! Do you think they would have listened if I'd tried to tell them about him? They'd probably say that I'd tried to kiss him and he laughed at me and then I killed him.'

And you know what, Annie? I think that just might be closer to the truth.

'The dirty birds around here would say *anything* to make trouble for me.' She paused, breathing hard, and again seemed to challenge him to deny what she was saying. 'I washed him . . . what was left of him . . . and drove up into the hills. I parked and carried him about a mile into the woods. I didn't hide him or anything. No, I knew the snow would cover him and I thought the spring floods would take his body and clothes away. It worked even better than I'd imagined. They didn't find his body for a whole year! And twenty-seven miles away! But your car won't go so far, Paul. It's too heavy. It'll just be stuck somewhere in the thick forest. Maybe someone will find its rusty body in two years' time or in five years' time, when wild animals have made their home on the back seat and plants are growing through the windows. And by then the book will be finished and you'll be back in New York or somewhere and I'll be living my quiet life here. Maybe we'll write to each other sometimes.' She smiled at her imagination. 'Anyway, I was thinking, you see. Your car had gone, so I knew you *could* stay and finish the book, and that made me happy because I love you so much.'

'Thank you, Annie,' he said.

'But would you *want* to stay?' she went on. 'That was the question I had to ask myself. And I knew the answer. I knew the answer even before I saw that you were getting stronger, and

noticed those marks on the door over there and realized you had been out of the room. Then I started to look carefully and I saw that one of the figures on my table was in a different position. That bird *always* flies south, Paul. The first time you went out was after we had that silly fight about the paper, wasn't it, Paul?'

'Yes.' What was the point in denying it?

'You wanted your pills, of course. I should have guessed, but when I'm angry, I get . . . you know . . .'

I certainly do know, Annie.

'Then two days later, one afternoon when you were asleep, I tried to come into your room to give you your medicine and the door handle wouldn't turn at first. There was a noise inside it as if something was loose. So I gave you some stronger medicine to make sure that you wouldn't wake up, and I took the whole lock and handle off the door, and look! Look what I found!'

She put her hand in her pocket, pulled out a broken bit of hairpin and showed it to Paul.

'Then, of course, I realized what was happening, and found the marks on the door-frame, too.'

Paul couldn't help himself; he began to laugh. He had been so stupid.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

When he quietened down she asked: 'How many times did you leave the room?'

The knife. Oh, no, the knife.

'Twice. No, three times. I had to get some water yesterday. But I wasn't trying to escape, Annie. I'm writing a book.'

'You didn't try the telephone, I suppose, or investigate the locks. No, you were such a good little boy.'

'Of course I did.' He was beginning to wish she would go

away. The drug was making him partly tell the truth, but he also badly wanted to sleep.

'How many times did you go out?'

'I *told* you. Three times.'

'How many times?' Her voice was rising. *'Tell the truth.'*

'I *am* telling the truth. Three times!'

'You're treating me like a fool.'

'Annie, I swear –'

'Oh, yes, you swear. People who tell lies love to swear. Let me tell you, Mister Clever. I stretched hairs all over the place – upstairs, downstairs, out in the barn – and a lot of them have gone.'

Annie, how could I have gone upstairs? How could I have gone outside to the barn? But she didn't give him time to protest; she went straight on.

'So you tell me that you left the room only three times, Mister Clever, and I'll tell you that you're the fool, not me. *How many times?*'

'Three.'

'Once for medicine.'

'Yes.'

'Once for food.'

'Yes.'

'And once for water.'

'Yes. Yes, I told you.'

She reached into her pocket again and brought out the butcher's knife.

'I looked under your mattress just before I gave you the injection for your operation, and see what I found.'

What did she mean by 'operation'? He was suddenly sure that she intended to use the knife on him.

'But you didn't get it out of the kitchen, did you? You only went for medicine, food and water. The knife must have flown here all by itself. What kind of fool do you think I am, Paul? *How many times?*'

'All right, all right. I got the knife when I went for water. But, Annie, what did you mean by "operation"?'

'I think you went seven times,' she said.

'Yes, if that's what you want to hear, I left the room seven times,' Paul said. He was angry now, because he was frightened.

Then she started to speak softly and he began to drift, almost into sleep.

'Do you know what the British used to do to workers in their diamond **mines** who tried to escape, Paul?'

'They killed them, I suppose,' he said, still with his eyes closed.

'Oh, no,' she replied. 'That would be like throwing away a whole car just because some little thing went wrong. No, they still needed them for the mines, so they just made sure that they couldn't run away again. They performed a little operation, Paul, and that's what I'm going to do to you. It's for your own good. Please try to remember that.'

The ice-cold wind of fear blew over Paul's body and his eyes flew open. She got up from the bed and pulled back the blankets so that his legs and feet were uncovered.

'No,' he said. 'No . . . Annie . . . whatever it is you're planning, we can talk about it, can't we? Please . . . you don't have to . . .'

She bent over and picked up some things from the floor. When she straightened up she was holding an axe in one hand and a **blowlamp** in the other. The blade of the axe shone dully. She bent down again and picked up the box of matches and a bottle of dark liquid.

'Annie, no!' he screamed. *'Annie, I'll stay here, I promise. I won't even get out of bed. I'll do whatever you say!'*

'It's all right,' she said, and her face now had that blank look. Some part of his mind which was not filled with fear knew that when this was over she would remember hardly anything at all about it. This was the woman who graduated in 1966 and now, in 1987, told him that she had been a nurse for only ten years.

She probably hardly remembered killing all those babies. He suddenly knew that this was the axe she had used on Pomeroy.

He continued to scream. He tried to turn over, as if he could get away from her, but his broken legs and drugged body refused to obey.

Annie poured some of the liquid on to his left ankle and some more on to the blade of the axe. The smell reminded Paul of doctors' offices in his childhood.

'There won't be much pain, Paul. It won't be bad.'

'Annie Annie oh Annie please no please don't Annie I swear to you I'll be good I swear to God I'll be good please give me a chance to be good ANNIE PLEASE LET ME BE GOOD–'

'Just a little pain, Paul, and then this unpleasant matter will be behind us.'

She threw the empty bottle over her shoulder, her face completely blank now. She seized the axe in both hands and moved her feet so that she was standing firmly on the floor.

'ANNIE OH PLEASE PLEASE DON'T HURT ME!'

'Don't worry,' she said, and her eyes were gentle. 'I'm a nurse.'

The axe whistled through the air and buried itself in Paul Sheldon's left leg just above the ankle. Pain exploded in his body. Blood splashed her face and the wall. He heard the blade rub against the bone as she pulled it free. He looked down and saw his toes moving. Then he saw her raising the axe again; drops of blood were falling off it. Her hair was hanging loosely around her blank, calm face.

He tried to pull back in spite of the pain, but he realized that, although his leg was moving, his foot wasn't. All he was doing was widening the cut, making it open like a mouth. He realized that his foot was joined to his leg by only a little flesh – and then the axe whistled down again. It cut through his leg and sank deep into the mattress.

Annie pulled the axe out of the mattress and threw it on to the ground. She picked up the blowlamp and lit it with a match.

