The Blind Observer

A series of accounts taken from the memoirs of William Hopkins

A Game of Hangman

I have never personally taken the time to put pen to paper, although in this case I suppose it's fingertip to typewriter, as, despite my rather illustrious education, I do not possess very coherent handwriting. Anyhow, I wish to write a record of a series of curious incidents that occurred in early October of 1919, culminating in a rather strange game I played with a rather strange man; but despite the strangeness surrounding these events, I must say that they were not negative by any means.

I suppose I must provide some background before introducing my narrative. My name is William Hopkins. My father is from Britain, having fought in the Afghan war as a medic, before losing a hand and returning to his hometown. He spent an austere existence as a fisherman, then moved to Boston in search of prosperity. Thankfully, he had made a successful career investing in the purification of pig irons and steel making, with Mr. Henry Ford being responsible for much of his financial triumph. He married a rather ravishing woman, supposedly a descendant of a wampanoag chief, and also my mother. He raised me as a gentleman, and stated several times that he wanted me to be the person he wished he was for the first half of his life: Highly educated, literate, and a socialite. "Look, mate," he would say, lifting me up in his arms. "I blundered a good deal when I was younger and it cost me my hand. I don't want you to lose a single finger before my age."

After he would tell me this, he would smile and count my fingers from the first to last, then show me back to whatever task I was given by my tutor. Ah, enough reminiscing, no matter how nostalgic it feels. Back to the narrative.

I remember it very well. I was sitting in what patrons call the Royal Casino in Austin, Texas, which no royal would be caught in, nor was it much of a casino. At least it was something that would break up the monotony of daily life which I had sought to escape by going down south.

"Ah, lad, I'm tellin' you I got a pair of aces in my hand!"

Sitting across from me was Robert MacDonald, an Irish born sailor who was supposed to be doing his rounds by the coast, but happened to have ended up in a casino several miles away, playing poker.

"With all due respect, Bob, I sincerely doubt that."

Robert roared with laughter. He was a great blustering brute with a large black beard and quite a temper when he drank. But he was nice enough once you got to know him.

"If you're so sure, why don't you raise the bet, huh?"

He leaned forward, sliding some scratched-up chips across the table to his bid pile. I responded by pushing the same number of chips into mine. He stared at me briefly, like a jeweler appraising a cut stone. I saw him scrunch his brow in deep thought before speaking.

"Well then. It appears you have got guts, lad. Let's test your mettle."

He signaled that the next card should be burned and another card was put on the creaky wooden table by our dealer.

“Last chance to back out before you lose any more coins.”

I smiled and let the next card be put out after raising the bet. We both put down our hands.

“A full house?!”

“Ah, and I see you indeed have a pair, although one composed of two’s is not very good, Mr. MacDonald.”

“Tell it to me straight, how did ya know I was bluffing?”

“It was quite simple. While you were thinking, you were looking at me, not at your cards when determining your next move, indicating that your hand was not as important as understanding what I would do.”

Robert backed up into his chair, and I had the thought that it might splinter under his considerable girth. He took a swig of alcohol then sighed.

“I must say ya read me pretty good. What are ya doin’ down here with a noggin like that, anyway?”

I suddenly became slightly ashamed, although I wasn't about to show it.

“My father made a tidy sum from investing, leaving me with very little to do after I completed my education. I had no interest in becoming a businessman, so I moved down south to discover something, anything to do.”

Robert hmmphed before taking a sip of his drink again. His brow knotted while he was considering what to say. “Look, Bill, I like you, but I'm not sure if gambling is what you should be doin’. Unlike me, you have got plenty o’ options and a bright future. I would take sumthin’ less risky if I were you.”

I stayed silent and got up, picking up my chips.

“Have a good day, Mr. MacDonald. Until next time.”

I was walking outside with some tens of dollars, knowing that Robert would probably be shaking his great head in disappointment. I knew it would not stop him from playing at least once again with me in the foreseeable future.

I strode through the front door with the intention of returning to my apartment when I was stopped by one of the casino staff, a tall skinny man in otherwise inconspicuous garb. The only discerning factor of his typical appearance was a green handkerchief stuffed rather roughly into his coat pocket, indicating that he was employed in the casino.

“I have been instructed to give you an invitation to an exclusive game against one of our other members at the Royal Casino. I look forward to seeing you there,” He said, sounding rather bitter. I started, realizing who was speaking to me.

“Mickerson?”

He glowered at me, his wiry eyebrows knotted in contempt. I am sure that if not for the immutable darkness of the night, he would have lit up the entirety of his gaunt visage with his evident discontent.

“Yes, but do not refer to me as that. Only patrons know me as Mickerson. Do you know what would happen if the authorities discovered that there is really a casino here?”

“My sincerest apologies, sir. However, I may point out that your rather loud attempts to render me silent could attract attention.”

