

Pinkerton's Secret
The Original Manuscript

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Prologue

Jacob Kreutzman's Farm

MOST PEOPLE THINK being paralyzed doesn't hurt since they can stick pins in you and you don't feel anything. Then again, most people are fucking morons. They form conclusions based on their most cursory observations, and they lack the imagination and mental rigor required to arrive at any opinion other than the one they started with. That is why I have been so successful at outsmarting so many who thought they were smarter than me.

When I reveal to clients the identity of the person who robbed their train, counterfeited their currency, or stole the U.S. mail from under their noses, they pronounce me a genius. Since few people have the capability to distinguish between the obvious and the implied, I suppose that makes me a genius.

I freely admit I have cultivated a certain mystery surrounding my methods of criminal detection. I myself designed the faintly absurd emblem for the Pinkerton National Detective Agency that all of America is familiar with—the heavy-lidded, half-closed eye of vaguely mysterious Hindoo

origin—below which are the chilling words: *The Eye That Never Sleeps*, the sobriquet that has attached itself to my person.

Is it a lie, an exaggeration or a total con?

Who cares? My job is to find the stain of truth in the fabric of deception. To that end I trained myself in the art of dissimulation, and I am more accomplished in its practice than any criminal adversary I ever faced. I admit that at times my actions can be ruthless, but despite the accusations of my wife, my children and many employed by me, I am not a cruel man.

No, I am not cruel, but I will not abandon the only thing that matters in this world—distinguishing between Right and Wrong and pursuing what is Right no matter the cost. If on occasion I have been overzealous, then all I can say, as I endure the near- total paralysis of my body, is that my Enemies can go to hell, which is where they wish me to fall at the end of my days.

I seem to have arrived there ahead of schedule. My paralysis is not the kind suffered by thousands wounded in the War of the Rebellion, though the symptoms are similar. I had a stroke, an explosion in my brain that rendered most of my body insensate and flaccid. Some parts still work, including my will, which labors ceaselessly to keep me functioning, using whatever is left of my body to accomplish the task.

Just being hoisted out of my wheelchair to take a shit, or wrestling with my one good arm to grasp a pen and make pathetic chicken scrawls on a piece of paper, sends off a frantic alarm to the few remaining working muscles in my chest, neck, and part of one leg, causing my body to twist and rack. I wouldn't give anyone the satisfaction of knowing what the pain is like, even if I could, but I can't, because it takes me thirty seconds to spit out three damned syllables. My tongue only moves with monumental effort. Curiously, my lips move, but only up, so I appear to be smiling more than I ever did before my incapacitation.

I even smile at my pious wife Joan, who regards me with smug vindication for my thirty years of belittling her banal religious prattling. To her, my current state is irrefutable proof that God runs an orderly universe, and she considers my condition a mere preview of the suffering that awaits me. Middle age has given her blue eyes a sheen of fanaticism, frightening to behold up close as she feeds me with a spoon.

I have, however, escaped her at last. I am lying rigid on a thin mattress atop a narrow, slatted wooden bedstead, in a cabin about fifteen by fifteen, which, I noticed as they carried me inside, is sturdy enough, sitting on a piled rock foundation. The wooden floor is a good two inches thick. The walls, however, are only unplanned pine boards with poor chinking and

no interior plaster. There is a small potbelly stove and a little stack of wood, but it's chilly, and it's only October. It will be cold come winter.

It doesn't matter. I am here not by choice but necessity. For the past two years I visited America's finest hospitals, and my condition did not improve. I finally took matters into the only hands I ever trusted, my own, even if they now barely move. I gave up on the conventional doctors and obtained every periodical I could find devoted to the new industry of healing the hundreds of thousands of survivors of the War who staggered home wrecked in body and soul. Most of these self-proclaimed healers are as fraudulent as the spiritual mediums all the rage before the War. When I read about a man named Jacob Kreutzman, however, I was struck by the earnest testimonials from men he'd healed. I dictated correspondence to him, and his terse replies further piqued my interest. I offered Jacob Kreutzman a considerable sum to come to Chicago to try to heal me. If his efforts failed, he could keep the money.

Kreutzman replied that he would accept me as a patient for treatment, but that he didn't travel, having a farm to maintain in western New York. I could barely locate it on a map. Getting here would have been impossible without assistance, and the only person I trust is George Bangs, the General Superintendent of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency for the past

twenty years. He thought the idea totally mad, but he has held that opinion of me for quite some time.

