

An American Genius

By

John Goldner

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email: [morphyfilm@yahoo.ca](mailto:morphyfilm@yahoo.ca)

Telephone: 1-438-936-2180

FADE IN

OPENING TITLE:

'Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days  
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:  
Hither and thither moves, and mates and slays,  
And one by one back in the Closet lays.

Omar Khayyam

EXT. NEW ORLEANS-1881-NIGHT

CHARLES MAURIAN, a middle-aged man with large eyes and a big mustache, walks down Royal Street on a misty evening and turns in at number 89, a distinctive looking mansion.

INT. MORPHY HOUSE-SAME TIME

The DOOR BELL is RINGING. TELCIDE LE CARPENTIER, an older woman of faded beauty, crosses a wide hallway to the door and opens it.

                  TELCIDE  
Charles! Come in.

                  CHARLES  
                  (entering)  
Hello Telcide. I came as soon as I  
could. How is he?

                  TELCIDE  
                  (fatigued)  
He's getting worse.

INT. DOOR TO AN UPSTAIRS ROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Charles knocks.

                  PAUL(O.C.)  
Who is it?

                  CHARLES  
It's me...Charles.

There is a CLICK at the door.

INSIDE THE BEDROOM

Charles enters. PAUL MORPHY, an unhinged looking man in his early forties, is turning away from the door. He walks in and then paces back and forth quickly in front of his visitor.

CHARLES

How are you doing, Paul? We haven't seen much of you lately.

PAUL

No, because it's not safe for me in certain places.

CHARLES

(gently)

What makes you say that?

PAUL

I have a lot of enemies. They are planning my demise at this very moment.

CHARLES

Why would anyone want to conspire against you, Paul?

PAUL

They want to drive me out of the city.

CHARLES

What for?

PAUL

So that they can spread vicious lies about me while I am not here to defend my position.

CHARLES

Do you really believe that? I think people are still very proud of your triumphs.

PAUL

I have no idea what you are talking about. I haven't accomplished anything.

CHARLES

That's not true. You're famous, Paul. Everyone agrees what you did was extraordinary. It will never be forgotten.

PAUL  
(emphatically)  
There is nothing to remember.  
(wheeling around to a stop)  
What do you want?

CHARLES  
How could you ask me such a thing?  
We've been best friends since we  
were five years old. I came to see  
you.

PAUL  
I don't have any friends.(pause)And  
nobody is allowed in my room.  
Didn't my mother tell you that?

CHARLES  
She did not.(pause) We could go out  
then.

PAUL  
Where would we go?

CHARLES  
(hopefully)  
There's a new French restaurant  
near the Market. We could have some  
dinner.

PAUL  
(turning to pace)  
It's out of the question. I can  
only eat food prepared by my  
mother. Or my sister.

CHARLES  
Why?

PAUL  
The chefs are part of their plan.  
They're scheming to poison me.

CHARLES  
(shaking his head)  
No.

PAUL  
(stopping close)  
Oh yes! The barbers of New Orleans  
are out to get me, too. They want  
to slit my throat with a straight  
razor.

CHARLES  
 (shocked)  
 My God, Paul!

PAUL  
 But I'm ready for that. I'll kill  
 them if they try it.

Paul wheels away and walks towards the wall. Charles watches him sadly for a moment.

CHARLES  
 Would you like to have a game of  
 chess? It's been a while since we  
 played.

PAUL  
 (turning back)  
 A game of chess?  
 (looking at him wildly)  
 I'm sure I couldn't think of  
 anything I would like to do less.

INT. MORPHY HOUSE/EXT. VERANDAH-MORNING

Paul is again pacing back and forth with his hands behind his back.

PAUL  
 He will drape the banner of  
 Castille over the walls of Madrid  
 to the cries of the fallen city,  
 and the little King will go away  
 all abashed...He will drape the  
 banner--

INSIDE THE HOUSE

TELCIDE hides behind the curtains and peeks through the doorpanes, hearing the words repeated. HELENA MORPHY, a spinster in her late thirties, stands next to her mother. They exchange looks.

INT. MORPHY HOUSE-MUSIC ROOM-AFTERNOON

SEVERAL GUESTS surrounding THREE MUSICIANS tuning their INSTRUMENTS. There are MUSIC STANDS spaced around.

Paul sits with one knee over the other and observes impassively from a chair near the door. Helena is present.

Telcide enters and walks over to her HARPSICHORD. She plucks a few strings, looks up and glances around.

TELCIDE  
 (to the cellist)  
 I don't see your friend--I believe his name is Mr. Hollaway?

CELLIST  
 He buried his child this morning.

TELCIDE  
 Dear God! I'm terribly sorry, I had no idea. Then we should play some pieces that don't require his flute.

CELLIST  
 (casually)  
 Oh, don't worry, he is late, but he will come. You see they never had a chance to know the child--it was stillborn.

PAUL  
 (hysterically)  
 HA HA HA HA HA...HA HA HA HA HA...  
 HA HA HA HA HA

THE GUESTS

appear uncomfortable, even disturbed in their chairs.

TELCIDE

stares intensely at her son.

INT. MORPHY RESIDENCE-NEXT DAY

PAUL

waits inside the front door. He is dressed up with a top hat and walking stick. He looks into the hallway at the face of

THE GRANDFATHER CLOCK

as the second hand ticks to 52...53...54

TATA, a stout black maid about sixty-five, watches Paul sadly from where he does not see her.

The CLOCK strikes twelve and TOLLS...

Paul opens the door quickly and goes out.

EXT. CANAL STREET-SHORTLY AFTER

Paul is walking along a stretch of his route which is not busy. TWO YOUNG WOMEN come the other way. As they pass him Paul stops and doffs his hat. They hurry on.

WHITE BONNET  
(quietly)  
Who is that odd man?

BLUE BONNET  
(glancing back)  
That's Paul Morphy!

WHITE BONNET  
Really?

BLUE BONNET  
They say he's mad now.

Paul is still staring in the background as they continue down the street.

INT. ST. LOUIS HOTEL-LOBBY-SAME DAY

Paul sits on a long leather couch reading *The New Orleans Picayune*.

ON THE PAGE

James Concannon and his wife Nicole  
(born Duprey) proudly announce the  
graduation of son Jeffrey, from The  
University of Louisiana.

PAUL'S EYES

as they dart back and forth.

HELENA

secretly observes him from just inside the door to the street.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREET-SHORTLY AFTER

Paul enters a barber shop.

HELENA

watches from across the way and then quickly moves off.

EXT-OLD QUARTER-SAME AFTERNOON

Helena comes up to the door of a house and rings the bell. A well dressed MAN in his mid-forties opens the door. They speak for just a moment and then quickly leave together.

INT. BARBER SHOP-THAT AFTERNOON

Paul is reclined in the barber chair. TWO CUSTOMERS are waiting. THE BARBER lathers Paul's face. He finishes and then lifts the STROP.

A STRAIGHT RAZOR

moving back and forth on the leather, glinting in the light.

PAUL'S EYEBALLS

rolling as they follow the sharp razor from side to side.

CUT TO BLACK:

INTER-TITLE

"His smile was delightful; it  
seemed to kindle up the brain-fuel  
that fed his eyes with light."

G.A. MacDonnell

INT. MORPHY HOUSE-DRAWING ROOM-1845

MUSIC fills the air. Younger, elegant Telcide le Carpentier on the piano, accompanied by violin and cello. GUESTS of the FAMILY are seated or standing around the MUSICIANS.



INT. MORPHY HOUSE-ADJOINING ROOM-SAME TIME

JUDGE ALONZO MORPHY and ERNEST MORPHY, both distinguished looking gentlemen, are playing chess. Eight year old PAUL MORPHY is seated between them, looking on attentively.

ERNEST  
(moving his rook)  
Check...check again...check.

ALONZO  
Threefold repetition! The game is a draw now.

ERNEST  
You are very fortunate, Alonzo.

They begin to re-set the pieces. Paul sits up.

PAUL  
Uncle Ernest, you should have won that game.

ALONZO  
(chuckling)  
You've never played, Paul. What do you know about it?

PAUL  
I've been watching. May I demonstrate it father?

ALONZO  
(humoring him)  
Go on then, show us what you think.

PAUL  
(arranging the pieces)  
Here it is. Check with the Rook, now the King has to take it and the rest is easy.

Alonzo and Ernest look at each other and then Paul in utter astonishment.

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM-THE NEXT AFTERNOON

Paul is writing at this desk. His older brother EDWARD abruptly walks into the room.

EDWARD

(a bit unfriendly)

I heard that you've suddenly become an expert at chess.

PAUL

I never said that.

EDWARD

Is it true that you told Uncle Ernest he could have won a game with father if he had made a different move?

PAUL

Well...yes, I did.

EDWARD

That's very audacious! Uncle Ernest is one of the best players in New Orleans. (pause) I don't even think you could beat me.

Paul fixes his eyes on Edward with a killer look.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS FRONT ROOM-MINUTES LATER

A white chess King is slammed down on the wooden board. Edward is setting up his pieces. Paul reaches into the box for his own King and places it softly on the square.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY-SAME DAY

Telcide wanders down the long hallway with HELENA, now a little girl in a pinafore with ringlets in her hair.

Tata, in her late twenties, comes up the winding staircase as she buffs the banister.

TELCIDE

Tata, where is everyone?

TATA

Miss Malvina gone out befo'. Masser Paul and Masser Edward be locked in that front room, Ma'am.

TELCIDE

(picking up Helena)

Oh...I wonder what the two of them are doing in there?

TATA

They be at that special kin' a  
checkers y'all play on Sundays.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS FRONT ROOM-SAME TIME

Edward's turn and he looks worried. Finally he sits up confidently and moves his Rook. Paul plays his Queen without hesitation and Edward's concerned expression returns.

INT. FRONT DOOR OF THE HOUSE-MINUTES LATER

Alonzo and Uncle Ernest enter from outside.

ALONZO

Then the District Attorney and the  
lawyer for the defense approached  
the bench and they proceeded to--

Edward suddenly bursts out of the front room and almost bowls over the two men, before rushing up the stairs. Paul has arrived at the door.

ALONZO (CON'T)

(turning to Paul)

What happened?

PAUL

(shrugging)

I sacrificed a Bishop to checkmate  
his King.

EDWARD

(from the top of the stairs)

I'll never play with you again!

(to Alonzo and Ernest)

I won't play with him and you can't  
make me.

ERNEST

I guess we'll just have to find  
some new opponents for you Paul,  
now won't we?

INT. MUSIC ROOM-ANOTHER DAY

Telcide is playing the piano. Sitting nearby is daughter MALVINA, a very attractive seventeen year old, who is making a bow in Helena's hair. The doorbell RINGS. Telcide gets up.

MALVINA  
 (referring to the music)  
 It's very pretty, mother.

TELCIDE  
 Thank you, dear.

Telcide crosses the large sunlit room and exits. She walks through the hallway as the maid is coming down the stairs.

TELCIDE (CON'T)  
 That's all right Tata. I'll see who it is.

EXT. FRONT DOOR

Telcide opens the door. Young CHARLES MAURIAN is there.

TELCIDE  
 (warmly)  
 Hello Charles. Paul has gone to visit his grandfather today.

CHARLES  
 Would it be all right if I went there too? I'm his best friend now.

TELCIDE  
 (smiling)  
 Certainly. Do you know where Monsieur Le Carpentier lives?

CHARLES  
 (turning to go)  
 Yes. Thank you, Mrs. Morphy.

TELCIDE  
 Charles, see if you can convince Paul to play outside a little.

CHARLES  
 (running off)  
 I'll try.

EXT. JOSEPH LE CARPENTIER'S HOUSE-SAME DAY

Charles is at the front door as a MAID in white opens it to let him in.

INT. ENTRANCE TO THE LIVING ROOM

Charles sees Paul in a big chair, perched on a stack of books. He reaches to the chess board and moves a piece.

GRANDFATHER JOSEPH

appears perplexed as he stares down at the board and shakes his head slightly.

PAUL

finally looks over at Charles, smiles and quickly puts his index finger to his lips.

EXT. OLD QUARTER-AFTER THEY LEAVE

Paul and Charles walk along the street together.

CHARLES

How did you do?

PAUL

I won all of the games.

(He cups his hand to his mouth)

He's not very good.

CHARLES

(giggling)

You really do like chess.

PAUL

It gives me the chance to think in a special way about something quite unlike my school subjects.

CHARLES

What do you mean?

PAUL

I can use my imagination. The pieces all move differently, but I know how they combine to create powerful attacks. So I win!

CHARLES

Is it difficult?

PAUL

Not really, if you understand the principles. I would like to get better and better.

CHARLES

How good can you get?

PAUL

I want to be the strongest player in New Orleans. After that, the country. Then I want to be the best player in the world.

CHARLES

(stunned)

Paul! The best chess player in the whole wide world!! How will you ever do that?

PAUL

I don't know yet. My dream is to one day beat the chess champion of England.

CHARLES

(captivated)

Oh my, Paul! He lives so far away. I hope you can.

PAUL

(glowing)

His name is Howard Staunton.