Mickerson's eyes smoldered as he curled his thin lips, clearly holding back a sharp response.

“Very well,” he said, passing me a cream colored card. “Here is the invitation. You may bring one additional person, but you cannot bring any of your effects or additional objects with you. To put it simply, please refrain from cheating.”

I opened the card, perusing its contents as I responded to this statement.

“You know, the last time you acted as a dealer, introducing that recent variation of poker, I caught you using a glimmer. Rather ironic, no?”

Mickerson gave me one last hate-filled glance before turning away, leaving me to look at his back as he returned to the brightly lit bar. Mickerson and I had had a history, one wherein I had caught him cheating, which left him with no little animosity toward me, although I had small interest in reporting him. Only wanting to play cards fairly, I managed to coerce him into dealing without any unfair advantage.

I looked back at the card to further analyze it, and I have produced a copy of its text below.

I would be honored to have you present at the Wilson Bar, better known as the Royal Casino by its most loyal attendees, for the sake of playing an exclusive match against another avid card player on the night of the seventeenth, eight o'clock sharp. Both you and your opponent will play for a cash prize of $500. The game will remain anonymous until both players begin it. You may bring one person with you. Do not show this letter to anyone besides those participating in the game. Good luck.

Your obedient servant, Freud Wilson, owner of the Wilson Bar

It fascinated me. Never in my wildest dreams would I imagine that I would be invited to such a secretive event with such a lucrative prize. It would be very soon as well, the next night in fact.

I walked down the street, intent on making my way back home, when a key event occurred which would change the rest of this queer situation significantly. I was suddenly grabbed from behind, and felt myself in an iron grip with noxious breath being exhaled past my shoulder. A mugger! I struggled in the brute’s arm as he rummaged through my jacket pockets with a free hand. Much to my surprise, the denizen backed up, grunting as if he had had the wind knocked out of him. I turned around to find that my conjecture was quite correct, and he was heaving as he shambled off into the darkness. I dusted myself off and began picking up my hat when I noticed the silhouette of a man, mostly obfuscated by the sable shadows of nearby buildings. He seemed to notice my pause and walked into the light where I could see him. He was a relatively young man, probably in his late twenties, and was well dressed, wearing what appeared to be a custom suit in addition to a silver-topped walking stick, albeit both with quite a bit of wear and tear, as if he had taken a tumble down a hill.

“Are you alright, sir? I was walking by when I heard your predicament and it appears that I was able to get a hit on the side of that beast.”

“Yes, I am fine. Thank you for aiding me, sir.”

I held out my hand as a gesture of respect. He did not take it.

“Um…sir?”

“Yes?”

It was then that I noticed that he was wearing tinted glasses. But for what purpose were tinted glasses in the evening? I then grasped the situation. This man was blind.

“Ah, are you holding out your hand? I apologize, I lost my sight nearly a year ago.”

He held out his hand and I took it, shaking it firmly. His brow furrowed.

“Hmm, what is a man like you doing down here in Texas? Surely you didn’t only come to gamble?”

Needless to say, I was shocked. How could this man know that I was a gambler?

“What exactly do you mean?”

“Well, your hands are not calloused in the slightest, indicating that you neither do physical labor nor do you write excessively. You don't even have indentations on your cuffs, which something like a typewriter would make. On the other hand, your jacket is of very high quality, even I can tell that by feeling the material. There are only two possibilities that I could come up with, either you have money sent by someone else, or you are a gambler. The second theory is likely as you were coming from the direction of the Wilson Bar, which I have long suspected to be a gambling den.”

I do believe that I may have gaped upon hearing this extraordinary explanation. What insight! Even then, I still had the urge to further test his abilities.

“Could I not be a criminal? Would that not cover the facts as well?”

“I had already discredited that theory, as if you were a criminal, I find it unlikely that you would struggle against a common thug, as you would have likely been carrying a weapon. You are evidently not a pickpocket from the quality of your clothes and lack of light clothing which discards that possibility as well. While I do find such mental exercises exhilarating, I do believe that we still have not made any formal introduction yet. I am Charles Morris, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

“My name is William Hopkins, and I must say that the pleasure is all mine.”

“Well, Bill, if you don't mind me calling you that, I would still like to repeat my former question as to what you are doing down in the south? You seem like a well educated man, and your accent tells me you are probably from Boston or thereabouts?”

I am still not sure whether it was due to the recent attack on my person, or due to the night air, but I answered the question quite honestly despite barely knowing this man.

“You are correct in your assumption that I am from Boston. To answer your question as to what I am doing in the south, it is because I did not find any occupations at my origin very alluring, and I journeyed to find something that I would find satisfying or fulfilling.”

¨Interesting. I would hazard to guess this is where gambling comes in?¨

¨Right again.¨

He palmed the top of his walking stick and rotated it slightly whilst speaking.

