

OCTET 1: THE FIRST DAY

THE FOOL'S INVITATION

No book can describe prison.

Anyone who attempts to write the story of prison is a liar and a fool. Herein, dear reader, I will be your fool. I will tell you the truth of prison, unflinchingly, while you hold your knife to my throat, ready to slit arteries as soon as truth makes you uncomfortable. But while you read, remember that I am a liar, that I am a fool.

Believe that.

And maybe you'll be safe.

Herein I will describe my crime and you will judge if I am a criminal. I will tell you of horror and you will decide if I am sane. I will tell you of violence, of stupidity, of fear, and I will slit the belly of your imagination with the kindness, compassion and love that dwells in every prisoner I have ever met.

You will decide when I am lying, because that is what you do. That is your job.

My job is to deceive you, is to convince you that I am a fool incapable of knowing truth.

Because only then can you be safe.

Our battle lines. You, a person who can separate lies from truth, foolishness from wisdom. Me, a dismissible prisoner, a challenger who intends to deny you your comfort, your certainty.

You versus me.

As you read, remember this: my lies are my attempt to externalize my inner reality.

Step carefully, fish.

You are at a portal to madness. Read no further than this first page and you can disregard the portal, can ignore my challenge. Instead, watch TV; read a comic book. Or enter my darkened world, a world where men have lost all meaning, where men have lost all hope, and I will betray you. I will do my best to trouble your intellect, to mine your anger and tickle your laughter, but I will do so only to trick you into hearing the stories. I want you to hear the claxon of truth and denial. I want you to *feel* the rape and the horror and the love and the honor compressed within these penitentiary fences.

One final note. This novel is many things, but foremost *88 Keys to Surviving Prison* is a trap. I have set little traps throughout which will make you comfortable with the nature of my traps. The little traps preceding The Big One will force your caution, will keep you skeptical. I will alert you before springing all but The Big Trap. Forewarned,

you can choose between avoiding them, which requires thought, or falling into them, which is more fun. But: reader versus author. I will prepare you to spot each trap before springing it, and I will deceive you into every trap, especially The Big One.

You have been warned.

THE KEYS

Keys unlock things.

The eighty-eight keys are a mental piano for the non-prisoner, are truths that, if listened to, will unlock the gates that keep you from joining me in prison. To play the keys, you must lose your complacency, must lose your virginity about How Things Are.

Ready?

Strike the first key, a key already mentioned: *My lies are my attempt to externalize my inner reality.*

Tweak it. Turn it upside down: *Your reality is a denial of my externalization.*

Is that bullshit? I'm a convict. Should you already yank your knife across my throat? Severing my arteries would be safer, but hear me out. There's much to come.

Imagine yourself as a prisoner, as a liar and a fool. To tell your story, you might have used forty-four tools or seven rules or a hundred-one whatever's, but for me it had to be eighty-eight keys. The truths had to relate to the music that writer-me and reader-you can create. As the reader, your job is important. You must do half the work. I have built the piano, but for you to succeed, you must play it, must play its music with the fingers of your imagination.

Consider key D-30. If you have the background and imagination for it, hear that D semitone, that key at the center of the third octave, *The Octave of Deceit*. If you cannot imagine how it sounds, get to a piano and plunk the thirtieth key, a semitone that underscores every other key. Go ahead. Take your time. As a prisoner, I'm in no rush.

Key D-30 is the chorus that plays between my verses: *My lies are my attempt to externalize my inner reality.*

This is your counterpoint: *Your reality is a denial of my externalization.*

Hear the harmony?

If you can hear it already, then you don't need to read about the eighty-eight keys. Instead, you should write about them.

Teach me.

Otherwise, listen to my stories.

To deceive you, I must stick to the truth.