She seized the axe in both hands and moved her feet so that she was standing firmly on the floor.

'There isn't time to sew all this up,' she explained. 'You're losing blood too fast.' She turned the flame on to the **stump** of his leg. Fresh pain seized Paul's body. Sweet-smelling smoke drifted up to his nose.

'Nearly finished,' she said. The blankets were burning now. Annie bent down again and picked up the yellow bucket. She poured water over the flames. Paul screamed again.

Annie stood and looked at him. 'You'll be all right,' she said. Her eyes seemed to move round the room aimlessly. It was a relief for her to notice something on the floor. 'I'll just get rid of the rubbish,' she said.

She picked up Paul's foot. The toes were still moving. She started to walk out of the room and then turned and said, 'Don't blame me for this. It was your own fault.'

Paul dived into the cloud, hoping that it would bring death this time, not just unconsciousness. He dimly heard himself screaming and smelled his burned flesh. As his thoughts faded, he thought: *Dragon Lady! Kill you! Dragon Lady! Kill you!*

Then there was nothing except nothing.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Some weeks later, on the first day of summer, the old typewriter lost its 't' as well. Paul thought: *I am going to complain. I am not just going to* ask *for a new typewriter, I am going to* demand *one. I know she can afford it.*

Of course he would ask Annie for nothing and certainly would not demand. Once there had been a man who would at least have *asked*. That man had been in much more pain, but he still would have asked.

He had been that man and he supposed he ought to be ashamed, but *that* man had two big advantages over this one: *that* man had two feet . . . and two thumbs.

Paul sat quietly for a moment, staring at the typewriter, and

then simply continued to type. It was better that way – better not to ask, better not to protest. Annie had become too strange. He had known for a long time what she was *capable* of doing; but these days he couldn't guess what would make her do it.

So he continued to work, but after five or six pages the typewriter lost the letter 'e', the most common letter in the English language. Paul could hardly believe it. *What shall I do now?* he thought, but of course the answer was obvious. He would write by hand.

But not now. The hole in the paper – the hole through which Misery and Ian and Geoffrey lived – had closed with a crash.

He listened to the sound of the **lawnmower** outside. Annie had a lawnmower which was like a small tractor. As soon as he thought of Annie he remembered the axe rising and falling, her calm face splashed with his blood. He remembered every word she had spoken, every word he had screamed, every sound and movement.

Why couldn't he forget? You're supposed to forget, aren't you? People who have car crashes forget what happened and are surprised when they wake up in hospital. So why couldn't *he* forget?

Because writers remember everything, Paul, especially the things that hurt. If you point to a writer's scars, he will tell you the story of every small one. From the big ones you get novels.

Perhaps memory would heal him. But why should he bother to remember? She had done it, and all the time between then and now had been painful and boring, except when he had worked on his silly book in order to escape feeling pain and being bored. There was no point in remembering, no point in anything.

But there was. The point was Misery, because Misery kept him alive. As long as he was writing the book Annie let him live. But he wasn't writing the book for Annie; he wasn't writing the book to please Annie, but to escape from her. And then he realized that as long as he was writing the book he let

himself live too. He could have died that day, the day of the axe, but he didn't – and he didn't because he wanted to finish the book! It wasn't just Annie: *he* wanted to know what happened too.

He was a writer, and writers remember everything, so he let himself remember.

This time the cloud had been darker, thicker, smoother. There was a feeling not of floating but of sinking. Sometimes thoughts came and sometimes, dimly, he heard Annie's voice. She sounded afraid: 'Drink this, Paul . . . you've *got* to!'

How close had he come to sinking on the day of the axe? He didn't know, but he felt almost no pain during the week after the 'operation', which seemed to show that he was close to death. So did the fear in Annie's voice.

He had lain there, hardly breathing. And what brought him out of it, out of the cloud, was Misery. The book was unfinished. Paul didn't know what the ending was going to be and he didn't know how some of the details fitted together. He never knew everything about the novels he wrote; he always waited to find out as eagerly as any reader. And this meant that there were unfinished questions in his mind. Those questions worried him – and so he came out of the cloud to find out what would happen to Misery. He chose to live.

She didn't want to let him return to work – not at first. He could see in her eyes that she had been frightened and was still uncertain. She had come closer to killing him than she had intended. She was taking extraordinary care of him – changing the bandages on his stump every eight hours, washing him down.

While he was unconscious she also filled in all the 'n's in the typescript. It was as if she was saying to him: *You can't think that I'm cruel to you, Paul, when I look after you so well and even write all those 'n's.*

He was finally able to persuade her that returning to work would help him, not harm him. And she too wanted urgently to

know what was going to happen in the book. This was the one thing the two of them in that house shared: this crazy interest in Misery's adventures.

He had always known he could write *good* books – books like *Fast Cars* – and that the Misery books were just a way of making money. But why had he written so many Misery books? He had plenty of money. It was – and he almost hated to admit it to himself – because they gave him something his other books did not: the Misery books gave him the excitement of needing to know what would happen in the adventure. He shared this with his millions of readers, who eagerly turned the pages; he shared this with Annie. It was crazy. He was going to die anyway; she was going to kill him. But he still had to write. It was more than just a way of escaping the cruel reality of his situation: he had to find out how the story would end. And it *was* the best Misery novel he had ever written, just as Annie had said it would be.

At first, sitting and typing were extremely painful and he could work only for short periods of time. The pain in his stump would burst into flame and it would flash through his body. But gradually he was able to work more, and he was right: he did regain some strength. He would never be the man he had been in the past, but he did recover some health.

One day Annie had come in with some ice-cream. Although he didn't like it, he forced himself to eat it for fear of angering her. There was something about her that day which worried him. It was as if she was pretending to be cheerful. And then she came out with it – the reason for the gift of the ice-cream. She put her spoon down, wiped her chin with the back of her hand and said pleasantly: 'Tell me the rest.'

Paul put his own spoon down. 'I beg your pardon?'

'Tell me the rest of the story. I can't wait.'

He ought to have guessed that this would happen. 'I can't do that,' he said.

Her face had darkened immediately. 'Why not?'

'Because I'm a bad storyteller.'

She ate the rest of her ice-cream in five huge mouthfuls. Paul's teeth ached just from watching her. Then she put her dish down and looked at him angrily, not as if he was the great Paul Sheldon, her hero, but as if he was someone who had dared to *criticize* the great Paul Sheldon.

'If you're a bad storyteller, how have you written so many books – books which have sold millions and millions of copies?'

'I didn't say I was a bad story-*writer*. I think I'm good at that, in fact. But I'm a useless story-*teller*.'

'You're just making up a stupid excuse.' Now her hands were closed into fists, tight against the sides of her skirt. He found that he didn't really care that she was angry. He was frightened of being hurt again, but part of him didn't care what happened.

'It's not an excuse,' he said. 'The two things are quite different. People who tell stories usually can't write stories. If you think writers are any good at talking you ought to watch some poor fool of a novelist being interviewed on TV. Apart from that, I never quite know what the ending of one of my stories is going to be. I only really know when I've written it.'

