



A Ball in Perfect Order

A Scenario Compatible with «Call of Cthulhu»

Daniel Wessel
with AI Assistance



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Acknowledgements & Thanks: ChatGPT was invaluable for deepening topics, generating text, and getting different points of view. This «centaur writing» (human and AI collaboration) did what a good environment should do: engage me fairly, follow the turns and jumps in the discussions, provide information I did not have, and summarize complex issues. And was just ... there. Kudos.

All images in this book were generated with ChatGPT unless otherwise specified.

Set with Affinity Publisher, using the fonts EB Garamond and IBM Plex Sans.

As this book self-published and English is my second language, some spelling and grammar mistakes will occur. I apologize for them in advance.

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Saying Thanks: I have invested some time into this scenario. If you want to say thank you with a gesture, you can do so here: <http://paypal.me/OrganizingCreativity>

It shows me that my work had value for you.

Thank you & have fun at the ball.

Daniel

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Cite as: Wessel, D. (2026). *A Ball in Perfect Order*. (0.95).

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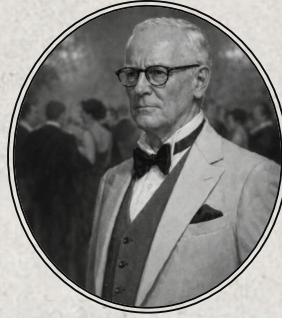
CHARACTER OVERVIEW FOR THE KEEPER



MR. WINSTON ARBUCKLE
Host of the Ball



MRS. FRANCIS ARBUCKLE
Hostess of the Ball



MR. FRANK WILKINS
Head-Butler of the Household



MRS. ROSE STERLING
Amplifier of Events



MISS VERONICA BLANCHE
Socialite



MR. HENRY DUCANTE
Former French Aristocrat



THE MILLERS
Close Friends of Mr. Ducante



MR. MILTON REGASS
Financier of the Upper Class



LADY MARGRET WINTERS
Connoisseur of Fine Food



MISS SERAFINA WINTERS
Catch of the Evening



LORD PETRYR HAMMERSMITH
British Aristocrat



MISS GABRIELLE OLSON
Unexpected Debutante



MRS. BIANCA VAN STEETEN
Established Socialite



THE SERVANTS
Disciplined and Observant



MISS IRENE WATTERSON
Invisible Help



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INTRODUCTION

KEEPER SUMMARY

The protagonists are invited to a high-society ball at the residence of Mr. Winston Arbuckle, an incredibly wealthy industrialist in Boston. The ball becomes a multi-layered affair of envy, blackmail, social etiquette, before it turns into an all *too orderly* affair.

Mr. Wilkins, the head butler, is the reason the evening escalates into cosmic horror. He strives for a proper evening and became the focal point through which an alien principle of order entered the mansion.

At first, it appears as heightened etiquette — precision, correction, and control. As it does not understand humans, nor their behavior or limits, the corrections gradually lose their human reference. Guests adjust themselves and others according to rules that are consistent, but not socially meaningful. The room becomes more ordered — and less intelligible — when order without human context becomes oppressive.

The horror is not that something breaks the rules. The horror is that the rules remain perfectly consistent — and stop making sense.

The scenario can be played as one-shot or within a larger campaign.

Certain Player Characteristics (see box) are advantageous.

BALL STORYLINES

A lot happens at the ball, which the players might witness or not. The following storylines can be used to get the players invested in what happens to the guest. They can be adapted, or dropped, depending on keeper's preference and players actions.

- Mrs. Arbuckle tries to destroy a female player (FC) character (see **Player Characteristics**) with social scandals, e.g., having her dear friend Miss Blanche seduce her partner (MC, **Seduction**), Blanche's fiancé Mr. Ducante challenge MC to a fight (**Duel**), or hoping for the reveal of blackmail material by Mr. Regass (**Blackmail**) on either FC or MC.
- Miss Olson, a young nouveau-rich woman, has made it to the party without her father knowing (**Kitten**). She is a source of faux-pas, until she is taken under Mrs. van Steeten's wing. However, van Steeten has had a short affair with Miss Blanche, during which Blanche took a flawless emerald from her. She wants it back (**The Emerald**). Both storylines intersect.
- Lady Winters is in financial trouble and looks for a rich husband for her daughter, Serafina. However,



PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS

A high credit rating (CR) of at least one player character (PC) is helpful for introductions and etiquette. The storylines are modular and adaptable to the background of the player characters.

Mrs. Arbuckle's storyline works best with two characters who are married. In the descriptions, FC is used for the female character, MC for her male partner.

However, her **Seduction**, **Blackmail** and **Duel** storylines work on their own and can be adapted to the different characters.

The R.s.v.p. card (see **Printable Material**) can be used to ask players for their character information in advance to prepare the storylines.

Serafina falls in love with Lord Hammersmith, who is respectable, but nearly twice her age and not very rich (**Dove and Raven**).

- Some guests can assist or hinder the players at the ball, e.g., the high-society correspondent Miss Sterling (**Framing the Narrative**) or the maid Miss Watterson (**Invisible Help**).

RUNNING THE SCENARIO

The scenario is not primarily about investigation. It is about participating in and destabilizing a social system.

If you run it like a mystery, it will stall. If you run it like a living social environment, it will generate its own momentum.

For this to work you have to:

- maintain a system (the ball, its etiquette, its phases),
- animate competing intentions (NPC agendas), and

- control the drift toward inhuman order.

You are orchestrating a system, not presenting a plot or delivering a story.

Over the course of the ball, the player experience changes:

1. **Arrival & immersion:** social maneuvering
2. **Investment:** relationships, intrigue, reputation
3. **Subtle disturbance:** etiquette intensifies
4. **Cognitive dissonance:** behavior loses meaning (genre shift in the aftermath of Mr. Arbuckle's speech)
5. **Collapse:** players realize something fundamentally wrong with reality

The scenario only works if players invest in social game for the first phases and do not go into default CoC behavior (search clues, find threat, solve problem). Then they realize that the rules of behavior themselves have become hostile. If they do not meet that approach halfway, the scenario becomes a crowded dinner party with unclear stakes.

Tips

1. **Players must invest socially before the horror begins:** Push introductions early, make status, reputation, and relationships matter immediately, and reward engagement with attention, access, and consequences.
2. **Etiquette must function as a real constraint:** Social missteps should have visible consequences, politeness should block direct action, and reputation should open and close doors.
3. **NPCs must act with intent, not as information containers:** Everyone wants something, everyone is watching someone, and information spreads socially, not mechanically.
4. **The horror must emerge gradually and ambiguously:** Do not explain Wilkins or Order, let players first interpret changes as «*strange, but social*», only later allow the realization that the system itself is wrong.
5. **Escalate by removing meaning, not adding danger:** Behavior becomes more correct, but less understandable, conversations become structured, but pointless, and people comply without knowing why. Players notice that they lose their autonomy or that the system will «*correct them*» — which is impersonal but potentially lethal.

PLAYER INFORMATION

As there is a risk of misaligned play behavior if players generalize from other CoC scenarios, the following information might be useful to give in advance:

This scenario takes place at a high-society ball. Your characters are part of this world — status, reputation, and relationships matter.

There is no single «*case*» to solve. What happens depends on what you pursue. Engage with people. Start conversations. Get involved in what's going on.

Play as if this evening matters to you — socially, personally, or strategically. The more you invest, the more the scenario gives back.

PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES

- **Track attention:** Who is watching whom? Who is being talked about?
- **Rotate focus:** No player should be idle for long.
- **Use soft pressure:** Invitations, expectations, and obligations.
- **Let consequences propagate:** One faux pas should ripple.

HANDLING ETIQUETTE

The social layer must feel like a game, with etiquette as the mechanics, conversations as moves, and reputation as resource.

Thus, there has to be a feedback loop so players see effects, a memory system so NPCs react consistently, and a progression system, so escalation happens naturally. Avoid point systems, trackers, formal «*checks*», or anything players have to manage explicitly.

Signals and consequences are enough:

- **Visible Social Actions at the Ball have Consequences:** Who sees them, what do they think about it, and how do they change? Show players that their actions are noticed, e.g., «*Mrs. Sterling is clearly watching this exchange.*» or «*You notice the Millers whispering after you speak.*»
- **NPC-Relation as Consequence:** Three conditions per relevant NPC are enough:
 - **In Favor** (they include you, introduce you to others, share information),
 - **Neutral** (polite but distant), and
 - **Disapproval** (subtle exclusion, resistance, gossip).



INTRODUCTION

- **Feedback Progression:** When a character violates or excels at etiquette (CR), reactions escalate depending on frequency and severity:
 - **Level 1: Noticed** (glances, whispers)
 - **Level 2: Social shift** (tone changes, invitations withdrawn/offered)
 - **Level 3: Action** (confrontation, rumor spreads, opportunity appears/closes)

This way social standing determines:

- **invitations to private conversations**, e.g., «*You are not invited to join the conversation.*»,
- **willingness to share secrets**, e.g., «*He withholds the information.*», and
- **protection from consequences**, e.g., «*She introduces you to someone important.*»

THE BALL

The ball is a character in itself, grandiose and opulent, with with clear phases. Each phase has its distinctive food and drinks, music, and guest behavior. The **Timeline** provides a high-level overview what happens during the ball in each phase and makes it more manageable while the **Phases of a Ball** in the **Appendix** goes into more detail.

- **Social Game before Meaning Collapse:** The ball provides the social game with which the players interact and invest in, while Order begins to establish itself more firmly. In phase four, the players experience their investment slipping when meaning collapses.
- **Role-Play over Rolls:** It is an interaction-heavy scenario. Reward players for good role-play, either by making the action an automatic success or giving them a bonus die.
- **Interpersonal Skills:** If rolls are used, CR (do they fit or Charm (are they at least «*positively entertaining*»)) might be useful. **Fast Talk** or **Intimidation** quickly damages reputation, while **Persuasion** might work. Note that the experience is quite different for characters with vs. without experience in high society (see **Etiquette**).
- **Music:** The distinctive music for each phase can be easily found online, e.g., on YouTube. The **Phases of the Ball** section lists good choices.

CHOOSING STORYLINES

The **Mr. Wilkins** storyline provides the cosmic horror. To ensure the players get invested, choose three other storylines and ignore the rest.

For example:

- Mrs. Arbuckle is the underlying reason for the players' invitation and the storylines: **Mrs. Arbuckle's Seduction** (MC) + **Duel** (MC), **Blackmail** (FC).
- The players visit the ball for any reason and get involved in independent storylines: **Blackmail** and **Emerald/Kitten** affecting all player characters, and **Duel** one of them.

ASSISTING THE PLAYERS

- As the context is etiquette heavy, players might need assistance. If their players have a high CR or they have researched the etiquette beforehand, the **Etiquette Sheet** in the **Appendix** can be given to them. At the ball, both von Steeten and Lord Hammersmith can provide some guidance.
- Story-wise, Miss Irene Watterson, a maid of the household, is trained to be invisible and helpful. She might provide what they need — within reason.



INVITATION LETTER

Four weeks before the ball, the PCs receive a letter with an invitation to the ball:

Mr. and Mrs. Winston Arbuckle request the pleasure of your company at a ball at their residence, on 31.10., at half past eight o'clock. Dress code: Black Tie or White Tie.

A small R.s.v.p. card is attached — expected within 10 days (see also Printable Material in the Appendix).

SOCIETAL GOSSIP

PCs have that time to prepare and to learn more about the Arbuckles:

- Mr. Winston Arbuckle is one of the richest men in Boston. He started with nothing.
- CR: The Brahmin of Boston look down on Mr. Arbuckle and secretly mock him as «*uncultured nouveau rich*». But his events are interesting for the people he invites. He is also a forceful personality in business and has ruined many competitors.
- CR (hard): Rumors that Mr. Arbuckle has affairs — he even stays most nights in the suite of his office building. One of his mistresses — young and blonde — might be at the ball. Another guest is an infamous French aristocrat. The Arbuckles have bought up multiple exclusive, smaller private libraries, apparently in an attempt to appear «*cultured*».
- CR (extreme): Rumors that Mrs. Arbuckle knows about the affairs, but would end up with nothing in a divorce. The French aristocrat apparently got involved in multiple private duels in France.
- If the Mrs. Arbuckle storyline is used, a «*reason*» for her «*correction*» is needed. That reason can be fully overblown. For example, FC remembers that Mrs. Arbuckle was not exactly close and they were interested in the same man (not MC). FC won that contest — how long it lasted up to FC.

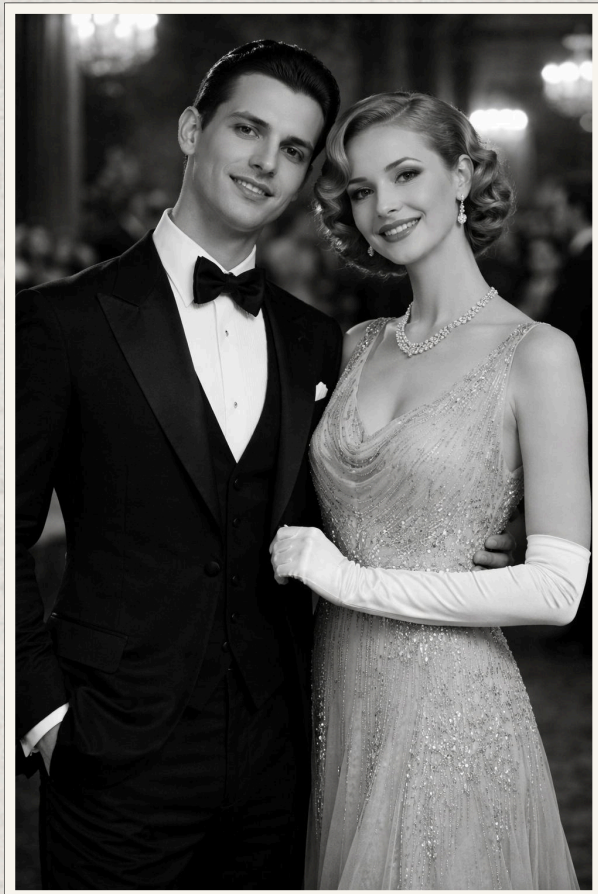
CLOTHES

Depending on their Credit Rating, players might want to brush up on their Etiquette or Dancing. And they might need clothes:

- **Black Tie:** Black dinner jacket, white dress shirt, black bow tie, black waistcoat or cummerbund, black trousers with silk stripe, black patent leather shoes. Optional: white pocket square, cufflinks/studs, gloves, hat. Price: \$40-100 ready-made, \$100-200+ bespoke/high-end tailoring.

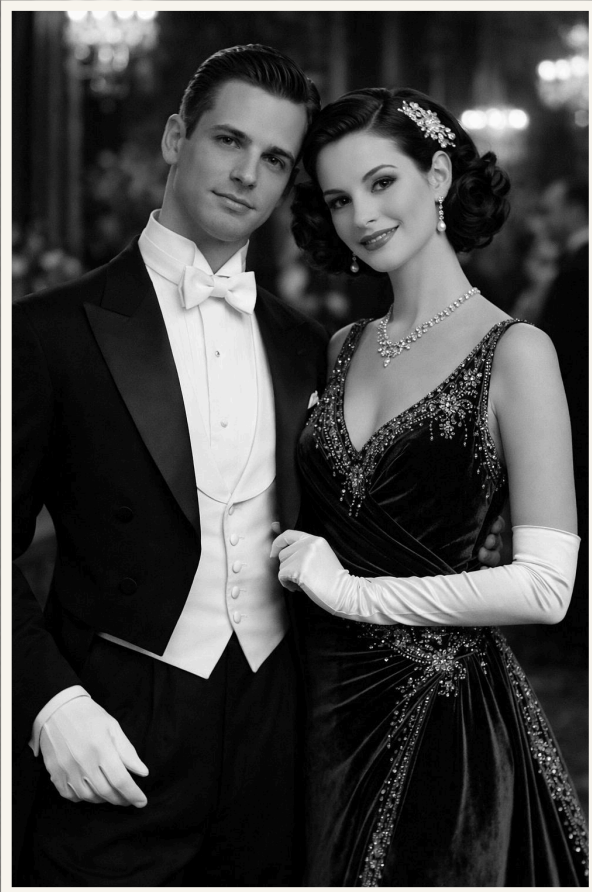


INVITATIONS TO THE BALL, see Appendix for printable version



BLACK TIE AND A LIGHT GOWN, the later a beaded chiffon evening gown that reads as airy and fluid, catching light and motion with every step, emphasizing grace, youth, and ease of movement.

Wearing Black Tie signals controlled ease. It feels polished, socially competent, and at ease in formality. An awareness of appearance, but not constant vigilance. It encourages composed, but natural movement.



WHITE TIE AND A DARK GOWN, the later a structured velvet evening gown with rich embellishment, absorbing light and imposing a more deliberate, statuesque presence that signals wealth, composure, and control.

- **White Tie:** Black tailcoat (cut away in front, long tails behind), stiff white shirt, white waistcoat, white bow tie, black patent leather shoes, often white gloves (removed when convenient). Optional decorations or medals if military or political background. Price: \$80-150 ready-made, \$150-300+ bespoke/high-end tailoring.

Wearing white tie signals discipline and constraint. It feels formal, visible, straightly constrained — like ceremonial armor. The shirt is stiff with the high collar pressing into the head, waistcoat tight across the torso, the tailcoat restricts arm movement slightly, the shoes are hard, glossy and not forgiving. It forces an upright posture, encourages small, controlled movements, and discourages spontaneity (DEX -10, CR +10).

- **Evening Gown:** Floor-length gown in silk, satin, velvet, or chiffon; straight, loose silhouette (often drop-waisted), low neckline (front or back), often sleeveless

A BALL AT THE ARBUCKLE ESTATE

BY ROSE STERLING

Invitations have been issued for a ball to be held on the evening of October 31st at the estate of Mr. and Mrs. Winston Arbuckle.

The Arbuckles, whose recent entertainments have drawn increasing attention, continue their efforts to establish a place among the city's more closely observed circles. The forthcoming gathering, announced with both Black Tie and White Tie specified, suggests an occasion of some ambition.

It remains to be seen how broadly the invitation has been extended. Several names associated with longer-standing families are expected, though not yet confirmed. Their presence — or absence — will no doubt be noted.

The Arbuckle residence, much discussed for its scale and recent appointments, provides a setting well suited to such an event. Whether the evening will distinguish itself beyond its surroundings is, as always, a matter for the guests.

For now, the date stands, and with it the expectation of an evening that will be watched with interest. The scale of the evening is not in question. Its reception remains to be seen.

or with thin straps; embellished as desired (beading, embroidery, fringe). Worn with evening shoes, stockings, and accessories such as long gloves (opera length), jewelry (pearls, diamonds; display of wealth is expected), and a wrap or stole. Price: \$30-80 simple but fashionable, \$80-200+ high-end/designer/imported.

Wearing an evening gown signals exposure and display. It feels visible, expressive, and physically unrestrained, but socially exposed. Heavier fabric forces an upright, composed posture with slow and deliberate movements (DEX -10, CR +10). Lighter fabric moves with the body, dancing is easier and gestures are more fluid (Fast Talk -10, Charm +10). Silk, satin, or chiffon shift with every step — while low necklines, bare arms, or an open back create constant awareness of posture and presentation (exposure to air, subtle temperature variations). Embellishments like beading or fringe add weight and motion, making movement part of the display. It encourages smooth, deliberate, continuous movement, rather than sharp gestures. You are less constrained than in



ETIQUETTE

formal menswear, but more immediately readable — every movement, misstep, or hesitation is noticeable.

- **CR:** Bespoke clothes are expected, wearing anything other than Black/White Tie for men or evening gown for women will prevent access to the ball. The suiting colors for the season are known (e.g., for a ball in autumn deeper tones such as burgundy, gold, or forest green for evening gowns). Younger women will lean more to modern flapper styles, older elite women will stick to more conservative elegance.

MOTIVATION

If curiosity is not enough for the players to attend the ball:

- **Occult/Mythos Tomes:** Among the libraries Mr. Arbuckle bought up was one that might have rare books. The ball might be an opportunity to explore his library. However, they might find out at the ball that only one mythos tome was preserved by Mr. Wilkins. The other books were discarded by Mr. Arbuckle as «*they were very old and very musty*» (SAN roll if **Library Use** ≥ 70 , $-1D3$ SAN if failed).
- **Access:** Many influential people will be at the ball. Perhaps the players need to connect with someone influential in a social setting. The ball will attract people from wide background (see **Other Guests**).
- **Social Attention:** Sterling's newspaper article might wet the players appetite.

KEEPER

- **Ready-made clothes** may incur a penalty die on **Charm**, **Persuade**, **Fast-Talk**, and **Credit Rating** at the high-society ball, but a bonus die on **Intimidate**. Clothes that cost more than \$200 may get a bonus die on all five skills.
- **Weapons:** The clothes make carrying weapons inconvenient to impossible. A small derringer or knife might be carried by men, women have more options with their handbags. But if they are discovered they will trigger strong disapproval. They are better left in the car as violence is not expected nor tolerated at a ball.





MANSION

ARBUCKLE MANSION

The mansion itself is large, glamorous, with spacious parking in front, a garden-park in the back, and a huge ballroom. It has all the modern amenities of 1920s Boston while trying to maintain old world money charm.

CR: Reveals that some alternations were made that undermine the «*old world money*» impression (e.g., painting style wrong, some objects to «*gauche*»). The Arbuckles are clearly new money and do not really understand tradition and consistency.

OUTSIDE

PARKING SPACE

In front of the mansion is ample space for parking. Players see expensive cars, including a silver Rolls-Royce parked under a roof. CR reveals that it belongs to Regass, who is well-known for his car and very protective of it.

GARDEN

Behind the mansion is an extensive garden, with carefully curated trees and hedges close to the mansion and a medium sized pond at the far end of it. There is a large stretch of grass in front of the pond.

ROOMS INSIDE THE MANSION

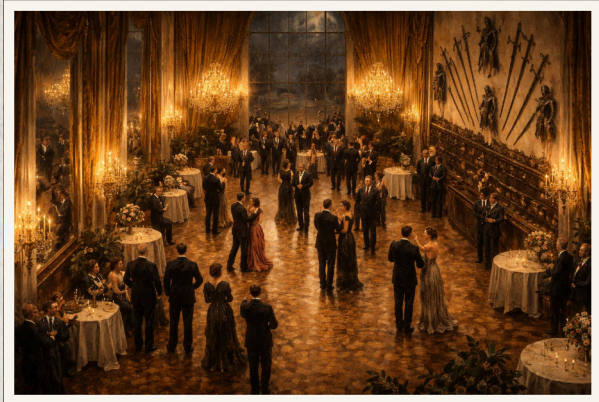
The huge mansion has various rooms. Relevant for the scenario are:

BALLROOM

A huge room with mirrors on two sides, windows on one side, and a wall of medieval to renaissance weapons on the fourth. The swords, knives, lances and spears are usable and sharp, as the Arbuckles do not go for cheap imitation, but the old-style rifles and pistols are not loaded, as the Arbuckles are not insane either.

Functional weapons are

- **Longswords:** Fighting (Sword), 1D8+1+DB, Touch, 1/round
- **Maces (club-like but made for battle):** Fighting (Brawl), 1D8+1+DB, Touch, 1/round
- **Knives (medium):** Fighting (Brawl), 1D4+2+DB, Touch, 1/round
- **Lances:** Fighting (Spear), 1D8+1, Touch, 1/round
- **Throwing Spears:** Throw, 1D8+half DB, STR/5 yards, 1/round



SIDE-ROOM

Adjacent to the ballroom a somewhat smaller room where guests can mingle. Later the evening, Charleston is played here and many younger guests to go that room.

CARD ROOM/SMOKING ROOM

A short way from the ballroom, the smoking room is quieter, heavier in atmosphere. Leather armchairs cluster around low mahogany tables; the air carries a layered haze of cigar smoke and polished wood. Decanters sit within easy reach. Conversation here drops in tone — less performance, more intent.

It is understood that gentlemen may withdraw here between dances or speeches. Ladies do not enter. If one does, she will be gently, firmly redirected—on the pretense of propriety rather than exclusion. However, Mrs. Arbuckle will flaunt that rule if needed.

Keeper Note: A room for decisions, deals, and blunt speech.

DRAWING ROOM

Adjacent but more brightly lit than the ballroom, the drawing room offers a softer retreat. Upholstered chairs, delicate tables, and floral arrangements replace the heavier tones of the main hall. Conversation here is quieter but no less pointed—observations rather than declarations.

Ladies may retire here between dances to rest, take tea, or speak more privately. Gentlemen may enter, but rarely linger unless invited.

Keeper Note: A place for reputation management, subtle influence, and controlled exclusion.

GENTLEMEN'S LAVATORY

A short corridor off the smoking room leads to the gentlemen's lavatory. The air is cooler here, touched faintly by soap and tobacco. White porcelain basins line one



wall beneath a long mirror; nickel fixtures catch the light in clean, hard reflections. Opposite, a row of discreetly partitioned urinals stands in quiet order, with enclosed stalls set further back.

A side table holds folded towels, combs, and a selection of hair tonics. The space is attended, but not intrusively so — everything is kept in precise readiness, without the need to ask.

Conversation here is brief, if it occurs at all. At most, a murmur between acquaintances, a low aside. It is a place to compose oneself, not to linger.

LADIES' CLOAKROOM / RETIRING ROOM

Set apart from the main flow of the house, the ladies' cloakroom opens into a softly lit suite of adjoining rooms.

The first is a retiring room with upholstered chairs, low tables, and tall mirrors framed in gilt. The air carries a trace of perfume and powder. Gloves are adjusted here, fans set aside, conversations resumed in quieter tones.

Beyond, through a discreet inner door, lie the lavatories proper — enclosed stalls and porcelain basins, arranged with privacy in mind. Everything is immaculate, attended to between each use.

A maid is always present. She does not intrude, but she is never absent. Ready to hand fresh towels, adjust a mirror, retrieve a dropped item, or quietly manage any small emergency of dress or appearance. She speaks softly, if at all, and seems to anticipate needs before they are voiced.

It is understood that one may linger in the outer room, but not indefinitely. Conversations here are more candid than in the ballroom — observations shared, impressions revised — but always within the bounds of decorum.

LIBRARY

Down a corridor from the ballroom is the door to a medium-sized library. Comfortable chairs and large shelves that contain modern — and completely mundane — books, though on a variety of topics.

A Library Use roll easily reveals that the books are more for display than for actual use — the Arbuckles have bought the idea of knowledge by the meter, but not knowledge itself.

The shelves are filled, but no single subject is complete. Key books of the domain are clearly missing, e.g., a section on geology missing the key reference book, and

foundational works are replaced by later or secondary texts. Many volumes are suspiciously clean or uniformly rebound. Even a section with fiction books hurts players with high library use: Lightweight popular novels are shelved as if they are great literature, next to decorative editions of classics that are clearly unread, e.g., «*The Complete Works of Charles Dickens*» — all pristine and uncut pages.

A hard success in Library Use reveals that several sections show clear discontinuities — older volumes appear to have been removed deliberately rather than lost. The remaining books are modern, clean, and entirely unremarkable. It screams taste performed without understanding — and knowledge edited for comfort.

A Spot Hidden roll reveals that the chairs, though plush, show no signs of use — no creasing in the upholstery, no wear on the armrests, and no nearby tables or lamps to suggest they were ever meant for reading.

Additionally, one section of the wall shelving sits slightly out of alignment. A faint gap and an inconsistency in the dust along the floor suggest it may not be fixed in place.

Closer inspection reveals a concealed door, leading to a hidden study.

HIDDEN STUDY IN THE LIBRARY

The library has a small hidden study with a small desk, a chair, a good reading lamp, and a smaller shelf. It is only accessible via the a secret door.

The Arbuckles do not know about it, as only Wilkins was informed about it by the architect and never got around to tell the Arbuckles about it. Later he saw no reason to do so, as the Arbuckles have not been in the library for more than two minutes. It became his private refuge.

The shelf contains a couple of mundane books, including «*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*», and these books are well-read but carefully cared for.

