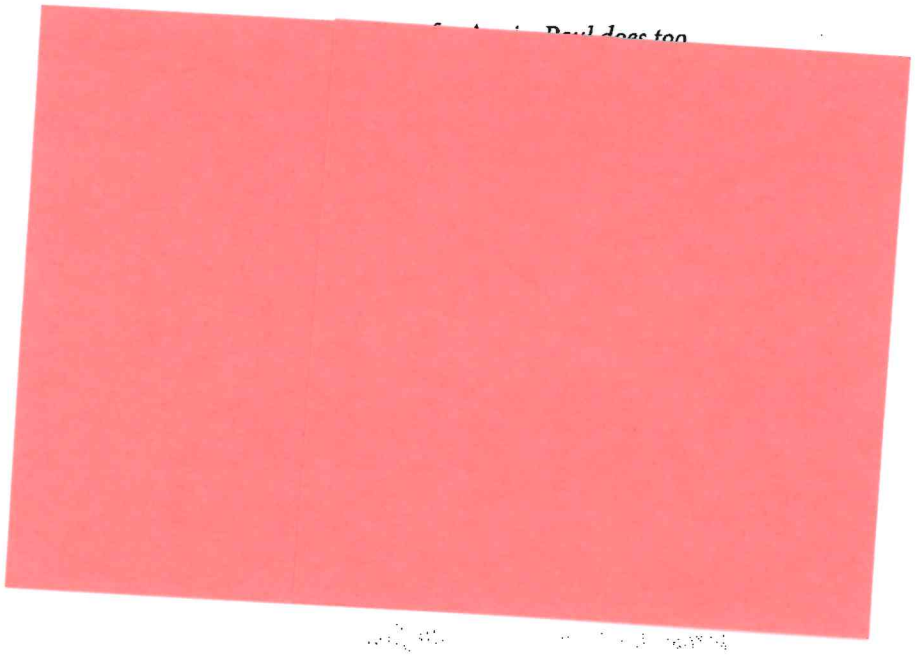

Epilogue

Now at last there is light—

—and we are no longer in Annie's house.

We are on a stage.

In New York City.

ANNOUNCER. *(Offstage.)* Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the best-selling author of the Misery Chastain series, Paul Sheldon.

And here comes Paul.

He looks great.

He wears slacks and a blazer.

And he is walking to the front of the stage.

Walking!

It is the first time we have seen Paul walk.

He walks with a limp.

PAUL. Thank you, everyone. I missed the book tour for *Misery's Child* so it's especially nice to kick off the tour for *Misery's Return* here at home in New York City.

Beat.

I had hoped to be touring with a different book this fall, but life has a way of shifting gears on us. That book feels very far away now, part of another life.

Beat.

I do know that I'm very happy to be able to share *Misery's Return* with you. And I suspect most of you have heard something of the circumstances by which I came to do so. If hiding the real manuscript and destroying a decoy sounds like something out of a gothic novel, well, what can I say… I am a man of my genre.

Beat.

Writing this book saved my life, and so I had to save this book. I wrote it for a woman who believed in my characters more than I did, who demanded that I be fair to them. She needed to know what would happen next in the story, and to my surprise, I discovered that I did too.

Beat.

My daughter, Chloe, who I'm delighted is here tonight, asked me what I'll write next. And I honestly don't know. My agent thinks I should write about my experiences in Colorado, but I don't think that's possible. Not yet. I do know I'm a different writer than I was. I think maybe I'm a better writer because of the… experience of writing this book. Better because I finally understand the kind of writer I'm supposed to be. And for that, I owe something, I owe someone… And so the dedication remains, FOR A—no "n," no "n"—IE WILKES.

Annie appears, an apparition, bloody and holding the sledgehammer.

Paul freezes, stares for a moment, takes a deep breath, tries desperately to recover his poise.

Whatever awaits me I like to think I... I hope I... All we can do is move forward, right? All we can do is move on.

ANNIE. I'll never leave you, Paul. I'm your number one fan.

Paul can only stare, shaken.

Annie laughs.

Lights fade to black.

Final curtain.

End of Play

PROPERTY LIST

(Use this space to create props lists for your p