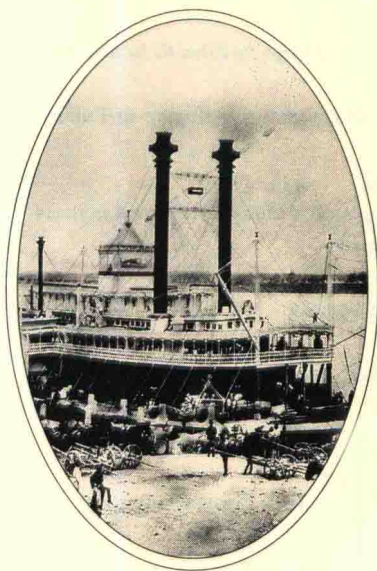


RICHARD MOQUIST

*Eye of the  
Agency*



◆ *A Sadie Greenstreet Mystery* ◆

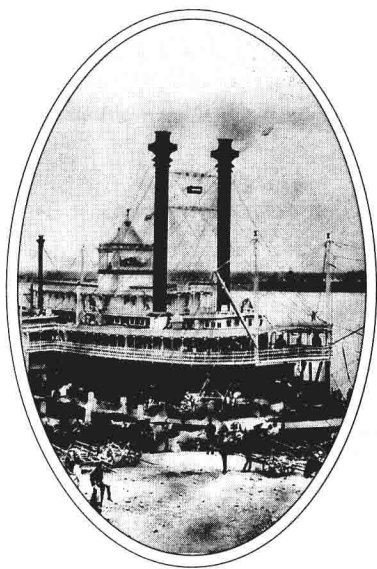
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*Eye of the Agency*

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## ENTER THE PINKERTON MAN

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It should have been, to paraphrase Dickens, the best of times, and, though it was far from the worst, I could not help but feel something was missing. Life had taken a turn some years back—a sudden turn, like a leaf just off the rapids finding itself among a hundred other leaves in slow-moving backwater. I was just now beginning to see that life is best on the rapids.

Those early years with my husband Horace were always an adventure. Days were filled with travel and the nights, I must confess, were filled with a bit of larceny. But, just as grey overtook our temples, respectability overtook us by degrees, and Horace accepted work with, of all organizations, the Pinkerton Investigation Agency. My husband's exploits with that illustrious firm have long been chronicled in newspapers from Chicago to St. Louis and, I have heard, all the way to New York—perhaps beyond. But always in those accounts he has been referred to discreetly as “an undisclosed Pinkerton agent.”

From his first case some eleven years past—protecting President Lincoln from enemies during a zigzag sixteen-hundred-mile train ride from Illinois to the Capitol—to his

famous uncovering of the great grain scandal in Chicago, the particulars of his many cases and the methods used to solve them remain to this day tucked neatly in the Pinkerton Agency file books.

Not that he hasn't been handsomely rewarded for his anonymous work. On the contrary, the Agency and others have kept us in comfort, if not extravagance. But my own part in that adventuresome life has been limited to the now-and-then cases taken on in our hometown of Chicago. Indeed, I found myself growing a bit impatient with his more than frequent absences, and just a trifle resentful of my increasingly limited role.

Being a distant relative of the patriot Thomas Paine, I have inherited his penchant for writing and, hopefully, some degree of his common sense as well. I have, for some years, kept myself occupied exercising these two modest qualities in my weekly advice column for the *Chicago Tribune*.

But it was my younger sister, Pamela, who first suggested I travel with Horace and keep a record of his cases. "Suggested" may not be the precise word. Horace had just returned from a three-month investigation of the infamous Ashby shootings in Cleveland. He had returned on the midnight train and hadn't yet risen the morning Pamela came knocking at my door with a determined look on her face.

"Sadie Greenstreet," she said without preamble, tossing her corded silk bonnet onto a chair with the same exhilaration a slave might throw off his fetters. "Where have I been, you ask?"



