The Lawmaker

I believe I may be required to record another fascinating exploit involving a rather curious acquaintance of mine, a blind man by the name of Charles Morris, a brilliant strategist that I encountered during a previous incident, which I have taken to fancifully name “A Game of Hangman”. I am not sure I have quite the nerve to publish the story as of now, but perhaps one day my, or rather Morris’s memoirs may come to light.

This particular account took place in late January of 1920, shortly after the free government of the United States decided to properly enforce a ban on the sale or transportation of alcoholic beverages. Truth be told, I cannot advocate as to how entirely effective this attempt was. It certainly did not stop the Wilson Bar, which already operated as an illicit gambling den. Mr. Wilson, or rather Werner Kaufmann, quickly adapted to the changing circumstances and set up a front as a stock brokerage owned by a cousin of his, with the majority of his operations continuing in the musty basement of the complex.

I grew to admire Charles Morris after our first encounter. Despite his betrayal, he had assisted me considerably throughout the escapade, and I felt I owed him to at least some degree. He sent me a letter with his address and occasionally invited me to his apartment near the outskirts of Dallas, where he lived a relatively frugal lifestyle, and one could certainly understand the dreaded “indolence” he feared.

The newest incident truly began when I visited Morris in his peeling flat, the wallpaper crumbling with age and the occasional tick of his clock punctuating the creaking floorboards underfoot.

I had visited several times before, stepping through the dusty halls to reach his room. The crackly wooden door swung open with the lightest touch.

There were only a couple of chairs in the flat, with Morris occupying one.His jacket hung over the backrest with his gloves set among the objects occupying the adjacent wooden stand his silver topped walking stick leaned against. A glass of what appeared to be juice sat on a wooden coaster atop the stand.

Morris had clearly memorized the layout of the room as was evident by his effortless manner in taking a cigarette out of a pack on the stand and simultaneously retrieving a silver lighter from a drawer. With practiced skill he lit the cigarette in one attempt, letting the smoke rise before putting it into the side of his mouth.

“Mr. Hopkins, I presume? I perceive you have let yourself in.”

“How did you know it was me?”

“Have you ever found yourself knowing your family member or friend is around simply by listening to the way they walk and the weight of their steps? I assure you that it is hardly a phenomenon.”

Morris paused for a moment to inhale the smoke before standing upright.

“Please, make yourself comfortable,” He said, vaguely indicating to the other seat in the flat. “May I offer you something to drink?”

“Thank you. Some water would be excellent.”

Morris quickly filled a cup with a metal carafe and passed it to me. I drained the glass rather quickly while Morris returned to his seat and stirred his own drink, seemingly pondering some enigmatic question.

"So, Morris, what seems to be the problem today?"

Morris's face broke out into a grin.

"I was simply considering an issue regarding the so-called Wilson Bar."

I froze for a moment.

"Do you believe we are in danger?"

Morris waved away the response before sipping from his glass. "Of course not. Kaufmann is not incompetent. He is perfectly aware of the ramifications that harming either of us would have. It doesn't hurt that I informed him regarding the contents of my will, which is safely stored in a bank vault and lists his exploits in great detail. Based on my agent's reports, it appears there is someone in the Wilson Bar who is on a winning streak."

"That is not particularly strange."

"I am aware. The strange aspect of it is that this individual is…uniquely skilled, if that term may apply to this situation."

"Once again, I'm not quite certain what you mean? Are you perhaps suggesting that this man is cheating?"

"Maybe. Truth be told, I am unsure as of now. He claims to possess an almost supernatural ability to read others, something which I sincerely doubt, but it is a fascinating puzzle nonetheless."

"I have seen much more impressive things from you based on our previous experience." Morris sighed, putting down his glass.

"I appreciate the compliment, but my methods rely almost entirely on rationality. This person's skill is practically inhuman. In fact, I am quite glad you came today, Bill. If you don't mind, would you accompany me to the bar to investigate?"

I was quite surprised by his abrupt offer, but the whole situation seemed relatively odd. I had not been to the Wilson Bar in quite some time, and his suggestion seemed very suspicious.

Yet… Morris once again offered a refuge for indolence. I had no qualms about this affair being an elaborate trap for me, as although I did not entirely trust Morris, I was confident he would not actively threaten or harm me but I could not shake the feeling that he was withholding information, which he seemed to detect.

"Bill, I am aware that I have not always been forthcoming with information, but trust me when I say there is always a rational explanation behind my actions," he said as he drank the remainder of his beverage. "You know my methods. Even if I misinform you, I have never led you wrong."

I sighed. "You are quite correct. Very well, I shall accompany you."

Morris stood up, grabbing his coat and putting it on in one swift motion as he smiled at me.

"Excellent. We will make our way over immediately."

He retrieved his walking stick and gloves, and we stepped outside to be greeted by a frigid breeze cutting into our exposed skin. Despite the blatant cold, the sun shone unceasingly, displaying what would be a humiliating bathos on its part.

Morris was decidedly unbothered by the temperature and continued to walk cheerfully toward the Wilson Bar, now a brokerage by the name of Mason and Co., a stately and relatively opulent facade concealing the unsavory underbelly beneath.

“Who is this so-called extraordinary man anyhow?”

“Based on my information, his name is Arthur Buchanan. He is a high society man who seems to have taken a liking to gambling, a liking that has paid off tenfold. He is also a transient person, often traveling the counties in Oklahoma.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“Surely the dealers would have noticed if such a man consistently won every game that he played?”

