

*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.*