I hadn't, but knew I would soon find out. Standing there, tall and statuesque in a dress of royal blue, she looked very much like a painting after the style of Gainsborough. Her ebony hair was accentuated by three circle tresses of the French fashion, one on either temple and the third just left-center of her forehead. Her face was slightly pale, except when excited. She was excited now.

"A meeting of the Illinois chapter of the Women's Suffrage Society," she declared, bowing slightly as if expecting applause. "That is where I've been."

I set my volume of Whitman on the side table and, after pouring two cups of sassafras tea, I rested my cheeks on open palms, preparing for the inevitable details of Pamela's latest enlightenment. She had, in the past, organized bazaars for relief after the great Chicago fire; stood side-by-side with the Knights of Labor and their newly unionized garment workers when they struck in '72; and stormed the gates of the Kennechutt packinghouse, rescuing sixteen child laborers. If this was like her other causes, she would enter into the struggle with energy rampant.

She did not disappoint. Pamela paced to and fro like a thoroughbred awaiting the gun. At length, using Horace's stuffed easy chair as a lectern, she began.

"It's high time we acted, Sadie. Do you realize it's been ten years since President Lincoln emancipated the slaves? And now here we are, little better off than they were then. We have no vote, cannot own property, cannot obtain a divorce; it is intolerable. Look at your own situation, Sadie."

"What on earth do you mean, my situation?"

"Oh, come, come now. All this reading and your 'Ask

Sadie' column are only diversions." She paused as her eyes caught a glimpse of Horace's derby hanging on a wall peg. "I know you are only happy when you're poking about in Horace's inquiries. I see he is home, but you can be certain that in no time he'll be off again. And you will . . ."

Pamela lifted my book from the side table, fanned its pages, then closed it hard, as if to make a point. "While Horace is out seeing the world, you are sentenced merely to sit at home and read of that world. But that's the way it's always been, Sadie," she said, shaking her head. "And why?"

I had no answer, so she continued, finger pointing to the ceiling. "Because we lack the backbone to stand up and voice our demands!"

Pamela proceeded, speaking now of Julia Howe, of liberalism, socialism, reform. But I heard only snatches of her words. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Horace standing by the upstairs balustrade, hands on hips.

Still a handsome man at forty, he was just now beginning to show his age. His forehead had moved an inch north from where it once had been. Thick, gold-rimmed spectacles now partially hid his dark brown eyes. Greying side whiskers and a confident air had transformed his look from boyish to bankish.

Presently Pamela's eyes followed mine, and pallor came to her face when she saw we were not alone. The sound of Horace's clapping hands resounded round the high-ceilinged parlor as he descended the staircase.

"Bravo, Pamela! A fine cause. I'm all for the rights of women. The fact of the matter is, I've convinced Mr.

Pinkerton to hire several women operatives of late," he said, with a circumspect glance, "and we always contribute to the unwed mothers' fund."

Pamela, quick as always with a comeback, was at no loss for words. "Well then, Mr. Horace Thaddeus Greenstreet, why do you allow your wife to live the life she does? Why is she not among these new operatives?"

Horace's forehead colored slightly as he nervously brushed each side of his moustache with a thumbnail. The only other person who ever used Horace's middle name was his mother, and the intent was not lost on him. He stood up straight for an instant as if being scolded for posture. He turned toward me again, this time plaintively. Pamela continued. "She sits at home and reads while you are off to Kansas City or St. Paul or who knows where else. Last Tuesday I came for a visit, and she was curled up with the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The *Encyclopedia Britannica*, for God's sake!"

I nearly protested at that moment, but checked myself and held my tongue, eager to hear Horace's reply. It was true, I felt stifled and static at times. Yet, there was something comfortable about my life, like an old easy chair you know should be abandoned yet still hang onto. I felt Pamela speaking for the part of me who wanted to discard that old chair.

"We have always been equals in this house," he said at last.

"We were once on equal terms, but today . . ." I shrugged to give a more pronounced effect to my words. "Today, I am not so certain."