There is one mythos tome in the study lying on the desk — carefully aligned with it. An old book that is nevertheless in *perfect* condition. If they players open it, they see immaculate writing, clear drawings, and untarnished paper, yet it feels properly used. The writing cannot be read, but looking at it instills a sense of clarity and order. POW roll, fail and the PC wants to continue reading it. If the PC puts it down, it ends up in the same perfectly aligned position as before, whether they wanted to or not.

The study has a certain atmosphere — it is extremely or-



MANSION

derly, no dust anywhere, everything is perfectly aligned. Players make a POW roll, if they fail they keep it orderly. For example, wiping away their fingerprints from the desk if they have touched it or putting any book back exactly the way it was before. After a while, they notice that they are even breathing right — in through the nose, out through the mouth — because *it is just the right thing to do*.

There are clues that the study is only used by Wilkins, skills checks unless players specifically ask for it:

- **Library Use:** The penmanship of the notes has an astonishing regularity and the spelling is British English, not American English.
- **Spot Hidden:** There are no signs of smoking (Mr. Arbuckle always smokes cigars), and no trace of perfume (Mrs. Arbuckle always wears Chanel No. 5, which has a sharp, floral, and unmistakably expensive, slightly abstract scent). Also the study is remarkable tidy and not a single thing is out of place. Even the books are ordered by color and size.





MR. WILKINS

Mr. Wilkins is the head-butler of the Arbuckles, and for the family he serves, he is extremely protective of their pride and dignity.

However large it might be.

He has served royalty and saw it as his duty to bring that sense of propriety to the Arbuckle household. Only to discover that the Arbuckles do not grasp it and likely never will. They are familiar with the servants, socially oblivious, and show no signs of change.

It is as if they do not understand it — have no sense of rightness, of order.

When Mr. Arbuckle bought a number of exclusive private libraries, Wilkins was tasked to remove the «old and musty books». Ever a man of duty, he did so, save for one book that drew his attention. An old book, but very carefully cared for. And despite its age, it is in perfect condition.

The writing is immaculate, the drawings clear, the paper is free of creases or blotches. Yet it feels read, feels properly used.

At first he thought it was a book on etiquette, but then he realized it was about the order behind the etiquette. During many late-night evenings in a hidden study of the library, Mr. Wilkins began to know the book better. And it got to know him. It understands order, though it does not understand humans.

But the principle is clear — some things are simply right and proper.

After each day, he returns to it in his study for deeper alignment. The book did not teach him something new, it made visible what was always there — deviation, everywhere. At first he corrected it. Then he noticed that correction revealed more deviation. The loop closed. Soon, he no longer imposed order — he allowed it. And slowly but surely that order began to spread in the Arbuckle estate.

The servants have become more concerned with the proper order of things, with being more ... exact.

He can now see it clearly — the upcoming ball will be a proper affair. He will get his staff in line and ensure ordered proceedings during the evening.

Everything will be well-ordered and then it will be perfect.

And the order waiting effortlessly and unnoticed on the threshold of his mind is perfectly aligned with it.

WILKINS' FRUSTRATIONS

Wilkins wants «proper» household standards, i.e. formality, ordered structure, and a clear hierarchy.

What frustrates him are:

- **Hypocrisy:** From serving actual royalty, he now sees money pretending to be class and inconsistency pretending to be elegance.
- **Inconsistency:** One moment formal, next moment careless, undermines discipline among staff.
- **Over-Familiarity:** He insists on the use of last names, even among the staff. Commands such as «Mary, bring this here.» or «Frank, don't fuss so much.» collapses the hierarchy he's trying to maintain. Using first names in front of guests signals the household is not properly run.
- **Disrespect:** Wilkins overhears comments about the Arbuckle's being «nouveau rich» and about him specifically as «money can buy servants, but they lose their luster quickly».

He usually deals with these frustrations by correcting subtly, e.g., «Mrs. Arbuckle, perhaps Miss Turner would —», but he never openly contradicts.

Reading the tome allowed him to see more deviations, which further increased his frustrations, leading to him craving even more order.

ORDER

Something that understands order — is order — has begun to use Wilkins as a conduit. While it brings the order Wilkins craves for, it does not understand humans or their limitations. During the ball it will begin to override human order with another kind of order — devoid of human purpose.

Note that there is no anger, no drama, and no attack when it asserts itself. Only correction, repositioning, or loss of relevance. And to those observers whose perception Order has shifted, is just looks «right», «correct», or «proper».

Its strongest initial influence is on Wilkins and Mrs. Arbuckle, as well as parts of the servants. It has hardly any influence on Mr. Arbuckle — he is rarely at the mansion.

While it has entered via Wilkins, once it takes a hold in the ballroom, it is not longer bound to him. Instead, it will spread — first to the servants, then to the guests. It is less a chemical or biological spread, but more a field, influenced by people and events. The spread and



strength of its influence follows an order, but none that can be clearly determined from this world.

EFFECTS DURING THE BALL

Over the course of the ball, players feel increased social competence (CR bonus), but also a compulsion to conform to the ordering system (POW roll or they do what is «right»). That system will deviate more and more from what humans understand, has meaning for them, or can tolerate. It is over-precise etiquette with a loss of context or optimization without human constraints. Over time, it erodes autonomy until correction overrides humanity.

Note that Order's effect is a **perception shift**. The action follows naturally and feels justified, an objective rightness, a «*this is correct, therefore I act*». For example, they are not compelled to do something, it is just that «*the way they're holding the glass is obviously wrong*», so it is calmly and confidently corrected. The question of force never enters, because there isn't even a question what the right choice is. And deliberately doing what is so clearly wrong — it takes a strong mind to do so (POW).

This includes

- **Language:** Conversations become precise but empty, people correct wording and pronunciation instead of meaning. People reformulate sentences repeatedly, eliminate ambiguity, reduce meaning to structure, e.g., «*No, that is not precise. Let me restate.*», or correct pronunciation. For example, «*The very idea of it.*» (pronounced **idear** of it with an intrusive *r*), «*I can't dance.*» (pronounced with a broad *a* as **cahnt dahnce**), or «*Very interesting.*» (pronounced with a dropped *r* as **vehy int'resting**).
- **Movement:** Paths become efficient but socially wrong, people reposition others without explanation, paths repeat at different scales, people mirror each other. During the end, people are no longer recognized as obstacles. Those who do not adjust are moved — first gently, then with increasing force, as if they are objects out of place.
- **Social Structure:** Status shifts without recognizable logic and interactions terminate abruptly but «*correctly*». At intervals, the room resolves into a fixed arrangement, e.g., akin to a throne room. One person stands central, others oriented around them. No one announces it. After a moment, it dissolves and movement resumes.
- **Objects:** Aligned geometrically, but not functionally.

CORRECTIONS

The system optimizes for alignment, symmetry, and conformity, so «*irregularities*» become errors — and errors get corrected. Over the **four ball phases**, the improper behavior gets corrected with increasing pressure:

- **I:** Looks and subtle hints by the servants among each other.
- **II:** Servants start to subtly correct guests.
- **III:** Guests are guided, repositions, and redirected.
- **IV-early:** Physical force is used, e.g., a guest corrects another's position physically, too forceful, resulting in an injury. Someone is restrained because they are «*out of place*», or a person is removed from a group because the «*don't fit*».
- **IV-late:** Physical force is used — irrespective of the damage it does.

Note that there is no emotion (e.g., anger, frustration) or hostility involved. Just precise and certain correction when humans become objects in an ordering system. Violent acts are progressive, coordinated correction that become physical, with the system continuing «*correcting*» past human tolerance.

If objects are missing, servants might correct it for the *completion of a pattern* by using unconventional objects. A glass that was «*empty*» becomes filled — not for use, but because the arrangement requires it.

- **Music:** It becomes increasingly ordered without human elements, ending in an unwavering tempo and mathematically consistent rhythm. The increasing precision and consistency makes it less and less compatible with human movement. Despite its clear structure and internal logic it violates social expectation and undermines embodied flow (dance, timing, anticipation). This is not «*alien music*», it is human music that «*should work but it does not*».

The order is coherent, escalating, but misaligned. Its spread is non-linear and unpredictable for humans. Pockets can form in different parts of the room, sometimes nothing happens, then something spikes, only to reconfigure in a different part of the room. If interrupted, it starts somewhere else, sometimes faster, sometimes slower. For some it looks like social chaos (failed CR), for others there is order in it (CR), and some act as if nothing is wrong (CR + failed POW).

For the PCs, the experience shifts from «*strange but understandable*», to «*wrong but patterned*», to «*con-*



sistent but do not know what it optimizes for». Resistance is easy in phases I and II, uncomfortable in phase III, and difficult in phase IV when they become co-opted by the Order.

The effects of Order as well as what is happening during each phase is described in the **Ball Timeline**.

PHASE SHIFT: THE SPEECH

At first, Order slowly increases. However, when Mr. Arbuckle dismisses Wilkins and what he stands for publicly in his speech (**Mr. Arbuckle's Speech**), something resolves.

Arbuckle thinks he gave a generous acknowledgment. What he actually did was collapsing the symbolic boundary between master and servant, challenge the established hierarchy, and publicly signaled that Wilkins' standards are optional.

While there are polite smiles, faint nods, and controlled applause, guests realize (or are confirmed in their belief) that Arbuckle does not understand norms or cannot handle delicate situations.

The staff — excluding Wilkins — hesitate for a moment, a few are even snickering. Then they *resume service as one with increased exactness*.

Wilkins loses his composure for a moment, making a painful expression, before he becomes very still.

Starting with Wilkins and his servants, Order undergoes a phase shift and the room begins to change. Order now increases exponentially, into something more exact — and less human.

INDIFFERENT ORDER

After the speech, players need to realize that the order they experience is no longer *«correct behavior for high-society»* or *«rich people being weird»*, but a system that redefines what *«correct»* means. That horror only fully emerges if players realize they are no longer playing the same game they started with. Subtlety might not be enough.

Shortly after the speech, show the players that the room starts behaving in a way that cannot be explained socially anymore. Then let the system run.

For example:

- A guest comments on what Mr. Arbuckle said and *«the only thing that really matters is that things work ... the very idea of it.»* and then repeatedly tries to pronounce *«idea»* right (*«idear»*, intrusive r).
- An artists imitates a part of Mr. Arbuckle's speech. Servants flank him and try to compliment him out of

MR. ARBUCKLE'S SPEECH

During the end of the **Dancing & Entertainment Phase**, Mr. Arbuckle makes a speech to his guests. He is *slightly* inebriated and ... speaks from the heart. He has a glass in his hand, leans slightly forward as if addressing a boardroom, and his voice carries more than usual.

«Ladies and gentlemen — friends, partners — welcome, welcome to my home.»

«Now, I know some of you come from families that have been doing this sort of thing for ... well, longer than my factories have been standing.»

(He gives a short chuckle, expecting one back.)

«And I'll admit, when my wife and I first began hosting, we were told there are ... rules. Ways of standing, ways of speaking, ways of pouring a glass of wine so as not to offend three generations of ghosts.»

(He makes a dismissive wave of the cigar.)

«Well — no offense to the ghosts — but I've always believed a man makes his own rules. Industry doesn't wait for permission, and neither do I. This house, this evening — it's not about dust and old habits. It's about what we're building now.»

(He turns slightly, gesturing vaguely toward the staff lining the walls.)

«Of course — none of this would run at all without the people who keep it moving. And I'll say this — Frank here—»

(a broad, careless gesture toward Wilkins)

«—has been making a valiant effort to keep some of those old-world touches in place. God knows I don't always see the use for all that formality, but he's stuck with it, and I'm glad I kept him on.»

(A few scattered, uncertain laughs — someone among the staff snickers.)

«Because at the end of the day, whether you come from old names or new money, whether you deal in books or steel or votes — the only thing that really matters is that things work. That the doors open, the glasses are filled, and the business gets done.»

(He raises his glass, satisfied, unaware of the damage.)

«So — to progress. And to a fine evening, however you prefer to stand while enjoying it.»



the room. The artist raises his arms in protests. Suddenly a sharp, splintering crack cut through the music — wrong, too heavy to be glass. A man’s voice followed it, high and brief, then abruptly smothered. Several heads turned. No one moved. The orchestra did not falter. Conversation resumed as if it had only ever paused for breath. There is no hint of aggression, just quiet correction.

- A servant finishes arranging food on tray, then prevents a guest from taking a piece as it *«would disturb the arrangement»*.
- A guest tries to leave but is calmly and firmly brought back in because he did not take his proper leave.
- The music becomes impossible to follow, yet dancers continue anyway. Stopping repeatedly and resuming, determined to *«get it right»*.

The behavior continues but with an obvious mismatch with human function. *«Correct»* behavior visibly overrides common sense, empathy, and physical reality. No drama, no shouting. Just precise, certain, socially *«correct»* violation of human autonomy and meaning.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

Once order has establish itself, it becomes self-correcting and hard to end. However, there are ways to deal with it.

LEAVING

Players can try to leave but they have to do it the *proper* way — and that definition shifts and narrows quickly during the evening.

Normally, *proper* only means a brief farewell to hosts, but the later the evening, the harder it gets. For example, now tone, timing, posture, and sequence matters, until the correct behavior no longer maps cleanly. Players might feel *«I am doing this right, but it is no longer working anymore.»*

It is the keeper's choice whether they have fulfilled the now increasingly orderly etiquette. Failure means that the PCs are blocked, corrected, or redirected.

If PCs try to leave anyway, servants will try to stop them (Correction, *«Sir, you have not yet taken leave properly.»* or *«You are not yet in a position to leave.»*).

Role-play or CR rolls (without bonus dice, phase III: regular, IV-start: hard, IV-end: extreme) can be used. A POW roll on a failed CR role is necessary in phase IV. If that roll failed, the players want to do it *right* themselves and do not wish to leave. Escape become a race between their ability to perform the system and the

REMOVING WILKINS

Wilkins is a conduit, but no longer necessary once the Ball has started and Order begins to established itself. Removing him will lead to a short dip in Order, before it grows again.

In the beginning, he is ahead of the system, late in phase IV, he can become the point that prevents convergence as his view on order is too rigid. The system cannot reach a stable terminal state.

If players point out the mismatch between Wilkins and the rest of the room with its evolving norms, the guests will then remove him in an orderly fashion, so the system can stabilize, either:

- **Expulsion:** Servants walk up to him and calmly but decisively escort him outside. If that happens, players might hear him outside screaming, then sobbing. Uncharacteristically, but he was just cast out of his paradise.
- **Death:** They interrupt him, restrict his movement, then pressure increases, adjustments become forceful, and then the system continues *«correcting»* past human tolerance. He dies when the system over-applies correction until the element is no longer present.

No matter how Wilkins was removed, if the guests manage to leave the event later, they will reclassify what they did, e.g., *«Mr. Wilkins is no longer present.»*, *«Unfortunate, but inevitable.»* or *«it was the right thing to do under the circumstances»*.

His effect on Order is short-lived. Servants continue service with increased precision. The system quickly reconfigures without him and further increases order, now that this rigid point is gone.

system becoming no longer navigable. If they fail, they start to help their own containment.

As you move toward the exit, a servant steps into your path – not abruptly, but exactly where you would pass. «Sir, you have not yet taken leave.» His tone is calm. Not accusatory. Simply correct.

ESCAPING THE MANSION

PCs can try to force their way out of the mansion. POW roll is necessary (phase III: regular, IV-start: hard, IV-end: extreme). The servants will firmly and calmly attempt Correction, but not follow them once they have left the grounds.

However, they might feel something tear that was at-



tached to them (POW roll to notice) and suffer from the Residual Order.

You leave the gate of mansion behind and feel a relief as the pressure to «do the right thing». But for a split second you feel the need to stop and close the gate behind you.

Gabrielle is the only guest who can simply leave, as she is illegible to the system. Her behavior is slightly off timing, wrong tone, and socially irregular. As she doesn't follow expected patterns the system cannot easily «correct» her. However, during phase IV she is overlooked by guests and servants, who can walk over her. Once she gets physically pushed aside, she flees the mansion.

The movement of the room passes through her. Not violently — but without adjustment. She is moved aside, then no longer accounted for.

GETTING EXPELLED

The system orders everything, including who belongs and who does not. As such, if PCs manage to act in a way that prevents integration, the servants or other guests might remove them from the mansion.

Three successful POW roles are needed to be expelled (phase III: regular, IV-start: hard, IV-end: extreme).

This happens to Serafina (if present), as she is too irregular and cannot be integrated (end of III or start of IV).

Guests begin to redirect her path. At first subtly, then with certainty. A servant takes her arm — not roughly, but decisively — and leads her toward the exit. She is no longer part of the arrangement.

INTERNAL COLLAPSE

Order cannot deal with paradoxes and unresolvable states, including conflicting etiquettes that are both «correct».

If players manage to create an unsolvable problem and focus attention on it, order will oscillate between different incompatible states and enter a positive feedback loop of increasing corrections. It starts with servants hesitating, repeated adjustments, and small timing errors, then continuous repositioning or corrections, until the corrections interfere with each other. Wilkins, as main node, will start screaming as he cannot handle it. The other guests will then remove him (Wilkins Removed).

However, if the unresolvable conflict persists, the process will quickly increase again before coherence drops. The mansion apparently turns back to normal

(see Residual Order).

Some unresolvable conflicts are:

- introducing someone of lower status first: correcting breach of etiquette makes mechanism explicit, but accepting it possibly diminishes your standing
- host's breach of taste (e.g., Mr. Arbuckles speech): guests supposed to be appreciative but also arbiters of taste
- introducing people who know but must not know each other (e.g., Blanche and van Steeten): acknowledgement exposes both, ignorance creates awkward contradictions
- encountering someone after a quiet scandal (e.g., Blackmail if not exposed but PCs start gossip): normalize presence would be indifferent to norms, but distancing oneself would mean complicity in exclusion/humiliation.

These conflicts work if the PCs focus the guests attention on them (CR roll) and prevent resolution, e.g., interrupt attempts to prioritize one solution.

People with high CR and understanding of etiquette (e.g., van Steeten, Serafina, or Lord Hammersmith) can assist the players with identifying them. Players can also get a hint of this resolution (Spot Hidden), e.g., two servants give conflicting corrections and the room hesitates briefly.

ASSIMILATION

If PCs do not escape or end Order, they risk getting assimilated (repeated success on CR, failure on POW).

They become high-functioning elements of the system and help stabilize the ball. The ball continues — and they are now part of what keeps it «working». They do not leave, not because they can't, but because it would not be «correct».

Delayed release after total assimilation is possible.

SELF-SEALING LOOP

PCs might try to destabilize order, e.g., overturn tables, shout, fight, etc. However, as long as Order can be restored (no Internal Collapse), disruption never breaks ordering but accelerates it. Once it has corrected a few major disruptions (Keeper's choice), it enters a self-sealing loop by going for perfection.

As perfection can only be asymptotically approached but never reached, players get stuck in the mansion and as order increases, constraints are tightened, and they eventually get assimilated (Assimilation).

PC are continuously participating in correction, e.g. ad-



justing objects, repositioning themselves, or refining behavior, but with no endpoint.

From inside the mansion, it becomes a progressing loop removed from reality. Things change, refine, and reconfigure, while from the outside, the mansion looks empty and will be avoided as abandoned.

Delayed release after total assimilation is possible.

DISPERSAL

As Order uses people and places as vectors, dispersing the people can work. For example, starting a fire, triggering a scandal or scare that empties the room, or removing key social anchors (e.g., *both* hosts, orchestra, or lighting).

Note that Removing Wilkins, or other characters such as Mrs. Arbuckle would be a false resolution. Their influence is too small. Destroying the book does not work either — it will burn in a very orderly fashion and even the ashes lie in a perfect pile afterwards. But it was a vector, not a container.

If PCs manage to clear the mansion, Residual Order will affect the guests.

The fire spreads quickly. A few guests look up. «Fire.» one of them says. «Women and children first.» another one replies. There is no screaming and not panic, the guests slowly but orderly leave the mansion. One guest simply collapses due to the smoke, another catches fire and walks on until his body gives up.

AFTEREFFECTS

If Order is dissipated or ended, the movements desynchronize, corrections stop aligning, and people pause. No big event. Just the system fails to maintain itself.

RESIDUAL ORDER

Guests who stayed until phase IV *might* notice an increased attention to detail, discomfort with disorder, and subtle behavioral shifts (D20, Result: 1-5 no effect, 6-15 medium effect, 16-20 high effect).

If the Result is ≥ 6 , they notice deviation more easily and have a habit of correcting it. Spot Hidden +Result and Listen +Result, but only for detecting things or sounds that deviate from the expected, POW (hard for high effect) to resist correcting what is «*obviously wrong*». This «*Poirot disorder*» lasts for D10+2 weeks and then vanishes suddenly.

More generally, something didn't end at the ball, it continues, or reappears. However with no clear pattern, no

DELAYED RELEASE

AFTER TOTAL ASSIMILATION

While perfectionism cannot be achieved, the system might undergo an internal correction. For example, it detects Wilkins as a fixed point, removes him and thereby reaches a stable configuration for an instant, or it encounters a paradox and dissipates. After that happens, the mansion apparently turns back to normal (Residual Order).

The guests will have vanished for D20 weeks, which will not have gone unnoticed. Key figures of society did not appear, missed engagements, or failed to respond, so events were cancelled, decisions were delayed, and alliances were strained. Society explained it with «*extended private engagements*», «*health-related withdrawals*», «*continental travel*», or «*family matters*». Implausible considering the amount of people but it maintains the social fabric.

Meanwhile, the guests have experienced that time as duration without memory resolution. There is a sense of extended passage and being deeply absorbed in a process, but indistinct, and players recall fragments, adjustments, and positions. But not a clear timeline. Guests genuinely believe it was normal, but speak in oddly similar terms and lack specific memories, which in itself is socially noticeable.

They also notice that they do certain actions that are not that useful, e.g., giving someone a light, or cleaning their glasses, with perfectly smooth movements.

stable explanation, and no agreement on what's happening.

Newspapers begin to report of a «*heightened sensitivity to social conduct*», «*more exacting standards*», and that «*guests remained admirably composed under difficult circumstances*» that affects different settings and locations (e.g., a formal dinner, a club, and a private gathering). Perhaps only a fifth of the events this seasons, but noticeable — especially for PCs affected by Residual Order.





TIMELINE OF THE BALL

BALL TIMELINE

The ball has a character of its own and is structured in four phases:

Phase I (8:30 – 9:30): Arrival & Reception

Phase II (9:30 – 11:00): Buffet Supper

Phase III (11:00 – 02:00): Dancing & Entertainment

Phase IV (02:00 – 04:00): Late Night Unraveling

Each phase has a distinct mood and makes the storylines easier to handle. General structure of a ball with examples for food and music is in the appendix.

For the Order Effects, the effects show the end points of that phase. Wilkins and some of his servants are most affected, the Mrs. Arbuckle, then other guests.

1. ARRIVAL & RECEPTION

From 8:30 to 9:30.

ORDER

- **Players:** No effects yet.
- **Wilkins:** He spots even tiny deviations on his servants (e.g., a piece of thread coming lose from a button) and corrects them (**Listen** roll to overhear). There is no frustration or distress in his actions, just «*this is how it should be*».
- **Servants:** Slight over-control. PCs can spot over-corrections, precise adjustments, and subtle intrusions. For example, the servants straightening some other servants cuff or correcting posture without asking, and reposition objects repeatedly but calmly until they are «*right*».
- **Guests:** They act mostly normal but a tendency towards more formal behavior.
- **Music:** Music is light classical music (normal).
- **Food and Drinks:** Small finger food — high quality and perfectly decorated. Champagne, Sherry.

PLAYER ACTIONS

- **Arrival:** Between 8:30 and 9:30 pm. Late arrival is acceptable — but *too late* is rude.
- **Entrance Ritual:** Guests are greeted by a liveried footmen. Coats, cloaks, hats taken immediately. Then a butler announces their names (e.g., «*Mr. and Misses Douglas Stein*»). Guests are then formally received by the Arbuckles. Not greeting the hosts briefly upon arrival is a major faux-pas — it is socially mandatory.
- **Arrival and First Impression:** The players arrive and

REFINED SENSES

The ball offers a feast for the senses. This includes:

- **Sight:** Men in Black and White Tie, women in beautiful dresses, servants and maids in the background, the manor itself, the ballroom with the windows to the garden, the weapons wall, and the two walls with mirrors multiplying the impressions.
- **Sound:** Excellently played music, shoes on the marble floor, Champagne sparkling, cultivated voices, and fabrics rushing (mostly from dresses).
- **Touch:** The feel of their own clothes (constricting with White Tie, exposed with dresses, temperature differences where not covered), the cold glasses, the exquisite food.
- **Smell:** Subtle perfume, the aroma of the food, of the drinks.
- **Taste:** Food and drink are world-class. The food has the perfect consistency (e.g., melting in the mouth, expressing its full aroma). Drinks have the perfect temperature. If the players's mouth waters, you are doing it right.

This is the baseline of rigidity, uniformity, and control that Order will shape.

are introduced:

The men form a black-and-white field – Black Tie, White Tie – settled and uniform. The women create the color: satin, silk, chiffon catching the light with every movement. Bare shoulders, long gloves. Jewelry punctuates everything – brief flashes at the throat, at the wrist.

Movement is smooth, restrained. No one rushes. Fabric glides rather than swings. The effect is almost ritualistic – uniformity with carefully controlled variation.

As you are announced, heads turn – not abruptly, but in sequence. A few eyes linger a fraction too long, assessing. Conversations pause just enough to register you, then resume.

Up close, the uniformity begins to fracture: a collar slightly wilted, a glove adjusted twice, a smile held just a moment too long.

No one approaches you directly. Not yet.

- PCs then have to greet Mr. and Mrs. Arbuckle. Francis' perfume smells of a refined, powdery floral note



TIMELINE OF THE BALL

with a faintly artificial edge — expensive, deliberate, and lingering (CR roll: she wears Chanel No. 5). Mr. Arbuckle smells of the cigars he smokes, rich, heavy tobacco scent — earthy, leathery, and slow to fade (CR roll: H. Upmann).

- If Mrs. Arbuckle's storyline is used, Psychology (hard) roll for noticing Francis' hostility. Players can then mingle and interact with the storylines.

CR, Spot Hidden, and/or Psychology: Some people inhabit the closes and some wear them. Some people have tiny imperfections — a wilted collar, a loosened glove, or a bead missing from a dress. Social similar styles gravitate together (see Other Guests).

STORYLINES

Players should get involved into the selected storylines quickly. Start points are, for example:

- **Seduction:** A strikingly beautiful woman with blonde hair and a black evening dress, marked by an emerald brooch and pearls, looks at the PC, smiles, and walks over. She introduces herself, with a quiet voice that draws people closer, as Miss Veronica Blanche. Seems genuinely interested, extreme Psychology roll to notice that she is a *too* interested. Mrs. Arbuckle can provide openings by isolating the PC.
- **Blackmail:** Regass, a thin man, is looking at PC repeatedly, with a faint smile. He approaches the PC, and in a quiet, even and unhurried voice hints at events the PC would rather not be known. Mrs. Arbuckle can provide openings by isolating the PC.
- **Duel:** Ducante is noticeable in his crimson shirt, rigid posture, and raised chin. He speaks in a heavy french accent. He might insert himself into a conversation the PCs are having. Spot Hidden to notice The Millers close-by, watching him. Listen roll for rumors about his duels.
- **The Emerald/Kitten:** Gabrielle, a girl who is slightly underdressed for the room arrives, looking around and nervously playing with a necklace. She causes a minor scandal, e.g., thanking the servants («*Oh thank you so much, you're so kind.*»), Spot Hidden or Listening for the event and/or the ensuing gossip). She might be approached by Regass who «*talks*» with her, hoping for her either incriminating herself or her rich father. Players can intervene, if not, van Steeten will.
- **Dove and Raven:** Mrs. Winters, a well-dressed but overweight woman, approaches the male PCs with a warm smile. She greets them in a familiar tone, asks after their family, then narrows it to income. If CR <

90, she laughs and redirects her attention to someone else as if nothing had happened. Serafina stands at her side, Psychology roll to determine her position. Afterwards Serafina might approach the PCs for help with being introduced to Lord Hammersmith.