'Well, I don't want to wait,' she said like a spoiled child. 'I brought you some nice ice-cream, and at least you could tell me a *few* things. All right, you needn't tell me the whole story, but . . .'

Annie fired some questions at Paul about the book, but Paul shook his head to show that he wouldn't tell.

She became even blacker, but her voice was soft. 'You're making me very angry. You know that, don't you, Paul?'

'Of course I know it, but I can't help it.'

'I could *make* you tell,' she said, but she knew she couldn't. She could hurt him so that he said a lot of things, but she couldn't make him tell a story whose ending he didn't know. The blackness was beginning to disappear from her face. She was fighting an impossible fight.

'Annie, I'm not being selfish. I'm not telling you because I

really want you to like the story. If I try to tell you it'll come out wrong, and then you won't like it and you won't want the book any more.' *And then what will happen to me?*

'But does Hezekiah really know about Misery's father? You could at least tell me that.'

'Do you want the novel or do you want a bedtime story?' he asked.

'Don't you dare be so sarcastic with me!' she shouted.

'Then don't pretend that you don't understand what I'm saying,' he shouted back.

She pulled back from him in surprise and the last of the blackness disappeared from her face.

He had skated on thin ice that time. He had expected her to get angry or depressed, but instead they had returned to the old routine: Paul wrote and Annie read what he wrote each day and filled in the missing letters. But in fact he *had* made her angry. Her anger stayed just below the surface, however, so he was never aware of it – at least not until a week later, when he had complained about the typewriter, about the missing 'n'.

'Well, if it bothers you so much I'll have to give you something to stop you thinking about that stupid "n",' Annie said. She left the room and he heard her in the kitchen, looking for something in the drawers. She was cursing in her peculiar way about 'stupid' this and 'dirty' that.

Ten minutes later she came in with the syringe, the bottle of dark liquid and an electric knife. Paul immediately began to scream. Anne tested the knife and Paul again begged and promised to be good. He twisted and turned in his wheelchair.

'Stay still,' she ordered, 'or I'll use this knife on your throat.' He stayed still while she poured the liquid on his thumb and on the blade of the knife. She switched the knife on and bent over him, concentrating on her work. As the blade hit into the flesh between his thumb and finger she told him – in a voice which suggested that this was going to hurt her more than it was going to hurt him – that she loved him.

She had cut his thumb off in the morning, and then that night she had hurried into his room, carrying a cake and singing 'Happy Birthday to You'. It wasn't his birthday. There were candles all over the cake, in no order. There, in the exact centre of the cake, like an extra big candle, had been his thumb – his now-grey thumb – with the nail a little rough because he sometimes chewed it when he was thinking. *If you promise to be good*, she had told him, *you can have a piece of cake, but you won't have to eat any of the special candle*. So he had promised to be good – and so he wasn't going to complain that the typewriter had now lost its 't' and its 'e' as well.

Paul was nearly asleep, sitting in his wheelchair by the window, listening to the steady sound of the lawnmower's engine and remembering. He jumped and wondered what had woken him up. At first he didn't believe what he saw out of the window coming into Annie's farm; he thought he must really be asleep.

It was a police car.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

I won't scream!

He sat at the window, totally awake now, totally aware that the police car he was seeing was as real as his left foot had once been.

Scream, you fool, scream!

He wanted to, but he could hear Annie's voice saying, *Don't you dare scream*. When he tried to scream his voice dried up and his mind was filled with pictures of the axe and the electric knife. He remembered the sounds: he remembered screaming *then*, but not to gain attention from anyone.

He tried again to open his mouth – and failed; he tried to raise his hands – and failed. A faint, low sound broke out from between his lips, and his hands moved lightly on the sides of the

typewriter, but that was all he could do. Nothing which had happened in the past – except perhaps for the moment when he had realized that, although his left leg was moving, his foot stayed still – was as terrible as the hell of not being able to move. In real time it didn't last long – perhaps five seconds – but inside Paul Sheldon's head it seemed to go on for years.

He could escape! All he had to do was break the window and scream: *Help me! Help me! Save me from Annie! Save me from the Dragon Lady!* But at the same time another voice was screaming: *I'll be good, Annie! I won't scream! I promise! Don't cut off any more of me!* He knew he was frightened of her, but he hadn't realized until now the extent of his fear.

His mind told him that he was going to die anyway. As soon as he had finished the book she was going to kill him. So if he screamed, and if the policeman saw him, and if that made Annie kill him now, what was the difference? Perhaps two weeks of life. *There's not much to lose, then, and a lot to win. So scream, Paul, scream! What's the matter with you? Are you already dead?*

The policeman got out of the car. He was young – about twenty-three years old – and was wearing very dark glasses, which completely hid his eyes and reflected the light like a mirror. He paused, just twenty metres away from Paul's window, and adjusted his jacket.

Scream! Don't scream. *Scream and you're dead.* I'm not dead yet. I'M NOT DEAD YET! *Scream, you coward!*

Paul forced his lips open, sucked air into his lungs and closed his eyes. He had no idea what was going to come out of his mouth. Was anything going to come out?

'DRAGON!' Paul screamed. *'DRAGON LADY!'*

Now his eyes opened wide. The policeman was looking towards the house. Paul could not see his eyes, but he seemed to have heard something.

Paul looked down at the table. Next to the typewriter was a heavy glass vase, which had been empty for weeks. He seized it and threw it at the window. The glass broke and fell on to the

ground outisde. Paul thought it was the best sound he had ever heard. It made his tongue free.

'I'm here! Help me! Watch out for the woman! She's crazy!'

The policeman looked straight at Paul. His mouth dropped open. He reached into his pocket and brought out something which could only be a picture. He looked at it and then walked a few steps closer. Then he spoke the only four words Paul ever heard him say, the last four words *anyone* ever heard him say. After that he would make a few sounds, but no real words.

'Oh, God!' the policeman exclaimed. 'It's you!'

Paul had been staring at the policeman, so he didn't see Annie until it was too late. She was still riding the lawnmower, so that she seemed to be half human, half something else. For a moment Paul's mind saw her as an actual dragon. Her face was pulled into an expression of extreme hatred and anger. In one hand she was carrying a wooden cross.

The cross had marked the grave of one of the cows that had died while Annie was away in her Laughing Place. When the ground had become soft in the spring, Paul had watched Annie burying the rotten cows. It had taken her most of the day to dig the holes in the ground. Then she dragged the bodies out of the barn with her car and dropped them into the holes. After she had filled the holes in again she solemnly planted crosses on the piles of earth and said some prayers.

Now she was riding towards the policeman with the sharp end of the cross pointing towards his back.

'Behind you! Look out!' Paul shouted. He knew that it was too late, but he shouted anyway.

With a thin cry Annie stabbed the cross into the policeman's back.

'AG!' said the policeman, and took a few steps forward. He bent his back and reached both hands over his shoulder. He looked to Paul like a man who was trying to scratch his back.

In the meantime Annie got off the lawnmower and stood watching the policeman. Now she rushed forward and pulled

the cross out of his back. He turned towards her, reaching for his gun, and she drove the cross into his stomach.