I KNEW MY HUNCH was correct the minute they lifted me out of the carriage when we finally arrived at Kreutzman's farm. Two boys set me into a wheelchair unlike the fancy, brass-railed, padded chair I've been sitting in for the past two years. This thing was made of wood planks and steel-rimmed cartwheels, but it was so damned comfortable I must have made some kind of garbled sound of surprise mixed with relief. The first thing I heard out of Jacob Kreutzman's mouth was a satisfied laugh.

With his blond, unkempt hair the texture and color of straw, blue eyes you'd practically call *twinkly*, a wide, toothy smile, and soft skin blotched with red patches that seem like blushes of innocence, Kreutzman was practically a walking advertisement for kindness, good will and gentleness of soul. He made you feel better the minute you met him, because all of us feel better in the presence of someone we can condescend to, someone who makes us lick our chops over easy prey for one's own superior cunning.

Oh, what a brilliant disguise, Kreutzman!

"It's a good chair, isn't it, Major Allen?" I detected a slight tremor of skepticism as he uttered my name, like the rustle of leaves when the wind

turns and warns the helpless antelope at the watering hole that a lion is stalking him.

Since the day of my stroke, my condition has been a closely guarded secret from the entire world, especially my clients. The Agency continues to operate as if nothing ever happened to me. The doctors who examined me were warned that a breach of silence would have serious repercussions. Kreutzman, like the rest, was told only that a “Major E.J. Allen” required his services.

I’ve assumed the disguise of a hundred different men since my transformation from penniless Scots barrel maker who washed up on the shores of Canada in 1842 into the founder of America’s first private criminal detective agency. *Major E.J. Allen*, though, is the alias so dear to me I practically think myself to be that man. He saved the President-elect’s life on his inaugural journey to Washington in the winter of 1861, and General McClellan commissioned him to form the Secret Service of the Army of the Potomac. He was nearly killed at Antietam.

When Kreutzman addressed me, however, the piercing look in those no-longer-twinkling eyes told me I was face-to-face with another detective.

HE SAID LITTLE MORE, directing George where to place my bags before stepping outside and leaving us to our farewells. George Bangs looked at me mournfully. We had not been apart for the five days it took us to get here from Chicago. He didn't want to leave me.

Kreutzman's place is frankly appalling, a ramshackle collection of crude shacks built on the edge of what may once have been a respectable farm, but has now gone utterly to ruin. There are a few cows wandering about, but nothing resembling pasturage. Kreutzman's claim that he had a farm to keep up is a joke.

"Allan, you can't possibly stay here."

"Nnnnn...Nnnnooo choice...George."

He leaned toward me with a handkerchief in his hand. I tried to swat him away with my one good hand, but I gave up and let him wipe the tears leaking down my cheeks.

"S...Sorry...George."

He looked alarmed, probably because I've never apologized to him for anything in twenty years. Then he bade me good luck and left.

MY APOLOGY WAS SINCERE. Without him I could never have kept my condition secret for this long, but we're out of time. I sense my sons regrouping for another assault upon me.

When I first opened my eyes in the Chicago hospital after being felled by that bolt of lightning to my brain, I saw the fear in their eyes, and I was relieved, because if a man's sons cease to fear their father, he is in mortal danger. Unfortunately, it really wasn't *me* they feared; the miserable ingrates were terrified *their* Pinkerton Detective Agency, promised to them by me in good time, was shot to hell if Allan Pinkerton couldn't even utter his own name. All they saw in that hospital bed was the ruination of their patrimony. I knew they'd panic and do something very stupid, very quickly.

With the one arm that half works I motioned Willie, my eldest, to come close. The room was full of doctors and nurses, but Willie has a certain animal cunning. He leaned over so I could whisper in his ear. Problem was, I couldn't whisper. The only way I could get a word out was to spit it, literally. "Don...say...fuckin'...*word!*" He recoiled, rubbing the spittle out of his ear, but I stared at him hard until he nodded his understanding.

After a brief announcement that Allan Pinkerton had been in the hospital for several weeks recovering from a fever contracted during his

apprehension of the Reno gang the previous autumn, everything returned to normal. The usual stream of instructions, reports, and contracts flowed back and forth from my Chicago office to our branches in New York, Philadelphia and Atlanta.