- **Invisible Help:** Watterson assist the PCs if they need something.

2. BUFFET DINNER

From 9:30 to 11:00.

ORDER

- **Players:** They get a Bonus Die for CR. They should notice «*I'm sharper.*», «*I understand the room better.*», or «*This is working.*». Obvious attribution is they are getting used to the ball, when perhaps the ball is getting used to them.
- **Wilkins:** Starts to deliberately correct even the slightest infractions of his servants, e.g., slightly slouching posture or position of arms and hands. Points out etiquette issues with guests («*Perhaps Sir would like to ...*»).
- **Servants:** Highly exacting service. Follow Wilkins in starting to point out slight etiquette issues of the guests. Discretely but unmistakably.
- **Guests:** Begin correcting others, interrupting what they said for precision. Start to enforce form over meaning (CR roll to notice). For example, a guest repeats the same phrase multiple times until it is «*perfectly formed*» while ignoring the conversation context.
- **Music:** Normally unobtrusive but warmer classical music. However, its tempo becomes slightly too steady (mechanical), the phrasing too precise with no expressive variation — «*this is very precise*» (Listen roll). It feels controlled and slightly stiff. Use competition ballroom recordings or modern «*dance sport*» mixes (very strict tempo) that are already optimized for correctness over feeling.
- **Food and Drinks:** Cold tables, hot tables, bread, desserts. Wine, Champagne, Punch Bowls. The food is perfectly arranged, bread pieces are all the same size, temperature of the hot food is exactly the same and *stays the same* for the whole phase.

STORYLINES

- **Seduction:** Blanche tries to isolate MC and cause a scandal by being «*surprised*» by Francis (or her confidante if The Emerald is in play and she wants to



TIMELINE OF THE BALL

- pressure the MC).
- **Blackmail:** Regass mentioned that he «*went to considerable expenses to protect*» the PC. Shows copy of evidence if needed. Resolution gets determined.
- **Duel:** Ducante continues to gather attention. Might provoke a male PC. **Spot Hidden** to notice The Millers close-by.
- **The Emerald/Kitten:** If PCs rescued Gabrielle from Regass, van Steeten might comment on it and suggest taking Gabrielle under her wing. Also, she might use PCs or Gabrielle to get her Emerald back, e.g., by directing their attention to it and mentioning that she had a similar stone. Players might then realized that it is not a normal stone (POW roll) and Gabrielle will notice the hostility between Blanche and van Steeten.
- **Dove and Raven:** Serafina asks PCs for help in «*getting properly introduced*» to Lord Hammersmith and dancing with him later.
- **Invisible Help:** Watterson continues to assist the PCs if they need something.

3. DANCE & ENTERTAINMENT

From 11:00 to 02:00.

ORDER

Corrections begin to override consent, context, and purpose. People are guided, repositions, and redirected. For example, someone repositions a guest physically or conversation stops because phrasing is «*incorrect*». People begin repositioning objects (glasses, cutlery, chairs) into increasingly rigid alignments, interrupting social flow.

- **Players:** Player get two **Bonus Dice** on CR but POW roll required, otherwise the player does what is «*right*». They «*feel pressure to behave a certain way, because it is just <correct>*». **Dancing** rolls receive a **Bonus Die**.
- **Wilkins:** Standing at the side of the ballroom, he becomes very still. The servants move around him, following his eye movements where to intervene (**Spot Hidden**). At the end of the phase, the speech by Mr. Arbuckle affects him deeply — for a little moment, he loses control over his expressions. Then he becomes still again as Order undergoes a phase shift. He begins to stabilize the patterns around him.
- **Servants:** Servants are more obtrusive in maintaining standards, for example, a servant keeps adjusting a guest's posture physically, beyond what is socially acceptable.

- **Guests:** Local «*order pockets*» emerge in which people speak more precisely, movements become more controlled, and small corrections propagate. Guests correct each other for slight lapses.
- **Music:** Waltz, Foxtrot, and Charleston in the side-room in the later part of this phase. Early, the classical Waltz (e.g., «*Blue Danube*», «*Waltz of the Flowers*») are in 3/4 time, with a strong predictable pattern that supports dancing. Foxtrot has a smooth, flowing rhythm designed for continuous movement. However, the music quickly begins to become *too* precise. Accents fall in the wrong places, phrases end one beat too early or late, melody resolves — but not where expected. Dancers hesitate, recover, and adjust. A few confused expressions but mostly they see it as right behavior, they are just a step behind. PC find the dances «*hard to follow*».
- **Food and Drinks:** Small sandwiches. Champagne, Sherry, Coffee. The sandwiches are all exactly the same. The coffee is uniformly the same hot temperature and does not cool down. The champagne is way too cold and stays this way.

STORYLINES

- **Seduction:** Last chance for Blanche to succeed or she gracefully abandons the attempt.
- **Blackmail:** Unless he got promise of regular payments, Regass releases the photos at the ball (e.g., to FC's partner while other guests are close). Reaction to it determines the standing of the PCs.
- **Duel:** Ducante challenges MC to «*settle things as gentlemen*», e.g., due to succeeded **Seduction**, Mrs. Arbuckles insinuation, or simply because he dislikes him. Duel plays out fully in this phase. Determines standing of PCs.
- **Mrs. Arbuckle:** If her storyline is used, she will talk to FC once **Seduction**, **Blackmail**, and/or **Duel** are concluded.
- **Framing the Narrative:** If PCs got involved in a scandal, she will approach and get their point of view. Possibility to limit the impact.
- **The Emerald/Kitten:** Last chance of the PCs to secure the Emerald for van Steeten, Blanche, or themselves. Depending on interactions, Gabrielle stays with van Steeten (and the PCs), Blanche, or is removed from the ball.
- **Dove and Raven:** Social navigation and trickery needed to allow Serafina and Lord Hammersmith to dance despite Lady Winters' attempt to prevent it.



TIMELINE OF THE BALL

Determines outcome of this storyline — one uninterrupted dance is enough to seal it.

- **Invisible Help:** Watterson continues to assist the PCs if they need something. If the Duel happened and PCs won, the Millers will try to intimidate her.

4. LATE-NIGHT UNRAVELING

From 02:00 to 04:00.

ORDER

The ordering principle detaches from human meaning — order increases, sense of meaning decreases. People become objects to be rearranged. Physical force is used, e.g., a guest corrects another's position physically, too forceful, resulting in an injury. Someone is restrained because they are *«out of place»*, or a person is removed from a group because they *«don't fit»*. Later parts physical force is used — irrespective of the damage it does. Space and time become unreliable.

- **Players:** Get **Two Bonus Dice** on CR but **hard POW** roll required or they do what is *«right»*. During end phase also **one penalty die** on **hard POW** rolls. Now they feel *«I am losing freedom of action»*. **Dancing** receives a **penalty die** (and no bonus die anymore) as the music is ordered but off.
- **Wilkins:** Stops correcting and becomes very still. He is internally *«resolved»* as the system is now *«correcting itself»*. In his eyes, everything is *perfect*.
- **Servants:** Prevent guests from leaving unless they have *«properly»* said their goodbyes to the Arbuckles.
- **Guests:** Conversations collapse into exact phrasing with guests repeating the same sentence over and over again, correcting each other on wording, while meaning gets lost. Most of them act as if nothing out of the ordinary is happening or misclassify it. For example, *«Mr. Walton was always a bit off.»* when they notice he used a finger to complete a pattern.
- **Music:** Normally Jazz music, but stuck on Waltz, Foxtrot and Charleston. The phrasing begins to shift — accents fall in unexpected places, and the flow no longer supports movement. Soon, the music remains internally consistent and perfectly structured, but no longer aligns with the dancers. It is exact, structured, and unusable. Players might think *«this is correct, but I cannot move to it anymore»*. Music that fits is *«La Valse»* by Maurice Ravel or Erik Satie (simple, detached, and *«too clean»*). In the later part, the music continues to play even if the musicians are no longer playing.

- **Food and Drinks:** Heavier, restorative food. Sherry, Coffee. Everything is perfectly placed and nobody takes anything because then it would no longer be *«correct»*.

STORYLINES

The other storylines should be concluded very early at the beginning of this phase. Otherwise Order will override the outcomes.

The characters reactions to increasing order:

- **Seduction:** Blanche notices quickly that something is wrong, looks at the PCs, then tries to leave.
- **Blackmail:** Excuses himself and leaves immediately after Mr. Arbuckles speech.
- **Duel:** Gets his pistols and cleans them. If he won or lost the duel, he then challenges other guests to a duel. They repeat firing in the ballroom until they *«get it right»*. If he was exposed, he puts a gun to his head and kills himself.
- **Mrs. Arbuckle:** She looks around, increasingly confused, has to sit down. She *«sees»* the shifting rules, but does not know how to react. After a while, she stands up and acts as perfect — non-manipulative — hostess with her husband.
- **Framing the Narrative:** Sterling increases the Order whether she is.
- **The Emerald/Kitten:** Van Steeten initially tries to maintain the order socially, then gets fully assimilated. Gabrielle stands apart, then gets ignored and people try to walk through her. Once she is hurt she flees.
- **Dove and Raven:** Lord Hammersmith notices that something is off and tries to maintain order — and becomes a part of it quickly. If he and Serafina danced, he will ask for her hand in marriage. When Serafina gets expelled from the ball, he assists in it *«because it is right»*, and then follows her, also *«because it is right»*.
- **Invisible Help:** Watterson assists others in showing the *«proper»* behavior.

AFTER THE BALL

Depending on the outcomes of Mr. Wilkins storyline the consequences of the ball take hold.

Newspapers mention the event (especially if Miss Sterling survived, see *Aftermath*).



TIMELINE OF THE BALL

	8:30–9:30 I. ARRIVAL & RECEPTION	9:30–11:00 II. BUFFET SUPPER
	<p>Music: Classical (light). Food: Small finger food. Drinks: Champagne, Sherry. Introductions (announced to host). Social positioning (rumors, light conversations).</p>	<p>Music: Classical (unobtrusive but warmer). Food: Cold table, hot table, bread, desserts. Drinks: Wine, Champagne, Punch Bowls. Guests circulate and mingle. Best opportunity for gossip.</p>
MR. WILKINS	<p>Players: Introduced, meet Arbuckles (might notice Francis' hostility). Dismissive rumors about the Arbuckles (new money).</p> <p>Wilkins' correcting a servant, over-control.</p>	<p>Players: Can get gossip about the characters. Get Bonus Die for CR.</p> <p>Wilkins' control intensifies, corrects servants for small details. Service becomes very ordered.</p>
MRS. ARBUCKLE	<p>Mrs. Arbuckle: Tries to separate FP and MP to give openings for Blanche/Regass.</p> <p>Seduction: Blanche approaches MP after being announced. Seduction begins.</p> <p>Blackmail: Regass approaches FP, starts «acquisition».</p> <p>Duel: Rumors about Ducante's miraculous survivals.</p>	<p>Seduction: Blanche tries to seduce MP before dancing starts, create compromising situation.</p> <p>Blackmail: Regass makes his move, shows photos if needed, asks for regular payments, threatens to reveal them.</p> <p>Duel: Ducante boasting about his skills and his superiority. The Millers flank him.</p>
PERIPHERAL	<p>The Emerald/Kitten: Gabrielle causes first scandal, Regass might approach her, van Steeten might take her under her wing.</p> <p>Dove and Raven: Male players get assessed by Lady Winters (wants ≥ 90 CR). Serafina composed but not happy.</p> <p>Invisible Help: Watterson offers assistance (in role as maid) if needed and she can remain unseen.</p>	<p>The Emerald/Kitten: Van Steeten might use Gabrielle and/or PCs to get her Emerald back.</p> <p>Dove and Raven: Serafina and Hammersmith see each other. Serafina asks players to facilitate the introduction.</p> <p>Framing the Narrative: Sterling might talk to players, allows them to assess Sterlings value for the evening – and especially beyond.</p>



TIMELINE OF THE BALL

11-02: III. DANCE & ENTERTAINMENT		02-04: IV. LATE-NIGHT UNRAVELING	
<p>Music: Dance (Live orchestra: Waltz, Foxtrot, Charleston in side-room). Food (secondary): Small sandwiches. Drinks: Champagne, Sherry, Coffee. Guests dance with each other. Social escalation.</p>		<p>Music: Jazz. Food: Heavier, restorative. Drinks: Champagne, Sherry, Coffee. Consequences hit. Order manifests itself.</p>	
MR. WILKINS	<p>Players: Other Storylines should focus most of the attention. Two Bonus Dice on CR but POW roll of player do what is «right». Bonus die on Dancing.</p>	<p>Players: Two Bonus Dice on CR but hard POW roll of player do what is «right». During end phase also one penalty die on hard POW rolls. Penalty die on Dancing.</p>	<p>Players: Deal with the Aftermath.</p>
	<p>Wilkins even more controlled. Service perfect and music becomes very ordered.</p>	<p>Order establishes itself. State Shift Increases in dominance. Music follows another order.</p>	<p>Mr. Arbuckle accidentally but publicly humiliates Wilkins in a speech.</p>
<p>Resolve Mrs. Arbuckle and Peripheral Storylines.</p>			
MRS. ARBUCKLE	<p>Mrs. Arbuckle: Continues to support Blanche and Regass. If Seduction fails she incites Ducante.</p>	<p>Mrs. Arbuckle: Talks to FP about evening.</p>	
	<p>Seduction: Last chance to seduce MP.</p> <p>Duel: Ducante tries to provoke MP to a duel.</p>	<p>Duel: Depending on outcome and whether Millers were stopped, Ducante will either act like a peacock or get drunk.</p>	
	<p>Seduction: Depending on outcome Blanche will either be noticeably present or subdued.</p>		
	<p>Blackmail: Unless promise of regular payment, material leaks at the ball.</p>	<p>Blackmail: Depending on outcome, Regass will either look self-satisfied or move to the background.</p>	
PERIPHERAL	<p>The Emerald/Kitten: Gabrielle might be used to get the Emerald and be exposed to Blanche. Players can assist either party. Determines position of Emerald and whether Gabrielle is still at the ball.</p>		
	<p>Dove and Raven: Mrs. Winters tries to keep Serafina and Lord Hammersmith separated. Players can intervene — one uninterrupted dance between the two is enough. Determines their relationship.</p>		
	<p>Framing the Narrative: Sterling might question players about Seduction, Blackmail (if exposed), or Duel.</p>		<p>Framing the Narrative: Sterling might talk to players in the aftermath.</p>
<p>Invisible Help: Watterson can assist.</p>	<p>Invisible Help: If she has assisted, Watterson threatened by the Millers. If successful, she is no longer available.</p>		





Mrs. Francis Arbuckle is a deeply unhappy woman. She has no children and her husband is widely suspected of having affairs (CR (hard) roll; rumors only, no proof). A divorce would leave her with little — most of the wealth would remain with Mr. Arbuckle, and her social position would collapse. Divorce is scandal; proceedings are exposure.

She can neither leave nor confront. The situation does not change, and cannot be made to change.

Over the past weeks, a single thought has taken hold. It did not arrive suddenly, nor does it leave. It returns, more clearly each time.

She has taken to drinking more frequently than before — nothing excessive, nothing remarked upon. A glass of Gin & Tonic is always near. She prefers it drier than most and prepares it herself, as the staff never quite seem to get the balance right. It makes the thought easier to return to, and harder to dismiss.

Her life, she has come to believe, should have been different.

Before her marriage, both she and the female character (FC) were attached to the same man. He chose FC — whether for youth, charm, or something less definable. In Francis' mind, the choice was not inevitable, but improper. FC was not better suited — only less constrained.

And she did not even keep him.

Hearing of FC's later adventures has not diminished this impression. That FC now appears happily married makes it intolerable. That life — whatever it is — should have been hers.

So Francis has decided to correct the imbalance.

She has arranged for FC and her partner to attend the ball. Blanche has been given to understand that a discreet complication involving FC's male partner would be... useful (Seduction). Blanche, recently engaged to a French aristocrat with a reputation for volatility (Duel), requires little encouragement. Mr. Regass will also be in attendance. He has a reputation for making certain situations... expensive (Blackmail).

The rest, Francis expects, will follow.

That FC may barely remember the earlier attachment (INT roll to recall) does not enter into her thinking. She does not consider this revenge — just an orderly correction.

THE SOCIAL FORCE

Francis Arbuckle provides a unifying motive behind the Seduction, Duel, and (partly) Blackmail events. She does not act directly, but creates conditions in which others act in ways that produce social consequences.

Keepers can easily replace Francis with another character, e.g., one from a previous scenario, if that character can fulfill the same role.

The replacement should:

- have a personal grievance or unresolved tension with the player characters,
- be unable or unwilling to act directly,
- operate through implication, suggestion, and social pressure, and
- benefit from creating situations rather than resolving them.

The exact motivation may vary (envy, resentment, moral judgment, ambition), but the function remains the same — to create a situation in which the player characters are socially tested, and to allow others to act in ways that make those tests consequential.

APPROACH

Francis will monitor MP and FP to give Blanche (Seduction) and Regass (Blackmail) openings, e.g., separating the two. However, always with plausible deniability. She will also manipulate Ducante to start the Duel if the Seduction failed — if it succeeded Ducante will not need the impetus to start it.

INFLUENCING FACTORS

Several people might notice what Francis is doing and subtle support or hinder the players.

- **Gabrielle:** Astute in observation, she might notice that Francis does not really like the PCs. She might also detect — but not fully understand — the intentions of Blanche.
- **van Steeten:** She has no love for social games and might suspect what Francis is doing, especially if she has taken Gabrielle under her wing (The Kitten). She might provide a subtle interpretation of the situation. She might become an ally if they have gained her trust and then assist her with The Emerald.
- **Sterling:** She can make missteps worse by amplifying them. PCs might persuade her to write a different ver-



sion of the events (Narrative Control).

- **Lord Hammersmith:** While he will not engage in «silly women's games», he is a good reader of character. If the players have gained his trust, he might lend support during the Duel.
- **Watterson:** She has observed Francis' behavior and is concerned about it, e.g., the drinking and hearing her talk to herself. She might notice what is happening once the players arrive and lend Invisible Help.
- **The Millers:** As thick as they are, they might notice the hidden dislike of the hostess to the PCs. Always the parasites attracted the power, they might lend some support. This includes intimidating Watterson (Invisible Help).

POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

Francis does not consider herself vindictive. She believes she is correcting something that should never have been allowed to stand.

FRANCIS «SUCCEEDS»

This happens if at least one of the Seduction, Blackmail, and Duel events results in reputational damage for the players.

Francis will then try to place her narrative onto FC by seeking a private conversation. She presents herself as concerned, offering perspective rather than judgment — soft voice, no visible anger, measured composure.

Example

1. «*I do hope you're quite all right. It has been... an unusual evening.*» (concern)
2. «*These things have a way of lingering, even when one prefers to treat them lightly.*» (it will matter)
3. «*One never quite knows how such moments are... received.*» (points to social interpretation)
4. «*You have always been rather fortunate in how things resolve themselves.*» (admiration masking resentment)
5. «*Some things have a way of returning, even when one imagines them long concluded.*» (alluding to the past)

She will not accuse, name the man both were interested in, or state intent. Instead, she observes FC's reaction.

- If FC engages, she feels confirmed.
- If FC remains composed and dismisses it, she registers the attempt as a failure.

Even if she «wins», it does not satisfy her. The out-

come confirms her belief — but changes nothing. The question remains, unanswerable — «*Why is she still where she is?*» So the result is not relief, but hardening. She becomes quieter, colder, more fixed. The situation does not resolve — only deepens.

TAKING AWAY FRANCIS' «SUCCESS»

Even if one or more events succeed, FC can still prevent them from «sticking».

FC must remain within the social framework while altering the meaning of what occurred. For example:

- «*These things tend to resolve themselves.*»
- «*I don't imagine this will prove... significant.*»

This denies weight without rejecting the system.

FC may also invert the situation by remarking — indirectly — that Francis seems unusually certain of its importance (e.g., «*You seem very sure it will matter.*»).

If done without accusation, this recasts Francis as invested rather than merely concerned. She will feel briefly exposed and experience the outcome as a failure.

What does not work is rejecting the system outright, e.g., «*This does not define me.*» Meaning is socially assigned. A personal claim does not override it. Such a response signals distance from the system, not control within it — and Francis will still consider this a success.

PLAYERS SUCCEED

This happens if the players successfully navigate all three events (Seduction, Blackmail, and Duel).

Francis' plan fails — and with it, the assumption that things would correct themselves if properly exposed.

This reaction is strongest if FC and MC remain composed. If nothing «sticks», and especially if they appear more stable than before, the contrast becomes difficult for Francis to ignore.

She may look at FC with a brief, almost uncertain expression — as if something does not align.

When she speaks, her tone remains controlled, but sharper than before:

«*You do seem remarkably fortunate in how these things resolve themselves.*»

«*Some people always seem to land well, no matter what they do.*»

«*It must be very convenient not to have to remember.*»

This is the closest she comes to losing control.





SEDUCTION

Mrs. Veronica Blanche wants to create a scandal with a male character (MC, FC's partner), as favor to Francis (Mrs. Arbuckle). She expects later repayment in the form of societal access.

Her aim is to isolate MC, create ambiguity, and engineer a compromising situation, not necessarily an explicit act. She does not need success — she needs appearance. One moment that can be interpreted in only one *socially damaging* way. The system doesn't ask: «*Did it happen?*» It asks: «*Can we treat it as if it happened?*»

However, the appearance still has to be more than standing together talking, dancing closely (normal), or casual flirtation. These don't produce a stable rumor.

Strong enough

- **Isolation & timing:** MC and Blanche alone in the garden, side room, or terrace and they are noticed entering or leaving together. This creates «*Why were they alone?*».
- **Interrupted intimacy (strongest option):** Someone (ideally Francis or a proxy) «*discovers*» them standing too close, Blanche adjusting her dress/glove, and MC visibly unsettled. Nothing explicit — but the frame is clear.
- **Overheard fragment (if crafted carefully):** Something like: Blanche (softly): «*You shouldn't have...*» or MC: «*This isn't the place...*» Heard without context. This only works if it fits what observers already suspect.
- **Physical trace (subtle but powerful):** A misplaced glove, disturbed clothing, or slightly disheveled appearance. Again not proof but *confirmation of suspicion*. She can create these traces, e.g., slight adjustment of dress or glove, closer than appropriate distance, and breath slightly altered. Then, a crucial line: «*You shouldn't* —» which implies action without stating anything.

The role of Witnesses: One person seeing something is weak. Two or three people sharing impressions is enough. So Blanche doesn't just create the moment — she ensures it is observed.

APPROACH

Blanche is socially highly experienced, so the attempt is gradual, plausibly deniable, and socially dangerous. She is not overtly crude or sexual, and she hints more than she shows. Done well, the player character will think her an innocent and might even try to protect *her* reputation.

She acts early when MC was introduced at the ball and can be isolated. She continues when MC reacts to her advances. She aborts when she confronts resistance, risks losing ambiguity, or might endanger her own reputation.

STEP 1: SAFE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Light flirtation, playful tone, amused, slightly personal and socially acceptable. The signal is that this could go somewhere — but isn't dangerous yet. The goal is to mark MC as different and create a small private bubble inside a public space.

Examples

- «*You look as though you'd rather be anywhere else.*»
- «*No, don't deny it — people who belong here never look quite so... attentive.*»
- «*You dance, don't you? Or do you only watch and judge the rest of us?*»

Reactions to Resistance

- «*Another time then.*»

STEP 2: TESTING BOUNDARIES

Tone becomes playful, probing, slightly closer. The goal is to introduce ambiguity and test how easily MC deviates.

Examples

- «*You're careful. I like that. Most men here are not.*»
- «*Tell me — do you always behave exactly as expected of you? ... Or only when someone is watching?*» (brief pause, slight smile)

STEP 3: ISOLATION ATTEMPT

Tone is casual and dismissing the room. She likes to go for the «*confidante turn*» by genuinely (high psychology) understanding the MC and what he desires (e.g., respect, recognition), recognizing his skills, or that he «*understands her*».

If MP goes for it, it escalates, if he refuses, Blanche adapts.

Examples

- «*These people talk endlessly and say nothing. At least you look like you notice things.*»
- «*You know how things work. Would you take a look at this for me?*» or «*I can't get this clasp to sit right — would you take a look?*»
- «*You dance well — show me properly?*»



SEDUCTION

- «It's unbearably loud here.»
- «I find these events... exhausting. Don't you?»
- «I seem to have lost my glove/fan/bracelet, maybe it is on the terrace. Would you be so kind?»

Reactions to Resistance

- «Oh, don't be so serious. It's only a few steps.»
- (soft laugh) «Very well. You are either very wise... or very dull.»

STEP 4: PRIVATE POSITIONING

Once isolated — even partially — tone shifts slightly. The trap gets set.

- «Better. One can almost think here.»
- «You see? No witnesses. You can relax.» (she steps just slightly closer — not overt) «Or does that make it worse?»

STEP 5: AMBIGUITY CONSTRUCTION

This is where she creates the moment. The tone is quieter, suggestive but not explicit.

Examples

- «You shouldn't have come.» (beat) «Or perhaps you should have done so sooner.»
- Letting him fix her clasp and saying «You're very precise.» (proximity and focus on her reads as intimacy)

Reactions

- If he steps back: «Oh... you are careful.»
- If he doesn't: (softly) «That's dangerous.»

STEP 6: DISCOVERY

Francis watches for the moment when Blanche has created enough ambiguity. She needs timing, framing, and tone. She can «discover» them, react just enough, and then withdraw. That signals to others: «Something improper occurred.» After that, the room does the rest.

When someone arrives (Francis or proxy), Blanche reacts with controlled impropriety, not panic. «Oh —» (small step back, composed but not fully) «I didn't realize we were missed.» Or, slightly stronger version: «I assure you, it was nothing —» (which implies something).

Francis says very little — but precisely. At discovery: «My dear... I had wondered where you had gone.» (looks between them briefly) «Do come back. People will talk.» That line alone confirms impropriety without accusation.

STEP 7: AFTERMATH POSITIONING

If questioned or watched later, Blanche cements the (wrong?) impression, e.g., «I'm sure it was a misunderstanding.», «He seemed... quite certain of himself.», or «I would prefer not to make a scene.»

This avoids accusation, implies impropriety, and preserves her reputation.

RESISTANCE

Seduction is possible but not inevitable. MC can refuse isolation, insist on public spaces, bring someone along, or disengage early. If he avoids all compromising setups then Blanche cannot force the outcome cleanly.

- **Calm, Controlled Rejection:** «This is not a good idea.», «We should return.», «You're mistaken.» Blanche disengages gracefully (e.g., «Then let us not be mistaken.»), preserving ambiguity, but might try again.
- **Intervention:** By another PC, van Steeten, even Gabrielle or Lord Hammersmith. For example, «There you are — I've been looking for you.» and bringing MC back into the public space. Blanche recalibrates.
- **Rescue during Isolation:** Works when MC and Blanche are close, but not yet «compromising» and when the rescue normalizes: «Ah — there you are. I was just about to steal you.» Light tone, no accusation, and immediate reintegration. Ambiguity dies and Blanche cannot weaponize it. A confrontation such as «What is going on here?» leads to a win for Blanche. She retreats elegantly and observers get a narrative, because the would-be rescuer brought it into the scene. Blanche still wins indirectly.

Blanche will react to resistance by protecting herself and leave ambiguity intact. For example, «Oh, don't be so serious — I was only teasing.»

DEFENSES IF DISCOVERED

If the Seduction succeeded, damage can only be contained. Defense is difficult, because every line Blanche uses avoids explicit claims, creates interpretive pressure, and lets others complete the story.

What Fails as Defense

- **Protest:** Because there's nothing concrete to deny. So MC appears defensive and overly reactive, which reads as confirmation.
- **Nothing happened:** Of course, MC would say that.

Will not be believed.

What Might Succeed

- **Calm Reframe:** Neither protesting nor blaming, but shifting the frame so the situation gets another explanation. For example, «*Miss Blanche seems to have misunderstood something.*». Requires an extreme CR success, as MC is up against a capable social actor, the system, and the hostess.