¨Gambling was an old vice of mine, but I’m afraid I had to retire from it after losing my eyesight. Be careful when playing; although thrilling, it is quite risky, and one can get themselves lost in that unsavory world.¨

“I concur,” I said. “But I do wonder what your background is.

Morris chuckled, a short, sharp sound, almost metallic in nature, but somehow quite lighthearted.

“I suppose I must reciprocate. I come from Boston as well; my family is from France, although they actually originated from North Africa. I am a librarian, as paradoxical as it may sound, and I came down to Austin due to my lack of fortunes up north.”

“A librarian? How exactly?”

“I make sure no books are missing and dust them, both to the best of my ability, which is not much. Occasionally, I convince customers to read to me, if they have time. I’m afraid I was quite fond of reading before I lost my sight.”

“How did you lose your sight, if I may ask?”

Morris curled his lip slightly then loosened it before he responded.

“Hmm. You seem to me to be a good enough fellow. I lost my sight in a case of vitriol throwing quite some time back.”

“My goodness! I apologize for mentioning it.”

Morris sighed.

“Oh, it’s quite alright . The main damage was done some time after this incident. Back in February I had a large sum invested in shipyards, however, a strike began and I lost much of my money. This was the key motivator for my move to the south, but as I have related, my search for success, and indeed a way out of austerity, have thus been outside my reach.”

After I heard his morose account an idea struck me right then, as if inspired by this man’s wonderful intuition.

“Perhaps I can offer you a solution to both of these problems. Would you be interested in participating in a game offered by the local gambling den?”

I read the letter aloud to him and he nodded at length.

“An intriguing proposition. I do wonder, what do you know of the organizer of this event, this Freud Wilson.”

“I know very little of him. He is present only at very infrequent occasions but he is a largely built man, with a black mustache, and he is almost bald. I would put his age at around fifty.”

“Very well,” he said, showing off the shadow of a smile.

There was something a bit off about Morris’ voice, as if he was holding back information, but I didn’t detect malice in his disposition. If I could have seen his eyes at that moment, I am sure they would have been glinting.

“Let us organize a rendezvous, how about you meet me at the corner of Huntington and Cleary at a quarter to eight tomorrow evening. I bid you farewell.”

And with those eloquent words, Charles Morris turned and left, his silhouette slowly merging with the growing shadows of the city.

Now, my dear reader, we will continue the narrative the next day, at around a quarter to eight in the afternoon. I was pacing back and forth across the street, as unsafe as it may sound, somehow impatient even though my companion could hardly have been considered late at that time.

As I was completing another circuit of walking, It occurred to me that this game was quite strange. I am aware that it would be strange for several reasons, such as its presentation, delivery, and general secretive nature, but why would the owner of a run down casino give away five hundred dollars? As I pondered this question, a man tapped on my shoulder.

I turned around to see that it was Charles Morris, precisely on time.

"How did you know it was me?"

"Who else would be pacing around at this specific time at this specific place?"

I must admit that it was a fair bit of reasoning and not an altogether complex conclusion to arrive at. He looked almost exactly like he did when I first saw him, albeit with additional fingerless gloves, which happened to have been just as worn as the rest of his attire.

"It is remarkably cold compared to the weather yesterday, how about we go inside?"

Somehow, this thought was not one that had possessed me while waiting. I nodded and we entered the casino together. As soon as we passed the threshold of the facade, which led to an old mudroom acting as an antechamber to the casino, we were stopped by Mickerson.

Ever expressive as he was, I could see a vein in his forehead that I had not noticed before. In truth, I was worried that he might have a case of apoplexy. He greeted us through gritted teeth.

"A pleasure to see you, Mr. Hopkins. I see you have also come with a compatriot."

He studied Morris closely, as if trying to discern whether he had the same undesirable qualities as me. Morris stuck out his hand, and Mickerson took it, shaking it cautiously.

"My name is Charles Morris. I am a participant in the game tonight. It is a pleasure to meet you Mr…?"

"Mickerson."

"Ah. A dealer I would assume? Your thumbs have strong bases, indicating that you shuffle quite a bit."

"I am a dealer, yes. An insightful observation for a blind man."

Morris shrugged whilst donning a smile.

"Just because I cannot see doesn't mean I cannot observe."

Mickerson nodded and I realized that he was clearly curious now. This man had a sort of undeniable charisma to him.

"Well, we will begin the game shortly. Please step in and meet your opponent."

We walked into the main room to be greeted by a very different casino than the one I had been in yesterday. All of the tables were moved out, making way for two large chalkboards near the back of the room. Dealers were standing next to each of the chalkboards, and looked quite bored, as if they had been waiting there the whole day. Two well dressed gentlemen were standing near the middle of the room, conversing loudly. I recognized one as Mr. Wilson himself, but I was not sure who the other was. He wore a button down shirt, with what appeared to be a large silver pocket watch poking out of his jacket pocket. He had brown combed hair which clashed rather horribly with an ostentatious mustache.