INT. MORPHY HOUSE DINING ROOM-EARLY EVENING

Alonzo, Paul, Malvina, Helena, Telcide and Edward are seated around a long table where they are eating supper. Tata stands by the door.

ALONZO

My darling girl, we're only considering what's best for you.

MALVINA

(defiantly)

I'm not a girl.

TELCIDE

You're only seventeen, Malvina. Do you think it's wise to be so serious about this particular young man?

Helena, who appears a little frail, begins to cough.

TELCIDE (CON'T)

(to the maid)

Tata, please take Helena to her room now. She looks very tired.

The maid helps the little girl from the table.

MALVINA

John Sybrandt is going to propose. And if I decide to marry him then I won't let anyone stop me. (pause) May I please be excused?

TELCIDE

Yes Malvina. You are excused.

(she looks over)

Paul, you've hardly touched your plate. Aren't you hungry?

Paul has arranged the salt and pepper shakers, along with some other condiments, in some peculiar configuration on the checkered tablecloth.

ALONZO

My boy I don't know how you could neglect such delicious fish. But I haven't been able to fully savor it myself owing to the strange monopoly you have exercised over every container of spice or sauce on the table. Whatever are you doing there?

EDWARD

He's looking at chess again, father.

PAUL

(lighting up)

It's a problem.

(pointing to the various items in front of him)

These are the Kings, here are three pawns, a Bishop and a Rook. It's checkmate in two moves. Do you see it?

INT. NEW ORLEANS CHESS CLUB-AFTERNOON

SEVERAL MEMBERS are seated around a chess table where Uncle Ernest is showing his nephew's chess problem.

ERNEST  
(moving a rook)  
Here it is.

YOUNG MEMBER  
Oh, isn't that clever!

OLDER MEMBER  
Ah, if he takes it then the pawn...

Ernest pulls back where he is joined by JUSTICE EUSTIS, a refined looking gentleman.

EUSTIS  
Really a wonderful little  
composition, Ernest.

ERNEST  
James, this child is beginning to  
demonstrate a truly astounding  
talent. He's confounding me with  
gambits, sacrifices--he has no  
fear!

EUSTIS  
Have a look at this telegram we  
received yesterday. It's from  
Winfield Scott.

ERNEST  
(opening it)  
General Scott? Didn't he have a  
pretty good go of it here a while  
back?

EUSTIS  
Indeed. He beat some of our  
strongest players. Now it seems  
he's planning to pass through again  
on his way to Mexico.

ERNEST  
(reading aloud)  
"Arrive Thursday. Please arrange  
contest with your best. Wish to be  
put on my mettle."

Ernest looks up at Eustis and catches his drift.



ERNEST (CON'T)  
I'll talk to Alonzo right away.

EXT. MORPHY HOUSE-DAY

Paul is walking up to the door. Charles is on the street.

PAUL  
I'll see you tomorrow, Charles.

CHARLES  
(running off)  
Good-bye Paul.

INT. HOUSE-UPSTAIRS HALL-MOMENTS LATER

Paul comes down the hall. The maid is loading folded linen into a closet.

TATA  
(stopping her work)  
Af'ernoon Masser Paul. Missus  
Telcide ask me to tell you when you  
come in. She like to talk to you.

INT. MUSIC ROOM-DAY

Telcide is at her piano playing a lovely piece while Helena is resting on a divan nearby. Paul arrives at the door and quietly steps into the room.

TELCIDE  
(surprised)  
Oh--Paul! You startled me. How long  
have you been standing there?

PAUL  
I just arrived. You wanted to see  
me?

TELCIDE  
Your father came home from the  
Courthouse for a little while  
today. He asked me if you could  
finish your homework before supper.

PAUL  
Well...yes. But why?

TELCIDE

I believe he has a surprise for  
you.

INT. MORPHY HOUSE-DINING ROOM TABLE

Alonzo, Telcide, Edward, Helena seated around. Paul is  
looking up at his father.

PAUL

(incredulous)  
An army general?

ALONZO

Is there any other kind? He's a  
very good player too. So finish up  
and we'll be on our way.

INT. CHESS CLUB-THAT EVENING

Well dressed MEMBERS mill around chess tables. Ernest is  
present. GENERAL WINFIELD SCOTT, in full military regalia,  
is talking to SEVERAL GENTLEMEN, including Justice Eustis.

GENERAL SCOTT

This Mexican War is a troublesome  
bit of business. We certainly have  
to keep a firm grip on the  
situation.

As the General speaks Eustis looks towards the entrance  
where Paul, dressed in purple velvet knickerbockers and  
white lace shirt with wide collar, has just arrived  
alongside Alonzo.

ALONZO

guides his charge across the room until they reach the group  
of men surrounding the imposing General Scott.

PAUL

peeks up through the crowd at his latest adversary, who has  
not noticed him.

GENERAL SCOTT (CON'T)

I intend to take care of that  
insurrection before it gets out of  
hand.

EUSTIS

General Scott, allow me to  
introduce your opponent for this  
evening.

General Scott looks around and is clearly uncertain as to  
where his counterpart is located. Then a small pale hand  
reaches up and comes to his attention.

GENERAL SCOTT

(flabbergasted)

What? If you gentlemen suppose  
there is any humor in this  
elaborate practical joke then I  
should leave immediately!

EUSTIS

General Scott, I'm fairly  
confident...

GENERAL SCOTT

(indignant)

What sort of resistance is this  
little child likely to provide?

EUSTIS

Sir, I can assure you that this boy  
will offer you a serious challenge  
here tonight, if you will permit us  
to proceed.

GENERAL SCOTT

(huffing)

Well, I never...

The giant army general scrutinizes little Paul Morphy, who  
stares up at him unperturbed. General Scott looks around at  
the members, none of whom convey any sign of mischief.

GENERAL SCOTT (CON'T)

(still dubious)

All right. Let's get on with it  
then.

Paul Morphy and General Winfield Scott sit down to do  
battle. Everyone gathers around. Paul extends his hand again  
and they shake. The boy immediately advances his Rook pawn.  
Several quick moves follow before General Scott pauses to  
think.

DISSOLVE TO:

Paul reaches out his hand and places his Queen next to his  
opponent's King in the corner of the chessboard.

PAUL  
 (quietly)  
 Checkmate.

There is a round of applause. General Scott looks shocked and confused. Paul pushes the white pieces across the board and they begin to set up for a second game.

INT. VESTIBULE OF THE CLUB-SAME EVENING

Paul and Alonzo are on their way out as Eustis bids them goodnight.

EUSTIS  
 (patting Paul on the shoulder)  
 Well done Paul, well done.

ALONZO  
 How long will the General be staying? I'd like to take him on myself.

EUSTIS  
 (laughing)  
 I think he'll be in a hurry to get on with the Mexican campaign after what happened to him here tonight.

EXT. 89 ROYAL STREET-DAY

Paul skips out of the house with a big stack of school books held together by a leather strap hanging over his shoulder.

LONG DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NEW ORLEANS HOTEL-DAY-1850

JOHANN LOWENTHAL, a tall man with bushy sideburns and a prominent nose walks out of the hotel and signals a carriage. It pulls up and he gets in.

IN THE CARRIAGE

The DRIVER turns around.

LOWENTHAL  
 If we could go please to Sazerac Chess Club.

INT. CHESS CLUB-SAME DAY

Several members are gathered around one of the tables to watch the conclusion of a game between Lowenthal and JAMES McCONNELL. Uncle Ernest is an interested spectator.

LOWENTHAL  
(moving his Queen)  
Check.

MCCONNELL  
(looking at his trapped King)  
The game is yours Herr Lowenthal.

There is a smattering of quiet APPLAUSE. Uncle Ernest steps forward.

ERNEST  
Permit me to introduce myself sir.  
I'm Ernest Morphy. I've admired  
your published games for some time.

LOWENTHAL  
How do you do.

ERNEST  
Our family is very fond of chess.  
We usually play on Sundays. I have  
a twelve year old nephew living  
here and he's been doing very well  
at the game. Perhaps you would like  
to meet him?

LOWENTHAL  
I'm afraid not to be in city long  
enough to give lessons to boy. It  
takes many times to improve.

ERNEST  
I wasn't thinking about lessons  
Herr Lowenthal. I thought perhaps  
you might be willing to play a game  
or two with him this evening.

LOWENTHAL  
(glancing at the others)  
To play with boy?

ERNEST  
It would be an honor to have you  
join us for dinner. After that  
there should be plenty of time  
before he goes to bed.

INT. DINING ROOM OF THE MORPHY HOUSE-THAT EVENING

Alonzo, Paul, Helena, Telcide, Edward, Lowenthal, and Ernest seated around the long table having dinner. The guest is enjoying his Shrimp Creole when he makes eye contact with

PAUL

showing a trace of trepidation on his face as he looks over at his latest adversary. He tries a smile but

LOWENTHAL

looks down at Paul like a stern headmaster.

INT. STUDY-AFTER DINNER

Paul moves quickly across the room to the chessboard, followed by Lowenthal. Alonzo and Ernest wait for a moment.

ALONZO

(aside; very quietly)

I'm a little worried, Ernest. This fellow is among the top chess players in all of Europe. Do you really think Paul can play at his level?

ERNEST

(whispering)

I'm not sure. But I believe we want to find out, right?

The brothers smile at each other and walk over to the board.

LOWENTHAL

(removing a piece)

I can give Knight to make better chances for boy.

ERNEST

(glancing at Alonzo)

Why don't we see how Paul does at even strength first. Then if he is no match you can give him an advantage.

LOWENTHAL

(nodding)

Yah good. Next game with odds.

The game begins and each of them moves quickly at first. In a few moments Lowenthal begins to recognize that the child will be no pushover.

PAUL

confidently picks up his Knight and captures a pawn on his Queen's fifth...

LOWENTHAL

appears surprised by this move and reacts with a nervous raising of his bushy eyebrows.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE THE STUDY-LATER

Paul emerges and makes his way across the hall and up the stairs. It is not clear from his demeanor how he has done.

INT. STUDY

Lowenthal still sits at the chess table surveying the wreckage of his final position. He appears to be in a slight state of shock.

LOWENTHAL

(muttering)

Hard to belief, boy is beating me.  
(shaking his head) I'm never seeing  
such a thing in my life, twelve  
years old.

INT. CHESS CLUB-DAY

Alonzo, Ernest, Eustis, McConnell, and TWO MEMBERS are sitting at chess tables. Everyone is having a good LAUGH.

EUSTIS

I wish I had been there to see it.

MCCONNELL

There's no more competition for him  
here in New Orleans, Alonzo.

ALONZO

Certainly not in our family. He  
checkmated me the other day by  
castling! Even Ernest is no match  
for him anymore.

OLDER MEMBER

I can't remember the last time  
anyone beat him.

EUSTIS

What now?

ERNEST

He said he wants to go to England  
next year and play in the London  
International Tournament.

YOUNG MEMBER

Really! How did he learn of it?

ALONZO

You can thank his Uncle for that.

ERNEST

I never told him. He saw the  
promotion in a Berlin chess paper.

ALONZO

Which you gave him.

YOUNG MEMBER

Paul understands German?

ALONZO

(shaking his head)  
Somehow. He reads it fluently.

EUSTIS

What do you think about the idea,  
Judge? Just imagine the sensation  
he would be. A mere boy up against  
the finest players in Europe!

ALONZO

He'll only be thirteen. He  
certainly couldn't go alone. And  
who is free to travel all the way  
to the Old World with him for two  
months?

Ernest furtively raises his hand.

MCCONNELL

(smiling)  
We have a volunteer.



ALONZO  
 (admonishing him)  
 Ernest, we talked about this.  
 (to the others)  
 Gentlemen, I understand your  
 enthusiasm. But I'm not going to  
 lose my head. I won't interrupt  
 Paul's education for any game.

EUSTIS  
 Have you told him yet?

INT. MORPHY HOUSE-STUDY-EVENING

Paul in the middle of the room. Alonzo is sitting behind a  
 big desk. Ernest stands off to the side.

ALONZO  
 No!

PAUL  
 Why, father?

ALONZO  
 Because schoolboys do not travel  
 half way around the world to play  
 chess.

PAUL  
 (emphatically)  
 But Staunton will be there!  
 (to Ernest)  
 Uncle Ernest, can't you do  
 something?

ERNEST  
 It's not up to me, Paul.

ALONZO  
 Indeed. You will start at Spring  
 Hill Academy in December, and there  
 shall be no further discussion.

INT. PAUL'S ROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Paul is sitting at his desk. He takes chess pieces from the  
 board and puts them into the box. Last is the Black King. He  
 gently fits it into the box and then SLAMS the lid shut.

CUT TO:

INT. SPRING HILL COLLEGE CLASSROOM-DAY

On the blackboard behind the teacher is written KING OEDIPUS.

FATHER KENNY

"Pride goeth before a fall." Who can tell me how this relates to Sophocle's play?

Paul sits among a DOZEN STUDENTS. Charles is beside him in the next row. There are no hands. Paul slowly raises his.

FATHER KENNY(CON'T)

Mr. Morphy.

