Dissension

An excerpt from a journal anonymously submitted to the Austin Police Department nearly a decade after the brutal Rubedo murders.

September 2nd, 1920

Ahh, there is nothing like tea in the morning. I swept over the batch papers on my desk, examining various financial statements from the emerald branch. A request to place an order for more playing cards, a stack of bundled newspapers from Austin, and miscellaneous documents. I pored over Kaufmann's report for the four month period of October, November, December, and January of 1919 and 1920.

I had ordered him to dispose of the five hundred dollars he had attained through… ah, distasteful means. Werner could have planted the money on someone else, but he didn't, after all, there were no arrests based on the newspapers I had collected, so he used some other method. His first intuition wouldn't be to destroy the money, as framing someone else would not leave the case open ended. This would technically preserve his anonymity to a greater degree, so why did he not attempt it first? Either he was not able to, or his attempt failed. But why would he not be able to? The Volstead Act had not been enforced yet, meaning he could still effectively have the front of a bar. If he suspected that there was an undercover officer or some other inhibitor, he would have asked me for advice. Therefore, it was likely a failed attempt. This makes sense given that he would not want to openly confess that he performed subpar on a task to his benefactor. Werner has always been a slippery devil.

What about the attempt itself? He had sundry options. Giving anonymously to say, a charity organization, would be far too risky in case his agents were seen. It would lead to general conclusions regarding the culprit's whereabouts and influence, especially if he spread it out.

How could the attempt be structured? It must be something that is not public to reduce possible leaks and it would probably involve people Kaufmann was familiar with, given that he would not take such a great chance without knowing the target. What about if Kaufmann, say, approached a patron to offer him a reward? Impossible, it would be too suspicious. Kaufmann would construct some game for several patrons to play against each other as a distraction, altering the narrative into that of an exclusive gamble. The one who wins goes home with the money, and at that point it's simply their word against Kaufmann, as the opponents would probably not testify against a dangerous man or be inclined to help their adversary after losing with such high stakes. Likely a duel of one person versus another to prevent as many leads as possible, but these people are illicit gamblers; they would not go alone into an unfamiliar environment, so Kaufmann, to reassure them, would allow them to bring a partner if they wish.

But something went wrong. Kaufmann could not have grossly miscalculated his own plan without vetting the patrons, so the other person must have been one of the participant's partners. However, they became acquainted recently and the other person had not been at the Wilson Bar. This is perceptible because if Kaufmann knew there was a chance that the patron

would bring this person, he would have concocted some alternative, as this person could potentially thwart his plans, and Kaufmann would not bring someone so intelligent.

The person could not have been at the Wilson Bar before for similar reasons, Werner would have known they were acquainted earlier and would have altered his proposal. This person and the patron could not have plotted together for this plan beforehand, such as pretending they had no relation, as there would have been virtually no way to have predicted if Kaufmann would ever make this gamble or if he would even have tainted money.

What was the aftermath? Well, there were no deaths. I did not notice any disappearances reported in the Austin papers I have sent to me. This means that they escaped, which would be more difficult by simply running away from the Wilson Bar. What this implies is that the patron and his partner had leverage over Kaufmann. They knew of his criminal connection and exploited it. This would not have been enough purely on its own, so they must have had a fail safe, likely threatening to expose incriminating documents to the police.

Hmm, and here we have a small decline in Mr. Wilson's profits in January. It is consistent with the enactment of the Volstead Act, but knowing Mr. Wilson, he was most likely well prepared. Patrons could be discouraged, but gambling and illegal drink do not necessarily go hand in hand. I would have expected an earlier resurgence, so something else discouraged them. The papers do not say anything about nearby busts and Kaufmann would have informed me if he suspected surveillance. He sent his monthly report so it is evident that the transmission lines were not compromised. This means that something happened which Kaufmann would not like me to know.

What else could lead to discouragement? A cheater or someone with a winning streak. Could it be the previous man who had shown up? No, assuming they were cautious enough to outwit Kaufmann I doubt he would go out of his way to directly provoke him not to mention the fact that applying pressure to Kaufmann in that manner would cause him to try to counter any sort of fail safes, making the situation extremely unsafe. So a stranger with a winning streak. Quite a long winning streak by the looks of it before the money came back in Kaufmann's pocket. Kaufmann would have kicked him out, but he didn't, so Kaufmann may have been in cahoots with him, pocketing money on the sidelines so as to not pay me my percentage.