It was a crucial time for the Agency. By the outbreak of the War of the Rebellion, I'd achieved my goal of creating America's first and only National Detective Agency, capable of crossing municipal and state lines to apprehend criminals. Our clients included the largest railroads, financial institutions and manufacturers in the country, as well as hundreds of smaller enterprises infested by the con men, thieves, and crooks who have always been part of our country. But if America is a land of innovators, it is also the fertile ground of imitators, and my success inspired copycats eager to take my business from me.

It was imperative that my clients continue to believe the legendary Allan Pinkerton was still their man. I told Willie that if he revealed my condition to a single soul, I would announce it to the world. Either I retained control, or I would destroy the Agency, and he and his brother could seek employment as railroad conductors. I assigned George Bangs to watch them. He bought Willie and his younger brother Robbie new suits, and they traveled in my stead to meet important clients. George maintained the

charade that I was *somewhere else* whenever anyone wanted to meet with me in person.

After a year of visiting the best specialists in the country, however, I was no better. Rumors began circulating, and George, Willie and Robbie had to redouble their efforts to keep up the ruse. Then my sweet laddie Robbie came up with a solution. At least that's Willie's version. Who knows? It would not be beyond William to sell out his own brother. I believe it was Robbie, though, because the plan was so pathetic. They decided to publicly announce that even though Allan Pinkerton had been a drooling idiot for over a year, his capable sons had admirably commanded the Agency with the assistance of Superintendent Bangs, and they reassured our clients they would continue to be served by the Pinkerton National Detective Agency under the new ownership and direction of William and Robert Pinkerton, Esquires.

Before they could carry out their mutiny, George showed me the documents my loving progeny intended to present to the court. They thought George had joined their cause in exchange for one third of the business; his testimony would be essential to their case at my competency hearing. The young idiots. I trained them to be detectives, and they couldn't even detect George double-dealing them.

On a sunny Monday morning he ushered them into my office at the Agency, which they gleefully thought was now theirs. The King is dead! They were ready to fight over who got to sit on my throne. Oh, the look on their faces, when they saw *me* in my chair, propped up behind my desk for the first time in a year. George read them my new will, already filed and approved by the court, attesting to my competence and making no mention of them inheriting any share of the Agency upon my demise.

I had, however, prepared another will, unsigned and unfiled, which restored their patrimony. I gave them two choices: Submit to my authority and eventually I might sign it, or go west and seek their fortunes with the hordes of dispossessed youth on the American frontier.

UNQUESTIONABLY, IT'S THEIR MOTHER who bears primary responsibility for their wretched characters. She used them as weapons against me from the day they were born. I have a certain grim respect for my wife. Her misguided religious beliefs sustained her for so many years, until she finally had an opportunity to settle every old grudge she'd nurtured against me. It is amazing what women cannot remember for thirty seconds and what they will not forget for thirty years. I cannot really blame her, even when she jabs a spoon into my mouth, and I spit out the gruel on my bib, and she *tsk-tsk*

as if it is my fault, it has all been my fault, and she is merely doing what she has always done—fed me and cleaned up afterwards. I cannot blame her, because, in her universe, where Right and Wrong exist with as much ferocious certainty as they do in mine, but as utter distortions of human reason, I am not only a hopeless sinner, but a son of a bitch who refuses to surrender, not to His Will, but to Hers.

Be that as it may, Joan, I forgive you, and my forgiveness matters more than His, you silly nitwit, because He doesn't exist, but I do! Oh yes, I fully intend to regain my strength, my speech, and my dominion. My beloved family has given me the resolve to undertake this odyssey of recuperation, if only to spite them. On the railroad platform five days ago, she wept at my departure. *Don't cry my dear, I'll be back, walking and talking, just like the good old days!* That thought made her cry harder.

The boys are terrible actors, even though I trained them in the deceptive ways of detective work, and their performances on the train platform were execrable. They are cunning but not artful. Timothy Webster, Roche, Fox, and Pryce Lewis, they were masters of the art.

But they're gone. Everyone is gone now.

KREUTZMAN ENTERED MY CABIN without knocking soon after George left, looking and acting kindly enough. Hell, he may even be a kind man in certain circumstances, but I never put much stock in kindness. Kind lunatics are just as dangerous as the cruel ones. He was accompanied by a barefoot boy of twelve, a local lad who works at the place, who won't speak to me unless directed by Kreutzman, whom he addresses as "Sir."