Mr. Wilson saw us and approached with his arms wide and a smile.

"Good evening, gentlemen! I appreciate your willingness to attend this exclusive game. I was just speaking with one of our more prominent patrons, Mr. Severoux. He does not come very often, but he is a good sport when it comes to games. Oh, and who is this?"

“My name is Charles Morris, I have come as an additional participant, as mentioned in your invitation.”

“Very good, the more the merrier, as they say. Please introduce yourself to your opponent, then the game will begin.”

Mr. Severoux approached and shook my hand in a strong grip.

“Good evening,” he said, his voice tinged with a slight french accent. “I am Louis Severoux, a banker.”

“I am William Hopkins and as I see we are stating our occupations, I am afraid to say that I am actually unemployed at the moment.”

Mr. Severoux smiled, revealing small square teeth. With that, he broke away to greet Morris.

“Ah, Mr. Severoux, it is an honor to meet you, sir. I am a gambler.”

“Monsieur, I am not sure if that qualifies as a job.”

“Of course it does. You put in your skills, whatever they may be, and you get a profit.”

Mr. Severoux laughed upon hearing these words, a loud throaty guffaw. I was very confused. I thought Morris was a librarian, not a gambler.

I turned to face Morris, and as though reading my thoughts, he nodded his head.

“Mr. Severoux, I noticed you are not wearing gloves, did you perhaps misplace them?”

Mr. Severoux regarded Morris curiously, cocking his head like a peacock.

“Interestingly enough, I had. What a strange question.”

Before I could ponder much of these developements, Mr. Wilson cleared his throat and began to make an announcement.

“Well then, now that all the participants are acquainted, let us begin! The game is a classical game of hangman, yes, as in the children's game. Each player will pick a word present in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, and please no slang. The word will be clarified by a dealer standing next to a given board, with each participant, er, participants, standing by one. Players will take turns guessing their opponents letters, with the letter being confirmed by a dealer. The first player to guess their opponent's word will win the prize money of five hundred dollars. In addition, if a player uses up all of their guesses, then the other player will win. You have five minutes to think of a word.”

Upon hearing these instructions, I came up to Morris and began to ponder a word to use.

“It’s quite fascinating really. If this game could be played optimally, one would narrow down an opponent’s word by compiling every word in the English language that appears with the same number of letters, then guessing a letter that eliminates half the options, continuing this strategy until they converge on a single word. Naturally, this strategy is untenable as we neither possess a dictionary nor the time to apply it. Regardless, in a normal game of hangman, one might be inclined to choose a long word, by virtue of its length, but in reality this is not the case. Longer words tend to contain more different letters than short ones, making it easier to guess the word over time. The average length of an English word is around five letters long, but the issue with this is that five letters words usually contain more than one different vowel, which becomes quite problematic in a game where the natural strategy is to isolate the vowel

which makes the word considerably easier to guess. Three and two letter words are out of the question entirely due to how easy they are to guess if even one letter is determined. That leaves four letter words."

"How do you know that your opponent might anticipate that you would believe that his word only has one vowel and would make his word have two? At that point you would assume you guessed the vowels and moved onto consonants, which would be disastrous."

"A good point. I may suggest that such a stratagem accompanies significant risk in the game. You see, if one were to choose a word such as "mate" or "lace" or any other words wherein the last letter is a vowel, they run the risk of their opponent guessing the last letter of the word, and since there are almost no scenarios in the English language where there are three consonants in a row in a word with only one vowel, especially in a four letter word, their opponent would consider that they might have two vowels in their word instead of one."

"What about if there are two vowels in a row?"

"I hardly think our adversary would attempt such a strategy. He would have to bet that his opponent would not be aware of the fact that there should logically be only one syllable in such a word. Even if one were to be put into such a situation, they might be adamant to continue guessing vowels, a strategy that would leave him with one extra guess regardless of whether there were one or two vowels, since there are six technical vowels, six guesses, and at least one vowel in the word. At that point, half of his word would be guessed."

I considered these ideas momentarily before suggesting what I believed to be a rather ingenious solution.

"How about words without vowels? There are a few, are there not?"

Morris shook his head, as if he expected more from me.

"I'm afraid those are not viable either. There are only three proper words in English without vowels or the letter 'y', as well as excluding onomatopoeia. All three are transposed from Welsh and contain the vowel substitute 'w', as well as the letter 'c'. Based on the locations of each of these letters in these words, one can determine fairly easily which one they are. Furthermore, given the number of guesses each player has, they could guess all the vowels as well as 'y' and still be in the game."

"What about the frequency of certain letters in words? Is that not a detail to take into consideration?"