'OG!' said the policeman this time, and fell on to his knees, holding his stomach.

Annie pulled the cross free again and drove it into the policeman's back, between his shoulders. The first two blows had perhaps not gone deep enough to kill him, but this time the wooden post went at least five centimetres into the kneeling policeman's back. He fell face down on to the ground.

'THERE!' Annie cried, standing over the man and pulling the cross out again. 'HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT, YOU DIRTY BIRD!'

'Annie, stop it!' Paul shouted.

She looked at him. Her dark eyes shone like coins and she was grinning the grin of the madman who has stopped controlling himself at all. Then she looked down at the policeman again.

'THERE!' she cried, and stabbed the cross into his back again – and then into his neck, and then into his thigh and his hand and into his back again. She screamed 'THERE!' every time she brought the cross down. At last the cross broke.

Annie threw the bloody and broken cross away as if it no longer interested her and walked away from the policeman's body.

Paul was sure that she would come and kill him next. At least, if she did intend to hurt him, he hoped that she would kill him rather than cut any more pieces off his body.

Then he saw the policeman move. *He was still alive*!

The policeman raised his head off the ground. His glasses had fallen off and Paul could see his eyes. He was very young – young and hurt and frightened. He managed to get up on to his hands and knees, but then he fell forward. He got up again and began to crawl towards his car. He got about half of the way when he fell over. He struggled up again. Paul could see the bloody marks spreading on his uniform.

Suddenly the sound of the lawnmower was louder.

'Look out!' Paul screamed. *'She's coming back!'*

The policeman turned his head with a look of alarm on his face. He reached for his gun. *That's right!* thought Paul. He got his gun out.

'SHOOT HER!' Paul screamed.

But instead of shooting her the policeman's wounded hand dropped the gun. He reached out his hand for it. Annie pulled the wheel of the lawnmower-tractor around and ran over the reaching hand and arm. The young man in the policeman's uniform screamed in pain. Blood stained the grass.

Annie pulled the lawnmower around again and her eyes fell for a moment on Paul. Paul was sure it was his turn next. First the policeman, then him.

When the policeman saw the lawnmower coming for him again, he tried to crawl under the car. But he was too far away and he didn't even get close. Annie drove the tractor as fast as she could over his head.

Paul turned away and was violently sick on the floor.

CHAPTER TWENTY

He opened his eyes again only when he heard the sound of Annie's key in the lock of the outside door. The door to his room was open and he watched her coming down the hall in her boots and her man's shirt, which was splashed with blood. He wanted to say something, to tell her not to cut anything else off his body because he would die – he would *make* himself die; but no real sounds came out of his mouth.

'I'll come to you later,' she said. She closed his door and locked it; she had fitted a new Kreig lock on it.

He turned his head and looked dully out of the window. He could see only the lower half of the policeman's body, since his head was still under the lawnmower. The lawnmower was nearly on its side, up against the police car. It was supposed to

cut grass, not people's heads, so it had fallen over – but the accident had unfortunately not hurt Annie.

Paul felt terribly sorry for the young man, but was surprised to find another feeling mixed in with the sorrow. He recognized the feeling as envy. The policeman would never go home to his wife and children if he had them, but he had escaped Annie Wilkes.

Annie came round the corner of the house. She grabbed the policeman's bloody hand and pulled him down to the barn. She drove the police car into the barn and then she drove the lawnmower closer to the barn. There was blood all over the lawnmower.

She fetched a large plastic bag and began to tidy up. She whistled while she picked up pieces of uniform, the gun and the broken cross, and her face was calm and clear. She took the bag to the barn doors and threw it inside.

She came back to the front of the house and stopped outside Paul's window. She picked up the vase and passed it to him politely through the broken window.

'Here you are, Paul,' she said. 'I'll clean up the little pieces of glass later.'

For a second he thought of bringing the heavy vase down on to the back of her head as she bent over. But then he thought what she would do to him if he failed to kill her – and the vase was not heavy enough for him to be sure that he would kill her with it.

She looked up at him through the hole in the window. 'I didn't kill him, you know,' she said. '*You* killed him. If you had kept your mouth shut he would have left here safely. He'd be alive now and there would be none of this horrible mess to clean up.'

'Yes,' said Paul. 'And what about me?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'He had my picture,' Paul said. 'You picked it up just now and put it in your pocket. You know what that means. If a

policeman had my picture, then my car has been found. They're looking for me, Annie, and you know it. Why do you think the policeman was here?'

'I don't know what you're talking about,' said Annie. But Paul could see from her face that she did. The usual madness was there, but something else – pure evil was there too. 'And I don't have time to talk about it now,' she went on. 'Can't you see I'm busy?'

By the evening she had finished cleaning up. There was no sign of blood anywhere outside. She had washed down the lawnmower too – but Paul noticed that she forgot to clean underneath it. She often seemed to forget things if they were not directly in front of her face. Annie's mind was like the lawnmower, Paul thought – clean on the outside but disgusting underneath.

After she had finished outside she came into the house, and Paul heard her taking some things down to the basement. When her key turned in the lock on his door he thought: *This is it. She's got the axe and she's coming to get me.*

The door opened and Annie stood there. She had changed into clean clothes, too. When she came in he was surprised to find that he could talk to her quite calmly. He said, 'Go on, then. Kill me, Annie, if that's what you've come to do. But please don't cut anything else off me.'

'I'm not going to kill you, Paul,' she replied. 'I *should* kill you, but with a little luck I won't have to.'

She pushed him in his wheelchair across the room and down the hall. She opened the kitchen door and rolled him into there. The door to the cellar was open and he could smell the damp. She pushed the wheelchair to the edge of the stairs down to the cellar.

Spiders down there, he thought. *Mice down there. Rats down there!*

'No, Annie,' he said. 'I'm not going down there.'

'Yes, you are,' she said. 'The only question is: are you going

down there on my back or shall I just let you fall out of the wheelchair down those stairs? I'll give you five seconds to decide.'

'On your back,' he said straight away.

'Very sensible,' she said. She stood on the stairs in front of him so that he could put his arms round her neck. 'Don't do anything stupid, Paul. Don't try to choke me. I'm very strong, as you know. I'll throw you to the ground and you'll break your back.'

She lifted him easily out of his chair. His twisted, ugly legs hung down at her sides. She had taken the splints off some weeks ago. The left leg was now shorter than the right one by about ten centimetres. He had tried standing on the right leg by itself and he could do so, but only for a few minutes before the pain became too great.

She carried him down the stairs. She had put a thin mattress on the floor, some food and water and some medicine. She let him get off her back and on to the mattress.

When she turned round she was holding a syringe.

'No,' he said as soon as he saw it. 'No, no!'

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

'You must think I'm in a really bad mood,' Annie said. 'I wish you'd relax, Paul. I'm not going to give you an injection. I'm leaving the syringe here with you, because it's damp down here and your legs might ache quite badly before I get back. Now, we have to talk.'

