Dissension

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

September 2nd, 1920

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Brilliant as the scheme to achieve my objective is, I must also prepare contingencies in the event that all these events do not go as predicted. If Mrs. White snaps, then I have prepared a chain of telegrams that tie in Ward & Clews into the event in addition to underworld connections and a laid trap to frame Mr. Morris. Under this offshoot, the general indirect structure is maintained to cause Mr. Morris to turn in Mr. Wilson. This failsafe will also be capable of reconciling other actions Mrs. White may take, such as trying to frame the members of Ward & Clews she believes is guilty or taking on a vigilante role. If Mr. Morris does not attempt to turn in Mr. Wilson and flees, then I will place evidence against him in Mr. Morris' apartment, a surprisingly easy task if one contributes to the cleaning service. If Mr. Wilson had prepared for Mr. Morris' trap in advance, then I will have his illegal dealings exposed through an anonymous analysis of his inconsistent financial record. If all of the above fails, then I will be forced to directly turn in evidence against him, but I hope that will not be necessary. If luck is with me, then this operation will be a success.

Signing off for now,

End of the first dated statement.

As my valued readers may have inferred, I have interspersed a remarkable journal entry that was discovered long after the Rubedo murders. As a part of this retrospective, I have taken to include relevant documents that concern the following conflicts that took place in early 1921 when Charles Morris faced his greatest threat yet, a man his direct superior in nearly every

regard. Indeed, he might have been the single most dangerous foe he ever encountered, something which will be abundantly clear as I chronicle their struggles together.

Hence, I have spliced many of this mastermind's thought processes so as to create a more coherent story for the betterment of any of those who have followed Morris's adventures. In the wake of the conclusion of the *Rubedo* case, Morris and I had been approached several times by Detective Portsman, with either both of whom apologized profusely for misleading the other or falsely accusing the other respectively. Morris began a consistent correspondence with Ms. Saxon, often drafting letters and having me deliver them in creamy envelopes. I was not entirely certain exactly why Morris sought to have communicative contiguity with an extremely dangerous criminal, but I trusted his judgement. In retrospect, it may have been quite obvious that he had been silently maturing his thoughts.

The crystallization of his ideas began quickly, as I was reading him *The Count Of Monte Cristo* in his apartment. After our previous debacle, I had assisted him in tidying up his room for he had misplaced a number of documents in his haste to flee before either Detective Portsman or Mr. Wilson caught him. Morris sat there with his fingers entwined, listening halfheartedly to the narrative. He suddenly interrupted me.

"Bill, what do you think of the conclusion of the Rubedo case?"

I wasn't quite sure what Morris was up to, so I closed the novel and put it down on the edge of my armchair.

"Ms. Saxon was a victim of abuse who eventually broke."

"An accurate, if taciturn description of the case. That was indeed the primary element of it, but given its sheer complexity, I am not sure it does it justice."

Morris dug into his black jacket and removed a few neatly folded letters with elegant feminine handwriting acting as their hallmark.

"I have been conversing with Ms. Saxon through mail, passing many of the details to the police department so they can properly reconstruct the case. She included the location of a number of incriminating documents pertaining to many employees at Ward & Clews. A letter from Mr. Saxon offering brutal services without condemnation is particularly damning. Interestingly, Ms. Saxon targeted those people whose signatures appear on a returning document that Detective Portsman identified, however, he also came across an old telegram record from the late Mr. Saxon denying these allegations ahead of time."

I took a sip of tea, contemplating what Morris had said.

"Hmm. Did he suspect that he could be accused? What have the others mentioned in the document said about it?"

Morris fanned himself with the letters.

"Seemingly, he did. If Ms. Saxon ever actually came out with these documents, it is extremely unlikely that he would have seen a courtroom. Besides operating behind a prestigious company name, he also had many enemies who might have fabricated such a thing, possibly why he anticipated it. So far, neither Portsman nor his team have managed to tease any useful information from the coworkers, they all deny involvement. Unfortunately, their denial is perfectly natural in either diverging cases, so there is not very much to glean."

I inhaled deeply.

"And Mr. Wilson? I trust he has been incarcerated?"

A smile crept onto Morris's face.

“Oh, if only. Mr. Wilson is as slippery as ever. His defense mostly consists of deflecting blame to a mysterious man who he claims he received orders from. Not only that, he was under duress to fulfill his orders.”