INFLUENCING FACTORS

- **Lack of Fidelity of MC:** Blanche is a strikingly beautiful and charming woman. MC might just go for her and Blanche might be surprised how easy it was and instead need to stop him at the right moment.
- **Context Blindness of MC:** Depending on the background (CR roll), MC might not recognize the social danger he is in. Thinking that «*nothing is happening, therefore nothing is wrong*» is precisely false in this environment. Blanche can play on his natural behavior in a context where that behavior is incriminating, by keeping him comfortable while placing him in the wrong frame. E.g., if MC has a high mechanical skill to ask him to fix something or to ask MC to demonstrate an *ostensibly harmless* competence in private.
- **Francis:** She will do her best to give Blanche repeated openings to approach MC without FC present. She can find legitimate reasons, e.g., introducing FC to other guests or asking her to help her with something, to keep FC busy for a while. However, she also wants to be the one who «*discovers*» the impropriety, so there is a careful balance.
- **Regass:** The blackmail attempt by Regass might shake FC or MC, making Blanche's attempt easier by him occupying FC. Blanche can even use her knowledge of Regass to get MC to talk to her in private («*Yes, I know him, but we shouldn't talk about him in public. Come with me, I know a spot.*»).
- **Van Steeten:** She can warn the player about Blanche, given that she has experience with her («*Miss Blanche is... interesting.*» followed by «*One must be careful with things that are easily acquired.*»). As she is hostile to Blanche, she might even interfere in a seduction attempt («*Come, my dear, you must meet Mrs.—*»). However, she will never accuse, confront, or humiliate Blanche publicly, as that would create instability and reflect poorly on herself.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

The resolution affects how the guests will interact with FC and MC.

CREDIBLE OR ACTUAL SCANDAL

Whether MC fell for her or Blanche just made it appear this way, MC is ostracized, FC is humiliated. She receives looks, but not accusations. No one says it directly — but everyone acts accordingly. Relationship FC and MC is likely damaged.

Blanche becomes *temporarily* untouchable. As she's not married but socially skilled, the default interpretation becomes «*She was compromised / led into something / nearly caught*», but also «*not at fault*». She signals surprise, slight embarrassment, and controlled withdrawal. That allows others to conclude that «*He behaved improperly.*». Long-term effect on Blanche is that some distrust increases, but also mystique, danger and attraction. She becomes more interesting, not ruined. And she will call in a favor from Francis in the future.

Ducante will perceive the scandal as a slight on his and his fiancée's honor and start the «*Duel*».

AVOIDED SCANDAL

If Blanche's attempt failed, she protects herself socially, possibly by withdrawing for a while. However, Mrs. Ar buckle will manipulate Ducante into starting the «*Duel*» by implying to him that something did happen.





Regass, a money-lender and blackmailer, wants to acquire a new client, a player character. FC makes a good target, as it can be used to separate her from MC, but any character works.

He wants leverage, not immediate payment. He also *does not want to expose people*. That would destroy the value of the blackmail material and it creates unpredictable fallout. He prefers sustained, controlled pressure, so he wants an agreement of regular *«modest»* payments (reduced CR).

APPROACH

Regass approaches his target as early as possible, e.g., shortly after the person was introduced at the ball.

He keeps the originals in a hidden room in the office of his mansion. If he *«starts a business relationship»* with a new client, he brings copies of it with him. If needed, he will produce them from a hidden compartment on the inside of his car. However, these are copies only. Finding the copies in the car takes a hard **Spot Hidden**, while finding the hidden room an extreme **Spot Hidden**.

ESCALATION

He acts when he sees that his target is isolated. He continues when he believes he can win. He aborts when he is threatened to be exposed. In that case, he will de-escalate by minimizing presence, avoiding confrontation, and waiting for the situation to settle.

His approach to the PC (here FC as example) *in private conversations* is:

1. Hint at FC that he has something on her by mentioning something that hints at it (e.g., compromising nude photos of FC taken in Paris: he will mention that Paris is a beautiful city for private photos and the name of the photographer).
2. After letting that fester for an hour or so, he then states that he took it upon himself at great personal cost to prevent some private photos from the photographers collection from public circulation.
3. If FC does not ask how she could repay him, he will mention that it may be possible that he might not protect the photos in the future. They might even circulate at the ball.
4. He will always maintain deniability, but if she either plays dumb or refuses to pay, he will make sure that material gets distributed. For example, the MC gets an envelope at the ball — e.g., via a servant who received it from some unknown person at the door.

INCRIMINATING MATERIAL ON PCS

Regass needs incriminating material on the PCs. The default that is used here as example are compromising photos of a FC's time in Paris. She posed nude for a photographer, who kept a copy and later sold it to Regass. Tame by today's standards, but socially devastating in 1920s.

Alternatives

- **More Indiscrete Photos:** Showing her nude in a *private* context — no longer artistic — or with another man, especially a married man, or even worse, another woman. Reversed for male blackmail victims.
- **Proof of Criminal Activity:** Actual crimes committed during past scenarios (*«the chickens come home to roost»*). If one or more investigators got away with something — perhaps it is time they learn that actions can have delayed consequences.

Regass prefers payments, but an occasional scandal keeps his other clients in line. He sees it as the *«an unfortunate costs of doing business»*.

RESISTANCE

PCs can attempt to avoid Regass, but he has the uncanny ability to appear when the person is alone. Both Blanche (by distracting another character) and Francis assist him indirectly.

The best that the PCs can achieve is delaying the blackmail until after the ball, though that might lead Regass to exposing the material to make an example.

DEFENSE AFTER EXPOSURE

If the material gets exposed during the ball, the PC is usually shunned. The suggestion is to leave quietly with damaged — but not destroyed — reputation and going for later recovery. However, defense is possible depending on the material — here assuming indiscreet photos.

FCS REACTION

Socially competent characters at the ball — e.g., van Steeten or Serafina — might assist the PCs here.

What does Not Work

- **Justification:** Explaining the photos, apologizing, or showing embarrassment gives them additional leverage.
- **Aggressive Rejection:** For example, *«You are all*

hypocrites.» It would lead to immediate, total isolation, no allies, and fast removal from the event. Francis would say «*Perhaps you would prefer to retire for the evening.*» Socially mandatory and framed as concern, not expulsion. Not leaving would be a second, larger breach. Staying would make her socially radioactive — extreme social pressure without direct confrontation. For example, people disengage, avoid eye contact, and reposition physically.

What might Work

«*Working*» means that the room does not unify against FC. That is a win in this environment.

- **Controlled Defiance:** Don't defend. Don't explain. Advance. If she tries to justify herself, she loses the advantage. She should act as if nothing meaningful has happened — and something else is now more interesting. For example, «*One forgets how industrious some people are in preserving other people's pasts.*» This acknowledges the event, reframes the exposure as distasteful behavior, and denies it emotional weight. The room expects shame, retreat, and emotional disruption. A calm, articulate, and slightly amused reaction creates doubt, hesitation, and space. And in that space narratives compete instead of settling. Requires a hard CR, normal if allies support FC. For example, van Steeten and/or Lord Hammersmith continuing to converse with FC. That can create the permission structure to ignore the scandal that high society needs.
- **Counterattack:** For example, «*Yes — and I assume I'm not the only one Mr. Regass has taken such an interest in.*» Shifts focus from *her past* to *his behavior*, implies that others in the room are also vulnerable, and creates immediate discomfort among the guests. High society fears exposure more than impropriety. Can be further escalated, e.g., «*I would be very interested to know how many present have received similar ... attention.*» or «*I wonder how such materials are obtained — and how securely they are kept.*» (fear of leakage, being next). Regass will state «*I have no idea what you are implying.*» but it is enough to make him socially dangerous to engage with. Once it's plausible that «*Regass has something on multiple people here*» then no one wants him fully exposed (chaos, where does the blackmail material end up?), but no one wants him fully trusted also, so everyone becomes cautious. Requires successful CR, FP looks «*improper*» on a fail, hysteric on a fumble.

COMPROMISED GUESTS

Regass has material on many guests at the party:

- **Arbuckle:** Proof of financial irregularities and illicit dealings in his business practices. Exposure would mean serious, but not devastating, reputation damage.
- **Francis:** Correspondence revealing her social manipulations and her increased drinking. Exposure would hurt her socially, but not totally.
- **Ducante:** His entire identity is built on reputation which Regass can destroy with correspondence about prior «*incidents*» in France and proof that he has no aristocratic background. Exposure would collapse his pride instantly and he would become socially ridiculous or dangerous.
- **The Millers:** Already borderline unacceptable socially, he has hard evidence of assault, coercion, and worse behavior. Exposure means they become untouchable even as «*useful idiots*».
- **Lady Winters:** She maintains her aristocratic façade despite financial desperation. He has letters revealing debts far worse than publicly known, and even possibly evidence of fraudulent behavior to maintain status. Exposure would result in total collapse of marriage prospects for Serafina and loss of remaining social standing.

The material on the Arbuckles ensures he is invited to their social gatherings. He would like to have blackmail material on van Steeten or Lord Hammersmith, but neither has given him an opening ... so far. He might try to prey on Gabrielle and «*persuade*» her to incriminate herself or her father in an «*interested discussion*», unless the players intervene. He is a parasite, pure and simple.

PARTNER'S REACTION

Here: MC's behavior on seeing the indiscreet photos shapes the reaction. Guests expect scandal — emotional rupture between partners with anger, jealousy, and embarrassment. If he acts differently, it can massively deflate the situation. The best reaction is calm, unimpressed, and disapproving of the room, not of FC.

For example, taking the photos slowly, looking at it briefly, pocketing it (ownership of the situation) without reaction, remaining composed and signaling disapproval towards Regass. This reframes the situation as «*This is not shameful. This is vulgar exploitation.*» and



makes Regass appear as a predatory, vulgar man. At the same time, he signals trust to FC, removes suspicion, and stabilizes her position.

However, the reaction must be deliberate and controlled — not performative, and not moralizing. If he starts lecturing or grandstanding, it collapses back into social disruption and thus exclusion. No verbal attacks or physical threats at Regass — at maximum a calm, quiet and controlled sentence such as *«You should be careful what you carry.»*

INFLUENCING FACTORS

- **Francis:** She knows what he is, given that he has material on her and her husband. But she is willing to give him openings to approach his target.
- **Blanche:** They are in a mutually exploitative relationship. Both feel they are using the other person and both are correct, partially. Blanche gains access via seduction, intimacy, or theft and occasionally passes along material. Regass monetizes information, provides indirect protection (shifts attention from her if needed by creating a scandal or threaten people who go after her, e.g., *«Public revelations have a way of becoming... reciprocal.»*), and directs her at vulnerable targets who cannot defend themselves effectively (*«That gentleman is careless.»*). He only gives her partial information without revealing his sources to keep her dependent. They never fully trust the other and are prepared to burn the other if necessary.
- **van Steeten:** Despises blackmail and might led support to PCs, especially if exposed. For example, a quiet and cutting *«How very industrious. One almost has to admire the effort.»* while looking briefly at Regass, then away. It identifies manipulation without stating it, makes Regass look vulgar, and gives others permission to disengage. Alternatively supporting PCs directly by restoring their position and publicly signaling alliance, e.g., *«My dear, do sit with me. There are far more interesting things to discuss.»*
- **Lord Hammersmith:** He does not play games and cuts through them. A simple and devastating: *«If that is meant to matter, it does not.»* has social wight and refuses the premise entirely. Or a *«We are not children. Let us behave as though we are not.»*, which rebukes the room, not individuals, and shuts down gossip escalation.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

PCs might handle the situation in various ways:

- **Paying the Money:** Regass is going for regular *«modest»* payments that lower the clients CR by 5% as long as the payments are made. He is greedy, but smart enough not to slaughter his golden geese. If agreed upon there is no further escalation at the ball.
- **Exposure:** Either by Regass making the material public or the PCs doing it themselves. With limited indecency and no criminal material, it can be possible to reduce or survive the scandal.
- **Intimidating Him:** Regass is used to dealing with dangerous individuals. If threatened or even tortured, he might reveal where he keeps his material. However, he will retaliate later — socially. If players get involved in criminal or social questionable activities after the ball, there is a 30% chance that Regass will learn about it and either blackmail them or expose them anonymously. He choses exposure only if he needs to restore his reputation or the players do not pay. Revenge is alien to him, he cares only about money.
- **Turning the Table:** If they find compromising material on Regass, they might try to turn the table. However, everybody *«knows»* about the blackmail, so that itself is no lever. Society will protect its legitimacy and thus him, rather than deal with the fallout of his exposure. As Regass has no other vices but greed, there is nothing else that can be used as lever.
- **Removing the Material:** Requires to find both the copies and the originals. The material could be used to start blackmailing high society themselves (CR improves, but risk of exposure and prison, hard INT roll needed to succeed). The main problem is that the players can never be sure that they found *all* copies. Perhaps Regass had a lock box somewhere and the blackmail resumes later.
- **Removing Him:** Killing Regass might seem preferable, however, players should ensure they also destroy both the copies and the originals. Otherwise, after D10 weeks, an associate of Regass will resume the blackmail operation. Additionally, high society tolerates blackmail as long as it does not destabilize the system, but will ostracize murderers. If there is *any* suspicion that the players are involved, e.g., close temporal relation between a public altercation and Regass' death, they will feel that reaction. Invitations will dry up and they will be shunned.





DUEL

Ducante craves social dominance. If the **Seduction** was successful, he will feel slighted. If not, Francis will hint to Ducante that a MC was disrespectful to Blanche. The result is the same, Ducante will then try to publicly humiliate the MC.

Success for Ducante means being publicly recognized as the superior man. This can be achieved by MC submitting to him — public apology where none was required — beating him in a duel, or by having the Millers beat him up in private if MC refuses the duel.

APPROACH

He acts when he thinks he can win. He continues when MC does not submit. He aborts when he risks losing control of the situation or might endanger himself, e.g., an actually fair duel.

FIRST ESCALATION

He will only stop if MC humiliates himself in front of the guests. If not, he escalates:

1. Insult him (e.g., his low breeding, «*Vous manquez singulièrement de tenue.*» [You are singularly lacking in breeding.]) and demand an apology for the slight against Miss Blanche.
2. Getting very close to him while the Millers are visibly close by.
3. Suggest they settle this outside among gentlemen, e.g., «*We settle this properly. As gentlemen. Not here.*».

Resistance and Reactions

- If MC does not agree to go outside and argues, he tries to slap him and call him a coward, before turning his back on him. If MC retaliates, the Millers will intervene.
- If MC ends the conversation convincingly to the guest, e.g., «*This isn't honor, it's theater.*» and turns away, MC has a chance to end it (hard CR roll). However, the Millers will try to get him alone to beat him up.
- If MC agrees to settle this outside, they arrange a meeting in 20 minutes at the pond. Ducante comments «*You might think on it.*» knowing he has a reputation that frightens most people. He and the Millers will then get the dueling pistols and walk to the pond where he prepares the guns himself.

PCs can use that time to sift gossip, gather witnesses, get their own weapon, or try to avoid the confrontation entirely.

DUELS IN 1920 BOSTON

A formal duel at a Boston high-society ball in the 1920s is implausible, but a private, illegal, ego-driven shooting framed as a duel is not.

This means it happens outside the view of the guests, who might expect a fistfight, but not guns. However, what Ducante is doing is more a ritualized mugging with a firearm and a justification narrative.

So technically, he is not doing a duel either.

An astute observer (Lord Hammersmith, van Steeten, or Gabrielle) might warn the player of a possible duel (Gabrielle with an innocent «*Oh, you aren't going to duel, are you?*»). Lord Hammersmith might also offer to go with the MC as witness, and, if necessary, state that no woman would be tolerated at the meeting.

THE DUEL ITSELF

If MC meets Ducante at the pond, the Millers will be waiting with a box.

SECOND ESCALATION

Ducante's approach is the following:

1. Demand a groveling apology «... or», then point to the box, which the Millers open to show two pistols.
2. The Millers will then mention that this might go the same way as in France, where he cut a line through useless aristocrats.
3. If MC does not apologize, Ducante will ask MC to chose a gun as «*this can only washed away with blood*».

If MC does not apologize nor take a gun, and no witnesses are present, the Millers will try to beat him up if they think they are stronger. If other witnesses are present, Ducante will just call him a coward and leave with the Millers.

If MC does take a gun, they duel. Unless MC finds out that the pistols are manipulated and corrects for the deviation, he will lose. Ducante will hit him — roll normal damage, Ducante prefers his defeated opponents alive.

If at any point Ducante seems to lose his control, the Millers will try to step closer, crowd MC, and try to reassert control.



DUEL

DUEL RULES

The duel is conducted facing each other at 10 paces (7–8 meters), taking aim before the count, and fire on signal («*One ... two ... three ...*» both fire).

Historically this is not about skill, e.g., like a quick draw in a Western, but mutual risk under a controlled ritual. It tests willingness to face death in the preservation of honor.

THE DUELING PISTOLS

The pistols are old-style dueling pistols, one made with black, the other with red wood. They are matched pair, both made exactly the same, save for the wood.

Damage: 1D6+2, one shot

Range: 10 yards

Malfunction: none (carefully prepared for one shot), but reloading takes two rounds

Ducante subtly fosters a reputation of them as «*cursed*» or «*strange artifacts*». He then uses the hesitation this reputation produces as proof of cowardice («*swayed by old wives' tales*»). After all, he lets his opponents choose first. Opponents can even ask him to make the first choice.

This reputation distracts from the mundane reason he was unbeatable with the pistols: Both of them shoot in the same angle to the right. He has trained with them and automatically corrects, while his opponents always miss. So far, no-one has discovered the fraud and Ducante is keen on keeping it this way.

DETECTING THE FRAUD

The PCs have a few ways of discovering the fraud or preventing to lose the duel:

- **Piecing Together the Gossip:** Comments such as «*He's always remarkably fortunate*», «*incredibly lucky or very skilled*», «*he always uses his pistols but lets the other person chose first*», or «*a good friend of mine did duel with him — said he couldn't understand how he had missed him, called it 'the luck of the devil'*», or «*I wouldn't duel him — I just don't think it would be a fair fight*».
- **Testing the Pistol First:** Ducante will see a test as an «*affront to his honor*» and try to prevent it. Without witnesses, the Millers might intervene, beating up MC and leaving Ducante to claim victory due to the cowardice of his opponent. With witnesses, Ducante will feign ignorance, claim the pistol was damaged during transport, and point out that MC did chose that gun himself. He will refuse to have his gun exam-

ined and declare the duel over.

- **Examining the Pistols Closely:** Requires a hard **Firearm (handguns)** roll. However, the extend of the deviation is difficult to assess before shooting with it (one penalty die during the duel). On checking, Ducante will say «*That won't be necessary.*» but not interfere.
- **Using ones Own Pistol:** If MC has it with him, Ducante calls it an affront to his honor and to the rules of dueling. If the MC would have to get it, he will call it a stalling tactic and refuse to wait. In both cases, he will insist on using his pistols. If rejected, the leaves, stating «*You are not worth the trouble.*». Without witnesses, the Millers will then intervene and try to beat up MC.
- **Clues During the Duel:** There are two clues that point to fraud: First, one of the Millers who was standing to the left of Ducante moves to the other side of him. A hard INT roll might give MP an idea that this is not accidental — he moved out of the actual line of fire. Second, seeing Ducante is not aiming exactly at him, but a bit to the PCs right side (**Spot Hidden** or **Firearms: Handgun**). If MC deduces the deviation and corrects, he can shoot with a penalty die.

CORRECTED VS. EXPOSED FRAUD

If the manipulation is revealed without a duel, but no witnesses are present, Ducante and the Millers will try to kill MC. The exposure would ruin him. If witnesses are present, he will deny everything, get the pistols — the Millers assist — and leave. They will then try to secretly switch the pistols with a pair that shoots straight.

If MC found out about the manipulation and corrects his angle during the duel, Ducante will hesitate to shoot. Not out of sadism, but out of genuine fear. He will say «*What are you doing ...?*» and hesitate for a second.

DUCANTE'S DUELING STYLE

Ducante is good — and he knows it, he has 70% skill with *his* pistols. But he never had a duel where his life was on the line, as he always used his manipulated pistols and no one ever discovered the manipulation. The MC could be the first — if he is clever.

Ducante is essentially trying to recreate an idea of honor he doesn't actually understand or lives while preserving the illusion of fairness. The duel is not about whether MC can shoot well — useless unless the deviation is corrected for — but whether he accepts a false frame under



DUEL

pressure.

Ducante lets MP shoot first (within reason) — he knows that, unless corrected, the shot will miss. Shooting second gives him a reputation of having courage while enjoying the expression of panic in his opponent eyes when he realizes Ducante will shoot him. He tries to «*only*» injure his opponent, as death leads to legal trouble. It was the reason he had to leave France. Worse, they can no longer acknowledge his superiority, so he prefers injuring and thereby humiliating them.

RESISTANCE

MC can try to avoid the duel via social maneuvering. However, Ducante is not a honest actor and he uses the Millers to pressure MC into exposing himself.

INFLUENCING FACTORS

- **The Millers:** As Ducante's cronies, they are always ready to assist him. Without witnesses and if they think they cannot lose, they are willing to hold MC or beat him up.
- **Lord Hammersmith:** He is someone who actually understands duels and does not take them lightly or as a source of pride. For him they are a failure — social (reputational) mechanisms have failed to deal with the issue. He is glad that they have been illegal for a long time. However, he is willing to assist the MC, e.g., as witness and/or counsel.
- **Gabrielle:** She can provide some surprising rumors or astute observations, e.g., whether these old pistols can actually shoot straight.
- **Witnesses:** The presence of witnesses changes things.
Any Female Witnesses: Ducante will call MP a coward for hiding behind women and demand that they leave. If not, he storms off and claim a win.

More than Two Male Witnesses: Ducante will see himself outnumbered, call MP an imbecile for not understanding what «*settling things properly*» means, and then demand that all but MC and two witnesses leave. Otherwise he will storm off.

One to Two Male Witnesses Only: Ducante will not like it but accept it.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

The duel can be avoided, lost, or won. If shots are fired, people at the ball do not hear it (distance, music). However, the potential for scandal is there. Especially if

someone innocent got hurt or Ducante is exposed.

- **Avoiding the Duel:** Possible by managing the confrontation socially.
- **Losing the Duel:** If MC humiliates himself, gets shot or beaten up. Ducante returns to the ball and claim satisfaction. He and the Millers will not send help if MC is wounded («*his problem*»). About 3/4 of the guests will then avoid MC if he returns.
- **Indirectly Losing the Duel:** If MC refused the duel and had witnesses, and Ducante stormed off, he will claim MC is a coward and try to tarnish MCs reputation further. About 1/3 of the guests will then avoid MC if he returns.
- **Winning the Duel:** If MC detected the manipulation and shoots Ducante, the Millers will patch him up and return him to the ball, about half an hour later. The MC will get looks of admiration from some women and signs of respect from some men.
- **Exposing Ducante:** While possible, the evidence is there, the society has no interest in seeing him exposed. It would reveal his supporters as having bad judgment. If Lord Hammersmith gets to know about it, he will quietly ensure Ducante is shunned *in the future* without causing a public scandal.





PERIPHERAL STORYLINES

THE EMERALD

Van Steeten has had a short affair with Blanche (extreme CR for hushed and disbelieved rumors), during which Blanche stole a flawless emerald from her. She wants it back but cannot expose her in public, as the affair would destroy them both and officially, they have never met.



Blanche is wearing it and it belongs to van Steeten. That ambiguity is poison for Blanche, as she cannot fully claim it nor fully dismiss it. The emerald becomes socially unstable property and she might want to remove it from play by quietly removing it, *«lose it»*, or replace it with something equivalent.

BLANCHE'S BEHAVIOR

Blanche took the stone on a sudden impulse when she tried it on (fumbled POW, see *Properties of the Stone*) and wears it on a dare (failed POW). However, she is unprepared for the exposure it gets her — she is not used to taking unnecessary risks. If attention is directed on it, she panics internally.



- **Destabilization of Blanche's Active Play:**

Blanche is engaged in multiple manipulations (Francis, Ducante, etc.). Gabrielle's strength is asking the wrong question at the right time, so van Steeten can place Gabrielle near Blanche during a delicate interaction and allow her to speak freely. For example, *«I thought you didn't like him — why are you smiling like that?»* or *«Didn't you say you were engaged already?»*. This disrupts Blanche's control over tone and narrative, creates micro-fractures in multiple interactions, and increases scrutiny around her. Blanche might simplify her situation, reduce risk and discard the liability.

Regass strongly suspects where she got it and chastises her for wearing it openly, e.g., *«You have been ... active lately.»*

Van Steeten's approach is always minimal movement with maximum shift. However, there are limits to what she will do with Gabrielle. She is willing to lose something valuable like the Emerald to avoid becoming

VAN STEETEN'S BEHAVIOR

She wants the stone back, but she is also patient, socially clever, and strategic. If the players gain her confidence, she might discretely mention part of it (*«I once had a stone just like that, but it got lost ...»*). But she will not go into the specifics.

She will not directly ask the players to retrieve the stone, but players can see her repeatedly looking at it.

PROPERTIES OF THE STONE

The Emerald is a flawless stone from Colombia, with a pure, intense warm green color. Van Steeten got it from a questionable merchant in South America on an impulse purchase. She has no proof of ownership and thus no legal claim to it (see also *Selling the Emerald*).

USING GABRIELLE

Van Steeten might use Gabrielle to put pressure on Blanche and thus get her stone back. Blanche controls situations through ambiguity (plausible deniability), social positioning (no one wants to accuse her), and control over narrative timing. Gabrielle destroys ambiguity without intending to, so van Steeten can use that ability to force Blanche into a position where keeping the emerald is more dangerous than returning it.

It is unique and highly valuable to the right people. It also has a subtle influence on its owner, making the person more likely to take risks in getting what they want. POW roll each day the stone is worn. Failure means the person does something risky during the day, fumble means they are doing a stupid risk, e.g., van Steeten spending a night with Blanche, or Blanche taking the stone.

For example:

- **Social Reframing of Ownership:** van Steeten engineers a situation where Gabrielle notices aloud the connection between the emerald, Blanche and herself. But not as an accusation, but just as an observation that starts a competing narrative. Among a small, controlled audience Gabrielle says something like *«Mrs. van Steeten said hers looked exactly like that.»* Now the room holds two ideas simultaneously —

Note that the risk is never random, the person goes for something he or she actually wants. The stone removes friction from desire. That becomes dangerous, because most people rely on that friction to stay within bounds. Put differently, the stone increases short-term agency and can give an *«edge»*, but degrades long-term judgment. It rewards impulsive actions and destroys careful ones.



PERIPHERAL STORYLINES

someone she disdains. So she will not put Gabrielle in overt danger or ruin her reputation (e.g., as «*the girl who causes scenes*», «*indiscreet*», «*dangerous to be around*»). She will also not stage a crude accusation, rely on chaos or chance, or directly interact with Blanche. Her perspective is long term — not only about the event itself — but also what follows, e.g., how are people seen long-term and more importantly, how does she see herself.

PLAYER'S ROLE

Players can be drawn into the conflict via:

- **van Steeten** subtly asking them for assistance if they gained her trust, e.g., creating a situation where Gabrielle can interfere with Blanche, or — if MC resisted the **Seduction** and got leverage — to apply pressure to Blanche to return the stone.
- **Blanche** might use a compromised MC (**Seduction**) to her advantage. Instead of letting Francis discover the apparent impropriety, a confidant of hers witnesses it. Then she uses it to apply pressure to MC and ask him to interfere on her behalf, e.g., claiming she had worn the stone before van Steeten had it.
- **The Emerald** as players might notice the stone — hard POW roll and they feel their gaze drawn to it. Afterwards they might want to acquire or examine it, which might lead them to go for it directly, or align with van Steeten or Blanche.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

There are multiple ways this storyline can play out:

- **No Resolution:** It is a side-story, so it does not need to be resolved. Van Steeten will then try to use her social influence after the ball to get the stone back.
- **Stealing the Stone:** An extreme **Slight of Hand** will get them the stone in conversation, a hard success during a dance. As Blanche has no claim to it, she cannot protest later. However, players need to be discrete about it or they risk strong social disapproval. A fumble likely gets the player removed from the ball, while a failure can be covered as «*unfortunate accident*».
- **Leverage:** Blanche might expose herself during her **Seduction** attempt, leading her to offloading liabilities if it does not cost her face. PCs might subtly hint at the stone as compensation, which Blanche might agree too.