How was this man cheating? It is certain that he was not just 'lucky', people are not lucky forever. This also means that his methods withstood scrutiny within that timespan as well. A common cheating method would be marking the cards, and so it is the first we can dismiss as anyone could have figured it out. Physical marks are a bit more likely, but did no one ever realize that there might be physical marks? I doubt it, so we scratch it off the list as well. He must be receiving information somehow, so the only other possible way is through a sort of auditory cue as the other senses are irrelevant in this situation. The cards themselves don't make a unique noise by themselves, besides the fact that the mechanism for such a thing would be extremely impractical. I conclude that he was somehow getting information from the only other person exposed to the cards, the dealer. But how was the dealer receiving information? The dealer… holds the cards differently than a player. He may slide his hand over the bottom face as he flips them or passes them out which is natural. But a person looking for physical markings would have run their hand over the surface or put their cards flat on the table, so it must be that the markings are not always there. Because of this, I propose that the markings could have been in a sort of hollow built within the cards so that the cards would not show any

sort of indent if they were flat on the table, as they would be pushed back into the hollow. However, a light touch by the dealer could be used to read the face of the card using this method. The dealer would need a way to communicate this information to the man, so it must have been something which would have been totally ordinary. Not speaking or tapping… or even eye signals. A person suspecting this man of cheating would obviously examine the dealer at almost a first glance, it's only natural to assume that they may be working together. Consequently, the method should be one which holds up to scrutiny, not as explicit as tugging or many other methods… possibly through breathing? Ahh, and look here! An order from Mr. Kaufmann in the month prior for new cards. This tidies up some of the inferences.

This man was either exposed or left, but it is curious… if he was exposed, wouldn't Kaufmann's criminal connection be unraveled? The fact that it wasn't implies the man could not be questioned. He fled after being found out but Kaufmann could have framed the situation so that the man had scammed him to preserve his reputation.

Anyhow, I obviously could not have one of my subordinates be disloyal, so I decided to engineer a scenario to deconstruct that group. I had a few agents of mine in Austin locate the man who originally saw through Kaufmann, a gentleman named Mr. Morris. His daily walk crossed by a ranch owned by the wealthy Mr. Saxon, occupied by his family. Mr. Saxon was frequently reported to be an unpleasant man, although his sister was his equal and opposite. Despite this, he did not kick her out of his house, on the contrary, she lived lavishly with her husband, who was disliked by Mr. Saxon. The details pointed towards an overprotectiveness of his own sister, but he was also a successful broker, so he clearly had a grasp of socialization, meaning that his behavior may have been intentional.

Why would he choose to act like that? Maybe as a defensive act for his sister, but there could also be an alternative. Mr. Saxon was an immigrant according to public sources, starting out very poor. It could be that he had felt inadequate even as he rose through social classes, which would be understandable, but he overcompensated with his aggressiveness. Think of the ranch he built: grand but isolated. He has no friends in higher circles and he probably knows it.

Based on reports, Mr. White himself was not entirely pleasant. Mrs. White also didn't leave the house very often nor did she have many friends. I can only conclude that she was trapped between two dominant personalities who clashed daily. She is tied to her own brother by blood but he is choking her with his negative miasma while her husband is clearly being overly controlling. Yet she refuses to engage with her situation, making no attempt to change it. Humans do not move unless the pain of inertia overcomes that of taking action and even then they often do not. She feels helpless and is probably at her wits end. This is the point of impact I can exploit. Human emotion in difficult times is often like flowing water. It is barred by a dam of self control, but is nearly unstoppable once released. Much like water, it will take the path of least resistance.