They put rough, leather-soled slippers on my feet, lifted me into a wheelchair, wrapped a heavy, woolen blanket around me, and wheeled my chair down a long, rutted path through the woods. After two years of not walking, I have sores on my ass that never heal over. I gritted my teeth as we reached a small open glade where six rough shacks sat in a half circle around a pool fed by a spring that gave off a nauseating, gaseous, mineral odor. Two other boys tended fires beneath kettles of spring water, hanging from sturdy iron tripods. At the far end of the glade, under shading trees, a low structure built into the ground appeared to be an icehouse.

Kreutzman and the boy pushed me up a ramp and carried me into one of the shacks, leaving the wheelchair outside. Inside, it was dark and steamy. There was a wooden tub deep enough for a man to stand up in, full of hot water, straight from the kettles hanging over the fires. As a former professional cooper, I admired the tub's construction. They took off my

shoes and drawstring pants and the woolen jacket Kreutzman dressed me in the night before, and without further ado lowered me into the tub as I screamed garbled curses. The water was hot enough to scald the hair off a pig, but my inarticulate howling elicited no response from Kreutzman or the boy.

I lost track of time until I was blinded by sunlight as the door swung open. The two other young helpers dragged in a kettle of newly boiled water and added it to the tub. When they finally hauled me out, after who knows how long, sweat was pouring from my body, but it felt good, the best thing I'd felt in two years. They wrapped me up in a blanket and carried me out to my wheelchair. My body felt like jelly, and I didn't even notice the jouncing of the chair as they rolled me across the clearing. I was looking forward to some nice sleep back in my cozy cabin, but instead they wheeled me up to another shack, where an empty tub, wider and not as deep, awaited me. They took off my blanket and set me in the tub, propping me up so I wouldn't fall over. I looked up in horror as the boys came in, each lugging two big buckets of chopped ice, which they dumped into the tub, not much caring if any fell right into my lap. The sensation was beyond description, and I am not untalented in the art of description.

Kreutzman knelt down behind me and grasped my head with his big hands. He pressed right underneath the helmet of my skull, in that soft, vulnerable place where you put a knife when you want to dispatch a man quickly. Kreutzman knew the spot well.

I passed out.

When I came to, I was back in my cabin, dressed, lying under several layers of blankets. Kreutzman's face was a few inches from mine, peering into my eyes. He starting poking and probing. I've grown used to that sort of thing from all the other doctors, but when he touched my chest right below my breastbone, just a light touch, it felt as if he'd set off a bomb, like the giant explosives they detonated underneath the fort at Petersburg in the War.

I have no idea what Kreutzman did to me then, but it went on for hours—at least it seemed that long—and left me like a sponge squeezed dry. He manipulated my legs, arms, feet, hands, and even my fingers and toes, in strange ways, nothing like the other doctors. Slow rotations, variations of pressure and pulling, rapid snaps, whispering, “Pay attention, Major Allen.” Then suddenly shouting, “Pay *attention!*” Goddammit, the last thing in the world I wanted to do was pay attention to this torture! “Major Allen, put your mind inside your body. Do you understand me?”

What the hell was he talking about? He massaged my head, sending bolts of lightning shooting around inside my skull, and all of a sudden I was not in that cabin, not in this world, not in this time. I was back on the plains of Indiana in the dead of night, more than two years ago, in 1868, the worst fucking year of my life.

I WHIPPED MY TIRED HORSE in the darkness. Willie, Robbie, and my three other operatives barely kept up with me. Madness was upon me, but it felt right, tracking killers in the night. The sons of bitches didn't just rob a train; they killed the engineer and the paymaster in cold blood. No one had ever done that on a line under the protection of the Pinkerton Detective Agency. No one but me could capture them, because no one else understood the War of the Rebellion was not over. The Reno Gang rode with the murderous Rebel Quantrill in Bleeding Kansas in '57, when John Brown stood against them, and the War just gave these bloody vigilantes a license for mayhem: bushwhacking Federal troops, terrorizing innocent civilians, and executing runaway slaves. Men like the Renos did not surrender with Lee at Appomattox.

