

**Paul Sheldon (the prisoner) Prepares to Write
Another MISERY Novel
just For
Annie Wilkes**

When he woke up Annie was shaking him and bright morning sun was slanting in the window — the snow had ended. Wake up, sleepyhead!' Annie was almost trilling. 'I've got yogurt and a nice boiled egg for you, and then it will be time for you to begin.'

He looked past her and saw she had turned the typewriter around before waking him

She rolled him over to the window so the sun fell on him for the first time in weeks, and it seemed to him he could feel his pasty-white skin, dotted here and there with minor bedsores, murmur its pleasure and thanks. She favored him with a glance that was very warm. 'I just can't tell you how excited I am, Paul.' She went out, leaving him to sit in the wheelchair and look at the water running from the icicles which clung to the edge of the barn.

'I'd like some different paper, if you could get it,' he said when she came back to put the typewriter and paper on the board.

'Different from this?' she asked, tapping the cellophane-wrapped package of Corrasable Bond.

'But this is the most expensive of all! I asked when I went to the Paper Patch!'

'Didn't your mother ever tell you that the most expensive is not always the best?'

Annie's brow darkened. Her initial defensiveness had been replaced by indignation. Paul guessed her fury would follow.

'No, she did not. What she told me, Mister Smart Guy, is that when you buy cheap, you get cheap.'

She was beginning to breathe more rapidly, almost to hyperventilate; the rhythm of her clenching hands was likewise speeding up, and he knew that in a moment she would be beyond him. Gathering up the little courage he had left, trying desperately to summon exactly the right note of sharp and yet almost casual irritability, he said: 'And you might as well stop that. Getting mad won't change a thing.'

She froze as if he had slapped her and looked at him, wounded.

'Annie,' he said patiently, 'this is no big deal.'

'It's a trick,' she said. 'You don't want to write my book and so you're making up tricks not to start. I knew you would. Oh boy. But it's not going to work. It — '

'That's silly,' he said. 'Did I say I wasn't going to start?'

'No . . . no, but — '

'That's right. Because I am. And if you come here and take a look at something, I'll show you what the problem is.'

'What?' she said grumpily.

'Watch.'

He opened the package of Corrasable and took out a sheet. He took a freshly sharpened pencil and drew a line on the paper. Then he took a ballpoint pen and drew another line parallel to the first. Then he slid his thumb across the slightly waffled surface of the paper. Both lines blurred smudgily in the direction his thumb

was travelling, the pencil-line slightly more than the one he had drawn with the pen.

'See?'

'So what?'

'Ribbon-ink will blur, too,' he said. 'It doesn't blur a much as that pencil-line, but it's worse than the ballpoint-ink line.'

'Were you going to sit and rub every page with your thumb?'

'Just the shift of the pages against each other will accomplish plenty of blurring over a period of weeks or even days,' he said, 'and when a manuscript is in work, it gets shifted around a lot. You're always hunting back through to find a name or a date. My God, Annie, one of the first thing you find out in this business is that editors hate reading manuscripts typed on Corrasable Bond almost as much as they hate hand-written manuscripts.'

'Don't call it that. I hate it when you call it that.'

He looked at her, honestly puzzled. 'Call what *what*?'

'When you pervert the talent God gave you by calling it a business. I hate that.'

'I'm sorry.'

'You ought to be,' she said stonily. 'You might as well call yourself a whore.'

' Good point,' he said. 'Now, going back to the subject of the paper — '

'I'll get you your cockadoodie paper,' she said sullenly. 'Just tell me what to get and I'll get it.'

'As long as you understand I'm on your side — '

'Don't make me laugh. No one has been on my side since my mother died twenty years ago.'

An odd stony look had come into her face. He did not like this mulishness, this almost ostentatious look of obduracy. It made him nervous. He could calculate her rage, but there was something in this new expression which was as opaque as it was childish.

'You don't have to talk anymore,' she said. 'I already told you I'd get you your paper. What kind?'