I applied a trifling amount of additional pressure; a letter here and there attributed to her husband, about how he felt limited by her. After this, a man accidentally bumps into her in the local market. They have a small discussion and he recommends *The Mysterious Affair At Styles* as a nice book to read, among other more minor works, such as *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. A copy of *Pretiosissimum Donum Dei* is introduced into the household near the same time. After she is imbibed with these tidbits, she will likely turn to books for comfort for now. The pressure will still continue to build, but she will realize that there is light at the end of the tunnel. She is an

actress, meaning she may be able to commit herself to perform certain acts without being suspected. She has not confronted her husband as of yet, meaning she has deluded herself into thinking that he may still love her or she feels bound to him. As a result, she will take a more drastic measure to confirm her suspicions. If she would want to know for certain, while limiting the amount of available information, then she will disguise herself as a different woman and seduce her own husband. Even though this course of action sounds fantastical, it is reasonable given her context. She cannot face him. Investigation is laden with danger and risk to her own life given her husband's nature as an abuser. Her remaining option is to test him. She will know that deception is plausible due to the shared stories, but she has no allies to assist her. The lasting association? Using herself to fool him. Now, a delusional woman may not think rationally about this course of action, but I am confident she will go to adopt a more rigid process after reading the works recommended to her.

Her goal will be to dispose of or incapacitate her brother and husband through what is probably murder. You know, people claim all the time how they would never harm another human, but when push comes to shove, in the heat of the moment, in the climax of conflict, they stop resisting their urges. They lash out and strike, even with premeditation. Once the first blow is done, they will feel like they have gone too far. They become hopeless and believe that they are unredeemable, cascading down to ever more drastic actions. Now that she views herself as a murderer, the only way she can preserve herself is through rationality, she must succeed, because at the end of the day it is her only option, the only opening left for her to flow through. I must be careful not to push her too far, otherwise she is useless to me. She needs to believe that this was her only course of action. That it is the preferable method of 'escape'. Her brother still cares about her which may contribute to extreme guilt on her part. She also will be responsible for several deaths. I decided to preempt the former problem by offering a letter to one of Mr. Saxon's coworkers detailing how he resented her for bringing a stranger into their house. That would eliminate any remaining empathy on her part. She needs to think she is doing what is correct, and so she may discover a deeper conspiracy in Ward & Clews. I solicited a number of violent crimes in her brother's name contained in a manifesto which was dropped by his desk. I knew she would not just be content in turning in this supposed evidence to the police, and even if she did, she would have found a contingent document from her very own brother denying the allegations ahead of time! Of course, all these records were completely fabricated and planted. All it takes is a few sheets of paper and a small fee to the telegram operator. This creates a deadlock for Mrs. White. She cannot directly confront either her husband or her brother in any way, and being exposed to structured crime will resonate with her creativity to form a scheme against them. I was concerned I might push her too far over the edge, after all, the key is to propagate cracks in one's psyche, not shatter it completely.

The alchemical manuscript will integrate a delightful amount of flavor into the case. To insulate herself, she can frame it as if a cult committed the crime. In addition, she may hide her own actions beneath a series of other murders involving those in the company. In my opinion it would be the most competent course of action, as the members of Ward & Clews are famously powerful in Austin. It would give the impression that the group is very strong and influential. She needs a motive for either her husband's or her brother's death. Even though she create a conflict where he crosses one of the cult members, I am more inclined to believe that she will frame one of them as an ex-cultist as such a conflict would create an explicit lead, which would

obviously contrast with the secretive nature of the cult, as no one would have ever heard of it before.

She will need a proper assassin for the murder, so I orchestrated the circumstances so that she would come across someone who knew him. Little do either of them know that Evan Taylor's own skillset was my design. He once received a letter with an invisible message as well as an extremely small address line. The rest was a simple association for him to make. He also may have been introduced to a paper written by Detective Portsman regarding the analysis of footsteps in investigations.

Of course, Mrs. White will also have the connection to her husband to exploit him with. She could do any number of actions to try to frame him, but only one leaves a completely cold trail: her persona must die. This will lead all to assume that her alter-ego was a real person, and she can tie her death into the entire cult narrative as well, using it as an anchor to accuse her husband of conspiring against her. It also provides a proper motive for him if she chooses to dispose of her brother. As for her connection to Evan Taylor, she may be able to use an emissary to pay him, but it presents an extraordinary opening: she can pay with her other self, leading to a direct connection between them and her husband! Not only that, but she can now mirror the initial framing method within Christie's opus to clear herself. What of the police? I had researched the nearby stations long ago and determined that the murder, in all likelihood, would be investigated by Detective Portsman and his department, hence Evan Taylor's indirect training.