"Good observation. It is very important, as the frequency of English letters goes something like 'e','t','a','n', and then some. On the other hand, it can lead to a sort of mind game, wherein one player is unsure whether the other player will take into account this information and refrain from using common letters, or perhaps the other player knows this and will use those letters to subvert the others' expectations.

"This is getting quite complex..."

Morris sighed, rotating his stick a small margin.

"That it is. I once read a paper on the card game *Le Her* by Pierre Raymond De Montmort that was somewhat similar in its mechanics to this situation, but this is a lot of information to take into account. One way to simply determine whether to use a word with one of these common letters is to flip a coin, as this will give us a result which

cannot be seen through by our opponent such as by reconstructing our thought process. How about heads to use one, and tails to not use one?"

I pulled out a coin and flipped it, telling him the result.

"Heads it is. I do believe I have a word in mind."

Morris pulled a piece of paper from the depths of his jacket pocket and scribbled the word "deed" on it. It took me a moment to realize how ingenious this word was to pick. Due to the nature of the aforementioned mind game, it would be very possible that Mr. Severoux would not be inclined to guess the letter 'e', and also even if he did, there are many words in the English language that have two 'e's in the middle, such as the words "meet', "seep", and many more.

Morris managed to locate the dealer next to one of the boards and gave him the paper. The dealer, a rather gaunt man with rheumatoid knuckles, snatched up the paper and examined it, before indicating that he accepted it. I turned around to see that Mr. Severoux had just handed in a scrap of paper as well and that Mr. Wilson was about to make an announcement.

"Please determine who will go first. Each player whose turn it is will have two minutes to guess a letter."

Mr. Severoux walked up to me with a confident grin.

"Ah, Monsieur Hopkins, do you have a coin?"

"That I do, Mr. Severoux. What do you guess, heads or tails?"

"You may pick first."

Morris, who had apparently been standing next to me, answered for me.

"I am feeling lucky today. How about heads?"

"Good choice, gambler. I choose tails."

I flipped the coin and watched as it made a full rotation in the air and landed in the palm of my hand.

"It appears that I shall go first."

Mr. Severoux walked across the room to his board, which like ours, had a gallows drawn on it in chalk as well as four blank spaces.

"I guess the letter 'e'."

"Is that your final answer?", the dealer next to his board asked.

"Yes," Mr. Severoux said, looking smugly at our board.

"Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Morris' word does not have any 'e's in it."

Mr. Severoux blanched, nearly staggering before recovering his composure.

Morris burst out laughing.

"How predictable," he whispered to me, in a way quite audible to the whole room.

Mr. Severoux's face quickly changed from white to scarlet as he heard these words. Needless to say, I was very confused.

Our dealer cleared his throat.

"It is your turn, Mr. Morris and Mr. Hopkins."

"What have you done, Morris?", I said quietly after turning to face him. He was still in the throes of laughter as he responded.

"I will explain quickly as we have quite limited time. Mr. Severoux was cheating. When I shook his hand, I noticed it was unusually sweaty, which I found suspicious as it is a cold night and the fabric of his jacket, while of high quality, is not very thick. It seemed to me that he was maintaining his composure very well, so why should he be

sweating at all? Furthermore, his hands were warm despite his seeming lack of gloves, telling me he had been inside for quite a while, and he was not out of breath so he could not have sweat from physical exertion. I had theorized that he had determined what the game was, and a very obvious cheating method would be the use of a small mirror. Such an object could be easily concealed and could be used to divine what your opponent has written, albeit with practice. You may have noticed that I did not go up to the dealer or the board until I actually handed in my word, so that I could be sure that not much would block his view. The real word is not ‘deed’, rather I had scribbled the real one on the back of the paper and then handed it to the dealer. I knew for a fact that Mr. Severoux would choose ‘e’ to avoid suspicion as ‘d’ is considerably less common and might attract attention.”

“Mr. Morris, will you guess or not?”

Morris leaned to my ear.

“Watch his jaw and see if it sharpens. I guess he will try to maintain his calm facade, but he is likely to clench his jaw reflexively if he hears one of his letters. He has shown that he cannot maintain perfect self control.”

“I will guess ‘e’.”

There was no reaction from Mr. Severoux, although he did appear to be quite upset from this recent trickery.

“Is that your final answer?”

“Well, is it, Bill?”

I realized what Morris’ tactic was at that moment. Having destabilized his adversary, he was confident that his expression would betray him if one of his letters were named, however Morris could just as easily retract the letter and choose another through the rule that guesses are confirmed.

“No, I don’t believe it is.”

“In that case, my final guess is ‘a’.”

“Mr. Severoux’s word has no ‘a’s in it.”

“Very well.”

The dealer drew a noose in chalk on our board, paralleling the one drawn on Mr. Severoux’s board during his turn.