'In this business-supply store you go to — '

'The Paper Patch.'

'Yes, the Paper Patch. You tell them you'd like two reams: a ream is a package of five hundred sheets — '

'I know that. I'm not stupid, Paul.'

'I know you're not,' he said, becoming more nervous still. The pain had begun to mutter up and down his legs again, and it was speaking even more loudly from the area of his pelvis. He had been sitting up for nearly an hour, and the dislocation down there was complaining about it.

Keep cool, for God's sake — don't lose everything you've gained! But have I gained anything? Or is it only wishful thinking?

'Ask for two reams of white long-grain mimeo. Hammermill Bond is a good brand; so is Triad Modem. Two reams of mimeo will cost less than this one package of Corrasable, and it should be enough to do the whole job, write and rewrite.'

'I'll go right now,' she said, getting up suddenly. She took the package of Corrasable Bond, then snatched the sheet with the two smudged lines and crumpled it into a ball. She tossed both into the

wastebasket and turned back to him. That stony, obdurate look covered her face like a mask. Her eyes glittered like tarnished dimes. 'I'm going to town now,' she said. 'I know you want to get started as soon as you can, since you're *on my side*.' She spoke these last words with intense, smoking sarcasm (and, Paul believed, more self-hate than she would ever know) 'and so I'm not even going to take time to put you back in your bed. There is one thought I would like to leave you with. You may think you can fool me, or trick me; I know I look slow and stupid. But I am not stupid, Paul, and I am not slow.'

Suddenly her face broke apart. The stony obduracy shattered and what shone through was the countenance of an insanely angry child. For a moment Paul thought the extremity of his terror might kill him. Had he thought he had gained the upper hand? Had he? Could one possibly play Scheherazade when one's captor was insane?

She rushed across the room at him, thick legs pumping, knees flexing, elbows chopping back and forth in the stale sickroom air like pistons. Her hair bounced and joggled around her face as it came loose from the bobby-pins that held it up. Now her passage was not silent; it was like the tread of Goliath striding into the Valley of Bones. The picture of the Arc de Triomphe cracked affrightedly on the wall.

'Geeeeee-yahhh!' she screamed, and brought her fist down on the bunched salt-dome that had been Paul Sheldon's left knee.

He threw his head back and howled, veins standing out in his neck and on his forehead. Pain burst out from his knee and shrouded him, whitely radiant, in the center of a nova.

She tore the typewriter off the board and slammed it down on the mantel, lifting its weight of dead metal as he might have lifted an empty cardboard box.

'So you just sit there,' she said, lips pulled back in that grinning rictus, 'and you think about who is in charge here, and all the things I can do to hurt you if you behave badly or try to trick me. You sit there and you scream if you want to, because no one can hear you. No one stops here because they all know Annie Wilkes is crazy; they all know what she did, even if they did find me innocent.'

She walked back to the door and turned again, and he screamed again when she did, in anticipation of another bull-like charge, and that made her grin more widely.

'I'll tell you something else,' she said softly. 'They think I got away with it, and they are right. Think about that, Paul, while I'm in town getting your cockadoodie paper.' She left, slamming the bedroom door hard enough to shake the house. Then there was the click of the lock.

He leaned back in the chair, shaking all over, trying not to shake because it hurt, not able to help it. Tears streamed down his cheeks. Again and again, he saw her flying across the room; again and again he saw her bringing her fist down on the remains of his knee with all the force of an angry drunk hammering on an oak bar; again and again he was swallowed in that terrible blue-white nova of pain.

'Please, God, please,' he moaned as the Cherokee started outside with a bang and a roar. 'Please, God, please — let me out of this or kill me . . . let me out of this or kill me.' The roar of the engine faded off down the road and God did neither, and he was

left with his tears and the pain, which was now fully awake and raving through his body.

He thought later that the world, in its unfailing perversity, would probably construe those things which he did next as acts of heroism. And he would probably let them — but in fact what he did was nothing more than a final staggering grab for self-preservation.