“A good point, however, Mr. Buchanan does not win every game he plays. He simply does not lose very often, something which makes him much more dangerous than a person who simply wins all the time. If he is cheating, it is certainly not obvious.”

We stepped into the brokerage, oddly quiet whilst clerks were milling around ticket tapers, noting down numbers on scraps of paper. The general appearance of the building was the same, creaking, dusty flooring in stark contrast to its polished exterior.

I made my way with Morris past the bustling clerks, scurrying and scribbling indistinct text onto boards, until I reached a primary clerk’s desk. He was a relatively old man with a high collar and a brown coat, and I knew immediately that he could lead me to the Wilson Bar from the emerald napkin in his breast pocket.

“How can I help you?” He said, appearing extremely disinterested at the prospect of assisting us.

“I believe you might be able to help me locate some particular stock information? I was told it could be downstairs.”

The clerk eyed me suspiciously, chewing his lip in contemplation.

“We wouldn’t have anything like that in the basement. Are you sure you aren’t looking for something else?”

“I’m quite sure that there is something of remarkable interest I am searching for.”

“Very well,” he said, lifting the partition next to the desk. “Follow me.”

He led us through a dirty back room stuffed with furniture and old drapes before pushing aside a large table to reveal a portal.

“Here is the Royal Casino. Just go down the stairs to the lounge.”

“Much appreciated.”

He did not respond, only swiftly turning back to his post.

“Well then,” I started. “I am impressed with Kaufmann’s performance regarding the brokerage front, he seems to have created the illusion with extreme thoroughness.”

“It is more impressive than you might think. Brokerages generally require several important papers as well as intrusive information to be established. I think it is more likely he has constructed a bucket shop with a professional style. I wonder if our adversary today will impress us equally. Before we meet him, it is very important that you pretend I am simply a stranger who has come to gamble here. Act as if you have heard of him so as to have an excuse to introduce me to him. He has blue eyes and dark hair with very formal attire, his typical garb being a brown hat and vest.”

“Perfect.”

“Well then, please lead the way.”

We made our way down the stairs, opening a large wooden door at the bottom. The sight that greeted us was a large room with lights hanging like sparkling baubles over several beat up tables, the harshness of them leaving dark corners across the chamber. The smell of smoke and alcohol was strong, many of the patrons sitting by a bartender at the side of the room, sampling a variety of drinks. A plethora of men occupied the room, of high and low profiles and various nationalities. A Persian man sat to the side, whispering furiously to another man while a Bohemian gentleman slapped several chips onto a table. I could not help but feel a thrill as another adventure was to begin.

A small teller was visible to my immediate left, where I slid a few bills in exchange for chips and transferred them to Morris. Afterward, I surveyed the room to locate Mr. Buchanan and found him in the corner, playing a game of cards against a short stout man. Mr. Buchanan looked down at his cards and snorted. He shoved a small pile of chips across the table, and his opponent swiftly put down his cards in surrender.

“The jokes on you, I only had a two and a three,” he said, leaning back in his seat.

The stout man shot a dirty look back at him and slunk away in defeat.

“Arthur Buchanan, I presume?”

Mr. Buchanan looked up at me, and under the rim of his hat I saw his piercing blue eyes scan my figure.

“That’s me. What do you want?”

“Your reputation precedes you, I hear you are a very skilled gambler.”

He put his feet on the table before taking up a glass of claret into his hand.

“That’s what they tell me. Say, are you attempting to make some sort of offer? We could play a game if you’d like.”

“That would work nicely, Mr. Buchanan-“

“Hold on,” Morris said, interrupting me. “You said your name was Arthur Buchanan?”

Mr. Buchanan shifted his gaze to Morris, studying him intensely.

“That it is,” he said, turning back to me. “Do you know this man?”

“Vaguely. We walked in together with the same goal of gambling down here.”

“So, how can I help you?” Mr. Buchanan asked waringly.

Morris tapped his walking stick impatiently prior to putting both his hands on the metallic grip.

“I’ve heard much about you. Is it true you can read people like books?”

Mr. Buchanan sipped his wine.

“It’s how I get my bread and cheese, so yes, I’d say it’s true.”

Morris raised an eyebrow and almost chuckled.

“Really? I’ve always wondered about your abilities.”

“In what sense?”

Morris coughed into his hand and adjusted his eyeglasses.

“Well, surely the reports cannot be true.”

“I assure you that they are. If you’d want to, perhaps you could join me in a game of poker so as to test me?”

“Sure. I hope you don’t disappoint me,” Morris said sneeringly.

Mr. Buchanan signaled a dealer to come over, a middle aged man with an open jacket and high forehead.

“What will it be?”

“Poker. The new version, if you will.”

The dealer took out a deck of cards and shuffled them thoroughly, the cards audibly flapping in his hands.

“Would you be so kind as to act as my eyes for this game?” Morris said, turning to me.

“Sure.”

Morris probed with his walking stick until he located the chair opposite our adversary and sat in it, letting himself lean back in the seat.

The dealer stood next to the table and threw a card to each player. Morris took up the card before flipping it over, and Mr. Buchanan did the same.

“Well, a four is greater than a two so I suppose I will go first,” Mr. Buchanan said, swirling his glass. Morris nodded silently as the dealer passed a couple of cards to him and his opponent. Morris lifted the cards in a way that neither of us could see them.