PAUL

Oedipus is exceptional, but vain. This compels him to search for the answer to a mystery only he is capable of solving.

FATHER KENNY

What for?

PAUL

To save the city. But pride ruins him. Hubris destroys him in the end.

FATHER KENNY

That's correct. I could not have put it more succinctly myself.

Charles and Paul exchange looks.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM-EVENING

Paul performs in Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice" with his brother Edward.

PAUL

(as Portia)

A pound of that same merchant's flesh is thine. The court awards it and the law doth give it--

EDWARD

(as Shylock)

Most rightful judge!

PAUL

And you must cut this flesh off his breast. The law allows it and the court awards it.

EDWARD

Most learned judge! A sentence! Come prepare!

PAUL

Tarry a little; there is something else. This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood; the words expressly are "a pound of flesh."

INT. FENCING STUDIO-AFTERNOON

Paul is practicing with a FENCING MASTER. The man retreats slowly as Paul advances.

FENCING MASTER

Remember, counterattack with thumb and index finger. When distance is right, extend and lunge.

Paul executes the attack and presses the tip of his foil to the target area.

INT. SCHOOL INFIRMARY-MORNING

A NURSE removes a thermometer from Charles Maurian's mouth.

NURSE

(examining it)

Well, Mr. Maurian, it looks as if you'll have to remain with us a little longer. Get some rest now--we'll look in on you later.

She moves away to reveal Paul in the next bed. He looks over at Charles mischievously.

INT. INFIRMARY-THAT AFTERNOON

Paul is sitting at a table reading a novel while Charles rummages through a cabinet containing cards, puzzles and books. He comes across a chess set and board.

CHARLES  
 (turning around)  
 Look what I found. A chessboard and  
 the men.

PAUL  
 I wonder who that belongs to.

CHARLES  
 (sliding the box open)  
 "Property of Raphael Carraquesde  
 and Louis Landry"

PAUL  
 I know them. I've got Carraquesde  
 in Philosophy and Landry was a  
 member of the study group last  
 semester.

Charles places a Bishop on the table.

CHARLES  
 I must say I've never understood  
 how two intelligent individuals  
 could push these little wooden  
 figures around for hours and derive  
 satisfaction from it.

PAUL  
 If you understood the game at all  
 you might change your mind.

CHARLES  
 (sitting down)  
 All right. Why don't you teach me  
 the moves.

INT. DORMITORY ROOMS-DAY

Paul walks quickly down the hall past some OTHER STUDENTS  
 and looks in on Charles, who is studying.

PAUL  
 (energetically)  
 Charles, I'm taking the afternoon  
 off to make a stop in Mobile. Would  
 you like to join me?

CHARLES  
 I've got this infernal Latin  
 translation.

PAUL

Why don't you come with me. I can help you with that later. (pause) They'll be some chess!

Charles fairly bolts from his chair.

EXT. SPRING HILL-MINUTES LATER

Paul and Charles are leaving the campus.

CHARLES

Where is it exactly that we are going, if I may be so bold as to inquire?

PAUL

We're going to call on Judge Meek. He's an old friend of the family. I have an open invitation to visit him any time. You'll see, he's a real chess enthusiast!

EXT. JUDGE MEEK'S HOUSE-AFTERNOON

Paul and Charles arrive at the door of a beautiful old house and knock. JUDGE MEEK, a tall silver haired man, answers.

JUDGE MEEK

(delighted)

Paul Morphy! What a marvelous surprise. (warmly shaking his hand) How are you my boy? (calling inside) Sandra, we have company.

Paul introduces Charles to Judge Meek. They all go inside the house.

INT. AUDITORIUM AT SPRING HILL-1854

Paul is giving the commencement speech to the GRADUATING CLASS.

PAUL

In conclusion, I reiterate the principal political philosophy of this creed. I do not believe that secession is either necessary or desirable under any foreseeable circumstances. The destiny of the  
(more)

PAUL  
 South remains rooted in the  
 traditional endeavors of our  
 society, while at the same time we  
 will inevitably profit from our  
 alignment with, our indispensable  
 role in, and our allegiance to the  
 United States of America.

INT. MORPHY RESIDENCE-AFTERNOON

The front door swings open and Alonzo enters carrying a large suitcase, followed by Paul who holds two smaller valises, and then Telcide.

TELCIDE  
 (moving through the hall)  
 Are you hungry, Paul? I can prepare something for you.

PAUL  
 (following his father)  
 No, thank you. I'll wait until later. There's the unpacking to do.

INT. MORPHY RESIDENCE-AN EVENING TWO YEARS LATER

A lavish reception with many FRIENDS to celebrate the return of Malvina and her husband JOHN SYBRANDT from Europe. A SMALL ORCHESTRA is taking a rest from playing at the moment...

A WAITER

carrying hors d'oeuvres on a silver platter moves through the room and stops to serve SEVERAL GUESTS...

THE NEWLYWEDS

surrounded by WELL WISHERS in the middle of the crowded hall...

EDWARD

and some of his COHORTS admire Malvina from a distance.

BY THE STAIRCASE

Alonzo and Telcide along with JAMES McCONNELL take everything in.

ALONZO

Well, John is with one of the largest brokerages in the country. And he's been developing excellent business connections in Europe.

MCCONNELL

Cotton?

TELCIDE

Oh, yes. Cotton, of course.

TWO SOCIETY MATRONS

are gossiping while they nibble at little pastries off of fine bone china plates.

PLUMP MATRON

(confidentially)

I heard that the newlyweds did not have Judge Morphy and Madame Le Carpentier's blessing at first. You know he's not a Creole.

SLIM MATRON

(savoring it)

I didn't know that! Then is it true that they eloped?

PLUMP MATRON

(a little reluctantly)

Well...no. Not really.

CUT TO:

Paul talking confidentially to Charles Maurian. Charles steps out and John Sybrandt approaches.

SYBRANDT

I understand congratulations are in order Paul. Your father tells me that you have just completed the law degree.

PAUL

Yes, that's right. But I'll have to wait until I'm twenty-one before I can practice.

SYBRANDT

Is it true that you memorized the entire Louisiana State Civil Code?

PAUL  
 (smiling a little)  
 Guilty as charged.

SYBRANDT  
 (condescending)  
 I really hope you can make a  
 success of it. The legal profession  
 can be such a messy business.

PAUL  
 (taken aback)  
 What do you mean by that, John?

SYBRANDT  
 (smiling tightly)  
 Well, you know. One often has to  
 rely on the misfortune of others in  
 order to earn a living.

MALVINA

interrupts before Paul has a chance to respond and takes  
 Sybrandt by the hand, pulling him away...

MALVINA  
 (excited)  
 Darling, there's someone I want you  
 to meet. Excuse us Paul.

As they walk off Paul stares at Sybrandt's back with a  
 withering glare, before walking over to join EDGAR HINCKS,  
 and HENRY PERCY standing with Edward.

THREE YOUNG WOMEN

led by ALICE PERCY, make their way over to join the crowd.

EDWARD  
 (to Alice)  
 There you are. I was wondering  
 where you had wandered off to.

ALICE  
 (taking his hands)  
 I was showing them the courtyard.  
 It's so beautiful out there  
 tonight.

EDWARD  
 Has everyone been introduced?  
 (turning) This is Edgar Hincks...  
 Henry Percy...my brother Paul.



There is a flurry of nodding and genteel handshakes during which Paul cannot take his eyes off the very beautiful girl standing next to him. She turns and smiles at him.

NICOLE

How do you do. My name is Nicole Duprey.

PAUL

(delighted)

Are you enjoying yourself this evening Miss Duprey?

NICOLE

Oh yes! It's such a magnificent house. The garden in the courtyard and that lovely rotunda. You must be so happy here.

THE ORCHESTRA

strikes up a waltz and MUSIC fills the room. Paul extends his hand and Nicole takes it. They swirl gracefully onto the floor along with A NUMBER OF COUPLES.

INT. NEW ORLEANS CHESS CLUB-EARLY AFTERNOON

Justice Eustis and SEVERAL MEMBERS watch as Paul plays a game with James McConnell. A number of moves are made rapidly.

PAUL

(quietly)

Checkmate.

Some respectful applause from the onlookers.

MCCONNELL

Well, thank you very much Paul. Just one of your relentless attacks is all I can take for this lunch recess.

There is a bit of laughter. Paul only smiles politely.

MCCONNELL (CON'T)

Still no word from Charles Stanley regarding your late offer?

PAUL

No, sir. I'm afraid he hasn't taken up the match challenge as yet.

EUSTIS

Nor anyone else for that matter.

CHARLES MAURIAN

enters the room with an open letter in his hand and crosses to them.

CHARLES

I've received a letter from the New York Chess Club.

PAUL

Is it Stanley?

CHARLES

No. It's from this fellow D.W. Fiske who we've been hearing about.

PAUL

May I see that?

Charles hands the letter to Paul and looks around expectantly at the others.

PAUL (CON'T)

(momentarily)

We hereby propose an inaugural tournament to determine the undisputed chess champion of the United States.

EUSTIS

Bravo! An excellent proposition.

PAUL

(still looking at it)

They are inviting me to play.

MCCONNELL

Of course they are, my boy! News of your exploits is traveling fast.

EUSTIS

Thanks to your Uncle Ernest.

PAUL

I will write Mr. Fiske immediately and inform him that I would be honored to enter the fray.

CHARLES  
(proudly)  
Just imagine. The Crescent City  
represented in New York at the  
First American Chess Congress!

INT. FRENCH OPERA HOUSE-EVENING

On the stage a DIVA finishes an ARIA to end the act before intermission. The curtain falls to great applause from the AUDIENCE.

IN A PRIVATE BOX

Paul claps enthusiastically and then looks down to the auditorium where he sees Nicole Duprey moving towards an exit. She looks up and smiles radiantly at him.

INT. LOBBY-A MINUTE LATER

Paul moves through the CROWD and sees Nicole near the punch bowl. She turns to him as he approaches.

PAUL  
I'm so delighted to see you again!

NICOLE  
I noticed you arrive in the balcony just before the curtain went up.

PAUL  
We barely had a chance to speak at the party before you had to leave.

NICOLE  
I know. It was really just that one dance. But I had a wonderful time!

PAUL  
You look lovely tonight, Miss Duprey.

NICOLE  
Please...call me Nicole. And I'll call you Paul. Paul Morphy. I've heard that you are the boy everyone was talking about a few years ago.

PAUL  
Aren't they talking about me now?

NICOLE  
(laughing)  
I don't know. My family just moved  
to New Orleans from Atlanta. Have  
you ever been to Georgia?

PAUL  
I can't say that I have. I went to  
college in Alabama. And university  
here. I'm going to be a lawyer as  
soon as I can get started.

Nicole smiles and nods.

CUT TO:

INT. REFRESHMENT TABLE-MOMENTS LATER

A HOSTESS hands Paul two small glasses of punch. He turns  
around to Nicole and gives her one of them.

NICOLE  
Oh, thank you. I am thirsty!

PAUL  
What do you think of the production  
this evening, Nicole?

NICOLE  
It's enchanting! Such a grand  
theater. This is my first time  
here. Do you attend often?

PAUL  
Only all the time. I absolutely  
adore the opera.(pause) Would you  
like to join me for the rest of the  
performance?

NICOLE  
I'd like that very much. I'm here  
with my father and mother. Will you  
wait for me while I go tell them?

PAUL  
Certainly. I'll be right here.

INT. OPERA HOUSE-DURING THE NEXT ACT

Paul and Nicole are sitting together in the Morphy's private box. As they watch she reaches over to Paul's hand and interlocks it with her's. Paul looks at her.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MORPHY HOUSE-EVENING ONE WEEK LATER

Paul is returning home when he sees the FAMILY DOCTOR leaving the house holding his black bag. The man gets into a waiting horse-drawn carriage and drives off.

INT. HOUSE-MOMENTS LATER

Paul opens the front door. Everything is quiet. He goes into the main hall and looks around. There is no sign of anybody.

INT. DINING ROOM

The table has not been set for dinner.

INT. MUSIC ROOM

Paul looks in and sees that his mother is not there.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

Paul reaches the top of the stairs and sees Telcide sitting in a chair down the hall, just outside a bedroom door. Her head is bowed and she does not look up. He approaches.

PAUL

I saw the doctor leaving just now.  
Is someone ill?

TELCIDE

(looking up)  
I'm afraid there's been an  
accident, Paul.

PAUL

What happened?

TELCIDE

Your father was standing outside  
the courthouse with a group of men.  
(more)

TELCIDE

One of them suddenly turned to speak to him. It seems the brim of this man's hat cut across your father's eyeball.

PAUL

(wincing)

Was he badly injured? I mean he can still see, can't he?

TELCIDE

It didn't seem terribly serious at first. But then he began to feel a great deal of pain. They brought him here and the doctor wants him confined to a dark room.

PAUL

He is going to be all right though, isn't he?

TELCIDE

(standing up)

Paul, when your brother gets in please keep very quiet. I don't want your father disturbed.

Paul watches her go inside the bedroom.