“What nonsense! Surely they do not take him seriously?”

Morris barked with laughter.

“My dear Bill, we should know by now that we are not so lucky as to escape fate that easily. Mr. Wilson has physical letter records defending his claim, although any manner of tracing them has not succeeded thus far.”

I stirred my tea, watching a sugar cube dissolve slowly.

“Maybe… Mr. Wilson created the telegrams ahead of time so he would have an alibi?”

Morris snapped his fingers at me.

“Ah! That was precisely what I had thought, but verifying the claim would be extremely difficult. I wonder what Detective Portsman’s thoughts would be on this theory?”

As though Morris’s words held some special power, a rhythmic knock could be heard following the conclusion of his question. I stood up in surprise as I made out Detective Portsman’s voice at the other side of the ligneous door.

“Mr. Morris?”

“Speak of the devil. One moment!” Morris called, rushing to the door with an oddly swift three step action. He undid the protective latch with undeniable precision, allowing me to finally see Detective Portsman once again. He stood at his full height with a muted bowler hat and a thick brown coat which hung past his knees. He took a step inside, examining the room with fluttering eyes.

“I see that Mr. Hopkins has been here fairly often within the last week, although there was a sudden interruption before my presence was made aware of.”

Detective Portsman looked down at Morris’s coat.

“Understood. So Mr. Hopkins has been caught up with the case’s current developments?”

Morris nodded as he pulled up a ribbed dining chair for Detective Portsman, which the latter promptly sat in.

I took my seat once again and poured some tea for the detective, who thanked me and lifted it to his lips with a gaunt hand.

“I am curious. How did you infer those details?”

“I saw *The Count Of Monte Cristo* on your chair, which told me that you had likely been reading it to Mr. Morris, after all, it would be rude to read to oneself in that circumstance. The bookmark is at the very least a few hundred pages in, meaning that you had made some significant progress reading aloud. However, I sincerely doubted you two had been dining together since the early hours as Morris is still wearing his jacket. It suggests that you both arrived here not very long ago. Based on these two details, you had been here at a different date in the past to read to him as it could not be done in one sitting. Yet the book has no characteristic film of dust on it, suggesting that it could not have been too far in the past. As for the second inference, I am personally aware that Mr. Morris has been in contact with Ms. Saxon and I can make out the outline of a rectangular bundle characteristic of a stack of letters. They are not fully pressed into the folds of the jacket, but have a distinct outline elsewhere, so Mr. Morris removed them recently before replacing them at a slightly different angle. The rest is a

simple leap as you had your tea in hand when I entered, with the folio next to you. Therefore you had already put down the book before I arrived, and Mr. Morris likely began his consultation at that point."

"Brilliant, Detective Portsman. I couldn't have done it better myself. Quite literally," Morris said, folding his legs. "But what of the developments of the case?"

Detective Portsman blew on the surface of the tea, causing ripples to propagate across the golden liquid.

"As you likely know from the paper's dramatization of the current conflict, Mr. Wilson claimed his crimes were committed under duress, and as such he should not be liable. His letters are especially problematic as they are definitive proof that he may have been forced to violate the law."

"But how?" I asked. "Could we not claim deception on his part?"

"As regrettable as it is, no, we cannot. Remember that this is a district attorney we are dealing with. Even if he is convicted for running a bar and gambling den, he would only get a few years in prison and a hefty fine. Attempted murder is a much more serious charge, and we assume he is innocent until proven guilty. If we cannot disprove his claim, then it is most likely that this charge will go nowhere."

Morris drained his glass, putting it down on the table with a clinking sound.

"Is there proof that there was actually a mortal threat to Mr. Wilson at that point?"

Detective Portsman opened his notebook, flipping through it until he stopped at a specific dog eared page. Clearing his throat, he read aloud:

Werner, blast you! I must make it abundantly clear that you cannot risk any form of informational leakage. You know exactly what can happen to those who cross me. If I find out you have been deceiving me, I will not stop pursuing you until you are dead and buried.

He replaced the notebook and tapped the table with a long finger.

"This message was dated from near the start of the Volstead Act's implementation. The handwriting is rigid, almost block like, but not quite. Notice how he uses the word 'deceiving'. He is not concerned with just preserving his anonymity, but also with preventing Mr. Wilson from double crossing him."

"Any success in finding its origin?"