“Act like you can read the cards in my hand. If Mr. Buchanan can truly read people with incredible accuracy, he should have no idea what we possess based on our responses. Furthermore, if he does reveal he knows or guesses our cards in some shape or form, we shall know that he is cheating.”

“Brilliant.”

Mr. Buchanan watched Morris closely, scrutinizing his actions with an intense glare. Morris naturally had almost no response besides a slight curling of the sides of his mouth and the rhythmic tapping of his fingers on the table.

“You’re a tough one. I'll pass.”

Morris put his cards face down on the table and his hands beneath his chin.

“I shall as well.”

The dealer exhaled as if a silent tension had been released. He put one card to the side and three face up on the rough surface of the table.

“They are a three of hearts, a six of spades, and a king of spades,” I said to Morris. Morris massaged his forehead, seemingly deep in thought, mirroring Mr. Buchanan whose face was a rictus of contemplation.

Mr. Buchanan slid a couple of chips across the board, which I promptly told Morris the value of. Morris matched it, and Mr. Buchanan seemed slightly surprised by his action.

“Do you believe you have a strong hand?” He asked.

“That heavily depends on the remaining cards, Mr. Buchanan,” Morris answered neutrally.

“You know, I am not sure what you have in your hand, but I have a feeling that neither do you.”

Morris almost laughed.

“With all due respect, Mr. Buchanan, that is patently untrue.”

“Really? Are you aware that I have a friend, Louis Severoux, who lost a game against an individual by the name of Charles Morris, a blind man, and his companion, William Hopkins?” Morris was unfazed.

“I was not.”

“He was distraught after losing the game, recounting the entire incident to me while draining a bottle of wine. It was an interesting story, and I thought that Charles Morris seemed

like a person who would be interested in all kinds of unique situations. A man as intellectually ruthless as he definitely didn't join the game by accident, did he? I asked around and Mr. Morris had never been seen in the casino with Mr. Hopkins before, despite his significant skill and the latter being a frequent patron. Perhaps he had purposely structured a situation to meet Mr. Hopkins and get invited to the game? But this explanation would require an agent in the casino who listened to everything. An agent who would surely notice, if say, a man became renowned for his ability to read others. I guessed that Charles Morris couldn't resist coming back to prove how superior he was, and an obvious ploy would be to not look at his own cards to test his foe's ability."

Mr. Buchanan paused to let his statement sink in, clearly enjoying the expression on my face. Morris was stone faced and while his composure had not broken, he was not smiling. Mr Buchanan was much more formidable than I had anticipated, seemingly possessing some sort of incredible ability to inhabit his enemy's mind and predict them.

"However, something that I found the most interesting was your relationship. You, Mr. Hopkins, were more than capable enough to go along with a plan I assume Mr. Morris invented to try to fool me. You are not a foolish man, and the circumstances that you met Mr. Morris under were probably seen through by you, yet here you are, going along with another one of his schemes. Mr. Morris is intelligent enough to be aware of this, so I suspect your motives are aligned. Perhaps both of you are so afraid of indolence that you would help each other anyway."

I flinched at his proposal, which he promptly noticed.

"So that's what it is."

"It seems we have lost our advantage. I must congratulate you on your remarkable performance. Simply incredible. The next card, if you please," Morris said, waving his hand. The dealer put the top card to the side before dexterously revealing another.

"A four of clubs."

"I pass."

"So do I."

"A seven of spades."

Morris leaned toward me.

"Your assistance will be invaluable during this delicate portion of the game. Please slide two dollars worth of chips across the table," he whispered in a low tone.

The chips made an audible clatter as they dropped on the wooden counter. Mr. Buchanan chuckled.

"What a risk taker you are! Your hand could be a flush, I suppose, but I'm not sure…"

Mr. Buchanan put his fingers under his chin, his eyes darting over us. Morris had placed his hands under the table, his cards hidden from sight as if to prevent Mr. Buchanan from seeing through them.

"I'll match it."

"The next then."

The dealer revealed the final card, exhaling sharply as the card dropped, as if extreme tension had just been resolved.

"A ten of hearts."

"I pass."

"So do I."

Both stalwart men dropped their hands onto the wooden table, with Mr. Buchanan revealing a ten of diamonds and an eight of clubs, and Morris displaying an ace of spades and a jack of hearts. Mr. Buchanan reached an arm over the table, scooping up the chips as he bore a self satisfied expression.

“Well played, Mr. Morris. Nevertheless, you’ve been bested.”

“Good show, Mr. Buchanan. It seems that you are as formidable as had been reported. I must say, it is rather refreshing to compete against someone of your caliber, it appears our sides are now tied.”

“I don't exactly understand what you mean?”

“You have allied yourself with Severoux, who you avenged now. I defeated Severoux in our previous confrontation.”

I noticed a shadow shift in the corner of the room with a familiar face emerging, his broad visage and square teeth clearly visible. It was Mr. Severoux! He had presumably tried to surreptitiously oversee the execution of Mr. Buchanan’s scheme, ensuring it would be casted properly.

“Morris-“

“I would assume you wish to inform me that Mr. Severoux is present? That is to be expected given his previous loss. It would be reasonable that he would desire to see his foe bested.”

Mr. Severoux walked slowly across the room to our table, holding his bustling frame high as his polished shoes clacked loudly against the floor. Morris turned around to the general direction of Mr. Severoux.

“Ah, my good Mr. Severoux! How are you? I admire your patience in regards to your attempts to outwit me.”