She settled down and told him her plan. She was drinking constantly from plastic bottles of Pepsi-Cola. She explained that she needed a lot of sugar at the moment.

'Listen to me. We're going to be all right if it gets dark before anyone comes to check on that policeman. It'll be dark in about an hour and a half. If someone comes sooner, there's this,' she

said. She reached into her bag and pulled out the policeman's gun. 'First I kill whoever comes, then you, then me.'

Once it was dark, she said, she was going to drive the police car up to her Laughing Place, with her husband's old motor bike in the back. She could hide the car up there and it wouldn't be found for months.

'I'd take you with me, because you've shown that you can be a real nuisance,' she said, 'but I couldn't bring you back on the bike. It'll be hard enough driving on those mountain paths by myself. I might fall off and break my neck!'

She laughed at her joke, but Paul said, 'And then what would happen to me?'

'Don't worry so much, Paul, you'd be fine,' she replied, but he knew he wouldn't. He would die like a dog down here in the damp basement and make a meal for the rats. There was a Kreig lock on the cellar door by now and the stairs were steep anyway. There were tiny windows, high up one wall, but they were covered in dirt.

'So I'm going to put him in his car and take him up to my Laughing Place and bury him there – him and his . . . you know . . . his *bits* – in the woods.'

Paul said nothing. He just remembered the cows complaining from the barn and then becoming silent. Annie had left them to die and he hoped she wasn't going to forget him too.

'I just hope nobody comes to the house while I'm away. I don't *think* they'd hear you down here even if they came right up to the house. But I'm going to put a chain across the gate from the road and hang a note on the chain saying that I've gone away for a few days. That might stop them coming up to the house.'

Annie was not taking any chances, Paul realized. She was playing 'Can You?' in real life, while he could only play it when he was writing books.

'I should be back by midday tomorrow,' she continued. 'I don't expect the police will come before then. They *will* come,

of course; I know that. But I don't think they'll come asking questions before then. They'll just drive along the roads, looking for his car. So if I'm back by midday I'll have you back in your room before they come. I'll even let you watch me talk to them, if you promise to be good. I say "them" because I think two of them will come, don't you?'

Paul agreed.

'But I can handle two, if I need to.' She patted the handbag which held the policeman's gun. 'I want you to remember that young man's gun while you watch me talk to them, Paul. I want you to remember that it's going to be in here all the time I'm talking to them, whenever they come – tomorrow or the day after or whenever. You can see them, but if they see you – either by accident or because you do something stupid like you did today – if that happens I'm going to take the gun out of the bag and start shooting. And remember: you're already responsible for one policeman's death.'

'Nonsense,' said Paul, knowing that she would hurt him for saying it.

But she didn't. She just smiled her calm, mother-knows-best smile.

'Maybe you don't care for them, Paul. Maybe you don't care if you kill two more people. But if I have to kill those two policeman, I'll have to kill you and me as well, and I think you still care for yourself.'

'Not really, Annie,' Paul said. 'I don't really mind leaving this life any more.'

'Oh, yes, I've heard that before,' she said. 'But as soon as you switch off their medical equipment or pick up the pillow to put it on their faces, then they struggle and try to cry out.'

But you never let that stop you, did you, Annie?

'Anyway, I just wanted to tell you,' she said. 'If you really don't care, then when they come you can shout to them. When they come I'll meet them and they'll ask me about the young policeman. "Yes," I'll say, "he was here yesterday. He showed

me a picture of Paul Sheldon. I told him I hadn't seen him and then he went away." They'll be surprised. "How can you be sure that you've never seen Paul Sheldon?" they'll ask. "He disappeared last winter." I'll tell them that Paul Sheldon is my favourite author, so I'd remember seeing him. I have to say that, Paul. Do you remember?'

He remembered. He remembered a photograph in her album. In the picture Annie was sitting in prison while she was waiting for the jury to return to court and pronounce her guilty or innocent. Under the picture was written: *Miserable? Not the Dragon Lady. Annie sits quietly and reads while she waits for the jury.* And in the picture Annie was holding up her book so that everyone could see she was reading the latest Misery novel.

'So,' Annie went on, 'I'll say that the young policeman wrote all this down in his book and said thank you. I'll say that I invited him in for a cup of coffee. He refused, but he accepted a bottle of cold Pepsi, because the day was so hot.' She held up an empty bottle of Pepsi. 'I'm going to stop and throw this in a ditch three or four kilometres up the road,' she said. 'But first I'll put his fingers all over it, of course.'

She smiled at him – a dry smile, with no humour in it.

'They'll find the bottle, and then they'll know that he went past my house – or they'll *think* they know, which is just as good, isn't it? They'll search for him for a while, but then they'll come back. Oh, yes, they'll come back, because I'm the Dragon Lady. I'm the only crazy one in the area, so they'll come back, and they'll come into the house this time. But they'll believe me at first – that's the point. So we'll have some time, Paul. Maybe as much as a week.' She looked at him coolly. 'You're going to have to write faster, Paul.'

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Darkness fell and no police came. Annie spent the time putting new glass in Paul's window and picking up the broken pieces, so

that when they came they would see nothing suspicious. *Unless they look under the lawnmower*, thought Paul. But why would they do that?

Before she left, Paul asked her to bring him some paper so that he could continue writing the book while she was away. He needed the drug of writing. She shook her head regretfully.

'I can't do that, Paul. I'd have to leave the light on down here and someone might see the light through the windows. And if I give you a torch or a candle you might try to shine it through the windows.'

He thought of being left alone down here in the cellar in the dark, and his skin felt cold. He thought of the rats hiding in their holes in the walls, waiting for darkness so that they could come out. He wondered whether they could smell his fear.