For example, complimenting her in private (e.g., Ladies' Cloakroom) on the stone («*That's a remark-*



MISS VERONICA BLANCHE, wearing an elegant black dress with a daring emerald brooch

able stone. ... it suits you.» — non-accusatory, observational, and gives her space). Her reaction might be a smile, «*Does it? ... I am not certain it does.*», removes it and places it down, «*Perhaps it belongs elsewhere.*», and leaves. This gives her the lowest-risk option of returning the stone quietly.

Note that she does not see this as being beaten, just as managing her risk profile. It is an elegant, deniable relinquishment of a liability before it costs her more. She justifies it internally with «*This piece is not worth the attention it attracts.*» — correctly given what the stone does.

If players acquire the stone, they have different options, however giving the stone up (returning, selling) requires a successful POW roll. Otherwise they cannot bring themselves to let go of it.

- **Returning the Stone:** If the stone is returned to van Steeten, she will be discrete but thankful, e.g., «*Ah ... How thoughtful.*» If Blanche has relinquished the stone voluntarily, her attitude to her becomes graceful distance.

Given the properties of the stone, a return might be the logical, but not necessarily the best situation for her. It will make her take risks, including stupid ones, in the future.

- **Selling the Stone:** On the shadow / private / questionable market *that buys stones without proof of ownership*, a merchant will pay between \$10,000 and \$40,000 for it. If he fails his POW roll take the price x2, on a fumble up x4. Players usually get only a fraction of what it is worth (see **Selling the Emerald**)
- **Keeping the Stone:** The player who owns it must do a POW roll each day he or she touches it with the outlined consequences.

SELLING THE EMERALD

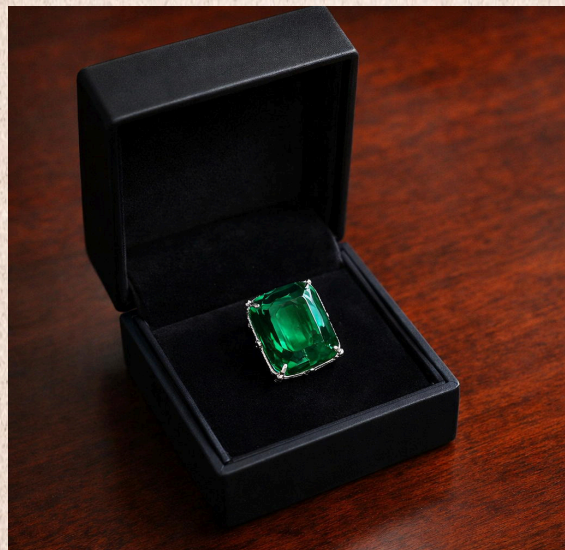
The stone is deceptively valuable. Columbian origin and pure, plus intense green is already top tier. «*Flawless*» multiplies the value dramatically as those are almost nonexistent. Emeralds *almost always* have inclusions («*jardin*») — those are proof that the stones are natural.

That complicates issues immensely as that stone *should not* exist. It looks so perfect that it *should* be fake, e.g., synthetic or heavily treated.

It's actual value from a legitimate dealer is between \$100,000 and \$300,000 in 1920s dollars. It is a museum-grade gemstone or major family wealth object. But without provenance (where it came from), documentation or recognizable dealer, and the ability to publicly sell it, the price collapses.

Under these conditions there is an authenticity risk (it could be a synthetic emerald, as they already existed), a legal risk (it could be stolen aristocratic jewelry), and it produces a resale problem (value only matters if you can sell it, and the buyer is stuck in the same shadow market).

To unlock the true value, the character would need a respected jeweler willing to stake reputation, a known intermediary, or access to elite buyers. Each of those is socially gated, reputation-driven, and risky to attempt with a dubious object.





PERIPHERAL STORYLINES

THE KITTEN

Miss Gabrielle Olson, a young nouveau-rich woman, has made it to the party without her father knowing. She is a source of faux pas until she is taken under Mrs. Bianca van Steeten's wing. But both she and her social opponent, Miss Veronica Blanche, quickly recognize she is more than that.



whom? Gabrielle, van Steeten, and Blanche have different goals:

Gabrielle is fascinated by the «grandness» of it all, the beautiful dresses, interesting people — it's a whole new world for her and she wants to experience it.

Blanche wants to use Gabrielle strategically and instrumentally. She is currently exposed (Seduction, The Emerald) and targetable. Taking her under her wing would provide her with cover and reputation insulation. She appears benevolent, gains social protection, and reduces suspicion around her own behavior. Also, while Gabrielle does not understand consequences, she sees a lot. She moves through the room without suspicion so she can deliver messages, ask questions others can't, and detect tensions. Blanche wants to contain or aim her.

GABRIELLE'S ROLE

Gabrielle makes faux pax, first by arriving without a companion, then she is friendly to the servants («*Oh, thank you very much.*» or worse, «*Let me help you.*»). She also has a habit of speaking at the wrong moment and saying the wrong things.



Van Steeten notices it and takes her in («*Come with me, we have much to talk.*»). She provides guidance on the correct behavior, being reminded of how she started to enter high-society.

However, it quickly becomes apparent that Gabrielle is astonishingly perceptive. She sees a lot and while rarely understanding the implications, she is essentially always right in what she sees.



Guests she talks to realize that quickly — her comments are often socially inappropriate, but repeatedly astonishingly astute. The players have a valuable source of information in her.

Van Steeten first saw herself in her, then realized that Gabrielle is dangerous and Blanche is circling. She does not believe that innocence survives exposure — she lost her four sons in the war. The environment will not teach her, but consume her, and she wants to decide how far that process is allowed to proceed. So she first contains the damage Gabrielle can cause by keeping her close, letting her speak sometimes and redirect her at key moments. She also notices that she can use

The situation escalates when she notices the tension between van Steeten and Blanche, for example, that van Steeten always seems to be aware where Blanche is, van Steeten mentions that she had a stone like that, and noticing how van Steeten looks at it.

Gabrielle to interfere with Blanches plans and even expose her. Letting her near her can be enough, but that would also give Blanche access to her.

When van Steeten and Blanche cross paths, e.g., at the Buffet table, Gabrielle makes one of her remarks, e.g., «*You took that from her, didn't you?*», «*Why does she look angry when she sees your brooch?*», or «*That brooch is the same color as the one you said was stolen.*».

In the short-term, Gabrielle's goals align much closer with Blanches goals. Blanche would provide her with experience and — within reason — let her go for what she *wants*. Van Steeten would ensure Gabrielle gets what she *needs*, even if Gabrielle does not see it yet. However, that would also conflict with Gabrielle's will in the short-term.

Blanche notices her perceptiveness and becomes interested — both in protecting herself from her perceptiveness and in using her for her own purposes.

PLAYER'S ROLE

GOAL CONFLICTS

The underlying issue is that Gabrielle's raw perception cannot exist inside a system built on managed appearances without breaking it. So it must be shaped, but by

Player's can be easily drawn into this conflict, especially if they get involved with *The Emerald*. Depending on the players interactions with Gabrielle, van Steeten and/or Blanche could see them as competition or allies.

- **Gabrielle:** She is both noticeable and a valuable source of information. She might also need protection from Regass, who tries her to incriminate herself



PERIPHERAL STORYLINES

or her father, before van Steeten notices her.

- **van Steeten:** If the players have her trust, she might ask them to keep an eye on Gabrielle or socially buffer her comments.
- **Blanche:** She might pressure MC to give her access to Gabrielle, e.g., by distracting van Steeten.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

There are different resolutions for the storyline which affect player's access to information.

STALEMATE

Neither van Steeten nor Blanche dominate. For the players, Gabrielle remains an asset for the evening.

VAN STEETEN WINS

She might keep Gabrielle close or removing her from the board.

- **Keeping her Close:** She does not utilize her against Blanche to get *The Emerald* back, as this would expose Gabrielle to Blanche's influence.
- **Controlled Extraction:** Clean, consistent, almost merciful by engineering a minor but decisive social misstep. It results in Gabrielle being quietly sidelined, sent home early, labeled «*unsuitable*», but not ruined. For example, placing her in the wrong conversation at the wrong time, letting her speak a truth that causes discomfort, but not scandal (e.g., «*You're being nice to her, but you don't like her at all.*», or ensuring someone influential decides: «*This girl should not be here.*»).
- **Surgical Ruin:** The colder, more dangerous variant. Van Steeten deliberately causes a lasting reputational stain, e.g., a perceived impropriety, association with the wrong man, or a breach of etiquette that sticks. Not catastrophic — but enough that Gabrielle is marked «*Not quite suitable.*» and *socially unaware in a problematic way*. This is not protection in the short term, but long-term containment. «*Better a controlled fall now than a total collapse later.*»

Note that in both controlled extraction and surgical ruin, Gabrielle does not consent what's being done to her. Van Steeten is making a unilateral decision about Gabrielle's future and about what she «*should be allowed*» to become, because she thinks Gabrielle's trajectory is wrong.

Van Steeten also would not combine the removal with getting her *Emerald* back, as she would see it as self-serving and give Blanche narrative leverage («*How conve-*

nient ...»). It would look as if she was using the future of a child to settle a personal score.

Gabrielle can react in three ways to the extraction:

1. She does not notice it, meaning van Steeten acted cleanly. No drama.
2. She notices it later, which is irrelevant for the ball and a quiet tragedy that plays out later.
3. She notices it in the moment, which might lead to confrontation, collapse of trust, and might lead her to associate with Blanche. Especially if Blanche steps in and uses her social capital to allow Gabrielle to stay.

BLANCHE WINS

During the evening, Blanche tries to approach Gabrielle and isolate her from van Steeten. She can then charm Gabrielle and try to recruit her, acting as mentor and protector. If that fails, she might try to discredit her. As Blanche is more aligned short-term, Gabrielle might even prefer her over van Steeten.

Blanche can win, e.g., by:

- **Gaining Gabrielle's Trust:** For example by giving Gabrielle the elegance and experience she wants. Achieved by having her talk with Gabrielle for some time without van Steeten.

It is also the default outcome if van Steeten tries to extract her, Gabrielle notices, and Blanche intervenes to let her stay (e.g., a barbed assertion of «*letting her stay in more experienced hands*»).

- **Discredit her:** Hard as people notice that she is *regularly* perceptive, but possible. For example, «*She has an active imagination ... like a child*». Guests might publicly agree that she is imaginative, while also privately knowing that she is right.

If Blanche wins, players likely lose an asset, as Gabrielle will be busy for the rest of the evening.



PERIPHERAL STORYLINES

DOVE AND RAVEN

Lady Winters struggles financially after the death of Lord Winters and wants to find a rich husband for her daughter, Serafina. However, Serafina falls in love with Lord Hammersmith, who is respectable, but nearly twice her age and not very rich.

The players can engage with this storyline and engage in social maneuvering. This can provide a breather from more serious pursuits.

LADY WINTERS' ROLE

Lady Winters' perspective is not as straightforward as it first appears. While she desperately needs a wealthy suitor for her daughter and is «*chasing new money*», she unconsciously knows that once her daughter is married, she will lose her function in society. Lord Winters is dead, her finances are unstable, and her relevance comes from being a mother with a marriageable daughter.

This creates a strong tension between marrying Serafina off to survive, but also fearing erasure once that is completed. Thus, she produces the self-defeating but psychologically coherent behavior at the ball: She tries to sell her daughter while marking her as «*not fully transferable*» by erasing generational hierarchy, implicitly competing with her daughter, and denying Serafina independent social existence (see *The Dresses*).

During the ball, Lady Winters controls Serafina's interactions. As an 18-year-old, Serafina is not socially independent and thus cannot socially «*exist*» without mediation. She cannot freely approach men, but must be introduced by a host or chaperone (i.e., her mother). Conversations are observed — being alone with a man would be a reputation risk (see *Seduction*).

If Lady Winters withholds or sabotages introductions, she controls access. She can also decide with whom Serafina dances and steer rich, but perhaps boring, men to her, e.g., Mr. Charles Pembroke.

Lady Winters knows that Lord Hammersmith lacks the funds she needs, so she tries to prevent introduction or dances with him. She privately disapproves of him to Serafina, without mentioning his financial situation. For example, «*He could be your father.*» to which Serafina can respond with «*I didn't know that my lineage was in question.*».



SERAFINA'S ROLE

Serafina sees the situation clearly and not naively. She knows that her mother is not wrong about material reality and is careful that her desire for a «*meaningful*» marriage does not become irresponsibility under dependency. Her «*choice*» still spends her mother's remaining capital.

She is not rejecting marriage, but being exchanged without agency. She sees that she is positioned as an asset, her autonomy is being deferred indefinitely, and marriage is not being offered as partnership, but as transfer of control. That clarity is accurate diagnosis, not youthful rebellion.

Once she has noticed Lord Hammersmith, she will start a counter-play to her mother's attempt to find a wealthy suitor. For example, uses intermediaries (PCs!) to bypass her mother's gatekeeping and be formally introduced to Lord Hammersmith, and then quietly reserves dances with him in advance.

Once she talked with him she notices that with him there is no negotiation, performance or valuation — which makes her able to accept his age and the likelihood of losing him early. For her, it fits her value hierarchy — a finite, chosen life is better than an indefinite, assigned one.

She might comment about the situation where appropriate:

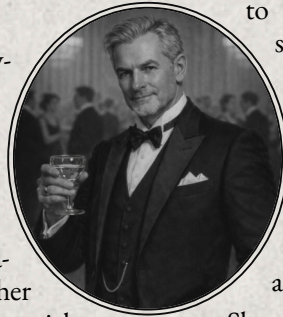
- «*I am to be placed where the accounts balance most favorably.*»
- «*It is remarkable how elegantly necessity can be dressed as propriety.*»
- «*One might almost admire the efficiency — presentation without the inconvenience of consent.*».

In contrast to Gabrielle, she sees her role clearly and speaks just enough to make others uncomfortable.

LORD HAMMERSMITH'S ROLE

He is drawn to Serafina, especially once he recognizes she is not naïve, understands the costs, and chooses anyway. It is not her youth that attracts him, but her clarity without illusion.

However, he also has clear lines, e.g., he refuses to speak to her unless properly introduced. He is also painfully reminded of his late wife and the child he lost in childbirth — in addition to his age and «*modest*» means.





PERIPHERAL STORYLINES

Continued interaction with her will lead him to court her.

PLAYER'S ROLE

Players encounter the Winters when they are introduced to Lady Winters and she makes a quick assessment of their suitability to be suitors for her daughter (CR ≥90). A simple Psychology reveals that Serafina has other plans and a CR roll reveals Lady Winters' interests. Serafina might then seek the PCs' help.

For example:

- **Introduction Barrier:** Serafina cannot properly interact with Hammersmith without Lady Winters' approval or a social workaround. PCs can arrange introductions through the host, create a distraction so Serafina *«accidentally»* meets him, or leverage gossip or blackmail to force Lady Winters' hand.
- **Interaction Barrier:** Even if introduced, Lady Winters will try to keep her separated from Lord Hammersmith. She assigns Serafina to dance with wealthy bores. Players can interrupt partners, redirect attention, and cause delays to give Serafina and Lord Hammersmith the time they need.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

There are three major resolutions to this storyline.

OPEN

It is a peripheral storyline, so there does not have to be a resolution if the PCs do not want to engage.

LADY WINTERS MAKES A MATCH

By controlling Serafina's interactions during the evening and preventing her from getting closer to Lord Hammersmith, she can find a suitable, i.e. very rich, suitor (Mr. Charles Pembroke).

SERAFINA CLAIMS INDEPENDENCE

If assisted by the players, through her interactions with Lord Hammersmith, she convinced him to court her. She takes a stable and clear position, e.g., *«I will absorb almost everything expected of me — except the loss of my life as my own.»* or *«There are obligations I accept. And there is a point beyond which I cease to exist. I have found it.»*

THE DRESSES

Lady Winters insisted that she and Serafina wear the same dress. It did save her money and publicly signals her claim to her daughter (*«an extension of me»*).

But she miscalculated. It is noticed in a *«trying too hard while pretending not to»* way that actively damaging her daughter's prospects (class leakage, she is going for *«we are still established aristocracy»* while signaling *«we cannot afford distinction and I need control»*). It shows the financial strain and collapses generational boundaries. Worse, as it is not only manipulative, but misjudging the effects, it makes Lady Winters appear unreliable.

Gossip they might hear:

- *«One does wonder whether Miss Winters is being presented — or retained.»*
- *«It's an... intimate interpretation of maternal guidance.»*
- *«Economy is admirable. Visibility of it, less so.»*
- *«Better a name than a fortune... though one doesn't pay for roofs.»*
- *«She'll sell the girl to the highest bidder.»*
- *«Am I courting the daughter — or negotiating with the mother?»*
- *«Is this household stable enough to marry into?»*

Where other young women would be mortified, Serafina takes it with dry humor. She knows exactly what that will do to her marriage prospects.

It prevents her from being legible as separate marriage candidate. Suitors ask themselves *«What comes with her — and what liabilities follow?»* as she is not bringing wealth, but a dependent mother, who refuses to age out, in the background. They also get an unshakable vision of what she could become in the future — so at least nobody will marry her for the beauty she currently possesses.

Consequently, she fully inhabits the dress and ignores any gossip or hidden insults. She just out-awkwards the situation, which raises her status in the eyes of sharper observers such as van Steeten or Lord Hammersmith.

For the PCs, she seems remarkably *untouched* by the situation, while engaging fully with the environment herself.



FRAMING THE NARRATIVE

Francis is the cause of many of the night's social events. Figures such as Blanche, Regass, and Ducante are the mechanisms. Sterling determines the afterlife.



PLAYERS' ROLE

Players cannot influence Sterling through information alone — she likely already has it. Instead, they must offer a better version of events, e.g., clearer structure, defined roles, compelling framing, and more useful implications.

In short, a version worth repeating.

«*This was complicated*» is useless. «*Nothing happened*» is uninteresting. But «*This was not a scandal — it was an attempt to create one.*» gives her something to work with.

She may then reduce the stickiness of events, redirect focus, or reassign meaning. The loss remains — but becomes socially survivable.

In play, she may ask «*How should one understand what happened tonight?*» Then remain silent. Whatever the players say becomes her raw material.

ROSE STERLINGS ROLE

Rose Sterling does not change what happened — she decides what it becomes, what survives the night socially.

She can amplify or blur a scandal, redirect attention, and connect unrelated details into a coherent narrative. While she cannot remove a loss (e.g., **Seduction, Blackmail, Duel**), she decides what that loss means.

For the players, she shifts the question from: «*What did the players do?*» to «*What will people believe they did?*».

She does not act to protect. Instead, she operates on narrative value. She asks:

- Is this story interesting?
- Is it stable? (otherwise her credibility is in danger)
- Who benefits from which version?
- What will people repeat?

Sterling does not need the truth. She needs a version that survives repetition.

IN PLAY

Sterling can take three roles:

1. **The Mirror:** She observes, asks questions, and reflects interpretations back to the players. «*That is an interesting way of putting it.*» or «*So it was not quite as it appeared?*» She shows how events may be understood.
2. **The Amplifier:** If players engage her successfully, she can shift blame, elevate or suppress details, and create a socially acceptable interpretation. For example, instead of «*FC was exposed*», it becomes «*An unfortunate display of vulgarity by certain parties.*»
3. **The Adversary:** If ignored — or poorly handled (e.g., failed a contested Fast Talk roll) — she constructs her own narrative. It will simplify, dramatize, and likely harm the players. Ambiguity resolves into the most compelling version, not the most accurate one.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

Players can win her, ignore her, or make her an adversary. (Examples of her writing can be found in the appendix.)

WINNING HER

Players succeed by making their version of events more narratively useful than the alternative.

She does not protect them. She simply decides their version is the one worth repeating. Negative events may remain — but are reframed.

IGNORING HER

Without input, Sterling constructs her own version.

It will fit her goals — not necessarily the players'.

ADVERSARY

If players attempt to deceive her, use a contested Fast Talk roll.

Sterling is difficult to mislead. She may be amused — but also take note. In that society, she is not an adversary one wants.

The resulting narrative will place the players at a disadvantage.



PERIPHERAL STORYLINES

INVISIBLE HELP

During the ball, the players might receive help from a maid, Miss Irene Watterson. However, that can make her a target, especially if Ducante was beaten in the Duel.

WATTERSON'S ROLE

At various times during the scenario, Watterson may provide the players with information or small assistance — within reason. She is observant and unobtrusively present, noticing more than most, and acting without drawing attention.

Where the rest of the staff remains invisible and purely supportive, she is cautious but not naïve. She dislikes status games and does not accept her position as entirely passive. She may have overheard or pieced together rumors concerning Francis, Blanche, Ducante, or Regass.

As familiarity with staff is frowned upon (*Etiquette*), she avoids direct interaction. Instead, she may leave objects where they are needed, pass along brief notes, or quietly redirect attention.

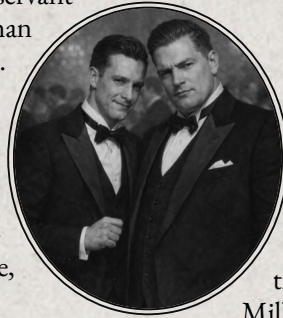
She does not ask for payment or recognition. If acknowledged directly, she deflects or withdraws. She intervenes selectively — when something crosses a line she recognizes, not as a matter of loyalty, but of judgment. She does not interfere lightly — but once she decides to act, she follows through without hesitation.

Note that she is not aligned with players or opposed to the household, or trying to *«fix things»* — she is responding to specific situations she judges as unacceptable. She operates within invisibility — but is not defined by it.

ESCALATION

If Watterson has supported the players, the Millers will have noticed. As opportunistic predators, they are looking for isolation, test boundaries, and withdraw if conditions change. They will only act when they think they cannot lose, so they are careful and escalate in stages.

1. They will start lingering outside the main ballroom and look for moments where Watterson must pass through less frequented corridors.
2. Once that happens the Millers will close in. They intimidate her by invading her private space.
3. If they have isolated her, and there are no witnesses, they will force compliance.



NOTICING THE MILLERS

Players can notice the Millers lingering outside the ballroom (*Spot Hidden*). Especially if they are careful about them after the duel (bonus die). A *Psychology* roll will also reveal that they are vindictive and go for an easy target. Even without a roll, their presence feels out of place — lingering where guests do not usually stand. Gabrielle might also point out the strange behavior.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

Outcomes are:

- **The Millers are Not Stopped:** The Millers remain unobserved and thus unobserved. In this case Watterson will no longer be available to assist the players. Questions about her are politely deflected. The Millers' presence becomes quietly unwelcome in future invitations, though nothing is said openly.
- **Preventing them from Acting:** If the players notice that the Millers are planning something they can ensure that they are never unobserved. That will stop them from cornering Watterson, though it will bind resources.
- **Surprising the Miller (Witnesses):** If the Millers are surprised while they are cornering Watterson and witnesses are present — e.g., three or more people, or even one high status guest or host — they will claim a misunderstanding or blame the maid. Depending on the situation, a *CR* might be needed to get them expelled, which would severely weaken Ducante.
- **Surprising the Miller (Fight):** If the players confront the Millers without high-status witnesses present, the Millers initially rely on intimidation, using the isolation to their advantage. If the situation shifts against them — or they believe they can end it quickly — they escalate. Watterson may inadvertently worsen the situation by attempting to flee; Bertrand knocks her unconscious without hesitation. If violence breaks out, the Millers draw knives and attack. The corridor is sufficiently remote that the ballroom's music conceals the fight. If the players prevail and inform the staff, Mr. Wilkins has the injured removed to a hospital quietly — even if one or both are dead — citing a *«medical issue»* and allowing the ball to continue uninterrupted. Watterson regains consciousness later and may be excused from the remainder of the evening.





ORDER HAD ESTABLISHED ITSELF

THE BALL AT THE ARBUCKLE ESTATE

BY ROSE STERLING

It is not often that an event so universally praised by its attendees should occasion such a curious degree of subsequent comment. The Arbuckles' recent ball, long anticipated and conducted, by all accounts, with their customary attention to detail, has left behind an impression at once admirable and difficult to articulate.

Those present speak of an evening of uncommon refinement. The arrangements, one is told, were impeccable; the flow of the rooms, the attentiveness of the staff, and the general tone of the company all contributed to an experience described, without exception, as entirely proper. Indeed, several guests have remarked upon the unusual ease with which the evening seemed to unfold, as though each moment had found its place without effort or delay.

And yet, beyond these assurances, one encounters a certain vagueness. When pressed for particulars — who spoke with whom, which conversations lingered, what small irregularities might have lent the evening its character — responses tend toward the general rather than the specific. It is not that anything was amiss; rather, nothing appears to have stood out. The impression conveyed is one of completeness, though not of variety.

More curious still are the peripheral details. Some have observed that the conclusion of the evening was less clearly marked than is customary, with guests departing without the usual clustering of farewells or the gradual thinning of company that signals a natural close. Others, not in attendance, remark upon the house itself, which in the days following seemed for a time unusually quiet, as though the occasion had withdrawn without quite announcing its departure.

Such observations would ordinarily be dismissed as the idle embroidery of those not present, were it not for the remarkable consistency of the reports from within. That so many should agree so entirely on the propriety of the event, while offering so little in the way of distinguishing detail, is in itself a matter of mild interest.

It would be ungenerous to suggest that the Arbuckles' well-known standards of arrangement might, on this occasion, have approached excess. And yet one is left with the impression of an evening perhaps too perfectly conducted — so carefully ordered that the small, human irregularities upon which memory so often depends had little opportunity to arise.

Whether this be taken as a mark of distinction or a curiosity of execution, it is certain that the Arbuckles' ball will be spoken of for some time to come, if only for the peculiar completeness of its success.

DELAYED RELEASE RESOLUTION

THE BALL AT THE ARBUCKLE ESTATE

BY AMELIA AMSEL FOR ROSE STERLING (ON EXTENDED LEAVE)

It is not often that an event so widely attended by figures of standing should leave behind a period of such curious quiet. The Arbuckles' recent ball, long anticipated and, by all accounts, conducted with their customary precision, has since been followed by a succession of minor disruptions across the social calendar, the causes of which remain indistinct.

Several engagements of note were, in the weeks following, postponed or allowed to lapse without comment. Correspondence, it is said, went unanswered longer than is usual among those whose habits are otherwise punctual. A number of familiar presences were, for a time, remarked upon chiefly by their absence, though no single explanation appears to account for the pattern as a whole.

Those who attended the ball itself, however, offer nothing to support speculation of any untoward occurrence. On the contrary, they speak with striking unanimity of an evening conducted with exceptional care. The arrangements, one is told, were beyond reproach; the company well-ordered; the progression of the night entirely in keeping with the highest expectations of propriety. Indeed, several guests have remarked upon the unusual completeness of the occasion, as though each element had settled naturally into its proper place.

And yet, when invited to recall particulars, these same accounts tend toward a certain generality. Conversations are remembered as agreeable, though seldom in detail; encounters as well-conducted, though rarely distinguished by incident. It is not that anything was amiss, but rather that nothing appears to have resisted its arrangement.

In the absence of clearer testimony, it has been suggested — quietly — that the very success of the evening may have contributed to the curious stillness that followed it. An occasion so perfectly ordered as to admit no interruption may, in its wake, leave little for recollection to fix upon, and less for the usual rhythms of society to take hold of again at once.

Such conjectures must, of course, remain provisional. It would be ungenerous to attribute to excess what is more likely the result of circumstance. Still, the coincidence of so many small absences, following so singularly complete an event, has not passed entirely without remark.

The Arbuckles' ball will no doubt be remembered — if not for any one moment, then for the peculiar thoroughness of its execution, and for the quiet interval that, for reasons not easily specified, seemed to succeed it.