The gang took over Seymour, Indiana, and turned it into a Secessionist stronghold. I infiltrated the town, and my operatives gained the

confidence of the locals harboring the gang. When they returned from another bloody train robbery, I rode down on them with no mercy and put John Reno and most of his gang into Federal custody, but Frank Reno escaped to Canada. At least he thought he did. No one escapes me.

I'm freezing. My God, I'm freezing. Kreutzman put another blanket over me and I'm pouring sweat and his fingers are pressing deep into the flesh of my dead arms and legs, but I'm still freezing in that icy water off the dock in Windsor, Ontario, where the Brits extend their gracious hospitality to American outlaws. I don't give a fuck about international protocol. I corner Frank in a bar in Windsor where he's sitting with his pals laughing at the Eye who'll never get him.

I walk right up to him, my gun in my holster. He jumps up like he's seen a ghost, draws his Navy Colt and points it at my chest and tells me how he'll send my soul to hell. But his hand is trembling. The jackass. Giving a sermon when he should've shot me. I stick my finger between the trigger and the steel of the trigger ring so he can't fire and rip the weapon out of his hand so hard I hear the pop of his shoulder coming out of its socket and he goes down howling in pain and I'm kicking the cold-blooded murderer to death in front of my sons begging me to stop. Five men pull me off him. Then I'm loading Frank onto a boat to cross the lake to Detroit, and the

British Consul, a fat ponce, comes marching down the dock with his troops, and I don't know who fired first, but we're in the icy water and Reno is drowning with his chains on and I'm hauling him up into the boat, shivering to death, but I have to keep moving in soaking wet clothes, riding trains all night, sticking Reno in a cell in Indiana because I have to get back to the Agency.

My Enemies are gunning for me!

I'm running down Michigan Avenue and even though I haven't slept in five days and my field clothes are still damp and caked with mud I burst into my office, gun drawn, and just as I thought, George Bangs is stealing from the Agency! Who would believe it? Except me! George Bangs, the National Superintendent of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, the first man I ever hired, the man who held the sign while I drove the nails when we opened the door for business! I grab the ledger book out of his hands to unmask his treachery, ignoring his feeble attempts to escape. He's telling me to go home, get dry, that I'm delirious with fever, that I'm mad, a fifty-year-old man chasing a bunch of killers all the way across Indiana and into Canada, creating some kind of International Incident and that Reno's brothers, the ones I collared back in Indiana, they were lynched by a mob, hadn't I heard?

I don't give a shit! I won't go home or listen to my mealymouthed sons in cahoots with George, instead of covering my back, so I fire George Bangs and he says, he says, what the hell is he saying?

“Allan, why would I steal twenty dollars from expenses? I sign all the company checks.”

“How the fuck should I know?”

My last words, before the explosion goes off inside my skull. It feels like the time I went flying off my horse at Antietam. I topple over and the side of my head hits the floor. I think I felt the carpet against my cheek. I couldn't move. Then there was only blackness.

I WAS STARING straight into Kreutzman's eyes.

“What is paralysis, Major Allen?” As if I can answer his question with my useless tongue. “You must discover the source of your ailment to cure it. Those doctors did nothing for you, because they don't really know what paralysis is. But I do.”

I grunted.

“Your brain exploded. Like a train boiler, too much pressure, no valve to let off some steam. Too much in you for a body to bear. Understand?”

Hell no! I shake my head back and forth, but he grabs it and probes my skull, all the soft places around the edges, like he's sticking his fingers into my brain.

“What happened to you, Major Allen?”

“F...f...fuck d'I know?”

“When I put my hands on your head I feel the strongest will of any man I've ever touched. But is it strong enough?”

“F...fer...what?” I spat the words out.

“Major Allen, I can't make the dead parts come alive again. Only you can solve the mystery.”

Then he left. How long ago was it? What time is it now?

The mystery?

Does he mean a crime? Of course he does! The man's a genius!

I've suspected all along I am the victim of monstrous wrongdoing. I have been too lax, too magnanimous, turning the other cheek. No more! I have finally found a true God of Mercy and Wrath who understands what I've suffered and urges me to root out and prosecute the miscreants who tried without success to destroy me!

Bless you, Kreutzman!

Only you can solve the mystery!

How the hell can I solve anything, lying here paralyzed in this shack?

But I will. I swear I will. I am the greatest detective who ever lived.