Detective Portsman sighed.

"None at all. I'm unsure where the actual letter is from. Mr. Wilson doesn't know either. He says he entered his dealings with this person anonymously in Boston, but never actually met him. The texture suggests that it might originate from a southern region, but I am unsure."

Morris suddenly straightened, his forehead creasing with thought.

"Tell me, what is the context of the original message?"

"Mr. Wilson's decision to cover up his gambling den with a bucket shop. It seems like his… 'benefactor'... thought it was a very poor choice."

"So the benefactor must have not known of Mr. Wilson's dealings with the hangman game or with Mr. Buchanan. I doubt he was inclined to share his plots that failed miserably. In addition, we would have seen the benefactor's letters reflecting his displeasure with him if he did know. If he was concerned about that plan, he naturally would have for the others as well."

I understood that Morris had a point regarding the messages themselves, but…

"Why would the benefactor send a physical threat if he thought it might be used against him in Mr. Wilson's trial?"

Morris smiled.

"It is a very good point, although it suggests that this man either lacked foresight or thought his threats would be enough to keep Mr. Wilson from using the letters. Think about the wording once again. 'You know exactly what happens to those who cross me,' this man is used to intimidation and coercion. It is a fascinating detail as it suggests that this man might be willing to step out of the shadows to take vengeance. I do wonder…"

"Yes?"

"What if Kaufmann created all these letters as you suggested? If he did, it would explain why we have difficulty tracing them even with his input. After this the logical progression would be to stage an attack on himself. If he succeeds and evidence is discovered, it will point us towards his scapegoat."

Detective Portsman stroked his chin.

"They are two of the most plausible options in my opinion. I will keep an eye on Mr. Wilson to test your hypothesis," he said, turning over his glass and standing up.

"Best of luck, detective. Be certain to save Mr. Wilson if the time comes, even though he may not be deserving of it."

The detective affirmed his statement before vacating the room, shutting the door behind himself on the way out. I moved to face Morris, who was removing his dusky coat and propping it carefully on a chair.

"Any other discoveries, Charles?"

"I have an inkling considering the document from Ms. Saxon that would have defamed her brother. Or more specifically, what it implies."

"In what sense?"

"There are two possibilities in that particular curiosity. Much like our other case, they concern the reality which may or may not exist behind the article. If its accusations are true, then it's reasonable that Mr. Saxon precluded it. If they are not, then either Mr. Saxon suspected a specific brand of slander ahead of time or it was planted for some undisclosed reason. If the response was not actually written by him, then why defend him at all? Mr. Saxon was unpopular, so it must be for some ulterior reason. They obviously could not have simply wanted to protect him, so it must have been to mitigate the effects of the original document. If the affronting piece was released to the public, the stocks for Ward & Clews would have plummeted, destroying the value of any shares. The response might ensure a steady uptake of the stock's value. There is clearly a clandestine motivator here; an intelligent man might purchase the stocks at extremely low prices after it crashes, then sell them as the stock increases. He could even sell them at a premium if he bought them before the crash. Since the documents were originally found near Mr. Saxon's desk, it stands to reason that they were placed by someone who frequented the location, such as Ms. Saxon. Presumably our culprit simply dropped by and placed them next to the desk when he was absent, perhaps near the end of the shift so that a janitor or secretary would discover them. However, Ms. Saxon found them and did not report them, which our man did not foresee."

“But then we have a self-evident conundrum, no? If the man never succeeded in his scam, then he never would have purchased stocks, meaning there is, in turn, no record!”

Morris grinned.

“Now please, Bill. There are alternatives to simply buying the stocks at low prices. If you knew a stock would drop, but could not have its shares, how would you maximize your profit?”

I thought for a moment. Any person who could conceive this plot operated on a more dynamic side of the law and would wish to enlarge his possible means.

“He could have placed a preemptive bet against the stock, claiming a recession and making an exorbitant sum.”

“Precisely. If he took this route, then his activities could be traceable. He would have most likely come to a bucket shop. It just so happens to be that Mr. Wilson’s brokerage was, in fact, a bucket shop, so feasibly we may be able to abstract some information from there. By there, I of course would mean the Austin Police Station as all of the ledgers were most likely impounded when Detective Portsman raided the institution. How about we make our way over to the station, in say, an hour? We shall become more acquainted with Dumas’ narrative until then. I am curious as to how Edmond will manage to deal with Danglars, so by all means, please continue.”