I was very surprised by these developments, but I was concerned about Morris’ strategy. In terms of probability, two letters have been eliminated from Morris’ word, ‘e’ and ‘d’, and while Morris has also eliminated two letters, ‘e’ and ‘a’, he is at a disadvantage as Mr. Severoux has the next turn, which will put him in the lead in terms of letters guessed.

Mr. Severoux turned and looked right at Morris, as if trying to bore into him with his eyes. I realized he was searching Morris’ face, trying to glean any type of information he could about his word. Morris had kept his composure the whole time, withholding the incident with Mr. Severoux’s first guess, but now he actually looked somewhat concerned.

Mr. Severoux appeared to consider for several more moments before making his guess.

“I guess ‘d’!”

“Is that-”

“Yes, ‘d’ is my final answer.”

“There are no ‘d’s in Mr. Morris’ word.”

Mr. Severoux turned scarlet yet again and put his face in his hands in embarrassment as the dealer next to him drew a large circle under the noose. Why would he choose ‘d’? It would be the first letter one would eliminate in his situation as who would possibly put one the letters used in a decoy in the actual word, for fear of an opponent choosing it?

“Mr. Morris and Mr. Hopkins, it is your turn.”

“Bill, you may be wondering why he picked ‘d’.”

“Please enlighten me.”

“Put yourself in his shoes. He is playing against a man who he believes is a gambler and hence a risk taker. In addition, he hears this individual say that he is feeling lucky as a coin is being cast, further impressing him with the fact that he loves to play with chance. Furthermore, he hears his intrepid foe say ‘how predictable’, as if any other letter he would have picked would be unpredictable. Finally, he observes that this person seems uncomfortable even after their scheme has succeeded. He cannot fail to connect the dots and decide that his adversary would take such a gambit.”

I shook my head in disbelief. How could such a person be so cunning?

“Wait…you said you were a gambler before the game was even introduced. Are you saying you planned it that far and foresaw what the game would be?”

“I did not, however I did suspect it would not be a normal game like poker or blackjack. I knew either way it would be beneficial to dissimulate so that my opponent would underestimate me.”

“Such foresight!”

Mr. Morris bowed like a magician upon the conclusion of his show.

“Thank you, Bill.”

“Mr. Morris, do you resign?”

In the heat of the moment, I had nearly forgotten about the time constraint.

“Oh, heavens no. I guess ‘u’, and before you ask, yes, it is my final answer.”

“There is a ‘u’ in Mr. Severoux’s word.”

The dealer next to Mr. Severoux drew a ‘u’ in the second space on Mr. Severoux’s chalkboard.

“Mr. Severoux, it is your-”

“I guess ‘i’!”

“There is an ‘i’ in Mr. Morris’ word.”

Mr. Severoux appeared to have regained his composure somewhat after guessing correctly, now reverting his face back to a haughty grin. The dealer next to us drew an ‘i’ in the second space of our word. Despite Morris’ cunning methods, I realized that in the grand scheme of things, Morris was actually behind. Presumably, both players only have one vowel in their words to make it more difficult to guess, meaning that at this point in the game one can eliminate all the vowels. Now, no player has yet to guess a consonant beside Mr. Severoux, guessing and eliminating ‘d’ as an option. This means that excluding ‘y’ and all the vowels, Morris has a three out of nineteen chance of guessing one of Mr. Severoux’s letters, as most likely there are three different letters remaining in a four letter word with one vowel. On the other hand, Mr. Severoux has effectively eliminated all the vowels and ‘y’ as well as the letter ‘d’, making his odds three out of eighteen.

“Mr. Morris, it is your turn.”

“Morris!” I called, coming up to him.

“Yes, yes, I am aware I am behind in the game by virtue of technicality. However, I had anticipated this. You see, I had effectively traded off getting two guesses in the beginning of the game and disabling Mr. Severoux’s advantage in going first in exchange for eliminating a consonant for him. Guessing the vowel correctly is possibly the most important part of the game, and the fact that I had those extra turns aided me. In addition, Mr. Severoux has had two incorrect guesses up until now due to this strategy, while we only have had one.”

“I…presume that is correct.”

“Now, to guess the letter! Very commonly, the third letter in a four letter word with its only vowel being the second letter is ‘n’, such as in ‘sunk’, ‘bunt’, or ‘punt’. My guess is ‘n’!”

“Is-”

“Yes.”

“There is an ‘n’ in Mr. Severoux’s word.”

The dealer next to Mr. Severoux’s board once again took up his chalk and marked down an ‘n’ in Mr. Severoux's third space.

“Mr. Severoux, it is your turn.”

Our opponent seemed to be deep in thought, carefully considering his next guess. His face broke into triumphant expression and he approached Morris.

“Monsieur Morris, I believe that you have just betrayed what your third letter is. I see right through you now that I have experienced your methods. You would obviously say your explanation to my third letter knowing I would dismiss it, but I know you only said it because you wanted that to happen. So logic states that your third letter is, in fact, ‘n’.”

