BUSTER/ANNIE

~~BUSTER. I don't watch much TV.~~

START ANNIE. ~~Oh, well…~~

She closes the front door.

What can I do for you, Sheriff?

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

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

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

ANNIE. Are you telling me he's dead?

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

ANNIE. But you don't think so?

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

He lets that hang there a moment.

ANNIE. What's that?

BUSTER. The coyotes got to him.

ANNIE. No! Please, please no!

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

ANNIE. I told you as much.

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

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

BUSTER. That's right, you said that.

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

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

ANNIE. Both of them?

BUSTER. Paul Sheldon and Misery.

She keeps looking at him.

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

ANNIE. You did? What did you think?

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

ANNIE. Misery's not dead.

BUSTER. How's that?

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

END

Pause.

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

ANNIE. There already is.

Buster looks back at her.

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

BUSTER. I hope you're right about that.

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

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

She turns and goes into the house.

PAUL/ANNIE

Nineteen

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

Paul sleeps.

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

—but he's groggy—

—helpless—

—He has been strapped to his bed.

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

ANNIE. Hi, Punkin.

Paul manages a nod.

Guess what?—I know you've been out.

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

ANNIE. You've been out of your room.

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

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

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

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

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

Now she holds up the typewriter key.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Beat.

Looking for this?

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

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

PAUL. Pre-op?

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

She holds up the typewriter "n" key.

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

She is building to climax now.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ANNIE. Now, don't fuss.

Annie picks up a sledgehammer.

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

She pulls the sledgehammer back—

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

—gets ready to strike.

PAUL. Annie, for God's sake please!

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

END

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

—there is the sound of metal crushing bone—

Paul's scream is terrifying.

Almost done—just one more.

She swings the sledgehammer against his other ankle.

God I love you.

Paul cannot stop screaming. The set rotates.

Twenty

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

ANNIE. Sheriff?

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

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