EXT. CEMETERY-DAY

Paul, Telcide, Malvina, Sybrandt, Edward, Helena, Grandfather Joseph, GRANDMOTHER MODESTE, AUNT AMELIE, AUNT AMENAIDE, UNCLE CHARLES, Eustis, McConnell, Charles Maurian, Uncle Ernest and MOURNERS gathered for the funeral of Alonzo.

FATHER

(as the coffin is lowered)

Earth to earth. Ashes to ashes.  
Dust to dust.

ON THE CEMETERY ROAD

Paul and Uncle Ernest lead the way. Behind them Edward holds Telcide by the arm, followed by the others.

AT THE CEMETERY GATES

Uncle Ernest helps Telcide into a waiting carriage. She is joined inside by Paul, Edward, Malvina, Sybrandt and Helena.

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM-DAY

Paul writes a letter at his desk.

PAUL (V.O.)

Dear Mr. Fiske. It is with great regret that I must renege on the commitment I made in my last letter to participate in the First National Chess Championship at New York this fall. I remain very flattered that the organizing committee chose to invite me. However, my family has suffered a tragic loss of late and as a result it will be impossible for me to leave New Orleans in the foreseeable future. With apologies and high regard, Paul Morphy.

EXT. MORPHY HOUSE-AFTERNOON

Telcide sits on the verandah as the wind blows through the leaves. Tata comes and places a heavy blanket over her.

INT. CHESS CLUB-DAY

Paul and Charles sit across from each other at one of the chess tables--but they are not playing. Charles says something and Paul shakes his head slowly.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS-EARLY EVENING

Paul and Nicole are strolling arm in arm near the water.

VOICE OVER ENDS

EXT. TRAIN STATION-MORNING

Charles stands on the platform as the train slowly pulls into the station. It comes to a stop and PASSENGERS disembark. Judge Meek walks in to greet Charles.

CHARLES

(shaking hands)

Thank you so much for coming, sir.

JUDGE MEEK

It's no trouble Mr. Maurian. I just hope I can be of some assistance.

CHARLES

We're all at a complete loss here. Mrs. Morphy is adamantly opposed to this New York voyage. And of course Paul is still a minor.

JUDGE MEEK

That may actually help us.

CHARLES

Do you think so? She really doesn't want to let him go.

JUDGE MEEK

Well, I'm sure you know what a close family they have always been. Perhaps she is a little concerned about all of this interest in Paul.

CHARLES

(sadly)

Their house was such a festive place while we were growing up. It's hard to believe that the Judge is gone so suddenly.

JUDGE MEEK

Alonzo's death was a terrible shock to all of us. (pause) I think Telcide simply needs some reassurance, that's all.

INT. MORPHY RESIDENCE-SAME DAY

Telcide and Judge Meek sit in the drawing room surrounded by grandparents Joseph and Modeste Le Carpentier, aunts Amelie and Amenaide and Uncle Charles. Tata fills Telcide's teacup.

TELCIDE

Thank you Tata. (she sips) I still don't see what could be so important about this congress, as you call it. New York seems an awfully long way to go just to play some chess games.



JUDGE MEEK

The winner of this tournament will be hailed as the undisputed champion of the United States! I think Paul will do all of us proud--if he has your blessing.

TELCIDE

What about these other men--the men who would be playing with Paul. What do they do besides look at chess? Are they otherwise engaged?

JUDGE MEEK

(glancing at the others)  
There should be some professional men, no doubt. I know Dr. Raphael from Louisville is going to compete. I will enter the tournament as well.

TELCIDE

I'm afraid this gathering in New York may attract some unsavory characters--gamblers and the like--people who might take advantage of my son. I don't approve of gamblers.

JUDGE MEEK

I think it's safe to say that nobody is going to take advantage of Paul Morphy. Certainly not anywhere near a chessboard.

TELCIDE

We have always believed that superior education and the diligent pursuit of a respectable occupation is the most important path for a young man.

Telcide picks up her teacup and drinks from it. All of the members of the family, some in unison and others a beat or two later, do the same. Judge Meek looks around at them.

TELCIDE (CON'T)

It's more important for us to see Paul establish himself as a lawyer than anything else.

JUDGE MEEK

Of course. And Paul has done everything possible until now to prepare himself for that. But he can't actually practice law until he turns twenty-one.

TELCIDE

I am aware of that.

JUDGE MEEK

Telcide, your son is a chess genius. Why not permit him the chance at this achievement in the meantime?

TELCIDE

(turning to her father)

Papa, what do you think?

JOSEPH

Well, I don't know. I suppose it can't be of any harm right now.

UNCLE CHARLES

(looking around at everyone)

It would be nice to have a champion in the family.

AUNT AMELIE

Judge Meek, do you really think Paul has a chance? He's still so young.

JUDGE MEEK

I would certainly put my money on him. (he sees Telcide's withering glare) Then again, I'm not a gambling man.

EXT. NICOLE DUPREY'S HOUSE-EVENING

A beautiful horse-drawn carriage pulls up to the front of the residence. Paul gets out and carries a large assortment of colorful flowers to the door.

INT. SITTING ROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Nicole arranges the bouquet in an elegant glass vase on the mantelpiece. She is ravishingly attired in a formal gown. Paul waits for her on the divan.

NICOLE

(turning)

You're going all the way to New York to play a game of chess?

She goes to sit with him.

PAUL

(amused)

Of course there will be more than one game. The tournament will take two or three weeks to complete.

NICOLE

(a little bewildered)

Oh.

PAUL

If I win, then I'll be champion of the entire United States.

NICOLE

Really! What will you do then?

PAUL

I'll most likely stay on in New York for a little while, but I'm coming back to New Orleans of course.

NICOLE

(leaning in)

Paul, if I were to ask you what you most want out of life, what would you say?

PAUL

Well, you know...the normal things. A respectable career and...(suddenly grasping her hands) Nicole, will you marry me?

NICOLE

(triumphantly)

Paul Morphy! We're not even engaged yet. And you're still too young to propose to me.

PAUL  
But you will marry me, won't you?

NICOLE  
Of course I will marry you, when  
the time comes.

PAUL  
Then it's only appropriate that I  
give you this gift as a symbol of  
our promise to each other.

He takes out a blue velvet box from his coat pocket and  
hands it to her. She opens it and removes a stunning gold  
necklace with a sapphire.

NICOLE  
(gasping)  
Oh!...Paul.

PAUL  
(helping her with the clasp)  
I know it's not a ring. But we  
needn't announce our engagement  
just yet.

NICOLE  
(fastening it)  
We can do that when you turn  
twenty-one.

PAUL  
And get married after I start my  
law practice. (admiring her) Do you  
like it?

NICOLE  
Paul, it's so beautiful. I love it.

She places her hand behind his head and gently pulls his  
mouth to hers. They kiss.

INT. MORPHY RESIDENCE-EVENING

Paul is packing clothes into an open suitcase which is on  
his bed. Telcide enters the room and moves up beside him.

TELCIDE  
Do you have everything you need?

PAUL  
I think so.

TELCIDE  
There is something I want to say to  
you about all this.

PAUL  
What is it?

TELCIDE  
Paul, you know that your father was  
a very successful man.

PAUL  
Yes. Everyone knows that.

TELCIDE  
I want you to promise me one thing.

PAUL  
What is that?

TELCIDE  
I want you to tell me that you  
won't play for money. Promise me  
that you will never gamble at  
chess.

PAUL  
I promise mother.

TELCIDE  
Thank you. Good luck in New York.  
Be careful.

She turns and walks out.

EXT. TRAIN STATION-NEW YORK CITY 1857

The train pulls in and many PASSENGERS disembark. Paul steps  
down to the platform carrying a large suitcase. A good  
looking thirty year old man, FREDERICK EDGE, walks up to  
him.

EDGE  
Paul Morphy?

PAUL  
(a little surprised)  
Yes.

EDGE

(a mile a minute)

I thought it must be you. Don't ask me how I knew. My name is Frederick Edge. I'm a reporter for the New York Herald but they've asked me to work as assistant secretary for the tournament.

(taking the suitcase and leading Paul away)

I've already registered you at the St. Nicholas Hotel--most of the others are at the St. Denis--but I think you'll appreciate the St. Nicholas. Everybody's very anxious to meet you. Mr. Kennicott came in from Chicago on Thursday but Louis Paulsen only arrived yesterday.

Edge loads everything into a carriage which is waiting for them at the side of the road. He gestures for Paul to get in and Morphy does.

EDGE (CON'T)

(getting in)

The competition is slated to begin tomorrow so you've made it just in time.

Edge pulls the door shut and the carriage drives off.

INT. DESCOMBES ROOMS-SAME DAY

A long hall with a raised platform at one end where a large American flag is displayed. PLAYERS and OFFICIALS mill around the room.

ON THE PLATFORM

A very handsome man with straight hair and a smooth face, D.W. FISKE, stands next to an intense looking gentleman with a mustache and goatee, COL. MEAD.

FISKE

(raising his voice)

Gentlemen. Can I have your attention please. May I present the president of the New York Chess Club, Colonel Charles Mead.

COL. MEAD  
(at a podium)

Thank you Secretary Fiske. It is my privilege and pleasure to serve as chairman of the First National Chess Congress. On behalf of the entire committee I wish to welcome all of you to the chess championship of the United States. We have sixteen of the finest strategists in the land for this competition. A series of preliminary matches will take place, the victor in all of these being the first to score three wins. In that fashion we will eliminate fourteen contenders until we have our finalists. Those two gentlemen will then meet in a match to five wins for the First Prize and the title of American Champion.

IN THE TOURNAMENT HALL

DR. B.I. RAPHAEL, JAMES THOMPSON, HIRAM KENNICOTT, THEODORE LICHTENHEIN, and LOUIS PAULSEN listen to the speech.

PAUL

turns his head to look over at...

JUDGE MEEK

who notices and smiles warmly at his Southern compatriot.

CUT TO:

A SHINY BLACK TOP HAT

held high and filled with slips of paper. Several hands reach in one after the other. Paul pulls back with his number.

INT. ENTRANCE TO THE PLAYING HALL-MINUTES LATER

Fiske posts the match ups on a board as several SPECTATORS observe.

INT. PLAYING HALL-SOON AFTER

Paul shakes hands with MR. MONTGOMERY and MR. KNOTT as Judge Meek looks on proudly. The first two gentlemen walk out.

PAUL

I owe you a debt of gratitude for my very presence here.

JUDGE MEEK

Not at all. You earned it with your brilliant play.

PAUL

Who is your opponent for the first stage?

JUDGE MEEK

(smiling)

I've got Mr. Fuller. I see you've drawn James Thompson.

PAUL

Yes, the Englishman. (pause) They've got an evening planned for me now. Would you care to join us?

JUDGE MEEK

That's kind, Paul. But I think I'll spend the night quietly.

MR. FULLER, MR. PERRIN, and Mr. Edge walk over to where Paul is standing as Judge Meek moves away.

FULLER

We have reservations for dinner at the St. Denis, Mr. Morphy.

PERRIN

And our members will be eagerly awaiting your appearance at the club after that.

FULLER

Shall we go?

PAUL

Yes, of course.

Fuller and Perrin turn to lead them away and Paul moves up to Edge as they all walk off.



PAUL(CON'T)

(aside)

I see you've calmed down Mr. Edge.

INT. NEW YORK CHESS CLUB-LATER THAT EVENING

A number of KIBITZERS are gathered around a table where Paul is playing with Perrin. Edge and Fuller look on.

EXCITED KIBITZER

Oh look at that Fred. He's left his knight en prise!

FULLER

Don't take it Fred. Surely it's a trap.

WEAK KIBITZER

No! Go on Freddy. I think he's made a blunder. Take his knight!

Perrin looks at Fuller to see if he has been influenced by the consensus.

FULLER

(shaking his head)

I think you'll be sorry.

Perrin looks at the rest of them for more encouraging support. He's dying to take the offered knight.

THREE KIBITZERS (O.C)

(one after the other)

Go ahead Freddy...It's a bluff...Take his piece!

PERRIN

(plunging in)

Okay...off with its head!

PAUL

(moving quickly)

Check.

Perrin rubs his forehead and then moves nervously.

PAUL

(moving immediately)

Check.

Perrin's eyes go wide in apprehension. Desperation sets in. He moves frantically.

PAUL  
Checkmate.

There is raucous and derisive laughter as Perrin looks around in disgust.

CHARLES STANLEY

a slim man about forty with long sideburns has arrived and pushes through the kibitzers.

STANLEY  
What's all the commotion about,  
gentlemen?

THREE KIBITZERS (O.C.)  
(one after the other)  
Stanley! Here he is...Get up Fred.  
Let Stanley in...Surely he'll be a  
match for Mr. Morphy.

Stanley sits down and begins to set up his pieces with a look of determination and confidence.

STANLEY  
(loudly)  
It's time for me to show this young  
man that there is a least one  
strong chess player in New York.

WRY KIBITZER (O.C.)  
Good luck.

STANLEY  
(turning his head)  
You will recall how I beat another  
player from New Orleans a few years  
ago, for the title.