“Monsieur Morris, I’m afraid your sharp rhetoric will not assist you today. You have lost.”

“Have I? We are on equal footing, Mr. Severoux. From my perspective, you have gained nothing. In fact, one might even say you have lost. Despite your designs against me, you have failed to make up even a fraction of the reward from our previous game, even assuming Mr. Buchanan has shared a portion of his winnings here today with you. All you have done is briefly entertain me, something I would gladly lose a small pile of chips for.”

Mr. Severoux was inflamed from this revelation, clenching his fist, but he rapidly regained his stature. Mr. Buchanan raised his head thoughtfully as he rolled a chip between his long fingers.

“You are trying to bait us, Mr. Morris.”

“Quite so. I am not denying such a thing. I simply find it hard to believe that someone such as yourself would be able to consistently win at various games offered at this casino.”

“I’m afraid I’m not sure what you mean.”

“It is no reflection of your abilities. Rather, you have shown yourself to be skilled at deriving information regarding your opponent. However, short of truly supernatural knowledge I do not see how one could possibly have a significant advantage in games such as vingt-et-un or baccarat which rely on chance. Marked cards are unlikely, they are the lowest of all cheating methods and are far too easy to see through. Even a skilled gambler such as yourself would have trouble keeping up such a consistent illusion with them. Reading an adversary will only go

so far, actually inferring semantic information like the cards in their hand with barely any information is patently impossible."

Mr. Buchanan appeared to consider Morris very carefully.

"You are treading on dangerous ground, Mr. Morris. You are calling me a cheater. I refuse to let a man, especially a blind man, insult me."

Many of the men around the room swiveled their heads toward both Mr. Buchanan and Morris, the already palpable pressure building in the room.

"If you are truly not a cheater, then you would prove it to me."

Mr. Buchanan surveyed the room, clearly aware of the eyes focused on him. Morris had put him in a very delicate position. If Mr. Buchanan backed down from this confrontation, it would be attributed to Morris's explanation of his vague cheating. Even though he lost the initial game, Morris had verbally outmaneuvered Mr. Buchanan. Even Mr. Severoux looked upon his ally with new regard, perhaps a trifle of suspicion upon his face.

"Very well. What game will it be? Bridge? Poker?"

"Neither. You obviously maintain an advantage in typical games in this casino, it would be self-destructive to play them."

Mr Buchanan sighed loudly.

"Then what will it be, Mr Morris?"

At that moment, a very queer incident occurred which drastically altered the narrative at hand. The Persian man, who had been listening attentively to our conversation, stood up. He wore a rather gaudy jacket with a brown tunic beneath.

"I…suggest a game. Four players, *aree*?

Our dealer for the poker game perked his head up.

"That there is. What do you have in mind, sir?"

"Hok'm."

I had never heard of it and we stood listening to the man explain the game in broken English to the dealer as he interjected with the occasional clarification. Upon finishing his explanation, the man sat down and continued speaking to the swarthy man across from him in some foreign language. Our dealer seemed to knot his brow before turning to us.

"It's quite interesting. Much like baccarat or bridge it's a trick taking game. Each player is on a team of two who sit diagonally from each other. The starting player is determined by drawing cards from the deck until an ace shows up, taking the role of 'hakem', which appears to roughly translate to lawmaker. He draws five cards and picks a suit to be the 'leading suit'. Each player then draws cards until they have thirteen. Play begins with the lawmaker, who plays a card of any suit. Each player continues by putting down a card of the same suit in clockwise order. Whomever has the highest value card in each round wins the trick for their team and leads the next trick. Although the game is normally seven sub games consisting of seven hands, for the sake of time, the first team to win seven tricks shall win the game. In the event that a player does not have a card of the given suit, they may either 'cut' the trick by playing a card of the leading suit or 'pass' by discarding another card. The leading suit takes priority over the other cards and will win the trick unless another individual plays a card of the leading suit with a higher value. Players cannot discuss the contents of their own or other's hands."

Morris tapped his walking stick along the floorboards as he listened to the explanation. The game seemed to be relatively simple and fit our current state quite well which was precisely why I found the entire situation very suspicious.

“This seems awfully convenient, does it not? Four men looking to settle a debt or two, and the perfect game simply falls into our lap?”

Mr. Severoux stepped closer to his partner.

“C'est très suspect. I agree with Monsieur Hopkins. This is very fishy.”

“That it is. However, it would be nigh impossible for Mr. Buchanan or Mr. Severoux to have set up this man. I truly do not believe they planned ahead of luring me here and defeating me in a paltry game of poker. I suppose Mr. Buchanan could have had a contingency, but it is most definitely one which does not favor him very much. It appears to be a game where it is very difficult to properly cheat at, with any form of communication, whether through extremely well hidden markings or messages with the dealer being rendered obsolete by the sheer number of cards in each player’s hands. If Mr. Buchanan is cheating, which frankly I do believe he is, I doubt he has engineered this engagement.”

“Likewise. I still wonder if you have constructed this situation, Mr. Morris.”

Mr. Buchanan scanned the room, his eyes focusing on a dealer across the chamber who was secretively picking at his nails.

“Mr. Wilson hired you to keep tabs on the patrons here, did he not? You have been glancing very periodically at the various newcomers and goers. In addition, you are poorly disguising your attempts to hide scraps of paper in your sleeve.”

The dealer flushed for a moment, the lack of color enunciating his salt and pepper hair.