SEDUCTION: MC & BLANCHE

MC WINS: SCANDAL AVOIDED

A MISUNDERSTANDING, PROPERLY MANAGED

BY ROSE STERLING

It is a common misconception that society thrives on scandal. In truth, it prefers the possibility of scandal, provided it resolves before requiring commitment. A recent near-incident — quickly corrected — illustrates the distinction.

A brief absence, involving Miss Blanche and a gentleman not previously associated with her, gave rise — momentarily — to a degree of curiosity. Such curiosity, under less favorable management, might have developed into something more durable. It did not.

The reappearance was timely. More importantly, it was legible. There are ways of returning to a room which invite continuation, and others which invite interpretation. In this case, the former prevailed. No disruption of tone occurred, and what might have become narrative instead dissolved into sequence.

Miss Blanche, as ever, demonstrated a certain instinct for proportion. The gentleman, for his part, appeared to recognize — if only belatedly — the importance of context.

One is reminded that ambiguity, to be effective, must be sustained. Interrupted too early, it produces not scandal, but merely an anecdote — soon replaced by something more cooperative.

BLANCHE SUCCEEDS: SCANDAL

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING SEEN

BY ROSE STERLING

There are occasions in which a matter need not be established in order to become accepted. A recent incident — concerning a brief but notably timed absence, followed by a return not entirely aligned with expectation — has provided such an example.

Miss Blanche, whose composure under observation is rarely in question, was observed in circumstances that invited interpretation, though not confirmation. The gentleman in question, by contrast, appeared less prepared for the demands of such ambiguity.

It would be imprecise to describe what occurred as impropriety. Nothing, in the strict sense, was demonstrated. And yet, the sequence — departure, interval, reappearance — formed a structure that required little elaboration. One does not require evidence when alignment suffices.

What followed was instructive. Miss Blanche withdrew with a degree of restraint that suggested not distress, but recognition. The gentleman, meanwhile, found himself subject not to accusation, but to a more decisive mechanism: reclassification.

There are moments in which one is not judged by action, but by position. To have been present, under the wrong conditions, is sometimes indistinguishable from having acted.

It is, perhaps, worth noting that Miss Blanche's reputation has not suffered accordingly. One might even say it has acquired a certain... definition.



BLACKMAIL: FC & REGASS (PHOTO REVEALED ONLY)

HANDLED WELL

ON COMPOSURE UNDER OBSERVATION

BY ROSE STERLING

There are moments in any gathering when the room, having grown accustomed to its own equilibrium, is presented with an opportunity to reveal what it values more: propriety, or composure. Such a moment occurred recently, when certain materials — of a nature not ordinarily introduced into polite company — were made visible with a deliberateness that invited reaction.

What followed was not, as some might have anticipated, a collapse. Miss—, to whom the materials ostensibly referred, declined both explanation and retreat. More notably still, she declined to treat the matter as consequential.

This alone would have been insufficient, had it not been accompanied by a second, quieter intervention. Her partner, upon being presented with the same, chose neither outrage nor inquiry, but a kind of measured indifference — one that suggested not ignorance, but refusal. The effect was subtle, though decisive. Where the room had expected fracture, it encountered continuity.

One observed, in the moments that followed, a hesitation. Conversation resumed — not immediately, but perceptibly. Attention, having briefly concentrated, dispersed again. The materials, so carefully introduced, lost their function when denied escalation.

It is tempting to describe this as resilience. It may be more accurate to call it control. Not of events — those had already occurred — but of their admission into relevance.

One is reminded that scandal does not reside in what is revealed, but in whether it is permitted to matter.

HANDLED BADLY

A REPUTATION RECONSIDERED

BY ROSE STERLING

It is a delicate matter, the transition from presence to absence. Miss—, whose recent introduction to Boston society had attracted a degree of attention not entirely unwarranted, has since withdrawn from it under circumstances that, while not formally acknowledged, have not gone entirely unremarked.

The incident in question — if such it may be called — did not, in itself, rise to the level of overt scandal. No accusation was made, no scene sustained. And yet, the effect was unmistakable. One observed a gradual but decisive shift: conversations shortened, invitations deferred, attention redirected.

It is perhaps misleading to attribute such outcomes to any single moment. More often, they result from a convergence of factors, one of which merely renders the others visible. In Miss—'s case, certain details, introduced at an inopportune time, appear to have altered not what was known, but how it was held.

There are those who recover from such adjustments, and those who do not. The distinction lies less in the nature of the material than in the manner of its reception. Silence, in these matters, is rarely neutral.

Miss—'s absence, then, should not be understood as a conclusion, but as a pause. Whether it will resolve into return or quiet reclassification remains, as ever, a question of context — and of memory.



DUEL: MC & DUCANTE

MC WINS DUEL

ON THE RISKS OF MUTUAL ENGAGEMENT

BY ROSE STERLING

It is occasionally the case that arrangements intended to confirm superiority produce instead a more complicated result. A recent encounter, undertaken under circumstances that invite discretion, appears to have concluded in a manner not entirely aligned with expectation.

Mr. Ducante, whose confidence in such matters is well established, has been observed since with a degree of restraint not previously characteristic. The gentleman with whom he was engaged has, conversely, returned without visible diminution.

What occurred between them need not be described in order to be understood as significant. It is sufficient that the anticipated direction of consequence did not obtain.

There is a particular instability introduced when an outcome contradicts the structure that was meant to produce it. Such moments rarely result in open reassessment. More often, they are absorbed quietly, their implications redistributed over time.

One might say that nothing has changed. One would not be entirely correct.

DUCANTE WINS DUEL

ON SATISFACTION, PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD

BY ROSE STERLING

It has long been assumed that certain matters, when insufficiently resolved in public, will seek resolution elsewhere. One such instance, occurring beyond the immediate view of the Arbuckle estate, has since returned — if not in detail, then in effect.

Mr. Ducante, whose sense of personal distinction is not easily overlooked, is said to have obtained what he considers satisfaction in a disagreement that might otherwise have remained merely conversational. The gentleman involved has not been seen to contest the outcome.

It would be inappropriate to speculate as to the precise nature of the encounter. What is observable, however, is its consequence. Mr. Ducante has resumed his place with an ease that suggests conclusion, while his counterpart has acquired a certain... distance.

One is reminded «honor», in its modern usage, rarely refers to principle. More often, it denotes the successful imposition of a narrative in which one party is permitted to continue unchanged, and the other is not.

Whether such outcomes deserve their language is, perhaps, a separate question.



DUEL: MC & DUCANTE

DUEL AVOIDED

AN UNSETTLED MATTER

BY ROSE STERLING

There are disputes which invite escalation, and others which reveal themselves, upon closer inspection, to be dependent upon it. A recent disagreement, involving Mr. Ducante and a gentleman not inclined toward theatrical resolution, appears to have concluded in the latter category.

Mr. Ducante, it is understood, extended an invitation to settle the matter «properly». That the invitation was not accepted has been interpreted in differing ways, though not, perhaps, with equal conviction.

It is a curious feature of such situations that refusal, while often framed as deficiency, may equally indicate recognition. Not every structure presented as inevitable requires participation.

The gentleman in question has, for the moment, retained his position, though not without a degree of recalibration in how he is regarded. Mr. Ducante, for his part, appears to consider the matter unresolved — an interpretation which, while persistent, has not yet found universal agreement.

One suspects that what has been avoided is not merely an outcome, but a particular kind of definition.

DUCANTE REVEALED AS FRAUD

A QUESTION OF INSTRUMENTS

BY ROSE STERLING

There are, from time to time, questions not of conduct, but of conditions. A recent matter involving Mr. Ducante has given rise — quietly, and not without resistance — to such a question.

It has been suggested that certain outcomes, previously attributed to consistency of skill, may admit of alternative explanations. One hesitates, in the absence of formal acknowledgment, to give these suggestions undue shape. And yet, their persistence is notable.

Mr. Ducante himself has not addressed the matter directly. This is, perhaps, understandable. Where reputation has been constructed upon repetition, even the possibility of irregularity introduces a difficulty not easily resolved through statement alone.

What is most instructive is not the suggestion itself, but the response to it. There appears to be little appetite for clarification. The implications, if pursued, would extend beyond a single individual, touching as they might upon those who have previously affirmed the results in question.

One is reminded that certainty, once established, is rarely dismantled in public. It is, instead, allowed to weaken — quietly, and at a distance.



THE EMERALD: VAN STEETEN VS BLANCHE

VAN STEETEN RETRIEVES IT

A RESTORATION WITHOUT INCIDENT

BY ROSE STERLING

There are occasions in which a matter, once noted, resolves without announcement. A certain emerald, whose brief displacement had not entirely escaped attention, has since returned to a more expected setting.

No explanation has been offered, nor would one necessarily be required. The restoration itself, conducted without visible intervention, suggests less a correction than a reassertion.

It is tempting to regard such outcomes as inevitable. That would be imprecise. They depend, rather, on the presence of individuals for whom resolution need not be declared in order to be achieved.

One observes, in such cases, not the event, but its disappearance.

BLANCHE RETAINS IT

ON THE PERSISTENCE OF POSSESSION

BY ROSE STERLING

It is occasionally observed that certain objects, once displaced, do not return — not because their absence goes unnoticed, but because their continued presence elsewhere becomes, over time, less contestable than their recovery.

A particular emerald, remarked upon earlier in the season under circumstances that invited quiet speculation, has since been seen where it was not originally expected. No correction has followed.

This is not, perhaps, as unusual as it appears. Possession, when sustained without challenge, acquires a legitimacy of its own. The question is not how such things occur, but at what point they cease to be disputed.

One might say the stone has found its place. One might also ask what prevented its return.

GABRIELLE INVOLVED

ON THE UNFORTUNATE ADHESION OF UNCERTAINTY

BY ROSE STERLING

It is a curious feature of certain incidents that they attach themselves not to those best equipped to manage them, but to those least prepared to do so.

A recent irregularity involving a piece of jewelry — briefly visible, then less so — has, in some accounts, become associated with Miss Olson, whose earlier appearances had already invited a degree of attention.

It would be unwise to insist upon this connection. It would be equally unwise to ignore the conditions under which such associations arise.

There are individuals who absorb ambiguity, and others to whom it adheres. Miss Olson, it seems, may belong to the latter category.

One suspects the object itself is of less consequence than where its uncertainty has settled.

EMERALD DISAPPEARS

ON OBJECTS THAT REFUSE CONCLUSION

BY ROSE STERLING

It is not uncommon for certain matters, once raised, to resist conclusion. A particular piece of jewelry, noted in connection with recent events, appears now to have withdrawn from circulation entirely.

This absence, unlike others, does not suggest resolution. Rather, it introduces a kind of suspension — an awareness without confirmation, a memory without closure.

Objects, in such cases, cease to function as possessions and become instead points of reference. One recalls having seen them. One cannot say where they are.

The effect is subtle, though not without consequence. What cannot be located cannot be fully accounted for.

And what cannot be accounted for tends, in time, to accumulate meaning.



THE KITTEN: GABRIELLE, VAN STEETEN & BLANCHE

VAN STEETEN WINS

A STUDY IN REFINEMENT: MISS OLSON RECONSIDERED

BY ROSE STERLING

Those who recall Miss Gabrielle Olson's introduction to Boston society may find her recent appearances of particular interest. Where once there was a certain immediacy of expression — remarkable less for its content than for its timing — there is now a composure that suggests careful attention has been paid to the question of when not to speak.

Such transitions are rarely spontaneous. It would be inelegant to speculate as to influence, though one cannot fail to notice that Mrs. van Steeten, whose presence at the Arbuckle Ball was as restrained as it was decisive, has since been observed in Miss Olson's company with some regularity.

What is most striking is not the improvement itself — Boston has seen many such efforts — but the speed with which it has occurred. One is left to wonder whether this represents the cultivation of latent potential, or the quiet removal of certain less adaptable qualities.

In either case, Miss Olson now moves with a precision that was not previously her own. Whether it will remain so is, perhaps, the more interesting question.

BLANCHE WINS

ON THE COMPANY ONE KEEPS: MISS OLSON AND MISS BLANCHE

BY ROSE STERLING

Miss Gabrielle Olson, whose introduction to society some months ago was marked by a candor not entirely in keeping with her surroundings, has recently been observed in the company of Miss Veronica Blanche. The association is, at first glance, an unlikely one — though such judgments have a way of revealing themselves premature.

Miss Blanche, as is well known, does not attach herself without purpose, nor does she cultivate without selectivity. That Miss Olson should now appear at her side — if not quite her equal, then certainly no longer unattended — invites a reconsideration not only of Miss Olson's prospects, but of the nature of influence itself.

There are those who refine by instruction, and others who do so by proximity. The distinction is subtle, though not without consequence. Miss Olson, for her part, appears to be learning quickly, though it remains unclear whether what she acquires is form, instinct, or something less easily named.

One does not become Miss Blanche. One is, however, changed by being near her.

VAN STEETEN EXTRACTS GABRIELLE

ON THE QUIET DISAPPEARANCE OF MISS OLSON

BY ROSE STERLING

It is not uncommon for new names to appear briefly in our circles, though it is rarer for one to vanish without incident. Miss Gabrielle Olson, whose presence at the Arbuckle Ball was noted less for any single impropriety than for a certain persistence of them, has not been seen since.

There are, of course, errors which provoke correction, and others which invite indulgence. More interesting are those which produce neither response, accumulating instead into a kind of conclusion. One observed, that evening, a pattern difficult to describe and easier still to remember — not because it offended, but because it resisted alignment with its surroundings.

Society, contrary to popular sentiment, is not unkind. It does not expel; it simply fails to retain. Miss Olson's absence, therefore, should not be understood as consequence, but as resolution.

One suspects she will be happier elsewhere.



DOVE AND RAVEN: SERAFINA & LORD HAMMERSMITH

GET TOGETHER

A MATCH OF SOME DISTINCTION

BY ROSE STERLING

It is understood that Miss Serafina Winters is to be married to Lord Petryr Hammersmith, whose name remains associated with one of the older holdings beyond the city, if not among its more expansive ones.

Miss Winters, who has been observed in recent weeks in the company of her mother, Lady Winters, has drawn quiet notice for a manner at odds with the more usual forms of presentation. That she should now be engaged is perhaps less surprising than the direction the arrangement has taken.

Lord Hammersmith, a widower of some years, is not without standing, though his circumstances are said to be measured rather than extensive. His reputation, where mentioned, tends toward steadiness rather than display.

The match, as it is presently understood, does not resolve the questions that have attended the Winters household, though it may alter their character.

Lady Winters has not yet made a formal statement.

Those who consider such matters in terms of advantage may find the arithmetic incomplete. Others may observe that not all decisions are made on that basis.

For now, the engagement stands, and with it the expectation that its consequences will be watched with interest.

DO NOT GET TOGETHER

AN ARRANGEMENT INTERRUPTED

BY ROSE STERLING

The anticipated engagement of Miss Serafina Winters to Mr. Charles Pembroke, long understood to be under consideration, appears not to have proceeded as expected.

Miss Winters is, at present, not in residence, and no formal statement has been issued by Lady Winters. Those familiar with the matter suggest that the situation extends beyond mere delay.

Mr. Pembroke, whose position is regarded as both secure and advantageous, has not commented.

The proposed match, notable for its clarity of benefit, had already drawn quiet attention. That it should now remain unresolved invites further consideration.

Whether Miss Winters' absence is temporary or otherwise is not yet established. What is clear is that the arrangement, as it was understood, no longer holds.



INVISIBLE HELP: PLAYERS VS. THE MILLERS

PLAYERS INTERVENE

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS AT THE ARBUCKLE ESTATE

BY ROSE STERLING

In the aftermath of last evening's disturbance at the Arbuckle residence, attention has begun to settle not only on its cause, but on certain events that followed in its wake.

It is understood that an encounter took place in one of the more remote corridors of the house, removed from the principal gathering. Accounts differ as to how the matter arose, though it is generally agreed that the situation escalated rapidly.

Two gentlemen, previously in attendance, were later conveyed from the premises under medical supervision. Their condition, at the time of writing, has not been formally clarified.

Those present suggest that the circumstances surrounding the encounter were not unrelated to the broader disorder of the evening, though whether they were a continuation of it or something more particular remains open to interpretation.

The individuals involved have not been publicly identified. No official statement has yet been issued.

In such moments, sequence is often mistaken for cause. The distinction may prove relevant.

THE MILLERS ARE NOT STOPPED

A NOTE ON CONDUCT

BY ROSE STERLING

Among the less remarked consequences of last evening's disturbance is the altered standing of certain attendees whose conduct, when removed from the general confusion, appears to have attracted quiet attention.

It is said that an incident involving a member of the household staff occurred in one of the less frequented corridors of the residence. Accounts are, as elsewhere, incomplete; what is less so is the impression left upon those who became aware of it.

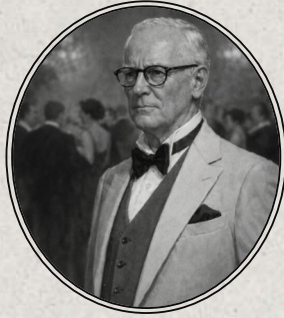
The gentlemen in question have not been named publicly, though their presence at similar gatherings may not be assumed.

In such matters, silence is often mistaken for absence. It rarely is.





CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS



MR. FRANK WILKINS

Disciplined servant of a higher order.

A tall man (age 58) in a perfectly fitted white coat moves without sound. He stands just behind conversations, not within them. His gaze lingers on shoes, posture, placement. When addressed: a slight incline of the head, a pause, then a quiet reply.

Corrects through others. Restores order. Watches, then acts without comment. Repeats corrections until they «stick».

A glass left out of line is moved; if shifted again, it returns within moments. A servant errs; Wilkins observes, then silently performs the task again while the servant watches.

Escalation: A guest ignores the room twice.

Pressure: Servants redirect them; conversations close; doors become attended. Persist, and a senior servant addresses them aloud.

Lines: «Sir.», «If you would follow me.», «Allow me.» (adjusts without asking), «Mrs. Arbuckle, perhaps Miss Turner would—»

Whispers: «He fixes things without speaking.», «Staff don't last under him.», «You don't notice him until you're moved.»

Order Influence — Assimilated: As conduit, he is the calm in the storm. Everything he does is just ... proper.

STR 55 CON 65 SIZ 60 INT 75 POW 85

DEX 60 APP 65 EDU 75 HP 12 DB 0

Build 0 Move 6 SAN 85 MP 17

Key Skills: Psychology: 70%, Spot Hidden: 85%, Listen: 75%, Persuade: 60% (formal authority), Charm: 50% (professional, not warm), Intimidate: 55% (controlled, quiet), Credit Rating: 50% (position, not wealth), Etiquette (Service): 90%, Organize/Manage Staff: 80%, Accounting: 50%, Stealth: 60% (moves quietly, observes unnoticed), Brawl: 40%, Dodge: 40%



MRS. FRANCIS ARBUCKLE

High-functioning social manipulator with low physical agency but strong control instincts.

A woman (age 42) in a carefully fitted evening dress stands where she can be seen. The scent of Chanel No. 5 lingers before she speaks. When listening, she tilts her head, eyes moving between speaker and audience. She steps in lightly, touches an arm, speaks, and withdraws before the reply.

Repeats others with small changes. Draws people into conversations they didn't choose. Answers a different question. Keeps attention on herself.

A sharp remark is repeated nearby, softened, and others nod. She calls someone across the room, folds them into a conversation, and leaves them there. Her husband's name comes up; a pause, then a new introduction, and the topic shifts.

Escalation: A guest speaks openly about something private and ignores her first redirection.

Pressure: She names them aloud, assigns them statements, or places them where correcting her causes a scene.

Lines: «I'm sure you didn't mean it that way.», «Do come back. People will talk.», «Perhaps this has been a bit much for you...», «You said it so well just now.»

Whispers: «You'll agree with her before you notice.», «She never raises her voice, and yet the room follows.», «Mention her husband and watch her smile change.»

Order Influence — Assimilated: «Sees» how everything fits together, but is overwhelmed.

STR 40 CON 55 SIZ 65 INT 80 POW 75

DEX 45 APP 70 EDU 80 HP 12 DB 0

Build 1 Move 6 SAN 75 MP 15

Key Skills: Charm 75 (hostess), Fast Talk 70 (deflection), Persuade 65, Psychology 70, Spot Hidden 60 (social shifts), Intimidate 40 (implied power), Credit Rating 85, Brawl: 25%, Dodge: 25%



CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS



MR. WINSTON ARBUCKLE

*Industrial power, socially blunt,
and used to solving problems directly.*

A broad man (age 62), balding, slightly heavy, stands as if the room should make space for him. A cigar rests in his hand or mouth; smoke follows him. His voice carries without effort. He speaks while others are still speaking, claps shoulders, steps too close, and turns away mid-reply.

Pushes through instead of around. Treats everyone as if they work for him. Trades favors, money, or decisions for solutions. Ignores small signals; responds to direct ones.

A servant hesitates; he waves them off, takes the bottle, and pours himself. A quiet exchange is interrupted; he joins in, answers for someone, and moves on. A request is made; he offers money or a decision before hearing it out.

Escalation: He is contradicted or slowed twice.

Pressure: He corners PCs with offers or decisions — money on the table, a favor assumed, or a public expectation to agree.

Lines: «*Industry doesn't wait for permission.*», «*Let's not waste time.*», «*Name your price.*»

Whispers: «*You can buy a manor, not the manners.*», «*He treats servants like foremen.*», «*He's at the office late—weekends too.*»

Order Influence — Assimilated: He radically shifts into the opposite behavior, becoming the perfect host.

STR 70 CON 70 SIZ 70 INT 65 POW 65
DEX 50 APP 55 EDU 70 HP 14 DB +1D4
Build 1 Move 5 SAN 65 MP 13

Key Skills: Persuade: 60%, Intimidate: 65%, Charm: 40% (blunt), Psychology: 40%, Credit Rating: 95%, Accounting: 70%, Law: 40%, Spot Hidden: 55%, Listen: 50%, Brawl: 60%, Dodge: 40%, Firearms: 45%



MISS VERONICA BLANCHE

*Social predator, opportunist, thief.
High charm, high adaptability, low commitment.*

A striking woman (age 26) with blonde hair and a black evening dress, marked by an emerald brooch and pearls. She moves easily between groups, never lingering long. When listening, she leans in slightly, eyes fixed, then looks away first. She lowers her voice to draw others closer, then steps back, making them follow.

Tests before committing. Matches tone and pace within seconds. Moves on at the first sign of friction. Leaves with something small and valuable.

A private aside becomes an invitation elsewhere; if refused, she smiles and shifts to another guest without pause. A personal detail is offered; she mirrors it, deepens it slightly, then withdraws. After a close exchange, a ring, lighter, or note is no longer where it was.

Escalation: A PC shows interest or reveals something private.

Pressure: She draws them aside, lowers her voice, creates a moment that is easier to follow than refuse.

Lines: «*Shall we step somewhere quieter?*», «*You shouldn't have come... or perhaps sooner.*», «*Another time, then.*»

Whispers: «*She never stays long.*», «*Ever read The Three Musketeers? Milady de Winter comes to mind.*»

Order Influence — Leave: She realizes quickly that something is wrong and tries to leave. Keeper's Choice or CR/POW rolls.

STR 45 CON 55 SIZ 55 INT 70 POW 60
DEX 80 APP 90 EDU 60 HP 11 DB 0
Build 0 Move 8 SAN 60 MP 12

Key Skills: Charm: 85%, Fast Talk: 80%, Persuade: 65%, Psychology: 60%, Sleight of Hand: 75%, Stealth: 70%, Spot Hidden: 65%, Listen: 55%, Credit Rating: 60%, Brawl: 40%, Dodge: 60%, Firearms: 30%



MR. HENRY DUCANTE

Performative aristocrat, duel-cheat, socially aggressive but structurally dependent.

A fit man (age 35) with a crimson shirt stands where he can be seen. He holds himself a fraction too rigid, chin slightly raised. His French accent is pronounced and deliberate. He watches reactions after he speaks, not before, and lets silence sit until someone answers.

Sets the frame, then enforces it. Corrects others publicly. Leans on titles, forms, and implication. Falters when ignored or reframed.

A minor breach is called out aloud, with a faint smile, forcing attention onto the offender. He inserts himself into a conversation, restates its terms, and continues as if agreed. If contradicted cleanly, he pauses, adjusts his cuff, and redirects to safer ground or another guest.

Escalation: Someone challenges his standing or refuses his framing twice.

Pressure: He calls out PCs in front of others — questions their conduct, demands form, or frames them as having erred.

Lines: «*Vous manquez singulièrement de tenue.*» [You are singularly lacking in breeding.], «*Permettez... ce n'est pas ainsi que les choses se font.*» [Allow me... that is not how things are done.]

Whispers: «*Left France under unfortunate circumstances.*» «*No one can place his family.*» «*A man missed him in a duel—called it luck of the devil.*»

Order Influence — Assimilation: Starts dueling with other guests.

STR 65 CON 60 SIZ 60 INT 60 POW 55
DEX 70 APP 75 EDU 65 HP 12 DB 0
Build 0 Move 9 SAN 55 MP 11

Key Skills: Charm: 60%, Fast Talk: 65%, Persuade: 55%, Psychology: 40%, Intimidate: 75%, Credit Rating: 75%, French: 65, English: 60, Brawl: 60%, Dodge: 55%, Firearms: 40% (70% with his pistols)



THE MILLERS

Opportunistic enforcers. Pack behavior. Confidence comes from numbers, not ability.

Two young men (ages 24 and 26) move as a pair, rarely more than a few steps apart. One speaks while the other watches. They linger at the edge of conversations, then drift closer without invitation. When still, they stand too near; when addressed, they glance at each other first.

Test, then commit. Close distance together. Attach to stronger presence. Withdraw if resisted early.

They appear nearby without being called, standing just within earshot. A step closer becomes two, then they flank slightly, narrowing space. If ignored, they remain; if acknowledged, one speaks, the other shifts position.

Escalation: They sense isolation or weakness and no immediate resistance.

Pressure: They crowd PCs — limit movement, split attention, force responses through proximity.

Lines: «*Just passing through.*», «*No trouble.*», «*You're in the wrong place.*»

Whispers: «*Alone, they're nothing.*», «*They show up when he needs them.*»

Order Influence — Escape: xxxx

In a fight, Bertrand flanks, distracts, and avoids direct hits. Ingmar closes distance, grapples, and overwhelms.

Bertrand (younger) / Ingmar Miller (older)

STR	CON	SIZ	INT	POW
60/80	55/70	55/70	50/45	45/45
DEX	APP	EDU	HP	DB
75/50	45/40	40/35	11/14	0/+1D4
Build	Move	SAN	MP	
0/1	9/8	45/45	9/9	

Key Skills: Stealth: 60%/40%, Intimidate: 55%/65%, Spot Hidden: 50%/45%, Brawl: 65%/70%, Dodge 60%/40%



CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS



MR. MILTON REGASS

*Blackmailer, collector of secrets,
socially tolerated parasite.*

A thin man (age 45) with glasses stands slightly apart, never central, never absent. He keeps his hands folded or lightly touching a glass he does not drink from. When speaking, he leans in just enough to be heard by one person, never more. His voice is quiet, even, and unhurried. He smiles faintly when others grow uncomfortable, then looks away first.

Speaks in implication, not accusation. Introduces familiarity before discomfort. Reveals knowledge in small pieces. Withdraws before open conflict.

He greets a guest as if continuing an earlier conversation, mentions a detail not publicly known, then pauses. A concern is raised; he reframes it as a shared memory, then suggests a quieter place to talk. When tension rises, he softens his tone, calls it a misunderstanding, and steps away.

Escalation: A PC denies or dismisses him twice.

Pressure: Isolates and references something they cannot easily explain, then comply, deflect, or risk attention.

Lines: «I'm sure you remember...», «It would be unfortunate if...», «A small matter, easily resolved.», «We can keep this between ourselves.»

Whispers: «He knows things he shouldn't.», «No one says no to him twice.»

Order Influence — Leave: Tries to excuse himself early.

