

Thirteen

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

Annie enters—she holds papers in her hands.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PAUL. I wouldn't call that cheating—

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

PAUL. (*Cutting in.*) —cliffhangers—

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

Beat.

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

She is back in her childhood more strongly now.

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

She's remembering it all so clearly.

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

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

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

Pause.

Do you understand?

PAUL. Yes.

He does understand; she is right.

Yes.

ANNIE. Then you know what's wrong?

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

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

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

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

ANNIE. Maybe it was a bee.

PAUL. What?