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Mrs. White will also meet someone who knows of Mr. Morris and his methods. Once this occurs, she will undoubtedly take action against him as he is virtually the perfect target. A man with a criminal background who is remarkably intelligent and was near the scene of the crime? He may as well have his hands dipped in blood. She will likely only take this framing as a last resort, since her main targets simply need to be defamed or killed. She could easily create a narrative device to implicate him. This is where all of the pieces slowly fall into place.

Now, what of Mr. Morris and Detective Portsman? I knew Portsman from his work on the Wetland Killer case and that he was a highly cautious man. Mr. Morris was as well, yet he also entered the lion's den when prepared. Plainly, he also won the gamble against his opponent in Kaufmann's game, so he was clearly an avid gambler, highly skilled in holistic insight. As for his ideology, he did not necessarily need to confront Kaufmann if he did not want to. He also did not turn him in. It seems that Mr. Morris is someone who enjoys playing with fire, a man who can see ahead, and who is certainly not foolish. How would these two interact at a crime scene? Portsman wasn't debilitatingly arrogant, so he would likely accept Morris' insights whilst maintaining suspicion. Morris would definitely consider that the entire narrative was falsified and possibly take precautions against Detective Portsman's suspicions.

Mr. Morris is a rational man, therefore we may assume he will take a rational course of action in the investigation. If he believes a secretive cult to be behind the crime, then he will use his connections to bait them out into the open. The simplest way to attempt this is by making them appear to be a threat as Mr. Wilson would have no reason to aid Mr. Morris. In addition, Mr. Morris could not risk simply coercing Mr. Wilson since it lays significant pressure on Mr. Wilson to counter whatever Mr. Morris might hold against him. Mr. Wilson will think that the cult is a threat to him and so will try to flush them out.

Adjacent to Mr. Morris is Detective Portsman, a man who likely suspects Mr. Morris. In all probability, he will try to investigate him, such as through his telegrams or letters. Mr. Morris will be aware of this fact and also possess the situational awareness to anticipate his own framing given his position. In other words, Mr. Morris has no control over either of these variables. He must take an action which guarantees certainty for both these eventualities. Mr. Morris cannot know exactly when he is being framed, so he must delay the effect of the framing. Here, Mr. Morris has an incredible opening: if he is framed, then Mr. Wilson and Detective Portsman will pursue him, viewing him as a danger. To reiterate, Mr. Morris will be chased by a criminal gang and Detective Portsman. Obviously, Mr. Morris will cause these groups to meet, handing off evidence to Detective Portsman to arrest them. To make his plan airtight, he must control the timing, so Mr. Morris will need to make Detective Portsman believe that arresting him immediately is not the best course of action.

At this point, it will have already been established that there is a cult, therefore Mr. Morris will connect these two concepts together, painting the picture that Mr. Wilson is a collaborator or underling, most likely creating a meeting point with an unassuming telegram. Once Detective Portsman finds the memorandum and discovers Mr. Morris' supposed involvement, he will have an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. Even if Mr. Morris does not succeed in being framed, that is simply a secondary objective. At that juncture, my trap for Kaufmann is set, and not a single person knows of my involvement, including the men who planted all the information. They were paid to drop off certain packages, the money from which could not be traced to any definitive location. I had the paper delivered from a southern stationmaster with a disguised hand. No one could have dreamed who was really behind it.

Brilliant as the scheme to achieve my objective is, I must also prepare contingencies in the event that all these events do not go as predicted. If Mrs. White snaps, then I have prepared a chain of telegrams that tie in Ward & Clews into the event in addition to underworld connections and a laid trap to frame Mr. Morris. Under this offshoot, the general indirect structure is maintained to cause Mr. Morris to turn in Mr. Wilson. This failsafe will also be

capable of reconciling other actions Mrs. White may take, such as trying to frame the members of Ward & Clews she believes is guilty or taking on a vigilante role. If Mr. Morris does not attempt to turn in Mr. Wilson and flees, then I will place evidence against him in Mr. Morris' apartment, a surprisingly easy task if one contributes to the cleaning service. If Mr. Wilson had prepared for Mr. Morris' trap in advance, then I will have his illegal dealings exposed through an anonymous analysis of his inconsistent financial record. If all of the above fails, then I will be forced to directly turn in evidence against him, but I hope that will not be necessary. If luck is with me, then this operation will be a success.

Signing off for now

End of the first dated statement.