The dealer next to him appeared to have considered asking him if that was his final answer before shrugging.

“There is no ‘n’ in Mr. Morris’ word.”

Mr. Severoux was livid as a torso was drawn onto his chalkboard.

“You…you devil! You knew I would think that, didn’t you?”

Morris smiled.

“You seem to have an affinity for falling for traps, Mr. Severoux.”

“It is your turn, Mr. Morris.”

As Mr. Severoux skulked away after his failed confrontation, I felt I had to ask Morris a question.

“Did you really anticipate that?”

Morris chuckled, a dry raspy sound.

“Not entirely. The coin flip you did to determine whether we should utilize a common vowel was not obsolete. Besides strengthening my misdirection of a decoy word in the eyes of our formidable foe, I had also used it to determine whether I should use an ‘n’ in my word. I had considered that once Mr. Severoux had guessed our vowel, he might be aware of the possibility that ‘n’ was the next letter. The purpose of the randomness was precisely to create a kind of situation where Mr. Severoux could not see through our train of thought, leading his guess into the realm of probability. At any rate, it is beneficial if Mr. Severoux believes I had anticipated that situation, as I am sure

he will overthink his options even more now. Ah, and before you ask, dealer, my guess is ‘t’."

“There is no ‘t’ in Mr. Severoux’s word.”

Morris appeared to have no reaction to this and simply went on to tap his stick against the ground.

“Mr. Severoux, it is your turn.”

Mr. Severoux came across as having calmed down since the last round and had put his hand on his chin, looking toward the ceiling.

“Hmm… I chose 'm’ as my guess."

“There is an ‘m’ in Mr. Morris’ word.”

Despite his ancient appearance, our dealer was quick to draw an ‘m’ in the first space of our board, his fingers flicking with practiced skill.

“Mr. Morris! It’s your turn.”

“I guess ‘k’. I am fully confident in my choice,” Morris said, waving his hand in the general direction of our dealer.

“Good choice. There is a ‘k’ in Mr. Severoux’s word,” The other dealer said, inscribing a ‘k’ in the last space of the adjacent chalkboard.

“Hmm…tricky,” Morris noted, his words nearly impossible to hear.

I understood exactly what he meant. How many four letter words that end in ‘unk’ could there be? ‘Punk’,’hunk’,’dunk’, there were so many possibilities! It seemed that I had underestimated our opponent's intellect, as even though his last two letters were somewhat predictable, he had created a difficult scenario given the nature of his word.

“Mr. Severoux, your turn.”

“I guess ‘k’ as well, which is my final choice.”

“There is a ‘k’ in Mr. Morris’ word.”

Mr. Severoux cast a sinister smile at us as our dealer furiously filled in the last space of our word. He dropped it after observing that Morris broke into one himself.

“Mr. Morris-”

“You have just given yourself away, Louis. I guess ‘j’.”

Mr. Severoux went rigid, maintaining his expression, but tightening his jaw sharply.

“Dear Bill, did he clench his jaw?”

“I believe so.”

“In that case, ‘j’ is my final answer.”

The dealer next to Mr. Severoux filled in the first space of his word, revealing it to have been ‘junk’. Mr. Wilson materialized from some corner of the room and walked toward us.

“Incredible performance, Mr. Morris! I must say that your tactics were quite innovative, and that you as well as your companion are well deserving of your reward. Ah, and unlucky Mr. Severoux, you are dismissed.”

Mr. Severoux got up, stone faced, checked his pocket watch, then departed through the front door, letting a chilly draft in for a moment. Mr. Wilson clapped his hands and reached into his jacket pocket, smiling warmly at the two of us.

“Now that your competitor has left, it appears that it is time for me to distribute the money. Five hundred dollars was it not?”

“Five hundred dollars, yes, but not the five hundred dollars I imagine you are pulling out of your pockets at this moment,” Morris said, sustaining a conniving expression.

“What exactly do you mean?” Mr. Wilson responded, his smile faltering.

“You know, I found it very queer that one in your position would want to create a game wherein you would give away a large amount of money. What would it even be for? What’s the point? It could not possibly be for publicity as it was a private event. Furthermore, I doubt you would risk the authorities discovering your gambling den. I asked for a description of your appearance from my friend here and discovered, after conversing with some of my acquaintances in the upper echelons of the police force yesterday, that you resemble a certain Werner Kaufmann, a housebreaker and embezzler from Massachusetts. In addition, I made my way to city hall and found that your records have been falsified. The final indicator was the fact that you decided to choose such a strange challenge, a game of hangman, surely to distract the participants from the odd nature of the situation. I am certain that this was all a ploy to get rid of your unclean assets, in the event that the money is traced back to you.”