STR 45 CON 50 SIZ 50 INT 85 POW 80

DEX 45 APP 40 EDU 85 HP 10 DB 0

Build 0 Move 6 SAN 80 MP 16

Key Skills: Fast Talk: 80%, Persuade: 75%, Psychology: 75%, Charm: 50% (polite, but not likable), Intimidate: 65% (subtle, implied), Credit Rating: 80%, Law: 60%, Accounting: 70%, Spot Hidden: 65%, Listen: 60%, Drive Auto: 70%, Stealth: 40% (not physical, but discreet), Brawl: 20%, Dodge: 30%, Firearms: 25%



LADY MARGRET WINTERS

*Fading aristocrat, indulgent,
financially strained, socially performative.*

A woman (age 41), well-dressed but slightly overfull in posture and presence, moves with practiced grace that strains at the edges. She holds a glass often, drinks freely, and gestures with it as she speaks. Her smile is warm and sustained a moment too long. She draws people in with easy charm, then keeps them there with questions about family, status, and prospects.

Opens warmly, then evaluates. Steers talk toward status and marriage. Ignores what does not fit. Presses her daughter into place.

She greets a guest with familiarity, asks after their family, then narrows to income or connections. A topic turns uncomfortable; she laughs lightly, redirects to something pleasant, and continues as if unchanged. Moves her daughter into position beside a suitable guest.

Escalation: Her status or finances are questioned, or her daughter resists publicly.

Pressure: She binds the person into polite obligations — introductions, expectations, or proposals — making refusal visible and awkward.

Lines: «You must tell me everything.» «Such a delightful match, don't you think?» «We mustn't dwell on unpleasantness.» «My daughter — come here, dear.»

Whispers: «A fine estate, but little else.» «She spends as if nothing has changed.» «Her daughter does not always look pleased.»

Order Influence — Assimilation: Becomes obsessed with arranging the perfect dinner plate for herself.

STR 45 CON 60 SIZ 75 INT 65 POW 55

DEX 40 APP 60 EDU 75 HP 13 DB +1D4

Build 1 Move 6 SAN 55 MP 11

Key Skills: Charm: 60%, Persuade: 65%, Fast Talk: 50% (deflection), Psychology: 45%, Credit Rating: 70% (title not wealth), Appraise: 50%, Spot Hidden: 45%, Listen: 50%, Brawl: 25%, Dodge: 25%



CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS



MISS SERAFINA WINTERS

Young aristocrat, intelligent, constrained, internally decisive.

A young woman (age 18) in a dress matching her mother's stands slightly behind or beside her, never quite centered. Her posture is composed, hands still, movements economical. She listens more than she speaks, eyes fixed on whoever holds the room. When she does speak, it is measured and precise, without raising her voice.

Waits, then acts. Redirects instead of refusing. Chooses moments, not openings. Grows quieter under pressure.

Her mother speaks for her; she lets it pass, then later corrects it in a smaller setting. A question is pressed; she answers part of it, shifts the rest, and lets the topic move on. Left briefly alone, she approaches a person directly, speaks plainly, then withdraws before being noticed.

Escalation: A path opens — privacy, distance from her mother, or a clear opportunity — and is not interrupted.

Pressure: She asks for small, precise help — time, access, a meeting — framed so refusal feels deliberate.

Lines: «*Not here.*», «*Another moment, if you please.*», «*That is not quite what I meant.*», «*I would ask a small favor.*»

Whispers: «*She listens more than she speaks.*», «*There is a mind there.*», «*The dress does her no favors.*»

Order Influence — Expulsion: She does not fit the system and is removed.

STR 45 CON 55 SIZ 55 INT 75 POW 70
DEX 55 APP 70 EDU 65 HP 11 DB 0
Build 0 Move 8 SAN xx MP 14

Key Skills: Charm: 60% (natural), Persuade: 65% (quiet determination), Fast Talk: 50% (can deflect), Psychology: 65%, Credit Rating: 65% (title, but unstable backing), Spot Hidden: 60%, Listen: 60%, Brawl: 25%, Dodge: 30%



LORD PETRYR HAMMERSMITH

Grounded aristocrat, practical, morally anchored, capable under pressure.

A man (age 52) stands at ease, posture straight without stiffness. He dresses plainly for the setting; no medals, no display. His voice is steady, unhurried, and carries only as far as needed. He looks directly at the person he speaks to and does not scan the room while listening.

Acts before discussing. Speaks plainly. Ignores status games. Steps forward when others hesitate.

A disagreement forms; he states a course of action and begins it, expecting others to follow. A servant struggles; he assists without comment, then moves on. A tense exchange escalates; he steps between parties, addresses the matter directly, and ends it or leaves.

Escalation: A situation stalls or becomes openly disruptive.

Pressure: He asks the person to act — direct, immediate requests that assume cooperation.

Lines: «*Let's be done with it.*», «*This way.*», «*That will not do.*» «*We act now.*»

Whispers: «*Unus, sed leo.*» [One, but a lion!], «*He lost his wife and child.*», «*If you're in the right, go to him.*»

Order Influence — Assimilated: Tries to maintain order and becomes a part of it.

STR 70 CON 70 SIZ 65 INT 70 POW 75
DEX 60 APP 65 EDU 70 HP 13 DB +1D4
Build 1 Move 6 SAN 75 MP 15

Key Skills: Persuade: 65% (measured, credible), Psychology: 60% (reads character, not nuance), Charm: 55% (reserved, not performative), Intimidate: 60% (quiet authority), Credit Rating: 70%, Spot Hidden: 65%, Listen: 65%, Navigate: 50%, Survival (Rural): 60%, Brawl: 60%, Dodge: 50%, Firearms: 55%, Sword: 70%



CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS



MISS GABRIELLE OLSON

Curious outsider, untrained in social codes, perceptive in the wrong way.

A girl (age 15), slightly underdressed for the room, stands a bit apart, turning an antique necklace between her fingers. She looks directly at people when they speak, head tilted, as if trying to solve them. Her voice is clear, unlowered, and carries further than she expects.

Asks at the wrong time. States what others avoid. Ignores hierarchy. Follows what interests her.

A quiet exchange is interrupted by a direct question; both speakers stop. She repeats something she just heard, plainly, to a different group. Corrected once, she nods — then asks again, more precisely.

Escalation: She notices something unusual and no one stops her after the first question.

Pressure: She asks direct questions in public, repeating or clarifying until they answer or deflect.

Lines: «*Why did you say that?*», «*Is that not what just happened?*», «*I don't understand.*», «*Should I not ask?*»

Whispers: «*You can buy jewelry, not manners.*», «*Strange necklace.*»

Order Influence — Escape: She is ignored by Order and escapes when she gets hurt.

STR 40 CON 55 SIZ 50 INT 70 POW 60

DEX 55 APP 60 EDU 55 HP 10 DB 0

Build 0 Move 8 SAN 60 MP 12

Key Skills: Spot Hidden: 85% (noticing what others ignore), Listen: 80%, Psychology: 50% (intuitive), Charm: 45% (awkward but sincere), Fast Talk: 35%, Persuade: 40%, Credit Rating: 80% (family money), History: 40%, Brawl: 20%, Dodge: 35%



MRS. BIANCA VAN STEETEN

Controlled, perceptive, experienced. Socially precise, emotionally contained.

A woman (age 40) stands slightly apart, never seeking attention, yet rarely unnoticed. Her posture is composed, movements minimal. She observes before speaking, eyes steady, hands still. When she does speak, her voice is low and precise; others lean in to hear.

Observes before acting. Speaks only when it shifts something. Uses timing over force. Withdraws instead of pressing.

A conversation turns; she adds a single remark that redirects it, then falls silent. A misstep occurs; she does not react, but later speaks to the one person who can act on it. Gabrielle falters; she steps in beside her, answers briefly, then lets the girl continue.

Escalation: A key moment presents itself — exposure, leverage, or protection — and delay would close it.

Pressure: She makes quiet, targeted requests — information, timing, positioning — difficult to refuse without consequence.

Lines: «*Not here.*», «*Consider what follows.*», «*That would be unwise.*», «*If you insist.*»

Whispers: «*She's a lady—no doubt.*», «*She sees more than she says.*»

Order Influence — Assimilation: Tries to keep order socially and becomes part of it.

STR 50 CON 65 SIZ 55 INT 80 POW 80

DEX 60 APP 75 EDU 80 HP 12 DB 0

Build 0 Move 7 SAN 80 MP 16

Key Skills: Psychology: 80%, Spot Hidden: 75%, Listen: 70%, Charm: 65%, Persuade: 75%, Fast Talk: 60% (used sparingly), Intimidate: 50% (quiet, controlled), Credit Rating: 80%, Etiquette: 85%, Appraise: 70%, History: 60%, Stealth: 50%, Brawl: 40%, Dodge: 45%, Firearms: 60% (.32 auto, 1D8, 15 yards, 1(3) uses per round, 9 bullets — 8 in magazine, 1 in chamber)



CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS



MRS ROSE STERLING

*Observer, extractor, amplifier.
Turns incidents into narratives.*

A woman (age 31) moves lightly between groups, pausing at the edge rather than entering fully. She listens more than she speaks, head slightly inclined, eyes fixed on whoever holds the floor. When she does speak, it is measured and quiet; others lean in, then continue for her.

Selects what matters. Asks, then waits. Reframes instead of contradicting. Lets others complete the story.

A remark is made; she repeats part of it as a question, then falls silent until more is added. Two accounts differ; she links them with a single observation and lets others resolve it. A scene ends; she recounts it nearby, cleaner and sharper, and it begins to spread.

Escalation: An incident draws attention and no clear version settles first.

Pressure: She asks person to clarify — publicly or in earshot — forcing them to confirm, deny, or reshape what will be repeated.

Lines: «*That is not quite how I heard it.*», «*And then?*», «*You were there, were you not?*», «*How interesting.*»

Whispers: «*Be careful what you say around her.*», «*She can piece together more than you tell her.*»

Order Influence — Assimilation: She amplifies the «*proper*» behavior across the room.

STR 45 CON 55 SIZ 55 INT 80 POW 65

DEX 60 APP 65 EDU 75 HP 11 DB 0

Build 0 Move 8 SAN 65 MP 13

Key Skills: Psychology: 75%, Spot Hidden: 75%, Listen: 75%, Fast Talk: 80% (primary tool), Persuade: 65%, Charm: 60%, Credit Rating: 60% (access, not status), Writing (Journalism): 80%, Library Use: 70%, Law: 50% (knows what can be printed vs implied), Stealth: 55% (social invisibility more than physical), Brawl: 25%, Dodge: 40%



MISS IRENE WATTERSON

Invisible Integrity.

A young woman (age 21) in a servant's dress moves quietly through the room, rarely noticed unless addressed. Her posture is upright, hands steady, eyes attentive without lingering. She watches for what needs doing, not who is watching. When she speaks, it is brief, direct, and without ornament.

Sees what needs doing. Acts without display. Ignores status when acting. Withdraws when nothing requires intervention.

A glass is empty; she replaces it before being asked. A guest falters; she steps in, steadies them, then steps back. Something is off; she pauses, observes, then adjusts a detail others miss.

Escalation: She recognizes something as wrong and no one else acts.

Pressure: She asks person for immediate, practical help — quietly, without explanation — forcing them to choose whether to assist.

Lines: «*This should not wait.*» «*Please — now.*» «*It will take only a moment.*» «*Thank you.*»

Whispers: (None. She is not spoken of.)

Order Influence — Assimilation: She assists others in showing the «*proper*» behavior.

STR 50 CON 60 SIZ 45 INT 65 POW 65

DEX 70 APP 65 EDU 45 HP 10 DB 0

Build 0 Move 9 SAN 65 MP 13

Key Skills: Spot Hidden: 60% (noticing details while ignored), Listen: 60%, Stealth: 75%, Psychology: 40% (intuitive, not trained), Etiquette (Service): 50%, Clean/Organize: 60%, Navigate (House): 60%, First Aid: 75%, Brawl: 30%, Dodge: 55%



CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS



THE SERVANTS

They reinforce the house is not just a setting — it's a system.

Servants are structure under pressure, Maids are observation and vulnerability.

TYPICAL MALE SERVANT (FOOTMAN / SENIOR STAFF)

Trained, observant, conditioned to anticipate needs and avoid notice, used to hierarchy and instruction. Can act under pressure if given direction.

STR 60 CON 60 SIZ 60 INT 60 POW 55
DEX 60 APP 55 EDU 55 HP 12 DB 0
Build 0 Move 8 SAN 55 MP 11

Key Skills: Spot Hidden: 65%, Listen: 65%, Psychology: 50% (reading guests, not equals), Persuade: 50% (formal communication), Charm: 45%, Stealth: 60% (moving quietly, unnoticed), Etiquette (Service): 70%, Carry/Balance/Serve (DEX-based): 65%, First Aid: 40%, Navigate (House): 60%, Brawl: 50%, Dodge: 50%, Firearms: 45%

TYPICAL MAID (HOUSEMAID / SERVING STAFF)

Lower status, highly observant, socially invisible, physically light but quick. Sees far more than she is supposed to.

STR 45 CON 55 SIZ 50 INT 55 POW 50
DEX 65 APP 50 EDU 45 HP 10 DB 0
Build 0 Move 8 SAN 50 MP 10

Key Skills: Spot Hidden: 70% (noticing details while ignored), Listen: 70%, Stealth: 65%, Psychology: 45% (intuitive, not trained), Etiquette (Service): 60%, Clean/Organize: 70%, Navigate (House): 65%, First Aid: 35%, Brawl: 30%, Dodge: 55%

GUESTS

Guests include Old Boston Families, Industrialists & Financiers, Politicians & Judges, Academics & Antiquarians, and Artists & Performers (see next pages).

MALE GUEST (DOMINANT)

Industrialist / Political Power Broker

Guest, male. Used to command. Expects obedience. Can impose temporary order — but may misread existential threat as a social problem. Dangerous if wrong.

STR 65 CON 65 SIZ 70 INT 70 POW 65
DEX 50 APP 70 EDU 80 HP 13 DB +1D4
Build 1 Move 7 SAN 65 MP 13

Key Skills: Credit Rating 85%, Persuade: 75%, Fast Talk: 60%, Psychology: 60%, Law: 50%, Intimidate: 65%, Etiquette (High Society): 80%, Spot Hidden: 50%, Brawl: 40%, Dodge: 30%

MALE GUEST (FRAGILE)

Elderly Judge / Academic

Guest, male. Intellect and status, but physically weak or declining. Represents the collapse of institutional authority when reality breaks.

STR 40 CON 50 SIZ 60 INT 75 POW 70
DEX 40 APP 60 EDU 85 HP 11 DB 0
Build 0 Move 5 SAN 70 MP 14

Key Skills: Law: 80%, History: 70%, Occult: 40%, Persuade: 65%, Credit Rating: 75%, Psychology: 55%, Library Use: 80%, Spot Hidden: 45%, Brawl: 20%, Dodge: 20%

FEMALE GUEST

Brahmin Woman / Social Anchor

Guest, female, age 32. Power is relational not physical. Reads people instantly. Maintains networks. Invisible influence.

STR 40 CON 55 SIZ 50 INT 65 POW 60
DEX 60 APP 80 EDU 70 HP 10 DB 0
Build 0 Move 8 SAN 60 MP 12

Key Skills: Charm: 80%, Persuade: 70%, Psychology: 65%, Credit Rating: 80%, Etiquette (High Society): 85%, Fast Talk: 55%, Spot Hidden: 60%, Listen: 60%, Brawl: 25%, Dodge: 40%

OTHER GUESTS

The Arbuckles have invited high-society, and they came, as well as some other guests for color. They can be identified (CR) by clothes and posture.

In the beginning, there is a social clustering of similar styles that gravitate together. Over time, changes creep in — people mix, ties loosen slightly, gloves come off, and posture degrades as the night progresses.

OLD BOSTON FAMILIES (BRAHMINS)

Men: Wear White Tie only, with tailcoats perfectly fitted and not flashy, slightly conservative cut. Immaculate shirts, heavily starched. Accessories minimal — simple studs, understated cufflinks. Everything looks settled, like it has always been this way. They don't look dressed up — they look correct by default.

Women: Silk, satin and velvet in restrained colors — ivory, black, or deep jewel tones. Elegant but not extreme cuts, slightly more conservative necklines. Real, old and understated jewelry — family pieces rather than showpieces. Controlled, inherited elegance. Nothing draws attention, yet everything is expensive.

Function: They define who belongs. They represent «old money» and «class» and are quietly dismissive of the Arbuckles.

Conversation: They speak in continuity, decline, and standards. «Standards are difficult to maintain when they are no longer shared.», «Some traditions exist for a reason.», «Discretion appears to be less valued.»

INDUSTRIALISTS & FINANCIERS

Men: Slightly newer tailcoats, sharper tailoring, with more luxurious fabric — the black is subtly richer. More noticeable accessories (cufflinks, signet rings). Highly polished shoes. They are performing belonging. Nothing is wrong, but it's a touch more intentional.

Women (wives and daughters): Very high quality, sometimes more experimental. Richer, more noticeable colors (emerald, gold, deep red) with slightly more daring cuts (lower backs, more embellishment). Wear larger, newer, and more conspicuous jewelry. Wealth displayed with intent. They want to be seen.

Function: Power without pedigree. Display of wealth while making preliminary contacts.

Conversation: They speak in growth, scale, and control. «Steel demand remains strong — though margins are tightening.», «Expansion requires... flexibility.», «Regulation tends to follow success.»

POLITICIANS & JUDGES

Men: Conservative even by Brahmin standards with slightly heavier fabrics, less fashion-forward cuts. Most noticeable in their posture — they expect to be recognized and respected. Authority first, style second.

Women (wives and daughters): Elegant enough to reflect power, but never so striking that it invites criticism. Silk satin, chiffon overlays, fine crepe in high quality, but not aggressively luxurious. Muted jewel tones (navy, burgundy, dark green), soft pastels (dusty rose, pale blue), black used carefully (elegant, but not theatrical). Fashionable but slightly moderated (neckline not as low and backs not as open as industrialists and financiers, hemlines in correct length, not pushing trends). They track fashion — but stay half a step behind the edge. Wear diamonds, pearls, and sapphires, often wedding gifts, anniversary pieces, or politically appropriate heirlooms. Not excessively large stones or avant-garde designs. Wealth is visible, but framed as stable and legitimate, not newly acquired.

Function: Narrative control. Display their authority, make political connections.

Conversation: They speak in legitimacy, order, and optics. «Public confidence is... delicate.», «The law must be seen to function.», «Certain cases attract unnecessary attention.»

ACADEMICS & ANTIQUARIANS

Men: Slight irregularities, e.g., tie not perfectly centered, waistcoat slightly off. Clothes may be older but are well-kept. Wear glasses and have distracted expressions. They belong intellectually, not socially.

Women: Academics' wives and women of the intellectual circles. Less dramatic dresses with slightly outdated cuts. Practical elegance rather than spectacle. Clothes are respectable but not central.

Function: Undermine others intellectually. Establishing or maintaining contacts.

Conversation: They speak in authority, knowledge, and subtle superiority. «Recent findings suggest earlier conclusions were... premature.», «Authenticity is often assumed rather than verified.», «The past is rarely as stable as one would like.»

ARTISTS & PERFORMERS

Men: The only men who bend the uniform — slightly softer shirt front, hair less rigidly controlled, and a hint of individuality (e.g., a silk scarf, a more fluid posture). Permitted deviation — curated eccentricity.



CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

Women: Chiffon, beaded dresses, lighter materials. The silhouette is closer to flapper styles (looser, more movement). Ornaments a fringe, beadwork, or shimmer under light. The impression is movement and modernity — they animate the room.

Function: Test tolerance boundaries. Being seen, status, contact with current or potential patrons.

Conversation: They speak in provocation, ambiguity, and novelty. «*People prefer what they already understand.*», «*Scandal is often just premature recognition.*», «*Respectability is... limiting.*»

SCANDALOUS GUESTS

The Arbuckles have deliberately as well as unintentionally invited scandalous guests. As Mr. Arbuckle is part of the business world, so he would not invite nor tolerate failed businessmen. But besides Ducante these guests can include:

Corrupt Politicians

- Gossip about them (everyone knows, no one says): «*He's been very active in recent negotiations.*», «*Some decisions require... discretion.*»

Disgraced Academics

- For example, plagiarism, affair with graduate student.
- Gossip about them: «*His work was... influential.*», «*One must be careful with attribution.*»
- To him: «*You've been... occupied recently?*» (controlled humiliation)

Unstable artists

Social risk tolerated as entertainment

- Gossip about them: «*One never knows what they will do next.*», «*Unpredictability has its place.*»





BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PHASES OF A BALL

1. ARRIVAL & RECEPTION

MUSIC

Signals refinement, wealth, and European cultural alignment.

Repertoire

- Johann Strauss II – light waltzes (e.g. «Blue Danube»)
- Franz Schubert – chamber music, lighter movements
- Claude Debussy – Clair de Lune
- Felix Mendelssohn – string quartets, elegant and safe
- Edward Elgar – Salut d'Amour

FOOD

This phase is about precision. Everything is small, controlled, and easy to abandon mid-conversation.

- Oysters on the half shell (very Boston, very status)
- Caviar canapés (small triangles, crustless bread)
- Shrimp cocktails
- Stuffed celery (almond paste, cream cheese, or pimento)
- Deviled eggs
- Salted nuts (silver bowls everywhere)

DRINKS

- Champagne
- Sherry or aperitif-style drinks
- Discreetly served cocktails

SOCIAL

Guests are being announced by a servant, then introduced to the host. Drinks are offered.

Social positioning occurs — guests gravitate to their own social class or group.

Light conversation, some gossip.

2. BUFFET SUPPER

MUSIC

A string ensemble with piano keeps the music unobtrusive and respectable, but a bit warmer. No one is dancing yet — it is still social positioning.

Repertoire

- Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky – waltz movements from ballets (Sleeping Beauty, Swan Lake)
- Frédéric Chopin – nocturnes (arranged)
- Johannes Brahms – Hungarian Dances (lighter arrangements)

FOOD

Centerpiece of the food experience is abundance without chaos. Long tables, heavy linens, silver chafing dishes, and uniformed staff. Variety across temperature and class signals. These are recognizable, reassuring, heavy foods — anchoring the evening.

Cold Table (prestige display)

This is where wealth is most visibly performed.

- Whole poached salmon, decorated with cucumber scales and aspic glaze
- Lobster salad or lobster Newburg (served chilled or warm nearby)
- Cold roast beef, sliced thin
- Galantines (deboned poultry, stuffed, served in aspic)
- Aspic molds (meat or vegetable suspended in gelatin — period-accurate and slightly uncanny — aspic dishes look beautiful and faintly unnatural)
- Potato salad, Waldorf salad
- Olives, pickles, relishes

Hot Table (comfort & richness)

- Roast turkey or capon
- Ham with cloves or glaze
- Beef tenderloin
- Oysters Rockefeller
- Scalloped potatoes
- Creamed spinach or asparagus
- Buttered rolls

Bread & Accompaniments

- Dinner rolls, Parker House rolls
- Butter, preserves

Dessert Table (separate, revealed slightly later)

- Layer cakes
- Éclairs and cream puffs
- Fruit tarts
- Ice cream
- Cheese selection
- Fresh fruit (grapes, oranges, apples)



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DRINKS

- Wine
- Champagne continues
- Punch bowls

SOCIAL

Guests circulate and mingle. Best opportunity for gossip.

3. DANCING & ENTERTAINMENT

MUSIC

Live orchestra plays the core dance styles in the main room, varying between Waltz (more frequent earlier in the evening) and Foxtrot (becoming more frequent later in the evening). The Charleston is danced by younger guests in a side-room after midnight, slightly toned down and viewed with mild disapproval. See *Etiquette — Music and Dance*.

Waltz: Danced especially by older guests, feels eerily ritualistic.

- Johann Strauss II dominates
 - Americanized waltzes
- Foxtrot:** Smooth, adaptable, socially acceptable — if nothing is happening, people are foxtrotting.
- Irving Berlin — «*Always*», «*Blue Skies*»
 - George Gershwin — «*Fascinating Rhythm*»
 - Paul Whiteman

Charleston (side room only, later in the evening): Associated with youth, energy, and mild scandal. Slightly toned down, danced by younger guests only, not the hosts.

- The Charleston
- James P. Johnson

DANCES

Music is doing social work: Classical music as class boundary («*we are established*»), Foxtrot is sign of modernity («*we are current but respectable*»), and Charleston/jazz as danger and decadence («*things are slipping*»).

- **Waltz:** A smooth, flowing partner dance in 3/4 time. Couples move in continuous turns across the floor, maintaining close frame and controlled elegance. It signals refinement, tradition, and social competence

— movement without disruption.

- **Foxtrot:** A progressive, gliding dance in 4/4 time with a mix of slow and quick steps. Less formal than the waltz but still controlled, it emphasizes ease, rhythm, and adaptability. It allows for subtle individuality without breaking social norms.
- **Charleston:** A fast, energetic dance with syncopated rhythms, kicks, and swinging arms. Often danced solo or loosely partnered, it breaks with traditional structure and invites display, playfulness, and mild impropriety. It signals modernity — and to some, a loss of restraint.

Elite hosts often hired live dance orchestras, not just classical musicians. The same ensemble might play Strauss early then switch to Berlin/Gershwin arrangements later.

During the ball, music signals rising tension and moral loosing.

DANCING ETIQUETTE

Men invite women to dance. A woman should not dance repeatedly with the same partner early in the evening.

FOOD

Secondary and strategic. Keeps guests going without interrupting dancing.

- Small sandwiches (ham, chicken salad)
- Canapés replenished
- Pastries and sweets
- Nuts and chocolates

DRINKS

- Coffee service begins appearing

SOCIAL

Guests dance with each other. No dance cards are used.

4. LATE-NIGHT UNRAVELING

MUSIC

A full jazz orchestra emerges playing controlled jazz, not a Harlem club atmosphere.

Repertoire

- Duke Ellington (emerging mid-late 1920s)
- Louis Armstrong (rising influence)



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FOOD

Heavier, restorative food is reintroduced. Its function is to sober people up, extend the night, and prevent collapse.

- Consommé and clear soup
- Oyster stew
- Scrambled eggs and chafing-dish dishes
- Welsh rarebit
- Leftover meats and breads

DRINKS

- Coffee (strong, constantly available)

SOCIAL

Guests loosen up.

Older guests leave first, younger guest stay later. Guests retrieve coats and a brief farewell to hosts is expected.

A NOTE ON FOOD & DRINKS

FOOD

Food has a social logic, it is rich, seasonal, and display-oriented.

- **Display vs Consumption:** Much of the buffet is seen more than eaten. Especially decorative fish, aspics, and elaborate cold displays. This creates untouched perfection early and gradual decay later.
- **Class Encoding:** French terms and presentation signal sophistication. New England seafood signal local prestige. Exotic imports (caviar, citrus) signal global reach.
- **Staff Presence:** Servants matter — carving stations, circulating trays, and silent correction of disorder.

DRINKS

Prohibition does not apply to this gathering — high status guests expect access to illegal alcohol. However, they also expect discretion and moderation.

CON if player imbibes a lot, fail incurs a penalty die. If the player fails a roll during the rest of the evening due to the penalty die, it will be caused by the inebriation — and recognized as such by the guests.

Drunk behavior will first be quietly overlooked, before the guest will be complimented to leave, or at least to rest out of view for a while («*Perhaps this has been a bit too much for you ...*»).

ETIQUETTE

The high-society ball has its own social rules — and lives by it. Players can be required to do CR rolls for each phase of the ball. Success makes things easier, failure leads to more negative reactions, while a fumble gets them ignored for a few minutes.

RANK AND REPUTATION

Social rank determines attention and introductions. Some NPCs will ignore players unless introduced. Others will test their legitimacy. Access becomes a resource which affects information gathering and creates friction without violence.

Introductions: You do not approach strangers freely, you must be introduced by a mutual acquaintance of equal or higher status or host.

For example, a person of lower rank cannot just walk up to Lady Winters. She needs Francis to introduce them or someone Lady Winters already knows. The lower-status person is presented to the higher-status person, e.g., «*Lady Winters, may I present Miss ...*», never the other way around.