Sweat ran down his forehead and stung his eyes. He licked a mixture of salt and tears off his lips. The shuddering would not stop. The pain was like the end of the world. He thought: There comes a point when the very discussion of pain becomes redundant. No one knows there is pain the size of this in the world. No one. It is like being possessed by demons.

It was only the thought of the pills, the Novril that she kept somewhere in the house, which got him moving. The locked bedroom door . . . the possibility the dope might not be in the downstairs bathroom as he had surmised, but hidden somewhere . . . the chance she might come back and catch him . . . these things mattered not at all, these things were only shadows behind the pain. He would deal with each problem as it came up or he would die. That was all.

Moving caused the band of fire below his waist and in his legs to sink in deeper, cinching his legs like belts studded with hot, inward-pointing spikes. But the chair did move. Very slowly the chair began to move.

He had managed about four feet before realizing he was going to do nothing more useful than roll the wheelchair past the door and into the far comer unless he could turn it. He grasped the right wheel, shuddering (*think of the pills, think of the relief of the pills*) and bore down on it as hard as he could. Rubber squeaked

minutely on the wooden floor, the cries of mice. He bore down, once strong and now flabby muscles quivering like jelly, lips peeling back from his gritted teeth, and the wheelchair slowly pivoted.

He grasped both wheels and got the chair moving again. This time he rolled five feet before stopping to straighten himself out. Once he'd done it, he grayed out.

He swam back to reality five minutes later, hearing the dim, goading voice of that sportscaster in his head: 'He's trying to get going again! I just cannot believe the guts of this Sheldon kid!'

The front of his mind only knew about the pain; it was the back that directed his eyes. He saw it near the door and rolled over to it. He reached down, but the tips of his fingers stopped a clear three inches short of the floor, where one of the two or three bobby-pins that had fallen from her hair as she charged him lay. He bit his lip, unaware of the sweat running down his face and neck and darkening his pajama shirt.

He let himself slouch to the right in the wheelchair, at first trying to ignore the pain in his right side — pain that felt like an increasing bubble of pressure, something similar to a tooth impaction — and then giving way and screaming. As she said, there was no one to hear him anyway.

The tips of his fingers still hung an inch from the floor, brushing back and forth just above the bobby-pin, and his right hip really felt as if it might simply explode outward in a squirt of some vile white bone-jelly.

Oh God please, please help me —

He slumped farther in spite of the pain. His fingers brushed the pin but succeeded only in pushing it a quarter of an inch away.

Paul slid down in the chair, still slumped to the right, and screamed again at the pain in his lower legs. His eyes were bulging, his mouth was open, his tongue straight down between his teeth like the pull on a window-shade. Little drops of spittle ran from its tip and spat on the floor.

He pinched the bobby-pin between his fingers . . . tweezed it . . . almost lost it . . . and then it was locked in his fist.

Straightening up brought a fresh slough of pain, and when the act was accomplished he could do no more than sit and pant for a while, his head tilted as far as the uncompromising back of the wheelchair would allow, the bobby-pin lying on the board across the chair's arms. For a while he was quite sure he was going to puke, but that passed.

What are you doing? part of his mind scolded wearily after awhile. *Are you waiting for the pain to go away? It won't. She's always quoting her mother, but your own mother had a few sayings, too, didn't she?* Yes. She had.

Sitting there, head thrown back, face shiny with sweat, hair plastered to his forehead, Paul spoke one of them aloud now, almost as an incantation: 'There may be fairies, there may be elves, but God helps those who help themselves.'

Yeah. So stop waiting, Paulie — the only elf that's going to show up here is that all-time heavyweight, Annie Wilkes.

He got moving again, rolling the wheelchair slowly across to the door. She had locked it, but he believed he might be able to unlock it.

It took Paul five endless minutes of backing and filling to get the wheelchair exactly where he wanted it, with the left wheel almost touching the door.