“I am afraid I cannot betray the confidentiality of the patrons of the Royal-“

Mr. Buchanan slunk over to him and jabbed at the dealer’s breast pocket, now bearing a bill of large denominations.

“Tell me what you know of this Persian man. When did he first come here?”

“Early November. He comes infrequently but gambles quite a bit when he does.”

“Early November, eh? In that case, he could hardly have anything to do with Mr. Morris. That was after he had already won his game against Mr. Severoux, and if I inferred correctly, he already had an agent here before that. Unless of course any patrons have left for that entire period, requiring him to seek another man?”

“There have been no patrons who have frequented the Royal Casino in the time frame you propose whilst simultaneously having been absent in the past two months.”

“Very well. Mr. Morris could not have possibly predicted this encounter, it defies belief. Nevertheless, it’s better to be safe.”

“Shall we play?”

“We shall, Mr. Morris.”

Morris nudged his chair to the side.

“If it is not too much of an inconvenience, I would desire a different dealer and deck in the event that they are stacked against me. We shall also require another chair for my good Mr. Severoux.”

The dealer who had overseen our game of poker turned to retrieve a chair whilst another dealer, a tall man with long arms and a goatee came to the table with a fresh deck of cards.

“For Mr. Morris’s convenience," he said, sliding the deck in between his dexterous fingers. “I would advise each player to announce their cards as they play them. Would you like to pick another man to dictate your hand throughout the game?”

“I appreciate your concern, but I shall only need an individual to briefly rehearse my hand,” he said, removing a metal stylus and a small slate from the interior of his jacket. “How about that Persian man from before?”

“Of course,” the dealer replied, motioning to the man to come over. Mr. Severoux had sat in the seat across from me, his generous figure easing into the chair. Mr. Buchanan took his seat next to me, rubbing his finger along the edge of his now empty glass.

Our dealer shuffled the deck well before skillfully flicking cards face up at each of us. The recognizable monographic ace of spades slid under Mr. Buchanan’s arm.

“Mr. Buchanan shall act as the lawmaker for this game,” the dealer said, inserting the scattered cards back into the deck. He then proceeded to give five cards face down to Mr. Buchanan. Our opponent gazed at the cards for a brief instant before putting them back down.

“The leading suit will be spades.”

“Very well.”

The rest of the cards in the deck were distributed evenly throughout each of the players, Morris having transcribed his hand with the help of his stylus and the mutterings of the Persian man, who promptly returned to his seat looking rather annoyed that his conversation had been interrupted.

“Let the game begin.”

Before I detail exactly what occurred during the remaining portion of the narrative, I had taken the trouble to enumerate the contents of my hand for the sake of any individual who may wish to track the action in more detail.

Ace of Diamonds
Five of Diamonds
Jack of Hearts
Nine of Hearts
Seven of Hearts
Five of Hearts
Two of Hearts
Ace of Clubs
Queen of Clubs
Six of Clubs
Two of Clubs
King of Spades
Eight of Spades

With a large sweeping motion Mr. Buchanan dropped a card on the middle of the table.

“Jack of clubs,” he said, gesturing at me as I looked down at my hand. It was an odd choice for Mr. Buchanan to play a jack. It was not a particularly high card and would be unlikely to win the first hand. In all likelihood, I supposed he must have been probing, using a card that would not reveal very much of his strategy so as to test the waters. I could have either played

the ace or queen, but the ace would be a much stronger guarantee of the trick, as Mr. Severoux could possibly have the king.

"Ace of clubs."

Mr. Severoux seemed surprised.

"An ace already?! I will play a three of clubs."

"Five of clubs," Morris said. He had written his hand down in the same order it was layered, so he had delicately plucked a card from the small pile of cards he had to play.

"It is your move, Mr. Hopkins."

I was inspecting my hand when I had realized something very crucial about the game with regards to the leading suit cards. They were the only cards to maintain their value, so to speak, throughout the game, since once players begin running out of other cards, only the leading suit cards can be used to win hands. It was best to use such high cards earlier in the game when I had more control.

"Ace of diamonds."

Mr. Severoux exhaled sharply, making a sudden flute-like noise. He adjusted his tie slightly, angling his forefinger along it.

"You are a lucky man, Mr. Hopkins. Three of diamonds."

"Seven of diamonds."

"None of those aces for me, eh? I'll play jack of diamonds," Mr. Buchanan said, flicking his cards as if to loudly allude to them. Very curious. It was extremely odd that Mr. Buchanan would play a jack of diamonds, why would he waste a relatively high card here? Unless he did not have many high diamond cards in his hand.

"Mr. Hopkins, you are up."

"One moment, sir. I am simply collecting my thoughts."

Furthermore, both Mr. Severoux's and Mr. Buchanan's actions were very strange. They tried to point towards a specific aspect of themselves, with Mr. Severoux trying to point downwards and Mr. Buchanan showing his own hand. Perhaps they were communicating to get around the rules? Mr. Severoux was pointing in negation…as if to indicate something lower whilst referring to my aces. Did Mr. Severoux tell Mr. Buchanan that he had a king of diamonds? His ally referred to his own hand after mentioning the aces as well, seemingly to indicate that he had no aces. But why refer to his own hand at all? Of course, it could be in reference to the signal he was trying to give, but maybe he was trying to enumerate himself as a player, the lawmaker who chooses the leading suit. Could it be that he was trying to tell Mr. Severoux that he did not have the ace of spades? If so, it would be a startling development as I could freely play the king of spades.