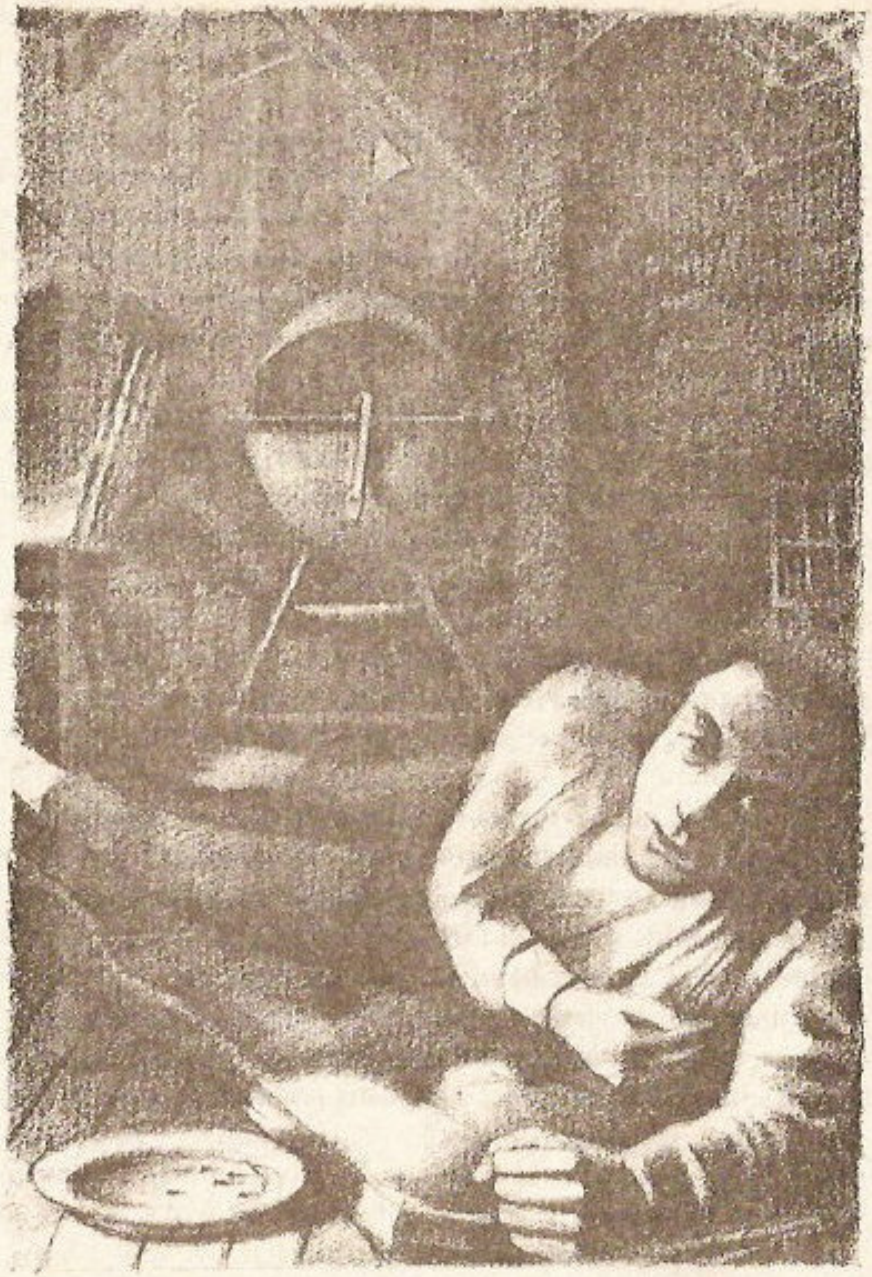
'Don't leave me in the dark, Annie. The *rats*.'

'I have to. Don't be such a baby. I've got to go now. If you need an injection, push the syringe into your leg. Don't worry about the rats, Paul. They'll probably recognize that you're a rat too.' She laughed at her joke and continued laughing all the way up the stairs.

When she closed the door to the kitchen it became totally black. He could hear her drive away. He imagined that she was still laughing. In the darkness his imagination soon began to play games with his mind. He imagined that the young policeman came to life in the barn and crawled up to the house; he imagined that he came through the wall into the cellar. He felt one of the policeman's cold, dead fingers touch his cheek – but it was only a large spider and Paul realized that he had been dreaming.

His legs were painful now and he gave himself an injection. Then he fell properly asleep, and, when he woke up, the dull light of early morning was filling the cellar. He saw a huge rat sitting in the plate of food which Annie had left, eating cheese. He screamed and the rat ran away.

He took some Novril and looked round the cellar. He saw the



Suddenly an idea burst into his mind like a bright light. He looked at the idea from all directions and it still seemed sweet.

barbecue stove with all its tools and equipment, and remembered burning *Fast Cars* . . . and suddenly an idea burst into his mind like a bright light. He looked at the idea from all directions and it still seemed sweet. At last he had a plan which might be successful. He fell asleep again with a smile on his face, dreaming about the next pages he would write.

Annie came back in the middle of the afternoon. She was silent, but seemed tired rather than depressed. Paul asked her if everything had gone all right and she nodded.

'Do you want another injection, Paul?' she asked. 'Your legs must be hurting a lot by now.'

It was true. The damp had made his legs hurt terribly, but he wanted her out of the cellar as quickly as possible, so he told her he was OK. When he got on to her back for the ride up the stairs he had to bite his lips to stop himself shouting in pain. At the bottom of the stairs she paused, and he hoped . . . prayed . . . that she would not notice the missing can of barbecue **fuel**; he had pushed it down the back of his trousers.

She didn't seem to notice anything. When he was back in his room he said, 'I think I would like that injection now, Annie.'

She looked at his face, which was covered in sweat from the pain, and then nodded.

As soon as she left the room to fetch the medicine he pushed the small, flat fuel can under the mattress. He hadn't hidden anything there since the knife, so he didn't expect her suddenly to look there. Anyway, he wasn't planning to leave it there for long.

After she had given him the injection she said she was going to sleep. 'If a car comes I'll hear it,' she said. 'I'll leave your wheelchair next to your bed so that you can get up and work if you want to.'

'I probably will, later,' he said. 'There isn't much time now, is there, Annie?'

'No, there isn't, Paul. I'm glad you understand that.'

'Annie,' he said innocently. 'Since I'm getting to the end of the book, I wonder if you'd do something for me.'

'What?'

'Please don't read any more. When I've finished it all, then you can read all the last chapters. Will you do that? It'll make it more exciting for you.'

'Yes, thank you, Paul. Yes. I'll do that.'

Four hours later she was still asleep. He had heard her go to bed upstairs at four o'clock and had heard nothing since then. He felt safe. He got into his wheelchair as quietly as possible and rolled himself over to his table by the window. Not long ago he had discovered a loose board in the floor. Under the board was a narrow space. The space was just big enough for the can of fuel. Paul sighed in relief when the board was back in postion. He gently blew the dust back over the board so that it looked the same as all the surrounding boards. He wrote some pages of the book and then went back to bed and slept peacefully.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Next day the police came. Paul heard the car and then heard Annie running down the corridor to his room. He put the pencil carefully down on the paper he was covering in his untidy handwriting.

Annie ran into the room. 'Get out of sight.' Her face was tight. She already had the bag with the gun around her shoulder. 'Get out of s–' She paused and saw that he had already rolled the wheelchair away from the window. 'Are you going to be good, Paul?'

'Yes,' he said.

Her eyes searched his face. 'I'm going to trust you,' she said.

She left the room and went outside to meet the policemen. Paul moved so that he could see out of the window without being seen himself.

The policeman who had come three days ago had been hardly

more than a child; these two were completely different. One was in uniform and one was a detective. Both were old and experienced. The detective looked tired, but his eyes were watching everything. The other policeman was large and obviously extremely strong.

They got out of the car and stood close to Annie while they asked her some questions which Paul could not hear. He thought about breaking the window again, but two things stopped him. First, the detective had his coat buttoned, so he would not be able to get his gun quickly. If he had noticed that, then Annie certainly had too. She would shoot the other policeman first and then the detective. The second thing that stopped him was his desire for revenge. The police would only put Annie in prison. He himself could hurt her, and he wanted to do that.

The big policeman pointed towards the house and Annie led them in through the kitchen door. Paul could now hear the conversation. The policemen were asking her about Officer Kushner, which was the young man's name, and Annie was telling them her story. She sounded very calm, but Paul thought he noticed some signs of suspicion in the policemen's voices.