The keyhole was the old-fashioned sort, reminding Paul of John Tenniel's Alice in Wonderland drawings, set in the middle of a tarnished keyplate. He slid down a bit in the wheelchair — giving out a single barking groan — and looked through it. He could see a short hallway leading down to what was clearly the parlor: a dark-red rug on the floor, an old-fashioned divan upholstered in similar material, a lamp with tassels hanging from its shade.

To his left, halfway down the hallway, was a door which stood ajar. Paul's pulsebeat quickened. That was almost surely the downstairs bathroom — he had heard her running enough water in there (including the time she had filled the floor-bucket from which he had enthusiastically drunk), and wasn't it also the place she always came from before giving him his medicine? He thought it was.

He grasped the bobby-pin. It spilled out of his fingers onto the board and then skittered toward the edge. 'No!' he cried hoarsely, and clapped a hand over it just before it could fall.

Now, he thought, unbending it and holding it in his right hand. *You will not shake. Hold that thought. YOU WILL NOT SHAKE.* He reached across his body with the pin and slipped it into the keyhole. 'Please God,' he said, sliding it in again. 'Please God, what do you say? Just a little break for the kid, that's all I'm asking.'

Now! Here was resistance! The tumbler! He could see it lying in there like the curved foot of a rocking chair, pressing the tongue of the lock, holding it in place, holding *him* in place. *It's strictly Mickey Mouse, Paul. Just stay cool.*

When you hurt this badly, it was hard to stay cool.

He grasped the doorknob with his left hand, reaching under his right arm to do it, and began to apply gentle pressure to the bobby-pin. A little more . . . a little more . . . In his mind he could see the rocker beginning to move in its dusty little alcove; he could see the lock's tongue begin to retract. The pin was simultaneously starting to bend and slip. He felt it happening, and in desperation he pushed upward as hard as he could, turned the knob, and shoved the door. There was a snap as the pin broke in two, the part in the lock falling in; and he had a dull moment to consider his failure before he saw that the door was slowly swinging open with the tongue of the lock sticking out of the plate like a steel finger. 'Jesus,' he whispered. 'Jesus, thank you.'

He had a bad — no, not just bad — terrible and horrible moment when it seemed the wheelchair was not going to fit. It was no more than two inches too wide, but that was two inches too much. *She brought it in collapsed, that's why you thought it was a shopping cart at first*, his mind informed him drearily.

In the end he was able to squeeze through — barely — by positioning himself squarely in the doorway and then leaning forward enough to grab the jambs of the door in his hands. The axlecaps of the wheels squalled against the wood, but he was able to get through.

She could come back anytime. Anytime at all.

'True enough,' he said, and rolled the wheelchair down to the bathroom. Looking in, he saw an austere room floored with hexagonal white tiles. A bathtub with rusty fans spreading below the faucets stood on clawed feet. Beside it was a linen closet. Across from the tub was a sink. Over the sink was a medicine cabinet.

His eyes widened. His first cursory glance had taken in the shelves with their stacks of folded sheets and pillowcases and washcloths and towels. Now he looked at the floor, and on the floor were a number of square cardboard cartons. Some were labelled UPJOHN. Some were labelled LILY. Some were labelled CAM PHARMACEUTICALS.

He turned the wheelchair roughly, hurting himself, not caring. *Please God don't let it be her cache of extra shampoo or her tampons or pictures of her dear old sainted mother or —*

He fumbled for one of the boxes, dragged it out, and opened the flaps. No shampoo, no Avon samples. Far from it. There was a wild jumble of drugs in the carton, most of them in small boxes marked SAMPLES. At the bottom a few pills and capsules, different colors, rolled around loose.

'NOVRIL,' he muttered, raking wildly through the box while sweat ran down his face and his legs pounded and throbbed. 'NOVRIL, where's the fucking NOVRIL?'

No NOVRIL. He pushed the flaps of the carton closed and shoved it back into the linen closet, making only a token effort to replace it in the same place it had been. *Should be all right, the place looked like a goddam junk-heap —*

Leaning far to his left, he was able to snag a second carton. He opened it and was hardly able to credit what he was seeing.