"I will play the king of spades."

Mr. Severoux dipped his head in his hands before lifting it again.

"Five of spades."

"Four of spades."

"Interesting choice, Mr. Hopkins. Ace of spades."

I bolted up.

"Are you alright, Mr. Hopkins?"

"I am fine. Simply… surprised."

"Did you, by chance, notice anything before playing the king of spades?"

“What are you implying, Mr. Buchanan?”

“Just that you may need to be more cognizant of who you are facing,” he responded with glittering eyes. “Frankly, you are outclassed.”

Had Mr. Buchanan anticipated my actions? Had he predicted that I would attempt to analyze his remarks? As Morris had no visual information, and as a result of the rules, he could not advise me properly. I believed they were taking advantage of Morris’s blindness to communicate, but in reality they had taken advantage of my own. Both of them insured that I would fall into at least one of their traps, as had I taken Mr. Severoux’s hint into account, I would be trapped without being able to play high diamond cards if I had them for fear of Mr. Severoux countering.

“I may be, but you best make your move, Mr. Buchanan.”

“Very well. King of clubs.”

“What? But you played the jack of clubs in the first round!”

Morris cleared his throat.

“It was a baiting tactic, Bill. He threw out the jack so as to bait out the ace to make way for the king.”

“But… how did he know that Mr. Severoux did not have the ace?”

“He did not. He operated on a balance of probability, assuming that since he did not have the ace, the odds were higher of one of his opponents having one than his ally.”

“Why would he not play the king? It would have been harder to defeat.”

“It makes no difference, Bill. The card which determines whether the round is won or lost is the ace. Regardless of a card’s value, if the ace is unaccounted for, then the trick will be lost.”

Mr. Buchanan leaned back in his chair.

“Very good, Mr. Morris. I was right to not underestimate you. It’s unfortunate that you will lose this game, I thought you could have offered me a challenge.”

Morris offered no response, only curling his lip slightly.

“Two of clubs.”

“Four of clubs.”

“Ten of clubs.”

Had Morris really played the ten of clubs? If he had no lower cards to play in clubs, it would indicate that he was out of that suit. It was also possible that he was bluffing as well.

Mr. Buchanan darted his eyes across Morris, looking for any sort of sign to gather information from. He released his breath and held his hand under his chin.

“Interesting…I’ll play a two of diamonds.”

A strange move. Was he trying to repeat his tactic from before so as to bait out a higher card?

“Five of diamonds.”

Mr. Severoux cast a toothy grin at me.

“King of diamonds.”

“King of diamonds?! But did you not misdirect me in the second trick with your movements?”

“Monsieur Hopkins, Mr. Buchanan created that tactic. I was simply trying to signal to him that I had the king of diamonds which he then reciprocated with a false signal. He made you assume I was lying as well to create an elaborate trap.”

“Precisely, Mr. Severoux. I had constructed a situation wherein had Mr. Hopkins fell for my gambit, he would let his guard down later if need be. Not only that, your own use of the king of spades was immensely damaging toward your team. You didn’t even stop at losing the trick, you also used up two leading suits, which are more scarce among the team the lawmaker is not on.”

“Unfortunately, Arthur is correct,” Morris said, tapping the table incessantly. “The lawmaker is largely guaranteed to have at least two cards of the leading suit in his hand since among five cards, two must share the same suit. All in all, our adversaries are at an incredible advantage. They have even been able to maintain control of the turn order throughout the game, making sure I cannot mandate the leading suit.”

“It is still your move, Mr. Morris.”

“Hmm. Queen of diamonds.”

Mr. Buchanan chuckled.

“How bold of you, Mr. Morris! You are trying very hard to stop our streak by creating the impression that you are lacking in many suits.“

“That is for you to infer, Mr. Buchanan. It is not my responsibility to explain.“

“Interesting. You are trying to lead us into playing hearts, no? You are naturally at a disadvantage regarding the leading suit, so eliminating clubs and diamonds as available options leaves hearts. Mr. Hopkins would have played the ace of hearts if he had it…“

Morris retained his composure, resembling a granite bust.

“But…you would not have made it that obvious, would you?”

Morris raised an eyebrow cryptically. Mr. Buchanan continued his statement.

“I would not be surprised if you did indeed have the ace, but I suspect your scheme has much more depth. You didn’t try to play the ten of clubs first even though you could have in an attempt to stop me from playing the king later. You let my tactics resolve without much intervention. I think it is plausible that you have built your strategy in the fashion that you want to conceal your lack of clubs through your relatively neutral behavior, giving off the impression that it would be a fatal error to play them, as you could simply cut the trick. But you are an intelligent individual, Mr. Morris. You have shown yourself in your previous encounter with Mr. Severoux to be capable of multilayered bluffs. I guess that you knew I would reason this far and simply added another layer of bluff so as to avoid being predictable. You have clubs…“

Mr. Buchanan paused and his electric blue eyes unfocused, as if some incredible epiphany struck him.

“But it would still be an error to play them, correct?“

He said these words whilst pivoting his eyes towards me. I scrutinized my hand and I comprehended exactly what he meant. I had the queen of clubs, which meant that no matter what Mr. Buchanan's colleague would play in clubs, he would lose the trick as the king and ace had already been used.