Very nearly an hour later, we left Morris’ apartment heading to the station, having made decent progress through the novel. Morris’ face flushed from the cold as he walked down the street, his walking stick waving in a repetitive, hypnotic motion. In spite of the biting cold that had been present for a few months then, there was not a snowflake to be seen. Morris and I withstood the burgeoning bitterness of the outside several times before, although this time the sun was concealed behind a blanket of clouds, denying us the momentary heat that temporarily spared us before. In what felt like a few unbearable hours, although it could not have been more than a handful of minutes, we had arrived at the station.

It was an impressive, if plain building, constructed of rudimentary geometric shapes jutting at various angles. The building was an oddly intense gray, almost like it had been crafted by a potter but not fully blasted. The entire facade took up perhaps three quarters of the block, absolutely dominating the nearby rural structures. A select few stood next to it, hands in pockets while walking on the pavement, stealing glances but never staring around themselves. Refurbished signage that the complex donned only served to confirm we had arrived at the correct place.

We were quickly greeted by a well dressed secretary who glimpsed us.

“Mr. Hopkins?”

“Yes, and Mr. Morris.”

“Please come into the room alongside the hallway to your left. Detective Portsman is expecting you.”

“Already? He may have thought further ahead than I previously believed,” Morris said as we moved through the unoccupied corridor. Entering the room, I realized we were now present in Detective Portsman’s office. It was a large rectangular room populated by papers, notebooks, and shelves, which despite their proliferation, had a rigorous, mathematical ordering to them. The intrepid detective himself sat in an armchair, sketching a firearm on one of his notepads. Behind him hung newspaper clippings from several older cases, most of which exclaimed his

triumph over the mystery involved. Once he noticed us, he closed the notebook and opened a drawer from his desk.

"I assume you are here for the ledgers? I found the circumstances of Ms. Saxon's testimony to be… questionable. At best I found it strange that Mr. Saxon could have realized such a thing, although not entirely implausible," he said, rummaging through the drawer. He removed several papers, skimmed them, then repositioned the articles. Soon, he removed the correct report and opened it. Detective Portsman scoured the ledger, his lips moving with an invisible calculus.

"The last record is credited to Montague Matin, a mathematician who was interested in buying a telescope from the Ross & Co. of London. They had a shipment delivered to an American distributor a few months ago."

He quickly replaced the ledger and turned to a gray cabinet shelf, which he promptly extricated a fistful of folders from. Detective Portsman leafed through them until he exclaimed and put down one of the colored indentures, placing a finger at the bottom line.

"Look, there is his information. A transaction made, investing a rather large amount into Ward & Clews. If we cross reference to local records, then we may find his address."

Detective Portsman revealed yet another, considerably thicker dossier, which took several minutes to locate what he desired.

"Here we are. 23 Congress Avenue, south of the Colorado River. A moderate area, I expect he is not overly well to do. We can head over at once for inquiries."

"Exceptional. Thank you, Detective Portsman, this little puzzle will serve to take the edge off. I only hope it is a bit more intriguing than what is apparent on the surface."

The Second Excerpt

September 4th, 1920

I look forward to Kaufmann attempting to use my own threatening letters against me, if only for his own downfall. After all, how could I have not seen a threat from such a distance? I have attempted to minimize any form of interaction between us, limiting it to advice and eerily accurate predictions as his benefactor. I have framed my own personality as a raucous, if powerful man of some intellect but one who does not understand the tactical finesse required of their position.

In other words, even Kaufmann knows me as someone entirely different from who I truly am. If he ever tries to weaponize my threats to exonerate himself, he will be deeply disappointed. Once he is turned in one way or another through my plan, he will most likely try to underplay his own autonomy as a defense. He cannot plead innocent otherwise as his own men will be eager to testify against him to save themselves. Now, if he submits the letters, the logical conclusion for either Mr. Morris or Detective Portsman will be that he has crafted them himself. This assumption is almost useless in court without further investigation, but it will lead the police in an interesting direction. Although the letters themselves are unable to be inferred, what if Kaufmann decided to attempt an attack on himself to strengthen his case? Not only that, he could frame some other unwitting soul to deflect the blame to him as the prime orchestrator. This is where one of my past contingencies springs into action. The papers denouncing Ward &