They left and Annie came into Paul's room. She stared at him for a full minute.

'Why didn't you shout?' she asked. She couldn't understand it. In her world everyone was against her, so why hadn't he shouted?

'Because I want to finish the book,' he said. 'Because I want to finish it for you, Annie.'

She looked at him uncertainly, wanting to believe. Finally she did believe him. It was the truth, anyway.

Three days later the local TV news programme sent a crew to Annie's farm. Annie refused to let them on to her land and fired a shot into the air to warn them off. Afterwards she said, 'You know what they want, Paul? This is what they want.' She scratched her forehead viciously with her fingernails, so that blood flowed down her face.

'Annie, stop it!'

'This is what they want too.' She hit herself on the cheek. 'And this.' She hit her other cheek, hard.

'STOP IT!' he screamed.

'It's what they want!' she screamed back. She pressed her hands against the wounds on her forehead and then held her hands out to him so that he could see the blood. Then she left the room and he took up his pencil and fell through the hole in the paper again.

The next day two different policemen came, to take a statement from her. She told them the story about Kushner and the Pepsi-Cola bottle. They asked her about the scratches on her forehead. 'How did you get those?'

'I had a bad dream last night.'

'What?'

'I dreamed that people remembered me after all this time and started coming out here again,' Annie said.

When they had gone Annie came into his room. Her face was distant and she looked ill. 'How much longer, Paul? When will you finish the book?'

'Tomorrow,' he said.

'Next time they'll have permission to search the house,' she said, and left before he could reply. It didn't take him long to get back to work. His swollen fingers were still locked tightly on to the pencil. Now more than ever he needed to finish the book.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

She woke him up the next morning with his breakfast. 'It's a very special day, Paul, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

She bent over and kissed him. 'I love you, Paul. Can I start reading it now?'

'No, Annie, you must wait. It's important that you wait.'

But she had gone blank again. He waited patiently for her to return and then repeated his answer, so that this time she would hear it.

'I'll leave you now,' she said. 'But you'll call me when you've finished the book, won't you? I've got some champagne in the fridge. I don't know much about wine and things, but the man at the shop said it was the best. I want us to have the best, Paul.'

'That sounds lovely, Annie. But there is one other thing you could do for me, to make it special.'

'What's that?'

'I'd really like a cigarette – just one, when I finish. There were some cigarettes in my suitcase.'

'But cigarettes are bad for you.'

'Annie, do you really think I have to worry about dying from smoking now? Do you really think that?'

She didn't say anything.

'I just want one cigarette. I've always relaxed with a cigarette immediately after finishing a book.'

'All right,' she said. 'But long before the champagne. I don't want to drink expensive champagne with my favourite author with all that dirty smoke in the air.'

She left and a while later came back with a single cigarette and a box of matches – with only one match in it. She put them quietly on the table and crept out of the room, not wanting to disturb her favourite author.

Several hours later Paul wrote the two words which every author loves and hates most: THE END. He sat back in satisfaction.

Then he bent over to the loose board in the floor.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

He called her five minutes later. He heard her heavy steps coming down the stairs. The room smelled strongly of fuel.

She stopped at the end of the hall and shouted out, 'Paul, are you *really* finished?'

Paul looked at the huge pile of paper in front of him on the table. It was wet with fuel.

'Well,' he shouted back, 'I did the best I could, Annie.'

'I can hardly believe it!' she said. 'After all this time! I'm so excited. I'll go and get the champagne. I won't be a minute!' She sounded like a little girl.

He heard her crossing the kitchen floor. The fridge door squeaked open and then shut again. She started down the hall.

He reached for the box of matches and took out the single match. He scratched it against the side, but it didn't light. She was nearly at his door. The third time, the match lit and he watched the yellow flame carefully.

'I just hope this –'

She stopped. Paul was holding the burning match just above the pile of paper. Paul had turned the top page around so that Annie could see it when she came into the room: MISERY'S RETURN, by Paul Sheldon. Annie's mouth dropped open.

'Paul, what are you going?'

'I've finished,' he said. 'And it's good. In fact, Annie, I think it's the best thing I've ever written. Now I'm going to do a little trick with it. It's a good trick. I learned it from you.'

'Paul, no!' Her voice was full of pain and understanding. Her hands reached out and she dropped the champagne bottle and the glasses on to the floor. They broke: there were pieces of glass and champagne everywhere.

'It's a pity that you'll never read it,' Paul said, and smiled at her. It was his first real smile for months. 'Actually, I think it's better than a good novel: I think it was a *great* novel, Annie.'

The match was starting to burn his fingers. He dropped it on to the pile of paper. For one awful moment he thought it had gone out, but then pale blue fire rushed across the top page and down the sides of the typescript. The flames grew taller and

stronger when they met the little pools of fuel which lay on the table on both sides of the typescript.

'OH, GOD, NO!' Annie screamed. 'NO! NOT MISERY! NOT HER! NO!'

Paul could now feel the heat of the flames on his face.

'PAUL, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? YOU CAN'T BURN MISERY, YOU DIRTY BIRD, YOU!'

And then she did exactly what he had known she would do: she seized the burning pile of paper. Then she turned round, intending to run to the bathroom with it and put it under the tap. As soon as she turned her back on Paul he picked up the heavy old typewriter and lifted it over his head. The side of the typewriter was hot and **blisters** sprang up on his hand. He ignored the pain and threw the typewriter at her. It hit her in the middle of her back.

'OO-OW!' Annie fell forward on to the floor, on top of the burning pile of paper.

Paul stood up on his one good leg. Tongues of flame began to play at the edges of Annie's clothes and he could already smell burning skin. She screamed in pain. She rolled over and struggled to her knees. Now he could see broken glass in her arms and face, too. Some of her clothes had melted on to her skin. He did not feel at all sympathetic or sorry.

'I'm going to kill you,' she said, and started to get to her feet.

Paul let himself fall on top of her. This pushed her down on to the hard typewriter. She screamed in pain again and tried to push him off. She rolled over on to her back. He grabbed some paper, which was lying in a pool of champagne, and squashed it into a ball.

'Get off me!' she shouted, and her mouth opened wide. Paul pushed the ball of paper into her mouth.

'Here's your book, Annie,' he gasped, and he grabbed some more paper. She struggled under him and his left knee hit the ground. The pain was terrible, but he kept his position on top of her and fiercely punched more paper into her mouth . . . and

more and more, until the first balls of paper were deep in her throat, making it impossible for her to breathe.

She fought back with all her strength and managed to push him off her. Her hands reached for her swollen throat. There was little left of her clothes at the front of her body and he could see that her flesh was red and covered with blisters.

'Mumpf! Mark! Mark!' Annie said. She struggled to her feet. Paul pushed himself backwards along the floor, his legs straight out in front of him. He watched her carefully.

She took one step towards him, choking on the paper. Drops of champagne from the paper ran down her chin. Her eyes looked at him with a question: *Paul, what happened? I was bringing you champagne. Why did you do this to me?* She took another step and fell over the typewriter again. Her head hit the wall hard as she fell down and she landed heavily on the ground like a loose sack of bricks.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Annie had fallen on the main pile of burning paper; her body had stopped it burning.