“I must say, Mr. Morris, the fact that you were capable of building such a trap simply by not intervening is incredible. You let me continue down this route knowing that I would become trapped here. Leveraging the contents of your ally's hand to add another layer to your stratagem? Undeniably brilliant. You have created such dissonance that it is practically impossible to discern any aspect of it. Since we face a quagmire possibly containing an ace of hearts, a queen of clubs, and quite possibly a high leading suit, I believe you know what to play,

Mr. Severoux. Even if he does not have any diamonds, he might waste a leading suit. Furthermore, I doubt you have many diamonds left, it is worth clearing them from your hand for the late game.“

Mr. Severoux nodded at Mr. Buchanan and slapped down a card with a pudgy hand.

“Three of diamonds.“

Morris let his composure crack, breaking into a warm smile.

“I appreciate your compliments, Mr. Buchanan, but I am afraid your team has stumbled into another trap. Ten of diamonds.“

Mr. Buchanan seethed silently before speaking up.

“You are…certainly menacing, Mr. Morris. Was my entire argument built on sand from the start?“

“In a sense. I knew you would realize Mr. Hopkins possessed the queen of clubs, it was to be expected from you. I played the clubs in that pattern because I knew you would address it later, letting you continue the second part of your strategy with the king of clubs. You would have to pass the torch to Mr. Severoux eventually, and when you did, I would be waiting for you. I will say that you came awfully close to seeing through by ploy. You managed to distinguish the various eventualities I had prepared for, only to fall for a fairly basic high card maneuver; by discarding my queen to conceal the presence of diamonds. You attempted to disassemble the complexities I set in motion but you overlooked one of my smaller misdirections. It is still exceptional that you considered such a trap, however, you also determined that it was unlikely you would be capable of countering it.“

Morris's explanation was extremely illuminating, as it enunciated the various aspects of his strategy and why he did not attempt to communicate with me as did not want my actions to dilute his own neutrality. I still had one additional query.

“Morris, how did you know I had a queen of clubs?“

“Ah, I thought you might ask that, Bill. Now, I do not believe it violates the rules if I tell you since it gives no direct information regarding your opponent's or my own hand, it only recounts previously known data. You hesitated briefly when you first played the ace of clubs, which implied that you had another card to play that would have beaten the jack. Since Mr. Buchanan played the king, logic followed that you had the queen of clubs, something which Mr. Buchanan noticed as well. Anyhow, I do believe it is your turn, Mr. Buchanan.“

“Eight of diamonds.“

“Two of hearts.“

“Well then. It appears that it is my turn once again. Ace of hearts.“

“Four of hearts.“

“Five of hearts.“

“Eight of hearts.“

Morris examined his braille sheet.

“Nine of diamonds.“

“Hmm. Six of hearts.“

“Seven of hearts.“

“Ten of spades.“

“Well played, Mr. Severoux.”

“Thank you, Mr. Buchanan.”

Morris had said beforehand that the lawmakers' team had a higher probability of having more of the leading suit. As the pool of cards narrowed, the leading suits would become much more valuable.
“Ten of hearts.”
“Three of hearts.”
“King of hearts.”
“Nine of hearts.”
“Eight of clubs.”
“Queen of clubs.”
“Nine of clubs.”
“I will pass with a six of diamonds. Good luck, Bill.”
“Six of clubs.”
“Six of spades.”
“Seven of spades,” Morris said, smiling. I quickly realized that he was sacrificing his seven of spades to force Mr. Buchanan to play a higher spade. Doing this, we had effectively traded a six of clubs and one card of the leading suit for two!
Mr. Buchanan sighed.
“Jack of spades. You have made this very difficult, Mr. Morris.”
“That was precisely my intention. The goal is to win, is it not?”
“Seven of clubs.”
“Jack of hearts.”
“Queen of hearts.”
“Nine of spades, then a queen of spades to win the next trick. I believe that is the game won, Messrs. Buchanan and Severoux.”
Our dealer amassed the cards on the table and slid them into the box with considerable proficiency.
Mr. Buchanan gritted his teeth as he stood up.
“Very well played, Mr. Morris,” he said caustically. “But I am simply not sure how that game would conclusively prove your initial accusations towards me.”
Morris snorted before responding, tapping his fingers on his walking stick.
“I will admit that the game was never a definitive proof towards any form of cheating, but that is quite futile as of now.”
“That was the point of the game, Mr. Morris. I do not see how it was aimless in any way.”
Morris stood up and put a hand on the table.
“Dealer, if it would not be too much of an inconvenience, may I please have the deck for a moment?”
Our dealer seemed confused but nodded at Morris, passing the deck of cards to his free hand.
Morris negotiated the rectangular box with his slender fingers to gain some purchase before opening it and taking up one of the cards into his hand.
“It was aimless because I had already determined how you were cheating before we even began.”
Mr. Buchanan snickered.
“What a bluff, Mr. Morris! That is ridiculous.”
Morris changed his expression to gentle amusement.

“Hardly. Whilst we were playing poker, I had the following train of thought, some of which I elaborated on beforehand: Mr. Buchanan cannot infer arbitrary information by reading a person, therefore he must be receiving said information through an atypical methodology. The only way a human can acquire information is through the five senses. We can safely eliminate taste and smell from this roster, and although tricky, we may also dispose of sight,” he said in his typical maieutic manner.

“But why? For all you could have known, the cards might have been marked!” I asked.

Morris pointed at me with a free finger.