Stanley looks back at Paul, who eyes him evenly. They shake hands quickly and begin the game.

INT. DESCOMBES ROOMS-NEXT MORNING

Fiske and Edge stand in the middle of the large playing hall. The combatants enter and proceed to their respective tables. Some SPECTATORS stand around the outside of the room.

STANLEY

enters with his shoulders slumped and a depressed expression on his face.

FISKE  
(quietly)  
Stanley doesn't look very happy  
this morning.

EDGE  
(suppressing a smile)  
Things didn't go too well for him  
against young Morphy last night.

FISKE  
What was the score?

EDGE  
Four to nil for Morphy.

FISKE  
(looking over)  
Speak of the devil.

Paul enters with his opponent James Thompson and they  
proceed together to a table.

FISKE (CON'T)  
What chance to you give Thompson in  
that match?

EDGE  
(confidently)  
After what I saw last night, not  
much, to tell you the truth. I hear  
that he's got some backers in  
England, though.

FISKE  
That's money tossed to the wind, if  
you ask me.

Paul and Thompson are now seated across from each other at  
the chess table.

MATHEW BRADY

walks in and takes a photograph of them as they shake hands.  
Thompson moves his King pawn and Paul the same. Several  
opening moves are played very quickly.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DESCOMBES ROOM-TWO DAYS LATER

Fiske lifts a pencil to the match-up sheet posted on the wall outside the playing hall. He writes a 3 next to MORPHY, a 0 next to THOMPSON.

INT. ST. NICHOLAS HOTEL LOBBY-ONE WEEK LATER

Paul sits in a big leather chair reading *The New York Times*. Edge comes in.

EDGE

Well, you'll be playing your good friend Meek in the next stage after all. He's finally beaten Fuller.

PAUL

Good for him!

EDGE

I say, Louis Paulsen is giving an exhibition of blindfold chess tonight. I thought I'd have a look. Would you care to join me?

PAUL

I suppose it would be interesting to see how he does.

INT. DESCOMBES ROOMS-SAME EVENING

LOUIS PAULSEN

is seated on the stage in a straight back chair with a dark blindfold over his eyes. A FEW SPECTATORS stand along the side.

PAULSEN

Knight to King's fifth on board two.

IN THE PLAYING HALL

Four OPPONENTS sit alone over different boards. Fiske strides up to board two and moves the knight. He sees another player gesture that he has moved a piece.

FISKE

(walking over)

Pawn to Queen's Rook third on board four, Mr. Paulsen.

PAULSEN

Bishop takes Knight there.

Paul and Edge observe the proceedings from a railing at the opposite end of the room.

EDGE

Have you ever attempted anything of this sort Mr. Morphy?

PAUL

No, I can't say that I have.

EDGE

I know Philidor once gave an exhibition of blindfold chess in London.

PAUL

(smiling)

That was only two games. And they said his performance "should be hoarded among the best samples of human memory, till memory shall be no more."

EDGE

(admiringly)

Yes, I remember reading that somewhere. (pause) Everyone is expecting that you and Mr. Paulsen are going to meet in the final. Do you have any predictions about the outcome of that?

PAUL

(lightly)

Ever the ardent reporter, aren't we Mr. Edge.

EDGE

(laughing)

I guess you've got me there. But I'd be willing to bet a week's salary right now that you'll win, if I could find a taker.

IN THE PLAYING HALL

One of the players glances up to see that Fiske is standing over his board. He makes a move.

FISKE  
 (looking at it)  
 Queens Rook to Queen's first on  
 board one.

FISKE

looks up at where Paul is standing and smiles...

PAUL

nods to him in response.

PAULSEN  
 Queen to Bishop's second on board  
 one.

PAUL  
 (politely)  
 Well, I'd best be getting back to  
 the hotel. Tomorrow is another day.

INT. DESCOMBES ROOMS-DAY

Edge, Fiske, Fuller and Thompson watch as Paul finishes a  
 tournament game with Judge Meek.

PAUL  
 (quietly)  
 Check.

Judge Meek smiles at Paul and extends his hand.

JUDGE MEEK  
 Well played match, Paul. Three to  
 zero again. Good luck in the next  
 stage.

PAUL  
 (shaking hands)  
 Thank you sir.

INT. HOTEL ROOM-NIGHT

Paul writes a telegram at the desk.

PAUL (V.O.)  
 Dear Charles. The chess congress is  
 going well. I will play Theodor  
 Lichtenhein of New York next.

INT. DESCOMBES ROOMS-DAY

Paul is seated at the chess table across from Lichtenhein. The latter pushes his King's pawn two squares. Paul replies.

CUT TO:

Paul sits straight up while Lichtenhein holds his head in two hands with his elbows on the table.

CUT TO:

Paul sits straight up while Lichtenhein covers his mouth with one hand, elbow resting on the table.

CUT TO:

Paul sits straight up while Lichtenhein holds his head in one hand at the ear, lower to the table.

INT. NEW ORLEANS CHESS CLUB-DAY

A few MEMBERS are playing some casual games. Eustis is looking on with McConnell. Charles enters, slowly shaking his head. Everyone gathers around him.

EUSTIS  
(in disbelief)  
Don't tell me that he lost?

CHARLES  
(reading a telegram)  
Starting Thursday the 29th, Louis Paulsen to meet...(looking up at them sadly) Paul Morphy in final!

Charles breaks into a big smile and they all begin to clap and congratulate each other.

INT. DESCOMBES ROOMS-DAY

Many SPECTATORS are gathered around for the final match. Fiske is standing over the board between Morphy and Paulsen.

FISKE  
May the best man win.

A short round of applause. The players quickly shake hands and begin to play.

DISSOLVE TO:

Paul reaches out his hand and captures Paulsen's Bishop with his Queen. There is a collective GASP from the gallery.

AMONG THE SPECTATORS

PERRIN

(astonished)

My God! Morphy is offering his Queen for a mere Bishop.

STANLEY

The lad must have lost his mind. I should think they'll be coming to take him away after that blunder.

PAULSEN

looks down to Morphy's Queen, which can be captured by a pawn. He stares at the Queen and then looks at

PAUL

who studies the board and then lifts his head to meet Paulsen's eyes...

The room is completely silent. Everyone is waiting to see what will happen next -- Fiske, Stanley, Perrin, all the spectators...

Paulsen takes the Queen.

INT. DESCOMBES ROOMS-BANQUET HALL-EVENING

All the players and many INVITEES are gathered for the closing ceremony.

COL. MEAD

(at a podium)

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the organizing committee, it is my great honor to present the First Prize to...Paul Morphy!

There is loud and sustained APPLAUSE from the entire assembly.

PAUL

gets up from his seat and heads to the podium, shaking hands with several players on his way. He arrives at the front.

COL. MEAD



lifts a beautiful silver service plate from a table next to the podium and presents it to Paul.

INT. HOTEL ROOM-THREE DAYS LATER

Paul sits in a chair reading the newspaper. There is a KNOCK at the door.

PAUL  
The door is open. Come in.

EDGE  
(entering)  
Good afternoon, Paul.

PAUL  
(reaching for a note)  
Fred, could you please deliver this to the chess club tonight?

EDGE  
Certainly. What is it?

PAUL  
It's a challenge.

INT. NEW YORK CHESS CLUB-THAT EVENING

PERRIN  
(reading it)  
I hereby offer any member of the New York Chess Club a match at the odds of pawn and move. Paul Morphy.

STANLEY  
(walking over)  
He can't give me that much of an advantage.  
(to Edge)  
Tell Mr. Morphy that I accept his challenge. Let the stakes be set at one hundred dollars a side.

INT. HOTEL ROOM-SAME NIGHT

Paul sits on the side of his bed while Edge is at the desk.

PAUL  
Stakes? Must there be stakes involved?

EDGE

There usually are in any serious match.

PAUL

(reflecting)

Unfortunately. (pause) Well, tell them that I'm ready to begin any time.

INT. NEW YORK CHESS CLUB-SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Paul sits at the chessboard by himself. Edge and a few MEMBERS are standing around. Perrin enters.

PERRIN

(approaching the table)

Stanley sent me to inform you he has concluded that your four to nothing lead is insurmountable. Therefore he resigns the match. Here are his stakes.

He places one hundred dollars on the table. Paul looks at the money.

PAUL

Where is Mr. Stanley now?

PERRIN

Well, actually he is at a nearby tavern.

(guffaws from some of the members)

But he prefers to be alone for the time being.

PAUL

(taking the money)

I see. Thank you very much Mr. Perrin.

Perrin and the others move away from the table as Paul gets up and turns to Edge.

EDGE

I guess that's that.

PAUL

(quietly)

Find out where Stanley lives if you can.

EXT. LOWER CLASS NEIGHBORHOOD/INT.CARRIAGE-AFTERNOON

Paul and Edge roll down the tenement lined street. Paul looks out the window for the number.

PAUL  
 There it is. Stop here driver.  
 (he gets out)  
 I'll only be a few minutes, Fred.

EXT. STANLEY'S APARTMENT-MOMENTS LATER

Paul knocks on the door. MRS. STANLEY, who is obviously pregnant, opens the door.

PAUL  
 (gently)  
 Mrs. Stanley?

MRS. STANLEY  
 (puzzled)  
 Yes?

PAUL  
 How do you do. I am Paul Morphy.

There is a mixture of awe and anxiety in Mrs. Stanley's eyes.

AT THE CARRIAGE

Edge has opened the door and stepped out. He sees Paul hand Mrs. Stanley the one hundred dollars.

INT. BOOKSTORE-DAY

The OWNER sits by a cash register to the left of the door. Paul browses slowly along the shelves on the other side and stops when one of the titles attracts his attention.

AT THE COUNTER

PAUL  
 I will take this.

He places it on the counter.

ON THE BOOK COVER

TWELVE YEARS A SLAVE  
 by Solomon Northup

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE/INT. TRAIN-DAY

Paul is sitting alone reading his book as the landscape passes by in the window.

HIS EYES

moving back and forth

ON THE PAGE

sold into slavery, and are at  
this moment wearing out their  
lives on plantations in Texas and  
Louisiana.

Paul closes the book and looks out the window.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS DOCK-DAY

A THRONG is there to welcome back the hometown hero. Charles cheers along with them.

INT. NEW ORLEANS CHESS CLUB-EVENING

Paul is seated with Charles, McConnell and other members. Justice Eustis reads a letter.

EUSTIS

To Howard Staunton, care of St.  
George's Chess Club, London,  
England. The chess players of New  
Orleans hereby invite you to visit  
this city for the purpose of  
playing a match with our new  
champion, Paul Morphy...

CUT TO:

INT. STAUNTON'S HOME-LIVING ROOM-LONDON

HOWARD STAUNTON, a tall, well dressed middle-aged man with a high forehead and short beard stands by the fireplace. MR. BARNES and the REVEREND OWEN are both seated.

STAUNTON

(reading the same letter)  
His victory in the recent National  
Chess Congress encourages us in the  
belief that we are now ready to  
challenge the Old World for chess  
(more)

STAUNTON  
 supremacy. We consider you to be  
 the most deserving European player  
 to meet this challenge. Please  
 advise us when it would be  
 convenient for you to travel  
 abroad.

BARNES  
 (sniffing)  
 I say, that is rather brash.

STAUNTON  
 These Americans are really the most  
 cheeky sorts imaginable. Who do  
 they think this boy is--another La  
 Bourdonnais?

OWEN  
 He did win at New York.

STAUNTON  
 Oh, I know. But what sort of  
 competition did he face then? There  
 wasn't a strong player in the lot.  
 (disparagingly)  
 "...the most deserving European  
 player..."

BARNES  
 I agree, old boy. A most  
 presumptuous letter indeed.

OWEN  
 Nevertheless Howard, they will be  
 anticipating some reply.

STAUNTON  
 Well of course I shall write back.  
 But I have nothing to prove. This  
 Morphy fellow can bloody well sail  
 over here if he wants to try and  
 make a name for himself.

STAUNTON (V.O)  
 Dear Sirs: I have received your  
 kind invitation to partake of a  
 transatlantic journey to New  
 Orleans for the sake of a chess  
 match with Paul Morphy. I should  
 point out that the best players in  
 Europe are not chess professionals,  
 but have other and more serious

(more)

STAUNTON (V.O)

avocations. I am myself presently obliged to devote virtually all of my waking hours to the completion of some literary criticism I have promised my publishers...

INT. MORPHY RESIDENCE-MUSIC ROOM-MORNING

Paul listens to Telcide play the piano while Helena sits nearby.

INT. NEW ORLEANS CHESS CLUB-DAY

Paul moves along a row of chessboards, moving quickly at each, as he gives a simultaneous exhibition for the MEMBERS.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS PARK-MAGIC HOUR

Paul and Nicole stroll together arm in arm.

VOICE OVER ENDS

INT. NEW ORLEANS CHESS CLUB-AFTERNOON

Paul, Charles, Eustis, McConnell, and other members gathered once again.

EUSTIS

(continuing Staunton's letter)

"...So you can see that time does not permit of such a long journey as you propose." And he signs it.