DARVON. DARVOCET. DARVON COMPOUND. MORPHOSE and MORPHOSE COMPLEX. LIBRIUM. VALIUM. And NOVRIL! Dozens and dozens and dozens of sample boxes. Lovely boxes. Dear boxes. O lovely dear sainted boxes.

He looked into the carton, trying to calculate how many of the sample boxes he might be able to take without her realizing a little mouse named Paul Sheldon had been nibbling away at the supply.

He took five of the boxes — a total of thirty capsules. He had to restrain himself from taking more. He stirred the remaining boxes and bottles around, hoping the result would look no more or less helter-skelter than it had when he first peered into the box. He refolded the flaps and slipped the box back into the linen closet.

A car was coming.

He straightened up, eyes wide. His hands dropped to the arms of the wheelchair and gripped them with panicky tightness. If it was Annie, he was screwed and that was the end of it. He would never be able to maneuver this balky, oversized thing back to the bedroom in time. Maybe he could whack her once with the O-Cedar mop or something before she wrung his neck like a chicken.

He sat in the wheelchair with the sample boxes of NOVRIL in his lap and his broken legs stuck stiffly out in front of him and waited for the car to pass or turn in.

The sound swelled endlessly . . . then began to diminish.

Okay. Do you need a more graphic warning, Paul-baby?

As a matter of fact, he did not.

He slowly backed the wheelchair across the bathroom, glancing behind himself occasionally to make sure he wasn't wandering off-course.

He was reaching for the wheels, meaning to pivot the chair so he could roll back to his room, when he realized he was pointed more or less toward the living room, and the living room was where most people kept their telephone and —

Light bursting in his mind like a flare over a foggy meadow.

He worked the wheelchair around until it was directly facing the parlor, and then he rolled down to it.

He rolled farther into the room. The left side of the wheelchair struck a small occasional table covered with ceramic gewgaws. They chattered together and one of them — a ceramic penguin sitting on a ceramic ice-block — fell off the side.

Without thinking, he reached out and grabbed it. The gesture was almost casual . . . and then reaction set in. He held the penguin tightly in his curled fist, trying to will the shakes away. *You caught it, no sweat, besides, there's a rug on the floor, probably wouldn't have broken anyway — But if it HAD!* his mind screamed back. *If it HAD! Please, you have to go back to your room before you leave something . . . a track . . .*

No. Not yet. Not yet, no matter how frightened he was. Because this had cost him too much. If there was a payoff, he was going to have it.

He looked around the room, which was stuffed with heavy graceless furniture. On a table at the far end of the couch, where she would sit to watch TV, was a plain dialer telephone. Gently, hardly daring to breathe, he put the ceramic penguin (NOW MY TALE IS TOLD! the legend on the block of ice read) back on the knickknack table and rolled across the room toward the phone.

He grasped the handset of the phone in one hand and slowly picked it up. A queer predestinate sense of failure filled his mind even before he got the handset to his ear and heard the nothing. He replaced the receiver slowly — Panic burst shrilly up in his mind, telling him that he had to get out of here and back into his room, hide the pills somewhere, return to his place by the window so that when she returned she would see no difference, no difference at

all, and this time he agreed with the voice. He agreed wholeheartedly. He backed carefully away from the phone, and when he gained the room's one reasonably clear area, he began the laborious job of turning the wheelchair around, careful not to bump the occasional table as he did so.

He had nearly finished the turn when he heard an approaching car and knew, simply knew it was her, returning from town. He nearly fainted, in the grip of the greatest terror he had ever known, a terror that was filled with deep and unmanaging guilt.

The sound of the engine began to drop as the approaching car slowed down. It was her.

Paul settled hands he could barely feel on the wheels and rolled the chair toward the hallway, sparing one glance at the ceramic penguin on its block of ice. Was it in the same place it had been? He couldn't tell. He would have to hope.