“That is precisely why they could not have been. The first thing a man considers when faced with a gambler with seemingly supernatural abilities is to examine the cards and ensure that they are not marked. Since Mr. Buchanan withstood scrutiny from the men in this casino and even gained notoriety due to his skills, I found it highly unlikely that the cards were visually marked. Now we only have touch and hearing left. I ran my fingers across the cards under the table only to find nothing. There were no indentations or significant physical differences between the two cards I had in my hand that I could make out, ergo Mr. Buchanan was securing information through hearing. I thought very deeply about what it could be until I realized it.”

I cast my mind back to the poker game. What noise was there that could signal Mr. Buchanan? Could it be…

“The dealer’s breathing?”

Morris grinned proudly, the skin under his eyes crinkling.

“Exactly! I listened closely and there was a particular pattern among the breaths. But how was the dealer gaining information? Once again, I ran through the five senses. Taste, sight, smell, and hearing can be eliminated, which leaves touch. The dealer is the only one in a game of poker that touches the cards in a very specific way, lifting them from the back unlike a player who holds them from the top or bottom. I felt the cards again but found nothing. Had I made a crucial error in my reasoning? Possibly, but it dawned on me that there was another option. Say that the cards had small hollows within them with even smaller pellets within? If the card were to be turned over and lifted, the pellets would push against the face of the card, causing temporary impressions to appear. With my hands still under the table, I turned over the card and lifted it, feeling for any change. Lo and behold, there were bumps on the back of the cards! ”

With that, Morris deftly twisted the card, ripping it cleanly in half. A few chalk colored globules dropped to the ground, clacking against the floorboards. The entire room’s attention had been captured by Morris and this was his zenith. Mr. Buchanan tensed up like a lion ready to strike. He shuffled close to the exit only to be stopped by several incandescent men with crossed arms. It was evident that Mr. Buchanan now had quite a few debts to pay off. Morris must have heard Mr. Buchanan’s attempt to escape as he continued speaking.

“Clearly Mr. Buchanan refrained from directly touching the back of the cards to prevent suspicion, hence the need for an accompanying dealer. I must applaud you on your ingenuity regarding your efforts to cheat. It was a refreshing puzzle. I do still wonder how it was implemented, as I find it very likely that all of the decks in the casino are marked in the same way since you hardly could have used the same deck in every game. I suspect that Mr. Wilson may have a hand in this, but that is an issue I may deal with in the future. I would suppose that our poker dealer was not the only one in on the plot. It would be extremely questionable if you only won with a specific dealer. I would guess the chain of events may have started with Mr.

Wilson buying the tainted cards, unknowingly or not. You waited several months so no one would connect you to the cards. Afterwards, you seized the opportunity that Mr. Severoux brought by confessing his loss to you, using it to both bait me here and provide a plausible reason why you would come to the casino."
Many of the dealers seemed uncomfortable with Morris's revelation as did I.
"If you surmised that Mr. Buchanan was cheating during the poker game, why did you bother trying to lure him into another game?"
Morris swiveled his walking stick, bearing a thoughtful expression.
"Because…there would be no entertainment in simply exposing him then. Unless there was a direct danger or significant risk towards me or another person, I believed there would be no harm in partaking in an additional game. Especially a game I implemented," he said, adding the last sentence with a flourish.
I was astonished! Morris had planned the game?
"From your silence, I can infer your shock. It began extremely soon after we finished our last adventure with Mr. Severoux. He was very clearly a man of opulence and stature, from both the quality of the fabric of his clothing and the fact that he was invited to the game at all. If Mr. Severoux, or indeed anyone else on his behalf, sought to take vengeance on me, it could be troublesome. Mr. Severoux would likely want to lure me out in the open to fool me more easily. A very poetic location he obviously knew well was the casino, so it came to mind. After three weeks, I sent a telegram under a false name to an old friend of mine, Morad. He realized it was me instantly, as I had created a code word for exactly this scenario so as to seem inconspicuous."
"If I may ask, why did you wait so long?"
"For exactly the same reason that Mr. Buchanan did. To make it seem as though our actions were disconnected. Morad owed me a favor from a deal with him quite a while ago, making him a good amount of money. I requested he gamble at the casino periodically for the next few weeks and to suggest Hok'm as a game if it became relevant, as it is a very difficult game to cheat at with any type of marked cards simply due to the fact that the entire deck is used. After Mr. Buchanan defeated me, I chose to take advantage of the situation and force him to play Hok'm."
Mr. Severoux stood there dumbfounded, the expression of pure disbelief on his face. To be completely fair, I had a similar reaction. I could hardly believe that Morris had been able to anticipate Mr. Buchanan's arrival.
"What an achievement, Charles!"
Morris waved a hand.
"Please. I highly appreciate your praise, but this would have been impossible without you. I was insistent in your accompaniment earlier today because Hok'm requires four players, and I needed to have someone I trusted to be my partner. You performed exceptionally well, despite your earlier blunders, which actually contributed towards our own success."
"Thank you, Charles."
"Well then, shall we depart?"
"We shall."
The entire chamber had a distinct air of uneasiness as I guided Morris towards the exit. It was fairly obvious that many of the individuals had been intimidated by his display.

We left together, leaving the homogeneously dressed dealers to handle the irate patrons on their own. From what I have heard, Mr. Buchanan managed to get away, although lost many of his earthly possessions when scuffling with his victims. He voyaged back north where he apparently works as a tidewater to this day. Charles Morris gained a more public reputation after his confrontation with Mr. Buchanan, for better or for worse, as time will tell. I only hope he may bring me along for any further escapades.