MCCONNELL

(sarcastically)

I see. Staunton's much too busy to come all the way over here for a match with you, Paul.

CHARLES

Though he does have time to write his weekly chess column in the Illustrated London News.

PAUL

(looking around at them)

Well, it seems that we can't get the English champion to leave his

(more)

PAUL  
lair. (pause) I'll just have to  
book passage to Europe and enter  
the Lion's Den myself.

EXT. NICOLE DUPREY'S HOUSE-EVENING

Paul arrives at the door. It opens and he enters.

INT. NICOLE DUPREY'S HOUSE-MOMENTS LATER

Paul walks into the room followed by Nicole. He turns around  
to face her and she stops.

NICOLE  
First New York, and now you're  
going all the way to Europe to play  
chess. Why Paul?

PAUL  
Because they think they're so much  
better than us in the Old World.

NICOLE  
At what?

PAUL  
Everything. Painting, music, prose,  
philosophy, languages.

NICOLE  
Isn't it true?

PAUL  
It's the Old World. They've had  
more time to create great works of  
art and literature.

NICOLE  
(laughing)  
I guess they have.

PAUL  
I want to show them that we're  
capable of some culture in the New  
World, too.

NICOLE  
How?

PAUL  
I'm going to England to play a  
chess match with Howard Staunton.

NICOLE  
Who is he?

PAUL  
He's the best player in the world.  
Or so he thinks. I'll be living out  
my dream.

Nicole comes up close to him.

NICOLE  
Aren't you a lucky boy.  
(She puts her arms around his  
neck)  
And so handsome!

She kisses him passionately on the lips. His arm comes up slowly towards her shoulder, but before it gets there she suddenly spins away.

NICOLE(CON'T)  
Do you like my dress, Paul?

PAUL  
(surprised)  
Uh...yes, it's lovely.

NICOLE  
Really? Well then I think I'll take  
it off.

PAUL  
What?

NICOLE  
Do you have any idea what it's like  
to be squeezed into one of these,  
Paul?

PAUL  
No I don't. What is it like?

She crosses the room and begins to go up the stairs.

NICOLE  
(loosening her corset)  
It's very confining.  
(higher on the stairs)  
Are you coming up?



Paul crosses to the stairs and climbs up to where Nicole waits for him. She takes his hand.

PAUL  
Are we alone in the house?

NICOLE  
(glancing back)  
Yes. They're in Atlanta.

INT. NICOLE'S BEDROOM

The room is romantically lit. The door flies open and Nicole comes in pulling Paul behind her. She stops inside the door and closes it. He turns around in front of the bed.

PAUL  
Look at all these candles!

NICOLE  
(kicking off hers)  
Why don't you take off your shoes, Paul. You'll be more comfortable.

PAUL  
(surprised)  
Uh...all right.

NICOLE  
(approaching him)  
Let me help you.

Nicole lifts his foot and undoes his shoelaces, then tosses a shoe to the side. She lifts his other foot and does the same, but this time she causes him to lose his balance.

PAUL

falls through the canopy of the bed and lands on his back...

NICOLE

crawls onto Paul and lets down the top of her dress. She presses herself to his stomach and begins to unbutton his shirt.

EXT. NEW YORK/INT. CARRIAGE-DAY

Paul is riding in the company of D.W. Fiske.

FISKE

You'll find Staunton in Birmingham when you get to England, Paul. He'll be there for the tournament that starts on the twenty second of June.

PAUL

I'll go straight there as soon as I land and re-issue the challenge.

FISKE

Frederick Edge will be there when you arrive in Liverpool. He'll be a good fellow to show you around.

PAUL

That is a relief. I look forward to his company.

FISKE

Be careful playing Staunton, Paul. He's got a lot of experience. He's very solid.

PAUL

Oh yes, I know. I've certainly looked at enough of his games.

EXT. PORT OF NEW YORK-SOON AFTER

A big ocean liner looms up in the background. PASSENGERS boarding the ship and WELL WISHERS to see them off. Paul stands behind the carriage as Fiske gets his suitcase.

FISKE

(lifting it out)

Tell Edge to write me as often as possible. We want to be kept abreast of your results over here.

PAUL

I will.

FISKE

(putting it down)

Good luck, Paul.

PAUL  
I don't know how to thank you for  
everything, Daniel.

FISKE  
You can thank me by beating  
Staunton. The whole country is  
behind you.

PAUL  
(smiling)  
It would be a dream come true.

EXT. PORT OF LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND-DAY-JUNE 20, 1858

A FOG HORN SOUNDS in the distance. It is raining. Edge  
watches as Paul emerges from the mist.

EDGE  
(alarmed)  
Paul! You look white as a ghost.  
What's the matter?

PAUL  
It was a very rough crossing. I  
didn't fare too well.

EDGE  
I can see that. Maybe I should find  
a doctor to have a look at you  
before we leave Liverpool.

PAUL  
(breathing deeply)  
That won't be necessary. It's just  
the after effects of a little  
sea-sickness. I'd rather get the  
train for Birmingham right away. I  
want to talk to Staunton before the  
tournament starts.

EDGE  
Birmingham? Didn't you get the news  
about the postponement before you  
sailed?

PAUL  
(puzzled)  
What postponement?

EDGE

They have decided not to hold the Birmingham meeting until the end of August. Staunton's in London, Paul.

PAUL

That's a surprise. (pause) Can we get a train to London this afternoon?

EDGE

Yes. But are you sure you don't want to stop somewhere nearby for a day and leave tomorrow?

PAUL

No, thank you Fred. I'll be fine.

EDGE

(taking the suitcase)  
All right then.

EXT. ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE/INT. TRAIN-SAME DAY

Bleak terrain rushes by in the window. Paul is asleep in his seat next to Edge. A PORTER arrives with a blanket.

EDGE

(quietly)  
Thank you so much.

Edge unfolds the blanket and places it gently over his weary companion. He then removes a BLACK NOTE PAD and PENCIL from his coat pocket, opens the pad and begins to write.

INT. ST GEORGE'S CHESS CLUB-LONDON-EVENING

A dozen DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMEN spectate a game between Paul and MR. BODEN. Barnes and Owen stand together. Edge watches.

EXT. ST GEORGE'S CHESS CLUB-SAME TIME

A carriage stops and Staunton gets out. He is very nicely attired in a handsome dark coat with a beige bowler hat.

AROUND THE CHESS TABLE

Owen notices Staunton enter. He slips away.

INT. ST GEORGE'S CHESS CLUB-VESTIBULE

OWEN

Morphy's beaten Boden four in a row.

STAUNTON

(alarmed)

Without a single defeat. Surely you're not serious, John.

OWEN

I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes.

STAUNTON

That's astonishing.

OWEN

He looks dangerous, Howard.

AT THE CHESS TABLE

Boden looks up from the board.

BODEN

I resign. Again.

They shake hands. The spectators move aside and Staunton walks in.

STAUNTON

(hale fellow well met)

I see our young American friend has at last arrived on these shores. How do you do Mr. Morphy. Howard Staunton.

PAUL

(standing up)

It is truly a great honor to finally meet you, Mr. Staunton.

STAUNTON

Now then, what brings you here in King Street this evening, after what I should expect has been a long and tiring journey?

PAUL

(smiling faintly)

Yes, it was. But the kind hospitality I've received since  
(more)

PAUL  
arriving is slowly but surely  
diminishing my fatigue.

STAUNTON  
Marvelous!

PAUL  
Sir, let me take this opportunity  
to renew the challenge which was  
sent to you by my friends in New  
Orleans last February.

STAUNTON  
(feigning ignorance)  
Forgive me. I have been frightfully  
busy with my literary work in the  
interim. What were the terms of  
that proposal again?

PAUL  
(a little miffed)  
Mr. Staunton. I have crossed the  
Atlantic Ocean for one purpose. I  
am the United States champion. And  
you, sir, hold the scepter of chess  
here in England. I challenge you to  
a match, the winner being the first  
to score eleven victories.

STAUNTON  
(joking)  
Oh yes, now I do recall something  
of this nature.

PAUL  
I believe a contest in which both  
countries have so much at stake  
promises to deliver many exciting  
and uncompromising battles. (pause)  
Do you accept my challenge?

STAUNTON  
Far be it from me to way lay such a  
chivalrous, and I might  
add--ambitious--expedition. And  
particularly on the part of someone  
so youthful as yourself Mr. Morphy.

BARNES  
I believe the winner was to collect  
the sum of one thousand pounds from  
the loser.

PAUL

I have no objections to that. But I leave the arrangements for the stakes entirely up to Mr. Staunton. (pause) When shall we begin play?

STAUNTON

These gentlemen here can attest to the fact that I am quite out of practice. I would need some time to brush up on my openings and endings before the match.

EDGE

How much time Mr. Staunton?

STAUNTON

Shall we say one month. Is that acceptable to you Mr. Morphy?

PAUL

(graciously)

That seems reasonable to me. I'm ready to begin play whenever you feel prepared.

STAUNTON

(grinning)

Very well then, one month it is.

PAUL

If that's settled, perhaps you would like to play me a casual game right now?

STAUNTON

(removing his watch)

Unfortunately I have a prior engagement at the theater very shortly. However I'm sure there are plenty of chaps left here who haven't had a crack at you yet.

PAUL

In that case I await word from you as to the exact date of our match Mr. Staunton. I'm looking forward to it. Have a pleasant evening.

STAUNTON

(smiling tightly)

Thank you. I certainly will.

Staunton, Barnes and Owen exit. As they do Paul and Edge exchange a look. Then Paul sits down to play ANOTHER OPPONENT.

INT. LOWE'S HOTEL-LATE THAT EVENING

The proprietor, OLD LOWE, a big bohemian with a large head, is at the reception. Paul and Edge enter.

OLD LOWE  
(heartily)  
Here they are!

EDGE  
Good evening Mr. Lowe.

OLD LOWE  
(getting their room keys)  
I've been looking over our game  
from this afternoon Mr. Morphy.

PAUL  
(lightly)  
Have you?

OLD LOWE  
I believe my position would have  
been quite satisfactory if I had  
moved King's Knight to Queen's  
second at my twelfth turn.

PAUL  
I'm afraid that would have allowed  
me to trap your King in five moves.

OLD LOWE  
(horrified)  
Checkmate!?

PAUL  
(smiling)  
After the sacrifice of my Bishop at  
King's Rook seventh.

INT. LOWE'S HOTEL-UPSTAIRS HALLWAY-MOMENTS LATER

EDGE  
(putting his key in the latch)  
What was your impression of  
Staunton, Paul?



PAUL

(opening his door)

He appears to be every inch the gentleman. Though I will admit that he seemed to be playing his cards pretty close to the vest.

EDGE

Well, I should tell you straight away that I don't like him. I never have. I can't stand his arrogance.

PAUL

Come come Fred. We don't want to foster any bad feelings. After all, he's agreed to the match.

They enter their respective rooms.

INT. LOWE'S HOTEL-DINING ROOM-NEXT MORNING

Paul and Edge sit at a table having breakfast. A WAITER comes up and refills their coffee cups.

INT. LOWE'S HOTEL-RECEPTION AREA-SHORTLY AFTER

Paul and Edge are on their way out. There is a CLERK behind the front desk.

CLERK

Mr. Morphy, I have a message here for you.

He takes a note from one of the cubbyholes and hands it to Paul. Paul looks down at it as he exits.

EXT. LOWE'S HOTEL-DAY

Edge is coming down the steps with Paul following behind.

EDGE

What's that?

PAUL

It's from Lowenthal. He's challenged me to a match.

EDGE

(laughing)

I'm not surprised. Since your arrival everyone keeps reminding  
(more)

EDGE  
him that he lost to you when you  
were only ten.

PAUL  
Twelve.

They get in the carriage and drive off.

EXT. GARDEN PATIO-AFTERNOON

Paul and Lowenthal are seated across from each other at the chess table, playing a match game.

INT. LOWE'S HOTEL-PAUL'S SUITE-EVENING

Paul is at the desk and removes his pen from the ink bottle. He inscribes "Mr. Howard Staunton" on the paper. His jaw flexes as he continues to write.

PAUL (V.O.)  
Dear Sir. As we are now approaching  
the time you have fixed for our  
match to commence, I think it would  
be advisable to settle the  
preliminaries during this week.

EXT. STAUNTON'S COUNTRY HOUSE-FRONT LAWN-AFTERNOON

Staunton, Owen and Barnes are sitting in garden chairs sipping drinks.

STAUNTON  
(reading the letter)  
"Kindly state some early period  
when your seconds can meet mine, so  
that a contest which excites such  
great interest may be looked upon  
as a fait accompli."  
(He folds the letter)  
That relentless boy won't give me a  
moment's rest.

BARNES  
The Americans are building this  
match up as a test of national  
supremacy.

OWEN

Even the New York Times has a correspondent reporting on Morphy's results here.

STAUNTON

(a little exasperated)

Well what of it? Surely he's not unbeatable.

BARNES

He's just defeated Lowenthal nine games to three. I played him, and I can tell you it was a most unpleasant experience.

Owen has a little laugh at this.