Horace puffed himself up to full height, a height that nearly matched that of Pamela. A quiet sort of tension grew for several seconds. The old brass mantel clock ticked loudly and rhythmically in the silence. As Horace pursed his lips and began to lift his hand as a prelude to speech, I jerked with a start. The knocker on the front door sounded, loudly and continuously.

Whether it is Fate or Providence that brings together two unrelated incidents and so changes one's life, I cannot say. Horace would say Fate, for he is a freethinker; I am a nominal Presbyterian and am inclined toward the latter. Nonetheless, the decision of Pamela to attend a suffrage meeting and her subsequent visit to our house was followed by a second, unrelated visit, and the two together marked great changes in my life. Without a word, Horace walked brusquely to the door and spoke briefly to a messenger boy, before filling the young man's open palm with several small coins. Horace gave us a secretive over-the-shoulder squint upon closing the door, and we watched as he read the dispatch.

When he had finished, I saw clearly the truth of Pamela's words. I had lost him again. The man who had arrived late last night with chocolates in one hand and a bottle of claret in the other had vanished. The man whom I had stayed up with into the small hours, discussing everything but his mission to Cleveland, was nowhere to be found.

The transformation had begun slowly. Horace set two sheets of paper, one large and one small, on his writing desk. He rolled a cigarette the way he always did—just as

the old Dutchman of his company had taught him during the war. The fingers on his left hand meditatively drummed the desk while his right deftly put together paper and Turkish tobacco in a shape that can best be described as resembling an English hunting horn. On the cigarette's completion, he lit the wide end and drew in deeply. The change was complete. He was now no longer my husband, but a Pinkerton man. And, soon again, I would be a Pinkerton widow.

## THE EYE OF THE AGENCY

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**T**he two papers came from a large, cream-colored envelope that bore an unmistakable red seal in the shape of an eye. Quite probably they were from Mr. Allan Pinkerton himself.

The fingers on Horace's left hand walked nervously up and down his cheek. Pamela sent a glance my way that asked if she should leave. I replied with a shake of the head and strode to Horace's side.

"Trouble?" I asked. Horace nodded solemnly but did not speak.

"I don't suppose it's local trouble," I said, not attempting to conceal the irritation in my voice.

Horace lifted his eyes in a pained expression. "I know I promised, and I wouldn't think of leaving again." He paused, gazing ruefully at the smaller of the two sheets of paper, then thrust it into my hand. "By God, Sadie! What am I to do?"

The note was neatly typewritten on penny paper. In the center of the page were the words:

*Richard Moquist*

I WILL SHOW THAT NOTHING CAN HAPPEN MORE  
BEAUTIFUL THAN DEATH.

"Is it meant . . . for you?" I tried not to show alarm in my voice.

"No, no Sadie. The letter is for . . ." Horace looked up, realizing we were not alone. He rose slowly from his desk, avoiding any contact with my eyes, and dropped weightily into the parlor chair with a sigh. "This concerns a client I shall call Mr. Jones so as not to breach a confidence. I shall tell you his story and leave it to you whether I should take his case." Horace continued as I took a seat next to Pamela. "It appears Mr. Jones owns a riverboat steamer company. He received an offer to buy his principal showboat about a month ago from a Mr. Brown, who owns a rival riverboat concern. Now, Mr. Brown has, in the past, bought up several small passenger steamers using a business technique which can best be described as strong-arming. It is believed that he is attempting to monopolize the business. Shortly after Mr. Jones declined the offer, a first threatening letter was received. It was unfortunately thought to be a prank and destroyed. This second letter," Horace pointed to the one I was now holding, "was received a week later, and, since that time, Mr. Brown's business practices have become better known to Mr. Jones, leaving him to believe the threat could well be genuine. He wishes a Pinkerton man to investigate the origins of the note and to protect him if necessary. Mr. Jones's showboat leaves Cincinnati tomorrow for a trip to St. Louis. Mr. Brown has requested another meeting and plans to rendezvous with the show-