He rolled down the hall toward the bedroom door, gaining speed. He hoped to shoot right through, but his aim was a little off. Only a little . . . but the fit was so tight that a little was enough. The wheelchair thumped against the right side of the doorway and bounced back a little. *Did you chip the paint?* his mind screamed at him. *Oh Jesus Christ, did you chip the paint, did you leave a track?*

No chip. There was a small dent but no chip. Thank God. He backed and filled frantically, trying to navigate the fineness of the doorway's tight fit.

The car motor swelled, nearing, still slowing. Now he could hear the crunch of its snow tires.

Easy . . . easy does it . . .

He rolled forward and then the hubs of the wheels stuck solid against the sides of the bedroom door. He pushed harder, knowing it wasn't going to do any good, he was stuck in the doorway like a cork in a wine-bottle, unable to go either way —

He gave one final heave, the muscles in his arms quivering like over-tuned violin strings, and the wheelchair passed through with that same low squealing noise.

The Cherokee turned into the driveway.

She'll have packages, his mind gibbered, the typewriter paper, maybe a few other things as well, and she'll be careful coming up the walk because of the ice, you're in here now, the worst is over, there's time, still time . . .

He rolled farther into the room, then turned in a clumsy semicircle. As he rolled the wheelchair parallel to the open bedroom door, he heard the Cherokee's engine shut off.

He leaned over, grasped the doorknob, and tried to pull the door shut. The tongue of the lock, still stuck out like a stiff steel finger, bumped the jamb. He pushed it with the ball of his thumb. It began to move . . . then stopped. Stopped dead, refusing to let the door close.

He stared at it stupidly for a moment, thinking of that old Navy maxim: Whatever CAN go wrong WILL go wrong.

Please God, no more, wasn't it enough she killed the phone?

He let go of the tongue. It sprang all the way out again. He pushed it in again and encountered the same obstruction. Inside the guts of the lock he heard an odd rattling and understood. It was the part of the bobby-pin which had broken off. It had fallen in some way that was keeping the lock's tongue from retracting completely.

He heard the Cherokee's door open. He even heard her grunt as she got out. He heard the rattle of paper bags as she gathered up her parcels.

'Come on,' he whispered, and began to chivvy the tongue gently back and forth. It went in perhaps a sixteenth of an inch each time and then stopped. He could hear the goddam bobby-pin rattling inside there. 'Come on . . . come on . . . come on . . . '

He was crying again and unaware of it, sweat and tears mingling freely on his cheeks. He was vaguely aware that he was still in great pain despite all the dope he had swallowed, that he was going to pay a high price for this little piece of work.

Not so high as the one she'll make you pay if you can't get this goddam door closed again, Paulie.

He heard her crunching, cautious footsteps as she made her way up the path. The rattle of bags . . . and now the rattle of her housekeys as she took them from her purse.

'Come on . . . come on . . . come on . . . '

This time, when he pushed the tongue there was a flat click from inside the lock and the jut of metal slid a quarter of an inch into the door. Not enough to clear the jamb . . . but almost.

'Please . . . come on . . . '

He began to chivvy the tongue faster, diddling it, listening as she opened the kitchen door. Then, like a hideous flashback to that day when his mother had caught him smoking, Annie called cheerily: 'Paul? It's me! I've got your paper!'

Caught! I'm caught! Please God, no God, don't let her hurt me God —

His thumb pressed convulsively tight against the tongue of the lock, and there was a muffled snap as the bobby-pin broke. The tongue slid all the way into the door. In the kitchen he heard a zipper-rasp as she opened her parka.

He closed the bedroom door. The click of the latch (*Did she hear that? must have must have heard that!*) sounded as loud as a track-starter's gun.

He backed the wheelchair up toward the window. He was still backing and filling as her footsteps began to come down the hallway.

'I've got your paper, Paul! Are you awake?'

Never . . . never in time . . . She'll hear . . .

He gave the guide-lever a final wrench and rolled the wheelchair into place beside the window just as her key rattled in the lock.

It won't work . . . the bobby-pin . . . and she'll be suspicious.