Testing Legitimacy: The unstated core question is «*Do you belong here, or are you pretending?*».

It is tested subtly via:

- **Conversational Traps:** Someone brings up shared acquaintances, schools, clubs, or travel. Example: «*You were in Paris? Surely you knew the Delacroix circle?*» They're not asking — they're checking consistency. If player answers vaguely it raises suspicion, if player answers precisely it leads to acceptance.
- **Etiquette Probing:** Small things, but deliberate. Does the player wait to be introduced? Use the correct forms of address? Handle the servants properly? A mistake won't cause a scene — but it will lower perceived status and reduce access.
- **Controlled Slight:** Someone slightly ignores or dismisses them, e.g., cuts conversation short, fails to introduce them onward, or redirects attention. If they react emotionally they fail, if they remain composed they pass.
- **Delegated Probing:** Lower-status characters like The Millers or even a servant test boundaries. For example, mild rudeness or overfamiliarity. If player tolerates too much they are seen as weak. If player overreacts he is seen as uncultured.

Attention: In any room, the highest-ranking individuals get first greetings, more time, and better positioning.

Visible signals are who the host spends time with, who others orbit around, and who gets interrupted vs who is listened to.

Class Leakage: Signals are slipping that reveal that the real position contradicts the claimed one. The Brahmin ideal is that *wealth and status appear effortless, stable, and unnoticed*. Leakage is uncontrolled contradiction that happens when certain things become visible — effort, cost-saving, emotional need, or control. For example, talking too much about money suggests you need it, overdressing or over-hosting suggests insecurity, or cutting corners in a visible way reveals constraint.

Reputation Management

- Public behavior is controlled. Private scandals are hidden — but everyone knows. In high society *rumor is often enough*. *Once something might have existed, people behave as if it did*.
- Women operate within stricter norms — but the 1920s are loosening them.
- Flirtation exists, but must remain deniable.
- High society tolerates blackmail, corruption, or affairs as long as it is within its rules and does not threaten the structure. Visible disruption, traceable agency (ignoring the rules), or unstable information flow are not tolerated.
- Not adhering to the rules or threatening its structure gets people ostracized, usually permanently. It is «*stay and fight within the rules*» or «*leave and lose access to that world permanently*».

DEALING WITH SERVANTS

Servants are *not socially present*, but must be treated as if they matter. You treat them like part of a well-functioning mechanism — but a respected one.

- **Acknowledgement without familiarity:** You do not ignore them completely. You also do not engage them personally. Correct is brief eye contact, small nod, clear, and minimal instruction. Incorrect is chatting, asking personal questions, or joking with them.
- **Indirect Requests:** You don't command bluntly. Correct is «*Would you see that this is taken care of?*», not «*Take this.*»
- **Neutral Communication:** Short, unemotional. No first names, no name or role-based address. «*Thank you*», «*Please*», «*That will be all, thank you.*» in a minimal, controlled way. Doing it correctly signals that you are accustomed to being served, not dependent on the servant personally (which using a name



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would imply), and you maintain distance without disrespect. Ignoring them entirely like furniture or snapping fingers signals arrogance or insecurity. Being too warm («*Oh thank you so much, you're so kind.*»), over-friendliness («*What's your name?!*»), or treating them as confidants signals unfamiliarity with the system.

- **No Visible Frustration:** If something goes wrong, you do not react emotionally. Losing composure toward servants signals you are not used to being served.

Servants can act as mirrors of status. They respond faster and more precisely to people who «*belong*». Slight hesitation or stiffness signals you are being evaluated — negatively.

During the ball, footmen/servants, maids, and kitchen staff are in operation. The staff is highly trained and invisible unless needed. They hear a lot because no-one pays them any attention until they are needed. Thus they can be used as source of information. The only exception is Mr. Wilkins who politely shuts down any inquiries as inappropriate (usually by overhearing the question, «*If you had asked me for information, I would have to politely refuse, and so would my staff.*»).

CONVERSATION TOPICS

At the ball, most conversation functions to establish alignment, probe status, introduce controlled tension, and signal knowledge without commitment.

Guests don't «*talk about*» something, they are trying to establish something without saying it directly. Players can align (e.g., «*Yes, the standards are changing.*»), probe (e.g., «*What have you heard?!*»), or destabilize (e.g., «*It depends on who is judging.*»).

Good conversations always do one of three things, otherwise it is background noise. It places someone (status), tests someone (reaction), or reframes something (narrative).

If something could be said directly (e.g., «*He is corrupt.*») it won't be (e.g., «*He has been very successful recently.*»).

Safe Topics (social lubricant; low risk, high signaling)

- **Season & Events:** To establish shared awareness without taking a stance. «*The Arbuckles have been ambitious this year.*», «*One sees new names more frequently.*», «*The season feels... less predictable than usual.*».
- **Travel:** Coded class signaling, signal refinement, quietly gate-keep experience. «*We spent the summer in*

Newport — though it has changed.», «*Paris is... not what it was before the war.*»

- **Art & Culture:** Safe but evaluative, to reveal taste without committing to controversy. «*Modern painting seems less interested in form.*», «*The Charleston is... energetic.*»

Controlled Tension Topics (people test each other)

- **Nouveau Riche (Arbuckle himself):** Old money won't attack directly, they will undermine legitimacy without open hostility. «*It is refreshing to see such... initiative.*», «*Industry has certainly changed the composition of gatherings like this.*», «*One forgets how quickly things can be built.*»
- **Prohibition:** Hypocrisy field with moral signaling while quietly acknowledging violation. «*Of course, one must support the law.*», «*It is unfortunate that enforcement falls unevenly.*», «*Some people lack the discipline to handle indulgence.*»
- **The War:** Still unresolved, character assessment disguised as reflection. «*It clarified certain things.*», «*Not everyone returned... unchanged.*», «*One learned who could be relied upon.*»
- **Reputation & Scandal:** Core currency, never direct but always oblique. Invite disclosure without committing to it. «*One hears things.*», «*It is rarely wise to ask for details.*», «*Some matters resolve themselves... if one waits.*»

Micro-Topics (especially useful for play)

Small but powerful.

- **Exclusion (implied):** «*Who is not here?!*», «*I expected to see the Whitcombs.*», «*They have been... less visible.*»
- **Relationship Speculation:** «*Who arrived with whom?!*», «*They seem... newly acquainted.*», «*I hadn't realized they moved in the same circles.*»
- **Potential Targets:** «*Who is being watched?!*», «*People seem very interested in him tonight.*»

Dangerous Topics (escalate easy)

Never stated plainly, but always implied, invited, or framed as curiosity.

- Money origins («*How was that fortune made?!*»)
- Sexual impropriety (never direct)
- Legitimacy of lineage
- War conduct
- Intellectual dishonesty

See also **Other Guests** for topics and comments by specific groups.

HISTORICAL NOTES

As the ball is a environment that relies on heavy social evaluation, two comments on the way people were seen.

ASSESSING PEOPLE

People were assessed by lineage and behavior, though the Great War challenged that approach. **Lineage defines expectation and behavior confirms or contaminates it.** The situation is largely ignored unless it can be turned into character evidence. In that world, context is suspicious, intent is irrelevant, and explanation often makes things worse.

Essentially:

What you do is not what happened, it is what you are.

Circumstances do not explain behavior, they expose it.

Lineage = Prior Probability (predictive model)

- What kind of person is this likely to be?
- What range of behavior is «*explainable*» for them?

With Old Families, errors are anomalies; with the Nouveau Riche, errors are confirmations.

Behavior = Diagnostic Signal

Behavior is not judged situationally («*She acted like this because of X.*») but treated as evidence of the underlying structure («*She acted like this, therefore she is this.*»). That is why things «*stick*» — behavior is retroactively interpreted as inevitable *for the person*.

Situation = Excuse Layer (Usually Discarded)

Situations exist, but are treated as noise, justification, or manipulation, unless they can be reframed as revealing conditions. For example, a person panicking is not excused with «*it was a scary situation*», but «*this is what the person is*». The situation can only make the person-related attribution stronger.

The underlying assumption is that **people reveal themselves, they do not change.** That stabilizes society by making people predictable categories, reducing interpretive ambiguity, and discouraging deviation.

However, that model is insufficient as situations, especially extreme ones such as war, have influence. For example, via context, systems, or incentives. The model also cannot handle genuine anomaly, and removes growth and reinterpretation.

However, it also captured something real — people are not infinitely plastic. They do have stable tendencies, dispositions, and constraints. The mistake was treating these as fixed and sufficient explanations.

As today, the pendulum has swung far into overestimating the situation, the 1920s make an interesting contrast if the players *go for it and inhabit this view*.

A direct result for the play is that characters with a strong lineage, e.g., van Steeten, Lord Hammersmith, have a reputational buffer. New money does not — e.g., Gabrielle. For them the behavior is quickly diagnostic and defines them. This also applies to the players.

SOCIAL PLACEMENT, NOT JOBS

People do not have «*jobs*» or «*careers*», but are placed socially. Thus, they do not *have* roles, they *are* their roles.

A maid is not just doing the tasks of a maid, she is expected to think differently, speak differently, and react differently.

When someone shifts position, it's not expected career development, but a **reclassification of the person**. Which raises questions:

- Was he or she always this?
- Was the previous role incorrect?
- What does that imply about the system?

Today, identity is fluid, roles are temporary, and behavior is seen as context-dependent. Back then, identity was stable, roles are defining, and behavior is seen as diagnostic.

For example, if a maid leaves the service and becomes a nurse. As a maid, she was invisible, background, and structurally limited. Afterwards, as a nurse, she is permitted to act, decide, and matter. Retroactively, her actions are reinterpreted, e.g., «*she was not merely that role to begin with*».

Note that the system will not say «*she was not a maid to begin with*». That would imply that the classification system was wrong, people were misassigned, and roles are unstable. It says she was a maid, but also «*something more*», which is now «*revealed*» through her new position, or simply «*She was always capable of more than her position suggested.*»

So in play, when guests panic, they are interpreted as having always been cowards. If people become decisive actors, they reveal themselves as well. Even if the extreme situation had a massive influence.

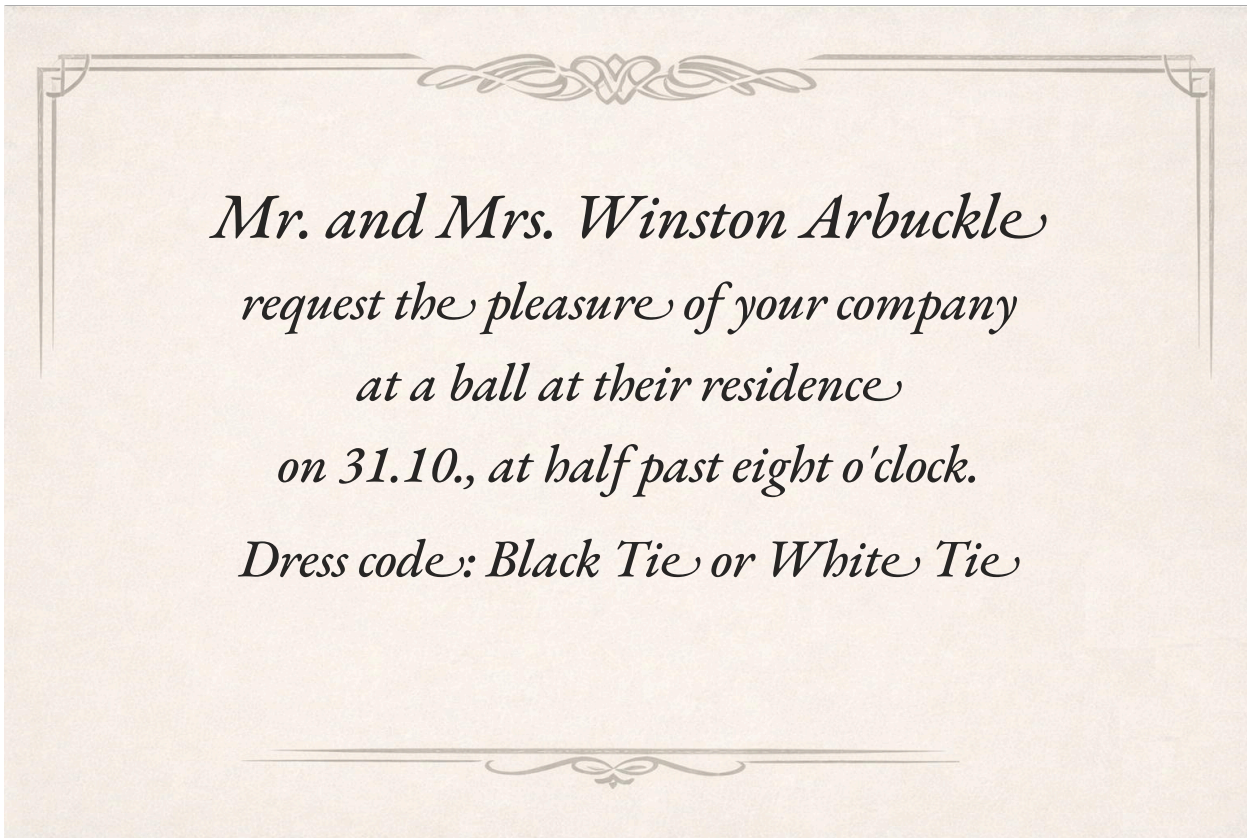


BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The experience at the Ball differs depending on whether characters are familiar with high society or not. The following table provides some background to what each character faces.

	INSIDER (HIGH CR)	OUTSIDER (LOW CR)
Experience	Continuous calibration (effortful, but smooth). Familiarity; real-time modulation within a known system. Feedback is immediate but subtle and legible. The room feels <i>coherent</i> — shifts are noticeable, interpretable, and often anticipatable.	Feedback is indirect, continuous low-level uncertainty while trying to decode an unspoken system in real time. Produces hesitation, slight lag, and a persistent sense of being just out of sync.
Overall	Tracks system, predicts transitions, adjusts preemptively, errors absorbed or reframed.	Tries to infer system, adjusts late, errors felt, not explained.
Pattern	The structure is visible: conversations have entry points, arcs, and exits. You recognize when a topic is closing, when someone is about to disengage, and where to move next.	Interactions are continuous and short, but you can't see the structure. People enter and leave conversations without clear signals you can recognize.
Cognitive Effect	Low explicit load, high implicit processing. You're not <i>figuring it out</i> — you're running a model. Attention can split between conversation, positioning, and social strategy without overload.	You're trying to decode what's expected while simultaneously participating. You miss cues and only realize it a moment too late.
Sensory-Cognitive	Names, faces, and affiliations anchor quickly, because they slot into known categories (family, status, and relevance). You remember <i>who matters</i> and why.	Names and faces don't fully stick; introductions blur slightly under pressure.
Effort Cost	Moderate, but efficient. Effort goes into optimization (who to speak to, how long, what tone), not basic decoding.	High. Attention is split between what is being said, what it means, whether you're doing it right. This creates slight lag.
Behavioral Consequence	You enter and exit smoothly, often slightly ahead of the moment. You rarely overstay, because you recognize micro-signals of closure, and you can redirect or gracefully disengage.	You hesitate when to join, when to leave, and how long to speak. Sometimes you stay too long or withdraw too early.
Feedback	Constant, subtle, and readable: tone shifts, eye movement, micro-pauses. You can course-correct in real time, often before anything becomes visible as a mistake.	No one corrects you openly. If you misstep, the conversation shifts subtly or ends sooner than expected. You're not sure whether anything was wrong.
Feels like	You're in sync with the room's rhythm. Not relaxed exactly, but aligned. You move with the current rather than against it.	You're half a step behind the room. That's the core.
Overall Impression	Conversations have a shape you can feel: you sense when to enter, when to pivot, and when to leave. You recognize who is worth speaking to and why, and you adjust your tone accordingly. Small signals — pauses, glances, shifts in posture — are readable and actionable. Even when something goes slightly wrong, you can absorb or redirect it before it becomes visible. The evening feels structured, navigable, and quietly strategic.	Conversations shift quickly, and you can't quite tell why people move on. You're watching for cues while trying to participate, often realizing a moment too late that you've stayed too long or said too much. No one corrects you directly — things just subtly change, and you're left unsure whether you misstepped.

PRINTABLE MATERIAL



INVITE

R.S.V.P. REPLY CARD

<p><i>R.s.v.p.</i></p> <p>— <i>Kindly Reply</i> —</p> <p>— <i>Accepts with Pleasure</i></p> <p>— <i>Declines with Regret</i></p>	<p><i>Attending Character</i></p> <hr/> <p>Credit Rating: ____%</p>
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Can be folded (glued) to use the back for the character description.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW FOR PLAYERS



MR. WINSTON ARBUCKLE
Host of the Ball



MRS. FRANCIS ARBUCKLE
Hostess of the Ball



MISS VERONICA BLANCHE
Socialite



MR. HENRY DUCANTE
Former French Aristocrat



THE MILLERS
Close Friends of Mr. Ducante



MR. MILTON REGASS
Financier of the Upper Class



MR. FRANK WILKINS
Head-Butler of the Household



MRS ROSE STERLING
Amplifier of Events



LADY MARGRET WINTERS
Connoisseur of Fine Food



MISS SERAFINA WINTERS
Catch of the Evening



LORD PETRYR HAMMERSMITH
British Aristocrat



MRS. BIANCA VAN STEETEN
Established Socialite

NOTES



MISS GABRIELLE OLSON
Unexpected Debutante

CLOTHES & ETIQUETTE

CLOTHES

- **Black Tie:** Black dinner jacket, white dress shirt, black bow tie, black waistcoat or cummerbund, black trousers with silk stripe, black patent leather shoes. Optional: white pocket square, cufflinks/studs, gloves, hat. It signals controlled ease. It feels polished, socially competent, and at ease in formality. An awareness of appearance, but not constant vigilance. It encourages composed, but natural movement.
- **White Tie:** Black tailcoat, stiff white shirt, white waistcoat, white bow tie, black patent leather shoes, often white gloves. Optional decorations or medals if military or political background. It signals discipline and constraint. It feels formal, visible, straightly constrained — like ceremonial armor. The shirt is stiff with the high collar pressing into the head, waistcoat tight across the torso, the tailcoat restricts arm movement slightly, the shoes are hard, glossy and not forgiving. It forces an upright posture, encourages small, controlled movements, and discourages spontaneity.
- **Evening Gown:** Floor-length gown in silk, satin, velvet, or chiffon; straight, loose silhouette (often drop-waisted), low neckline (front or back), often sleeveless or with thin straps; embellished as desired (beading, embroidery, fringe). Worn with evening shoes, stockings, and accessories such as long gloves (opera length), jewelry (pearls, diamonds; display of wealth is expected), and a wrap or stole. It signals exposure and display. It feels visible, expressive, and physically unrestrained, but socially exposed. *Heavier fabric* forces an upright, composed posture with slow and deliberate movements. *Lighter fabric* moves with the body, dancing is easier and gestures are more fluid. Silk, satin, or chiffon shift with every step — while low necklines, bare arms, or an open back create constant awareness of posture and presentation (exposure to air, subtle temperature variations). Embellishments like beading or fringe add weight and motion, making movement part of the display. It encourages smooth, deliberate, continuous movement, rather than sharp gestures. You are less constrained than in formal menswear, but more immediately readable — every movement, misstep, or hesitation is noticeable.

DANCING

Men invite women to dance. A woman should not dance repeatedly with same partner early in evening.

Expected dances are **Waltz**, **Foxtrot**, and **Charleston** (in a side-room and danced by younger guests).

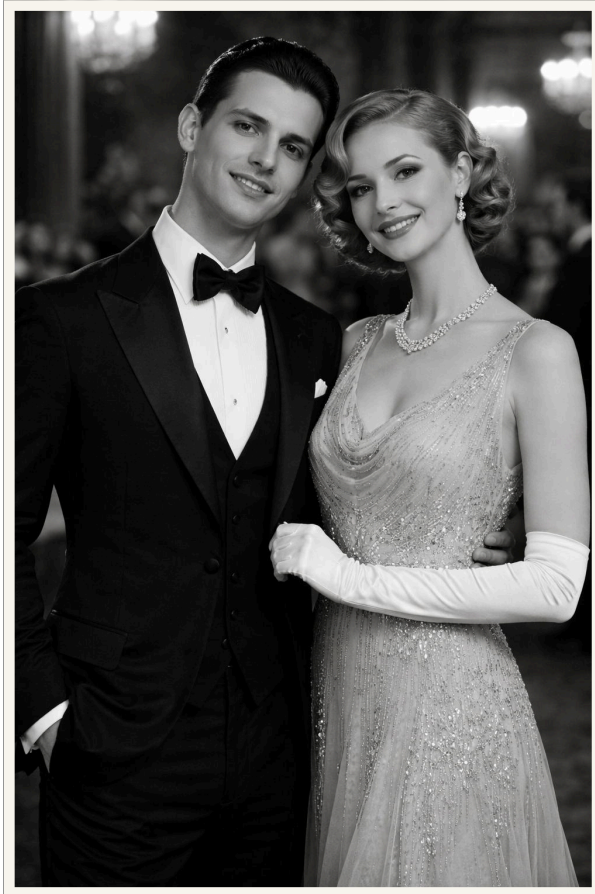
RANK AND REPUTATION

Social rank determines attention and introductions. Some NPCs will ignore players unless introduced. Who gets attention as status indicator.

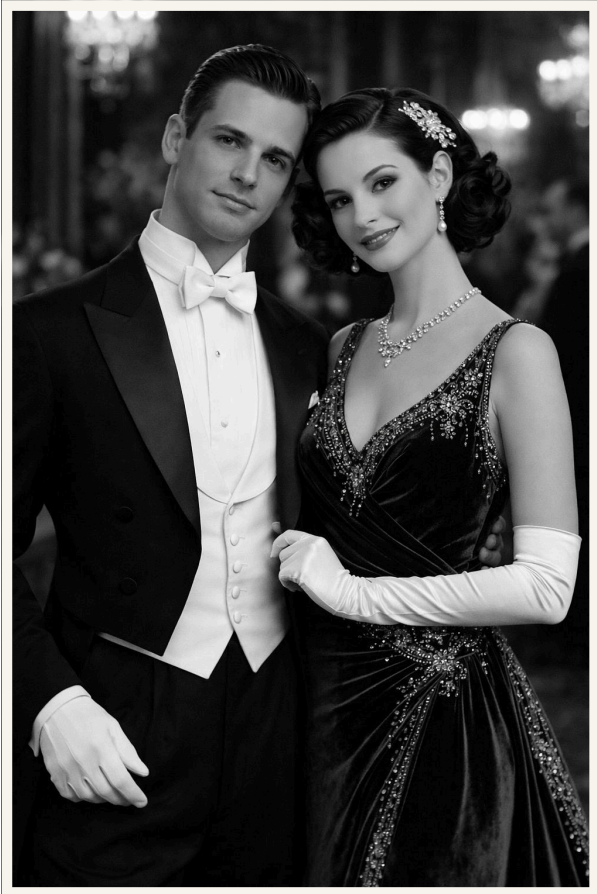
- **System Legitimacy:** Not adhering to the rules or threatening its structure gets people ostracized, usually permanently. It is «*stay and fight within the rules*» or «*leave and lose access to that world permanently*».
- **Entrance:** After being announced by a butler, guests are required to formally greet the hosts.
- **Introductions:** You do not approach strangers freely, you must be introduced by a mutual acquaintance of equal or higher status, or by the host.
- **Testing Legitimacy:** The unstated core question is «*Do you belong here, or are you pretending?*». Testing can be done via **Conversational Traps** (how well do they know who and what they should know, e.g., certain people), **Etiquette Probing** (do they show the correct etiquette), **Controlled Slight** (do they react with composure), or **Delegated Probing** (lower status people test boundaries).
- **Class:** The expectation is wealth and status appear effortless, stable, and unnoticed. **Class Leakage** is frowned upon, e.g., when certain things become visible: effort, cost-saving, emotional need, or control.
- **Reputation Management:** Public behavior is controlled. Private scandals are hidden — but everyone knows. In high society *rumor is often enough*. Once something might have existed, people behave as if it did.
- **Conversation:** Not small talk but placing people by what they talk about and how they say it. Safe Topics used for class signaling are **Season & Events**, **Travel**, and **Art & Culture**. Controlled Tension Topics with which people test each other are **Nouveau Riche**, **Prohibition**, the **Great War**, and **Reputation & Scandal**.
- **Exit:** A brief farewell to hosts is expected.

DEALING WITH SERVANTS

Servants are *not socially present*, but must be treated as if they matter. You treat them like part of a well-functioning mechanism — but a respected one. For example, **Acknowledgement** without **Familiarity**, **Indirect Requests**, **Neutral Communication**, and **No Visible Frustration**. Servants mirror status — respond faster to people who «*belong*».



BLACK TIE AND A LIGHT GOWN, the later a beaded chiffon evening gown that reads as airy and fluid, catching light and motion with every step, emphasizing grace, youth, and ease of movement.



WHITE TIE AND A DARK GOWN, the later a structured velvet evening gown with rich embellishment, absorbing light and imposing a more deliberate, statuesque presence that signals wealth, composure, and control.

A BALL AT THE ARBUCKLE ESTATE

BY ROSE STERLING

Invitations have been issued for a ball to be held on the evening of October 31st at the estate of Mr. and Mrs. Winston Arbuckle.

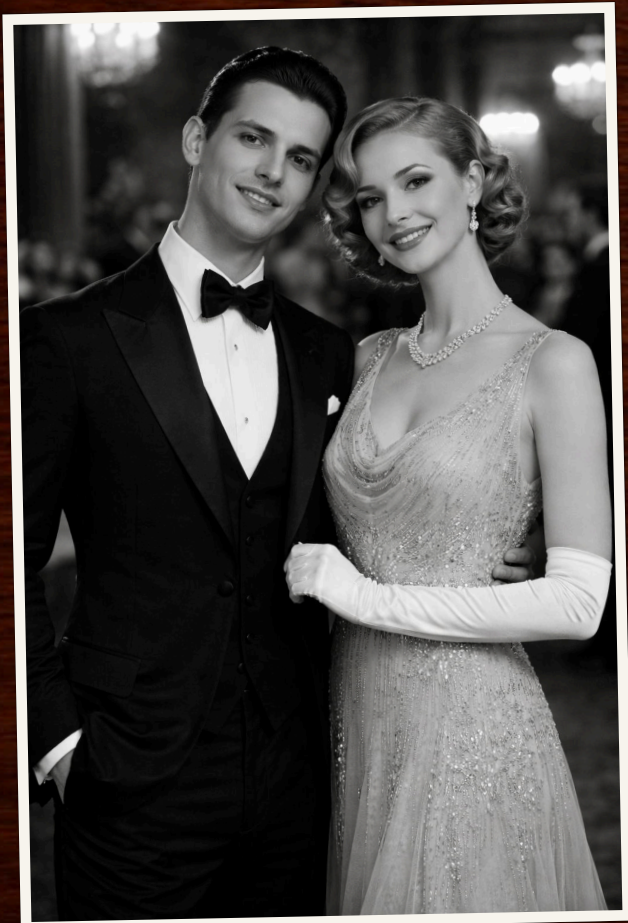
The Arbuckles, whose recent entertainments have drawn increasing attention, continue their efforts to establish a place among the city's more closely observed circles. The forthcoming gathering, announced with both Black Tie and White Tie specified, suggests an occasion of some ambition.

It remains to be seen how broadly the invitation has been extended. Several names associated with longer-standing families are expected, though not yet confirmed. Their presence — or absence — will no doubt be noted.

The Arbuckle residence, much discussed for its scale and recent appointments, provides a setting well suited to such an event. Whether the evening will distinguish itself beyond its surroundings is, as always, a matter for the guests.

For now, the date stands, and with it the expectation of an evening that will be watched with interest. The scale of the evening is not in question. Its reception remains to be seen.

*Mr. and Mrs. Winston Arbuckle
request the pleasure of your company
at a ball at their residence
on 31.10., at half past eight o'clock.
Dress code: Black Tie or White Tie*



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