Clews are to be dropped off at his desk near the end of his shift, so that Mrs. White may come across it. She visited very occasionally, but she could be observed. If she did not come across them, but someone else did, then the papers could be placed in the public view and under scrutiny. This would logically lower the stock for Ward & Clews, only to be followed by a response which would probably culminate in a slight bolstering of its prices. The abrupt response will not have been written by Mr. Saxon, so the criterion narrows sharply. Mr. Saxon had no significant allies who would have written it, nor would an enemy who inherently disliked him. The reasoning follows that the act was not directed towards him but had an entirely separate motive. The original denunciation and its successor are solely correlated through their manipulation of stocks, which could be extremely beneficial for anyone seeking to take advantage of say, a betting hall or bucket shop, which Kaufmann happens to own. I had a bet placed for the stocks to dip in the name of a Montague Matin, who also happened to be the man whom the method in attempt to kill Kaufmann may be traced back to. This makes the framework for what any savvy investigator will be looking for in Kaufmann's attempt to deflect blame. What he may not be aware of is that the name on the ledgers were actually printed by a typewriter of the same style of those within the Wilson Bar, meaning that Montague did not actually write his own name, rather someone did for him. It also might come to the authority's attention that the method, in this case poisoning, could also be tracked to a pharmaceutical company whose records do not contain Mr. Matin's name, besides one of their fences claiming to have dealt with orders from Mr. Wilson's men.

If the police fail to find the clues I have laid out, then I may be required to intervene even further, such as putting out my own analyses, but I doubt it will come to that given the competence of Detective Portsman and his allies. Mr. Morris specifically is someone who I find somewhat fascinating. According to my reports, he is completely blind, yet he could outwit Mr. Wilson. This when taken with his thrillseeking, risk taking nature gives me the impression that he wishes to compensate for his lost sight. Upon doing further research on Mr. Morris I discovered that he was originally an investor born in Boston, involved in some questionable dealings. He became blind after his eyes were badly damaged in an attack. He lost most of his wealth and moved down to Austin. It strikes me that Mr. Morris may perceive himself not as a fallen aristocrat, although he seeks to emulate that ideology, but rather as almost a method by which he can adventure. Becoming blind and losing one's source of income all at the same time would be psychologically damaging to him, and his move to Austin resembles a form of local hope.

Of his methods, I believe I have arrived at another conjecture regarding the state of affairs when Mr. Wilson's card cheating plan was discovered. As I had established previously, Mr. Wilson is not totally incompetent. He must have been well aware of the possibility that Mr. Morris may have intruded upon him, so they could have made an agreement near the end of their inceptive impromptu rivalry.

However, either his scam fizzled outside of his predictions, which it could not have been since his connection with the culprit was never exposed, or someone else who never wanted to turn him in at all was involved. The only person who I have dealt with who matches this profile is none other than Mr. Morris. What is notable is that he was not delivered any form of punishment after intervening, meaning Mr. Wilson could neither anticipate his arrival, nor could he have countered his actions. This leads to a dual inference: Mr. Morris changed his tactics to ensure he could not be parried and Mr. Wilson did not know he had any way of deriving data from the

Wilson Bar. From this, we can see that Mr. Morris must have had an accomplice within the bar. He undeniably could not have heard of such news directly given the inherent secrecy of the bar. Although he could have technically bribed someone to be his informant, given his previously ordained shrewdness and forethought. Is it any coincidence that a very intelligent man stumbles upon a game? Of course not. He must have known about it, thus supporting the principle that he began with one. And his changing tactics? Mr. Morris would need to guarantee that Mr. Wilson could not murder him unexpectedly. He surely could not have anyone wait by the station at all times, therefore he must have created a preemptive strike against Kaufmann. Conferring his information to another person would be ineffectual given Mr. Wilson's resources and a possibility that Mr. Morris could be blackmailed by the very man he trusted with it. To be perfectly effective, he must have his will modified to include the collective evidence against Mr. Wilson then informed him of the contingency. This also implies that Mr. Morris had an established line of communication with Mr. Wilson, likely encoded.