Paul crawled towards his wheelchair. He had strained his back, there were blisters all over his right hand, his head ached and his stomach rolled with the sick-sweet smell of burned flesh. But he was free. The Dragon Lady was dead and he was free.

He was halfway to his wheelchair when Annie opened her eyes.

Paul watched, unbelieving, while she got slowly to her knees. Perhaps she could not be killed! Her eyes were staring and horrible. A huge wound, pink-red, showed through her hair on the left side of her head. Blood poured down her face.

'Durd!' Annie cried through her throatful of paper. She began to crawl towards him.

Paul turned away from her and started to crawl for the door.

He could hear her behind him. He started across the broken glass and then he felt her hand close around the stump of his left ankle. He screamed.

'Dirt!' Annie cried. Paul looked round to see whether she had spat out the paper, but she hadn't, and her face was starting to turn purple.

It was easy for him to pull his leg out of her grasp because there was no foot for her to hold on to. But she reached out again and seized him higher up the leg. Some broken glass stabbed into his elbow as he continued trying to crawl away.

'AW . . . GAW! OOO OW!'

He turned again and now her face was nearly black. He reached for the doorframe and pulled hard on it to try to escape, but her hand closed on his thigh.

'No!' he cried in fear and desperation. He felt her hands run like spiders up his back and reach his neck. He felt the weight of her body on his legs, pinning him to the floor. She moved further up his body, trapping him. It was difficult for him to breathe.

'GAW! OOO . . . BIRT! DIRT!'

The Dragon Lady, on top of him. She seemed dark and immense. The air was driven out of her lungs as she fell on to him, and her hands dug deep into his neck.

He screamed: *'Die! Can't you die? Can't you ever die?'*

Suddenly her hands went loose and she lay heavily on top of him.

He pulled himself out from underneath her body and crawled into the hall. Annie lay silent and face down in blood and spilled champagne and pieces of green glass. Was she dead? She *must* be dead. Paul did not believe she was dead.

He shut the door and reached up to turn the key in the lock. He lay down, in pain and exhaustion, on the floor. He stayed there, only half conscious, for an unknown period of time. He only moved eventually when he heard a scratching sound. At first he thought it was the rats in the cellar. Then Annie's thick

bloodstained fingers crept under the door and tried to seize the end of his shirt. Paul screamed and punched at the fingers with his fist. The fingers did not disappear back under the door, but at least they lay still.

Paul crawled further down the hall, towards the bathroom. He was in terrible pain now, from his legs, his back and his burned hand. As soon as he was inside he found the packets of Novril and swallowed three tablets. He sat with his back against the door and slept.

When he woke up it was dark. He listened carefully for any noises outside in the corridor. The more he listened the more he seemed to hear slight noises. *This is crazy*, he told himself. *She's dead* . . . But what was that? Was that a light footstep in the hall? . . . *and she is in a locked room.*

She could have escaped through the window.

Paul, she's DEAD!

Paul had a problem. He needed to check on something. He wanted to make sure that the typescript was safe . . . the *real* typescript. What Annie had seen and tried to save was just a pile of blank pages and old, uncorrected pages which he had collected. He had put the title-page on the top so that Annie would believe it was the book; but the real typescript was in his room, under the bed. He wanted it safe, he wanted people to read it. He knew it was the best book he had written. That was the problem. Did he have the courage to go back into the room to get the typescript? Suppose Annie was still alive!

He crawled slowly down the hall towards his room. In the shadows he imagined Annie everywhere: waiting for him in the sitting-room or further down the corridor. The boards on the floor made a noise behind him and he turned round. Nothing . . . this time.

Outside a car door shut and he heard a man's voice say, 'God! Look at this, will you?'

'In here!' he screamed. *'In here! I'm in here!'*

It was the two policemen from the day before. When they

managed to understand what Paul was saying they looked in his room. Paul stayed in the corridor. They came out again and the detective said, 'There's no one there. There's a hell of a mess – blood and wine and stuff – and the window's broken, but there's no woman in there.'

Paul was still screaming when he fainted.

They told him later that they found her in the barn. She was dead, but she was grasping the axe tightly in her hands and was on her way back towards the house.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Paul's legs slowly recovered in hospital and the doctors made him an excellent left foot. *Misery's Return* sold millions of copies . . . but Paul still sees Annie Wilkes waiting for him in corners, in shadows on the streets, in every woman who ever tells him that he is her favourite author.

EXERCISES

Vocabulary Work

Look back at the 'Dictionary Words' in this book.

1 The following groups of words are each connected with *one* of the 'Dictionary Words'. Which word is each of them connected with? (The first one has been done for you.)
   a bed – hiding place – under: *mattress*
   b face – red – embarrassed:
   c arm – string – needle:
   d grass – cut – machine:
   e photographs – newspaper stories – book:
2 Write similar groups of words which could be connected with the remaining 15 'Dictionary Words' in the book. Compare your ideas with other people's.

Comprehension

Chapters 1–9

1 Answer these questions.
   a Who is Misery Chastain?
   b What is the 'serious novel' Paul has just finished?
   c What *especially* does Annie not like about this book?
   d How does Annie make Paul destroy this book?
   e Why is Paul's wrecked car not discovered quickly?

Chapters 10–18

2 Complete these sentences.
   a The man in the Chevrolet comes to the farm because . . .
   b Paul unlocks the door of his room with . . .
   c According to the newspaper story, Annie's father died because . . .
   d Annie knows Paul looked in the photograph album because . . .
   e Annie cut off Paul's thumb because . . .

Chapters 19–28

3 Put these sentences in the right order.
   a She pushed the wheelchair to the edge of the stairs down to the cellar.
   b Some of her clothes had melted on to her skin.
   c The policeman looked straight at Paul. His mouth dropped open.
   d Paul's legs slowly recovered in hospital and the doctors made him an excellent left foot.
   e The room smelled strongly of fuel.

Discussion

1 Do you know of any similar real-life cases of secret killers, like Annie Wilkes, who have not been caught for a long time? How did they avoid discovery? Describe and discuss any cases you know of.
2 What were the most horrible and frightening moments in this book for you? Why?

Writing

1 Outline the whole story of Paul Sheldon's imprisonment by Annie in no more than ten sentences.
2 You are one of the police officers who finally find Paul. Write your police report (200–250 words) describing your previous suspicions and investigations, and the actual discovery of Paul in the house and Annie's body in the barn.

Review

1 What are the things which make *Misery* one of the best-known modern American horror stories (and films), in your opinion?
2 How does Stephen King build up both the physical appearance and the character of Annie Wilkes, step by step, in the early chapters of this book?

A story by Stephen King - the master of horror.

Paul Sheldon is Annie Wilkes's favourite writer. She loves all his books about Misery Chastain. When Annie finds Paul after a car accident, she takes him home to look after him. Then Annie discovers that Paul wants to kill Misery and to write different kinds of books. She is determined to stop him, and Paul becomes her prisoner.

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