But the piece of alien metal must have fallen all the way to the bottom of the lock, because her key worked perfectly. He sat in his chair, eyes half-closed, hoping madly that he had gotten the chair back where it had been (or at least close enough to it so she wouldn't notice), hoping that she would take his sweat-drenched face and quivering body simply as reactions to missing his medication, hoping most of all that he hadn't left a track —

It was as the door swung open that he looked, down and saw that by looking for individual tracks with such agonized concentration, he had ignored a whole buffalo run: the boxes of NOVRIL were still in his lap.

She had two packages of paper, and she held one up in each hand, smiling. 'Just what you asked for, isn't it? Triad Modem. Two reams here, and I have two more in the kitchen, just in case. So you see — ' She broke off, frowning, looking at him. 'You're dripping with sweat . . . and your color is very hectic.' She paused. 'What have you been doing?'

And although that set the panicky little voice of his lesser self to squealing again that he was caught and might as well give it up, might as well confess and hope for her mercy, he managed to meet her suspicious gaze with an ironic weariness.

'I think you know what I've been doing,' he said. 'I've been suffering.'

From the pocket of her skirt she took a Kleenex and wiped his brow. The Kleenex came away wet. She smiled at him with that terrible bogus maternity.

'Has it been very bad?'

'Yes. Yes, it has. Now can I — '

'I told you about making me mad. Live and learn, isn't that what they say? Well, if you live, I guess you'll learn.'

'Can I have my pills now?'

'In a minute,' she said.

'I'm all set,' he said. 'Annie, please — '

'And you won't make me mad anymore?'

'No. I won't make you mad anymore.'

'Because when I get mad I'm not really myself.' Her eyes dropped. She was looking down to where his hands were cupped

tightly together over the sample boxes of NOVRIL. She looked for a very long time.

'Paul?' she asked softly. 'Paul, why are you holding your hands like that?'

He began to cry. It was guilt he cried from, and he hated that most of all: in addition to everything else that this monstrous woman had done to him, she had made him feel guilty as well. So he cried from guilt . . . but also from simple childish weariness.

He looked up at her, tears flowing down his cheeks, and played the absolute last card in his hand.

'I want my pills,' he said, 'and I want the urinal. I held it all the time you were gone, Annie, but I can't hold it much longer, and I don't want to wet myself again.'

She smiled softly, radiantly, and pushed his tumbled hair off his brow. 'You poor dear. Annie has put you through a lot, hasn't she? Too much! Mean old Annie! I'll get it right away.'

He wouldn't have dared put the pills under the rug even if he thought he had time to do so before she came back — the packages were small, but the bulges would still be all too obvious. As he heard her go into the downstairs bathroom, he took them, reached painfully around his body, and stuffed them into the back of his underpants. Sharp cardboard corners poked into the cleft of his buttocks.

She came back with the urinal, an old-fashioned tin device that looked absurdly like a blow-dryer, in one hand. She had two NOVRIL capsules and a glass of water in the other.

Two more of those on top of the ones you took half an hour ago may drop you into a coma and then kill you, he thought, and a second voice answered at once: *Fine with me.*

He took the pills and swallowed them with water. She held out the urinal. 'Do you need help?' 'I can do it,' he said.

'Of course. I'll just put a few things away and come right back.'

As soon as she was out of the room he was reaching behind him, bringing out the boxes and stuffing them under the mattress one by one. The layers of gauze kept thickening, moving steadily from gray toward black.

Get them as far under as you can, he thought blindly. Make sure you do that so if she changes the bed she won't pull them out with the ground sheet. Get them as far under as you . . . you . . . He shoved the last under the mattress, then leaned back and looked up at the ceiling, where the W's danced drunkenly across the plaster.

Africa, he thought. Now I must rinse, he thought.

Oh, I am in so much trouble here, he thought. Tracks, he thought. Did I leave tracks? Did I — Paul Sheldon fell unconscious. When he woke up, fourteen hours had gone by and outside it was snowing again.