BARNES (CON'T)

You didn't fare any better, Alter.

OWEN

(sobering up)

He's a nasty tactician. Those combinations of his are really very annoying.

STAUNTON

Do you doubt that I can beat him John?

OWEN

You've been the best player in England for a long time, Howard. But this Morphy is proving to be an awfully tough nut to crack.

BARNES

We should never hear the end of it from the Americans if you lose this match old boy.

STAUNTON

(resolved)

I have no intention of losing. After enough preparation I could win a match with Paul Morphy. But I don't have the time for it.

OWEN

What will you do?

STAUNTON

What I won't do is risk my reputation on this boy from the New World. I simply won't ever play him.

BARNES

(surprised)

But how will you get out of it now?

STAUNTON

Oh, I'll get out of it. I have my ways. Just wait and see.

INT. LOWE'S HOTEL-DINING ROOM-MORNING

Paul and Edge are at breakfast.

EDGE

(buttering a roll)

Two weeks and still no reply from Staunton.

PAUL

None.

EDGE

What do you think is the matter?

PAUL

I have no idea.

EDGE

I heard he won his first match in Birmingham two days ago. He's drawn Lowenthal next.

They look up at each other. Suddenly they both jump up and leave the table in a hurry.

EXT. ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE-DAY

A train travels from left to right, smoke billowing from the locomotive.

EXT. QUEENS COLLEGE-BIRMINGHAM-SAME DAY

Paul and Edge are rapidly walking through the quad on a misty, gray afternoon. They encounter Staunton, LORD LYTTELTON and MR. AVERY coming the other way. Paul and Staunton come face to face.

STAUNTON

(seizing the initiative)  
Young man I am entirely out of play. I am under bonds to my publishers. If I play you at chess right now I might subject them to the loss of many thousands of pounds.

PAUL

(pinning him down)  
Are you telling me that you wish to call off the match?

STAUNTON

I need time to complete at least some of my work for the printers. Then I would have to practice up for a few weeks.

PAUL

Mr. Staunton, will you play in October, in November, or December? Choose your own time, but let the arrangement be final.

STAUNTON

Well, Mr. Morphy, if you consent to the postponement, I will play you at the beginning of November. I will see my publishers and let you know the exact date within a few days.

PAUL

Very good. Continued luck to you in this tournament. I await your confirmation.

Staunton has walked off before Paul finished speaking.

STAUNTON

(over his shoulder)  
Good day.

Staunton continues on. Avery and Lyttelton look embarrassed.

LYTTELTON

I'm sorry, Mr. Morphy. That was dreadfully rude of him just now.

AVERY

Inexcusable. My apologies as well.

PAUL

Lord Lyttelton. Mr. Avery. I appreciate those sentiments.

(looking off at Staunton in the distance)

There's no harm done.

EDGE

Everyone would just like to get on with the match.

AVERY

Well, almost everyone.

LYTTELTON

At least it appears to be settled now.

PAUL

I truly hope so.

EXT. ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE-DAY

A train travels from right to left, smoke billowing from the locomotive.

EXT. HYDE PARK-LONDON-DAY

Paul and Edge are sitting on a bench in the sunshine. Edge is reading the newspaper.

EDGE

(agitated)

This is outrageous. This is simply unacceptable.

PAUL

What exactly are you referring to?

EDGE

It's Staunton's latest column in the Illustrated London News.

(holding it out)

You won't believe what he's written.

PAUL  
(looking away)  
Why don't you read it to me Fred.

EDGE  
(reading)  
"In chess matches of importance it is the invariable practice in this country, before anything definite is settled, for each party to be provided with representatives to arrange the terms and money for the stakes. Mr. Morphy has come here unfurnished in both respects."

PAUL  
(shaking his head)  
I never imagined he would put something like that in the paper.

EDGE  
It's nothing short of scandalous. I heard you tell everyone at St. George's that the amount of the stakes was entirely up to him. (pause) Paul, you must demand a retraction immediately.

PAUL  
(looking away and back)  
No. When a man resorts to such means as these, he will not stop until he has committed himself irremediably. Let him go on. He said he would play in November. November it is.

EXT. LONDON STREETS/INT.CARRIAGE-NIGHT

Paul and Edge are riding together.

PAUL  
(looking out)  
I don't really see what there is to do in London until then.

EDGE  
You have beaten everybody else and we've seen all the lions.

PAUL  
 (turning to him)  
 I'm prepared to leave for Paris  
 tomorrow, Fred. Are you free to  
 join me?

EDGE  
 (excited)  
 Paris? The Cafe de la Regence?  
 Arnous de Riviere! Journoud! Daniel  
 Harrwitz!

PAUL  
 (kidding him)  
 Your French accent is very  
 good--for an Englishman.

EDGE  
 (caught up)  
 Of course I will go. I wouldn't  
 miss it for the world!

EXT. CHANNEL STEAMER-FOGGY DAY

Paul is hanging over the railing of the boat and retching.  
 He lifts his head.

EDGE  
 (holding out a handkerchief)  
 Do you feel better now?

Paul takes the offered linen and wipes his mouth.

PAUL  
 (glaring at him)  
 Don't ever again invite me to dine  
 on baked oysters before a channel  
 crossing.

Paul looks out to the channel while Edge has to laugh  
 quietly. Paul suddenly looks back at him but Edge quickly  
 assumes a straight face just in time.

EXT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-PARIS-NIGHT

Paul and Edge stand outside the famous meeting place near  
 the Royal Palace.

EDGE  
 Here it is Paul. The Cafe de la  
 Regence. (pause) Voltaire,  
 (more)



EDGE  
 Rousseau, Franklin, Robespierre,  
 Napoleon--this is where they all  
 came to play.

INT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE--MOMENTS LATER

Dense tobacco smoke. Newspapers all around. A WAITER carrying a large tray of steaming coffee cups moves between the many CROWDED tables. At one, the giant PERE MOREL laughs heartily.

PAUL and EDGE

walk through slowly and pass a table where they overhear some GERMANS. Then they come to a group of RUSSIANS having a lively discussion over drinks. Everywhere there are card games and chess contests underway.

DANIEL HARRWITZ

stands up at his table and pockets one franc handed over by his OPPONENT. He is a sneaky looking man, about thirty-five.

PAUL  
 (looking over)  
 That must be Harrwitz.

EDGE  
 Yes. He's been professionally  
 installed here for two or three  
 years now.

PAUL  
 And he takes money at chess from  
 these poor mazettes.

EDGE  
 That fellow he just beat is no  
 mazette. That's Paul Journoud, one  
 of the strongest players in Paris.  
 On his right is Arnous de Riviere,  
 who is even better. That's the  
 sculptor Eugene Lequesne sitting  
 with them.

PAUL  
 I've heard of him.

EDGE  
 The man standing over the table is  
 the owner of the cafe, Mr.

(more)

EDGE

Delannoy. Come with me and I shall introduce you to all of them.

PAUL

(grabbing his arm)

Wait Fred. It's been a long day. I don't want to announce myself tonight.

(taking it all in)

We'll come back tomorrow.

EXT. ARC DE TRIOMPHE-DAY

PEDESTRIANS stroll under the arch in the bright sunshine.

INT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-AFTERNOON

Paul and Edge make their way to DELANNOY standing at the counter. Edge speaks to Delannoy and gestures to Paul. Delannoy immediately shakes Paul's hand very warmly.

DELANNOY

ATTENTION EVERYBODY!

He whistles loudly and the general DIN dies down. All the CUSTOMERS look over.

DELANNOY (CON'T)

It is my special privilege to announce the arrival of the American chess champion, Paul Morphy!

There is a LOUD and sustained OVATION from everyone. Paul nods and bows, then smiles.

AT THE CHESS TABLE

DE RIVIERE, JOURNOUD, LESQUESNE, Delannoy, Edge and ONLOOKERS stand around the board as Paul plays Harrwitz. Harrwitz concludes an attack with a decisive Queen move.

HARRWITZ

(arrogantly)

That is checkmate Mr. Morphy.

Paul extends his hand to shake Harrwitz's.

HARRWITZ (CON'T)  
 (grabbing Paul's wrist)  
 Well, it is astonishing! His pulse  
 does not beat any faster than if he  
 had won the game.

De Riviere and Journoud both look disgusted. Edge shakes his head. Lequesne walks away and Delannoy stares at Harrwitz coldly.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL LOBBY-EARLY EVENING

Paul sits in a chair looking at the newspaper. Edge enters.

EDGE  
 Everything is settled. Harrwitz  
 agrees to a match for three hundred  
 francs. First to win seven games.

PAUL  
 When do we start?

EDGE  
 Play begins tomorrow morning at La  
 Regence.

PAUL  
 (standing up)  
 Excellent. I'll see you then.

EDGE  
 (alarmed)  
 Where are you going now?

PAUL  
 This is Paris, Edge. I'm going out  
 on the town.

Paul walks off and Edge watches him leave.

INT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-NEXT MORNING

Paul appears tired. Edge stands near the chess table with Lequesne and Morel. Journoud is seated close by. Harrwitz makes a move and bounces up and down. De Riviere walks over.

DE RIVIERE  
 Paul isn't playing the best chess  
 this morning.

EDGE

Well, he prepared for this game by staying out all night.

JOURNOUD

I hope this isn't a sign of things to come. Not too many people here want to see Harrwitz win this match.

HARRWITZ

(agitated)

I heard that, Journoud!

DE RIVIERE

(leaning over to Edge)

He's got fifty francs on Morphy. (pause) I have a hundred francs on Morphy.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL-APARTMENT SUITE-EVENING

Edge sits on a divan in the living room writing in his black book. Paul emerges from his bedroom formally attired. Edge quickly pockets the diary. Paul notices but does not let on.

EDGE

Where are you going?

PAUL

(fixing his tie)

I'm meeting some friends for dinner and then we're off to the cabaret.

EDGE

How nice. And what time do you anticipate that you'll be returning, if I may ask?

PAUL

(absently)

I really have no idea.

EDGE

Perhaps I should remind you that you lost today.

PAUL

(lightly)

Oh, did I? Thank you Fred, I'd forgotten the result.

Paul crosses to the door and opens it.

PAUL (CON'T)  
I don't know what I would do  
without you.

Paul steps out and closes the door. Edge shakes his head slowly.

INT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-NEXT DAY

Paul and Harrwitz are playing. Nearby are Edge, de Riviere, Journoud, and Morel. OTHERS in the background.

DE RIVIERE  
Paul's position is hopeless. He's  
going to lose.

JOURNOUD  
Again.

AT THE CHESS TABLE

PAUL  
(calmly)  
I resign.

Harrwitz reacts by raising his arms and practically flapping them up and down. Journoud looks disgusted and turns away. De Riviere whispers something in Edge's ear.

EXT. RUE DU DAUPHIN-MINUTES LATER

Paul and Edge are walking together.

EDGE  
I know you're not fond of gambling Paul. But some of your friends have a lot at stake on the outcome of this match.

PAUL  
I am aware of that.

EDGE  
Well, I can assure you that they are not too happy right now.

PAUL  
How astonished all of these men will be if Harrwitz does not win another game.

EXT. HOTEL BRETEUIL-THAT EVENING

A carriage comes to a stop at the entrance. A group of THREE REVELERS pours out one side. At the window on the other side is PRINCESS MURAT, a beautiful woman in her late twenties.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL LOBBY-MOMENTS LATER

A DESK MAN and a BELLHOP stand behind the front desk.

YOUNG REVELER  
 (to the desk man)  
 Could you inform Paul Morphy that  
 his friends are here to show him  
 around.

The desk man nods to the bellhop who quickly walks off.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL-UPSTAIRS-A MINUTE LATER

The bellhop stands outside the door. Edge opens it. Paul can be seen in the background.

BELLHOP  
 There is a party waiting for Mr.  
 Morphy in the lobby.

Edge turns to see what Paul will do.

PAUL  
 You may tell them that I won't be  
 going out tonight.

BELLHOP  
 Very good sir.

Edge looks pleased as he hands the bellhop a franc.

INT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-DAY

Paul and Harrwitz opposite each other at the chess table. De Riviere, Edge and Journoud stand nearby. OTHERS in the background.

ON THE BOARD

Paul advances his pawn to the seventh and Harrwitz his own to the sixth. Paul makes a Queen with check. Harrwitz moves his King to the eighth and Paul moves his Queen to the third. Harrwitz flicks over his King hard with his middle finger.

JOURNOUD  
 (happily)  
 Four games to two for Morphy now.

DE RIVIERE  
 Amazing how fortunes can change so  
 drastically in just a couple of  
 days.

EDGE  
 Quite.

AT THE CHESS TABLE

HARRWITZ  
 I'm not feeling too well. I'd like  
 to postpone the next game for a few  
 days.

PAUL  
 Of course.

EXT. TULIP GARDENS-AFTERNOON

Paul and Edge are strolling on the beautiful grounds near  
 the Royal Palace.

EDGE  
 How much longer do you think that  
 Harrwitz will delay the match?

PAUL  
 I can't say. Until he's feeling  
 better I guess.

