

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.

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.*?

BUSTER. I don't watch much TV.

ANNIE. Oh, well...

She closes the front door.

What can I do for you, Sheriff?

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

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

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

ANNIE. Are you telling me he's dead?

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

ANNIE. But you don't think so?

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

He lets that hang there a moment.

ANNIE. What's that?

BUSTER. The coyotes got to him.

ANNIE. No! Please, please no!

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

ANNIE. I told you as much.

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

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

BUSTER. That's right, you said that.