Then there were the circumstances themselves. Assuming Mr. Morris was indeed the man who exposed the auspicious gambler, then the logic from my conclusions would follow that he had begun by being informed of his opponent's presence, suspected his adversary were cheating, then exposed him. But… would that really be all there was? If we revise this reasoning taking into account Mr. Morris' mentality, then there would be little benefit in exhibiting the method right away. It is interesting to note that Mr. Morris likely came in person as it minimizes the information involved and the risk factor for any allies he had within the casino. If he had made one of his underlings perform the exposure, then they would have been placed in mortal danger, which although preventable by further coercing Mr. Wilson, it would be extremely risky as it could reveal their connection. This is also supported by the fact that, once again, there were no reported disappearances as far as I can tell, not to mention the fact that Mr. Morris would have been implicated and perceived as a threat once again.

From here, I can infer that Mr. Morris was not content with just inferring the method of his opponent; he desired mental stimulation, facing off against him. Besides that, Mr. Morris also came with another man. He could not have navigated by himself. There are several possibilities, such as a caretaker, a friend, et cetera, but it most likely would have been someone who had frequented the bar before. If he came with a covert agent, it would uncover their connection, so it had to be someone whom Mr. Wilson and the staff would know superficially as an associate. The other person who fit this description was his partner in the first game, a gambler who had been to the casino, won the game, then most likely allied himself with Mr. Morris.

However, had Mr. Morris participated in a game against a man he suspected of cheating? Seemingly, yes, if only for the thrill. How fascinating. I do wonder… if we may step into the realm of pure speculation, then what would I have done if I were in Mr. Morris' shoes? I am aware of a possible swindler, then how would I handle it? I would have come to the conclusion about my foe's modus operandi, then I would perhaps try to best them on equal footing. After all, I must have a bit of fun with them first, as long as there is little risk. Perhaps I might have my agent delicately suggest a game which is very difficult to cheat at, whilst maintaining a nigh-untraceable connection to them. After humiliating them, I might turn them in.

But now let us return to the real puzzle at hand: How come Mr. Morris went to Austin to begin with? Austin is an extremely remote district and a rather small city in Texas. He had no prior experience or connections there, especially not in any of his investments, but he had

surely known that gambling dens abounded in Austin. Could it be that he had always intended to become a gambler there? No, impossible. I have a hand in many of the dens there and not once has Mr. Morris appeared elsewhere, nor has he been seen in the Wilson Bar before the game.

It seems that Mr. Morris had an entirely different reason to go down to Austin than I initially assumed. There could have been many reasons for doing so. I am told Mr. Morris has a primary job as a librarian, strangely enough, but the library would not have any useful information for something he could be searching for. Even if he was looking for someone, say, acquainted with the staff, why waste his time interceding in a gamble? Furthermore, Mr. Wilson has absolutely no connections to the library, so there is no correlation between the two goals he had set.

What about a piece of information he could have retrieved from Mr. Wilson? This is slightly more plausible, as he may have wanted to bide time until Mr. Wilson stumbled, then used the gamble to leverage him. But how would he know Mr. Wilson would have the gamble to begin with at all? How could he be sure he could be invited? It very well could have been that Mr. Morris had always been aware of his identity as Werner Kaufmann, which would lead him to assume that he would be required to dispose of currency in some way. He may have even followed a similar line of reasoning as in my previous entry to do such a thing. But how could he become invited? He would have to come with a companion who had actually procured an invitation, or more specifically he would need to gain their trust. One way he could have done this is to show off his intellect, which was likely a part of his strategy. By gaining a council with Kaufmann, he could confront him personally whilst holding back his ace, that way his threat could not have been assessed beforehand and he would have shown his skill before Kaufmann, acting as an additional layer of intimidation.

It is worth noting that I highly doubt Mr. Morris blatantly requested information from Kaufmann directly after this incident. He would know that if he was too forward with Kaufmann, he would attempt to circumvent any sort of contingencies Mr. Morris might have. But if Mr. Morris did not try to get information from Kaufmann then what did he want? It must be some result of his actions with Kaufmann. Let's see… Mr. Morris doesn't want to turn him in on the spot, rather he waits. Could it be… that Mr. Morris wishes to create a more concrete connection with the local authorities? If he simply turned in Kaufmann, very little would actually occur for him. But if Kaufmann became part of a more active investigation, then he could turn in the evidence alongside police presence, impressing them as an invaluable contact. How strange, my plan for Kaufmann directly intersects with Mr. Morris' end goal… to build himself back up. What a resilient man!

Signing off for now,

End of the second dated statement