Mr. Wilson, or should I say Mr. Kaufmann had utterly transformed upon the conclusion of this shocking statement. Gone was the smiling man with seemingly harmless body language, and in his place was a grimacing individual who suddenly seemed considerably more threatening than he had been mere moments ago. Even the dealers, who had been standing across the room putting away the chalkboards, seemed to be shocked by their employers true identity, with Mickerson having staggered in surprise.

“Smart man,” he said to Morris, wagging a finger. “Unfortunately, you will not be able to report your suspicions.”

With those words, he stuck a hand in his pocket, and I stepped back, confident he would pull out a weapon. Morris was completely unfazed by his behavior and put both hands on his walking stick.

“I would not recommend killing me, Mr. Kaufmann. What I neglected to mention is that I have a man, a good Harold McParland, waiting by the police station with a docket containing my compiled evidence against you. I instructed him to deliver the docket to the police if I do not return to him before ten o’clock, and I’m afraid shooting me will not help you stop him. Check and mate, Mr Kaufmann.”

Mr. Kaufmann hesitated, his face a veritable maelstrom of consideration. He finally removed his hand from his jacket, thankfully empty.

“What do you want?”

“I would like five hundred dollars, and none of that dirty money either. If I receive this sum, you have nothing to fear, my good sir.”

“Very well.”

Mr. Kaufmann reached into his pocket, removing his wallet and extricating five hundred dollars in large bills from it. He shoved the money toward me and turned around, still speaking.

“For your safety, Mr. Morris, I would not cross paths with me again.”

“Neither should you with me, Mr. Kaufmann. I trust that my friend should be able to attend your casino if he wishes?”

Mr. Kaufmann turned around and shot a glance at me.

“Fine. He doesn’t seem as dangerous as you.”

“What is dangerous is underestimating someone, but I applaud your hospitality. Let us depart, Bill.”

We exited the casino, and I handed Morris two hundred and fifty dollars, half the sum we had won from the casino.

“Ah, much obliged, Bill. I must say that was quite an adventure. I have not been stimulated that much since I lost my sight. Oh, and in case you were wondering, my word was ‘milk’.”

“Interesting… I had been curious about your choice of ‘j’ as your last guess. How did you even consider that such a letter would be his initial choice?”

“Severoux struck me as a competent individual, despite his challenges sustaining his composure. I thought it very likely that he had an uncommon letter as the first one of his word. He consistently impressed upon me his ability to analyze surface level conundrums, and it would be just like him to choose a simply uncommon letter given his confidence in all of his maneuvers, however flawed they may have been.”

“Suppose Severoux had never cheated in the first place? How could you be sure your strategy would even function?”

“That is precisely the crux of the stratagem. Had Severoux never cheated, the game would likely have been much closer. Truth be told, part of the reason why you were not informed about the decoy word was so that Severoux would not be able to read you through bluffing. Any information he would receive, had he innovated my retractive guess tactic earlier, would be inaccurate. I had made sure that in the event my proposal that Severoux was using a mirror would be incorrect, it would have a lessened impact on the overall outcome of my strategy.”

Morris’ expression was inscrutable. I could hardly believe how vigilant a person such as himself was and I counted myself lucky that he had saved me. At just that moment, I was staggered with a thought.

“Morris…did you set this all up?”

He hesitated briefly.

“What do you mean?”

“Surely it was no accident that you, someone who has been searching for something, anything to do to prevent the austerity of daily life, would end up in a lucrative gamble by chance?”

Morris started laughing again.

“Clever indeed! You are correct, although by no means did I set up everything that occurred. I had always known that there was a local gambling den. I had a man placed there in the event that some interesting opportunity that I could snatch would come up, and two days ago he overheard your conversation with Mickerson. He related it to me and I was sure that if I were to fabricate a situation wherein I would save you, I would acquire an invitation to the game. I slipped a coin into some old beggar's pocket in exchange for his help in staging an assault on your person, which I would rescue you from.”

“What?!” I felt betrayed. I fell for his ploy like a fool.

After he heard my exclamation, his voice softened.

“I apologize for doing that, Bill. I felt I would become indolent without any activity. Have you ever had that feeling?”

I was about to deny it, but…

"Admitedly, I had. Furthermore, I am sure I would have lost the game without you."

"You don't give yourself enough credit, my friend. You managed to see through my facade and you suggested a semi-viable strategy for the game. In the end, I believe that we both got what we wanted."

"But…"

"I assure you, Bill, you were never in any danger; as far as I am willing to go to accomplish my goals, I would never intentionally put someone's life at risk, which is why I had my man wait by the station, and why I was standing by your initial assault, ready to help you."

He was smiling with genuine warmth, and I did not detect any dishonesty in his voice, although given his reputation, I am unsure how much that detail counts for. Morris gave a little bow and turned around, disappearing into the shadows with the metallic staccato of his walking stick echoing in the distance.

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.