EDGE  
 Well, he doesn't seem to be too  
 terribly ill, if you ask me. He's  
 been at Regence until midnight all  
 this week. Playing for a franc a  
 game as usual.

PAUL  
 I know. (pause) Fred, I think this  
 hiatus provides the perfect  
 opportunity for an exhibition that  
 could really excite the interest of  
 the general public.

EDGE  
 Chess is all the rage in Paris as  
 it is Paul, thanks to you. What do  
 you have in mind?

PAUL

A demonstration of blindfold chess  
at the Cafe de la Regence. Eight  
boards simultaneously.

EDGE

(astonished)

It's never been attempted before!  
Eight chess games at the same time  
without sight of the boards. I  
scarcely believe it to be humanly  
possible.

PAUL

(smiling)

Will you organize it Fred?

EDGE

Yes, of course. But are you capable  
of it?

PAUL

We shall see.

INT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-DAY

DELANNOY

(highly enthused)

What a brilliant idea! I would be  
thrilled to present such a tour de  
force.

EDGE

The only condition which Paul  
insists upon is that the public be  
admitted to watch free of charge.

DELANNOY

That is no problem. My business has  
never been better since Paul Morphy  
arrived in Paris.

EDGE

Jolly good.

DELANNOY

You may set up the chess boards in  
the billiards room Mr. Edge.



EXT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-AFTERNOON-SEPTEMBER 27, 1858

A CROWD is gathered.

INT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-BILLIARDS ROOM-SAME TIME

Paul sits in an arm chair at one end of the room, with Edge off to his side. GENTLEMEN in top hats surround the tables where EIGHT OPPONENTS are setting up chessmen. De Riviere stands in the middle. DOCTOR SINGER walks up to Edge.

DR. SINGER

Mr. Edge?

EDGE

Yes.

DR. SINGER

I have been told that you are the gentleman who looks after the American champion.

EDGE

I am Paul Morphy's secretary. How may I help you?

DR. SINGER

I must insist you put a stop to this madness right now.

EDGE

I beg your pardon?

DR. SINGER

I am a physician, and I urge you--for the sake of that young man's health--to let me advise him that he must cancel this engagement immediately.

EDGE

On what grounds?

DR. SINGER

The human brain is not capable of the exertion to which Mr. Morphy is about to subject it. The effect could be damaging to the cells-

DE RIVIERE

SILENCE PLEASE!

The general DIN in the room subsides very quickly.

EDGE  
 (whispering)  
 I'm afraid it's too late now.

PAUL  
 (facing away)  
 Pawn to King's fourth on all  
 boards.

CUT TO:

INT. BILLIARDS ROOM-A LITTLE LATER

Edge moves along behind the chessboards where SEVERAL OBSERVERS are conferring quietly at each with the actual contestants.

DE RIVIERE  
 King to Bishop's first on board  
 six.

PAUL  
 Queen to Knight's third there.

EXT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-SAME TIME

A handsome carriage with two proud WHITE HORSES rolls to a stop. A FOOTMAN steps down and opens the door. Princess Murat gets out and walks towards the premises.

AT THE FRONT DOOR

The crowd parts to let Princess Murat through.

INT. BILLIARDS ROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Princess Murat wends her way through the spectators until she is close enough to observe Paul. She watches him very intently, though he does not notice. Edge looks at her.

DE RIVIERE  
 Knight to Bishop's fourth on board  
 five.

PAUL  
 Rook to Bishop's third.

EXT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-DUSK

There are lanterns aglow and MORE PEOPLE hold candles in the fading light, so that it looks like a vigil.

AT PRINCESS MURAT'S CARRIAGE

The door is held open and she gets in. The footman climbs in and the carriage drives away.

AT THE DOOR OF THE CAFE

Delannoy appears with Pere Morel.

DELANNOY  
(shouting out)  
Bierwith, Baucher and Borneman have  
now been defeated.

There is a loud and prolonged CHEER from everyone.

DELANNOY (CON'T)  
The score stands at five wins and  
one draw for Paul Morphy, two games  
still in progress.

More enthusiastic WHISTLING and SHOUTING from the throng. Delannoy smiles widely and steps back inside. TWO YOUNG MEN try to crash the door but Pere Morel blocks them.

INT. BILLIARDS ROOM-SAME TIME

Paul closes his eyes and bows his head slightly. Doctor Singer studies him with a serious and concerned expression.

AT BOARD NUMBER FOUR

M. GUIBERT whispers to a MAN leaning over his shoulder, then plays a move. Journoud observes this.

JOURNOUD  
Pawn to Bishop's third on board  
four.

PAUL  
Rook to Queen's fifth.

Paul looks over to Doctor Singer. He crosses his eyes, jerks his head back and forth and sticks out his tongue. Doctor Singer cannot help but laugh.

CUT TO:

INT. BILLIARDS ROOM-EVENING

The only remaining opponent, old M. SEGUIN, sits surrounded by a sea of rapt faces.

PAUL (O.C.)  
Pawn to King's seventh

SEGUIN  
(after a moment)  
I resign.

There is a tremendous outburst of APPLAUSE and CHEERING. Everyone rushes to Paul as he gets to his feet. His SUPPORTERS lift him up on their shoulders.

AN OLD MAN

with tears in his eyes reaches up and holds Paul's hand.

OLD MAN  
(overwhelmed)  
This was incredible.  
(stroking Paul's hair)  
Such a beautiful mind.

EXT. CAFE-SAME TIME

FRENCH FANS  
(in unison)  
We want Morphy! We want Morphy!

INT. CAFE

Pere Morel leads them out as Paul is carried towards the front door. The celebration surges past Edge.

EDGE  
(reminiscing to himself)  
Until memory shall be no more.

EXT. CAFE

Paul is carried through the CROWD with Pere Morel clearing the way. Arms and hands flail from all directions in an attempt to touch him.

FRENCH FANS  
Long live Morphy! Long Live Morphy!

AT THE DOOR TO A CARRIAGE

Paul struggles in, followed by Edge, De Riviere and Journoud. The carriage cannot go anywhere at first, surrounded as it is. Finally there is some room and the horses start off.

INTERIOR-SCULPTOR'S STUDIO-DAY

Paul is sitting perfectly still on a high stool in front of a big window. The light from outside spills over him. Eugene Lesquesne chisels at a marble bust.

EDGE(V.O.)

Dear Fiske, I can hardly describe the adulation which now surrounds our young friend here in Paris. I can assure you they treat him like a god. The other night at the Theatre Francais the entire orchestra stood up to look at him. Everyone tries to get introduced. Even the Emperor has requested his presence at the Palace. The social whirl will not abate. It is all I can do to keep up. Edge.

INT. CHATEAU OF BARONNE DE LAROCHE-EVENING

A large ballroom filled with well dressed HIGH SOCIETY GUESTS. Edge stands next to the matronly BARONNE DE LAROCHE as she watches Paul across the room, where he is surrounded.

B.DE LAROCHE

(turning to Edge)

Tell me Mr. Edge. How is Mr. Morphy doing against that professional at the Cafe de la Regence?

EDGE

(laughing)

You mean Daniel Harrwitz.

B.DE LAROCHE

Yes! He's the one. Harrwitz.

EDGE

(disdainfully)

Their match is over now Baronne de Laroche. Mr. Harrwitz gave up with the score five wins to two in favor of Mr. Morphy.

B.DE LAROCHE

(gleefully)

Did he really! And what about the champion of England, Staunton. Isn't there supposed to be some kind of contest with him?

EDGE

Staunton has been procrastinating for weeks. He's even used his chess column to claim that the problem is Morphy's lack of sufficient finances for the prize.

B.DE LAROCHE

That's very unsportsmanlike.

EDGE

It's ridiculous. There are gentlemen in London and Paris who have told me that Morphy could be backed against Staunton for ten thousand pounds, and the money raised within twenty four hours.

B.DE LAROCHE

Well, you may tell Mr. Morphy from me, that for ten thousand pounds against Mr. Staunton, or any player in Europe, he must not go further than this house.

AT THE PUNCH BOWL

MADAME JEAN D'ANGELY is standing with the DUCHESS DE TREMOILLE and MADAME REGNAULT. They look over at Paul and then turn to each other.

JEAN D'ANGELY

Everyone I know has taken up chess with a passion. All of a sudden it's the most popular pastime there is.

M. REGNAULT

I've been to some parties this season where all they did was play chess.

D. DE TREMOILLE

I had a game with Mr. Morphy last week. And I won!

(laughing)

(more)

D. DE TREMOILLE  
Of course he played without his  
Queen.

CUT TO:

Paul standing near the winding staircase. THREE GUESTS nod to him and walk off as Lesquesne approaches with the DUKE OF BRUNSWICK and COUNT ISOUARD.

LESQUESNE  
Paul, these two gentlemen have come all the way back to Paris from the Rhine to meet you tonight.  
(turning to them)  
May I present the Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard.

PAUL  
It is an honor to meet you both.

C.ISOUARD  
The distinction is all ours, Mr. Morphy.

DUKE OF BR.  
Your name is famous throughout the Continent now.

PAUL  
I can't imagine that outside of chess circles there could be much knowledge of my activities here.

DUKE OF BR.  
Oh not at all! I can tell you that people from all walks of life are marveling at your conquests on the checkered field.

C.ISOUARD  
(glancing at the Duke)  
You know Mr. Morphy, we play the royal game a great deal ourselves. We're fond of consultation matches.

They both grin ingratiatingly at Paul, who manages a polite smile in return.

CUT TO:

Edge and Baronne de Laroche.

B.DE LAROCHE

How much longer do you expect the American champion will remain in Paris?

EDGE

I don't know exactly. He promised his family that he would return to New Orleans by Christmas.

B.DE LAROCHE

(surprised)

That doesn't leave him much time.

EDGE

They're putting a lot of pressure on him. It would be a shame, because he hasn't faced Adolf Anderssen yet.

B.DE LAROCHE

Oh indeed! The German champion. That would be a spectacular battle. Surely Mr. Morphy wants it to take place.

EDGE

Of course he does. The trouble is his mother doesn't. But I'm doing everything I can to bring the match about.

B.DE LAROCHE

(slyly)

Are you scheming, Mr. Edge?

EDGE

(looking around)

Yes, I think you could call it that.

B.DE LAROCHE

How delightful.

CUT TO:

Paul, the Duke and the Count.

DUKE OF BR.

Lesquesne tells me that you are very fond of Italian opera.



PAUL  
Grand opera is the greatest passion  
in my life.

C.ISOUARD  
(laughing)  
You must mean the second greatest  
passion.

Paul shows a trace of displeasure at this.

DUKE OF BR.  
I would be very flattered if you  
could join us in my private box for  
"The Barber of Seville."

PAUL  
I would be happy to. Please arrange  
it with my secretary.

The Duke and Count shift their attention to Paul's right.  
Paul looks in that direction as...

PRINCESS MURAT

arrives, dressed elegantly in a stunning gown and wearing  
long gloves.

PRINCESS MURAT  
Hello Paul.

PAUL  
(surprised)  
Princess Murat! I didn't know you  
were here. Where did you come from?

PRINCESS MURAT  
I was upstairs.  
(turning to the others)  
Good evening.

PAUL  
Gentlemen, would you please excuse  
us?

DUKE OF BR.  
(bowing slightly)  
We look forward to seeing you at  
the opera, Mr. Morphy.

PAUL  
I shall be there.

C.ISOUARD  
(grinning)  
Enjoy the party.

The Duke and Count walk away. Paul turns to the Princess and smiles.

PRINCESS MURAT  
You really have made quite a name for yourself in Paris, Paul. You're always surrounded by so many people.

PAUL  
Sometimes all the attention is a bit too much. But it's wonderful to see you again, Anna.

PRINCESS MURAT  
I came to your blindfold exhibition at Regence in September.

PAUL  
I was told you were there. Somehow I never even caught a glimpse of you.

PRINCESS MURAT  
I stood back so you wouldn't see me. I didn't want to distract you.

PAUL  
(lightly teasing)  
That was thoughtful. But are you so sure you could have distracted me?

PRINCESS MURAT  
(smiling)  
It was a spell-binding display of phenomenal ability. How do you do it?

PAUL  
Caissa has smiled on me, I guess.

PRINCESS MURAT  
(enthused)  
She has! Now I'm more captivated than ever by chess. I've been playing through all your games from the newspapers.

PAUL  
 (impressed)  
 Then you know how the notation works. Have you learned anything?

PRINCESS MURAT  
 I've noticed that you bring out all your pieces very quickly from the start.

PAUL  
 You've discovered my secret!

EDGE

stands by himself now and observes Paul and Princess Murat from across the wide room. He takes a drink from his glass.

PRINCESS MURAT

looks around the room and then turns to Paul.

PRINCESS MURAT  
 I've been thinking about that night at the cabaret. I had a lovely time with you.

PAUL  
 I enjoyed the evening as well. It was nice to make friends so soon after my arrival.

PRINCESS MURAT  
 I never met a man who talked to me so much about music and art and literature. The men here don't converse with us like that. It must be different in America.

PAUL  
 Not really. I think women in both the Old and New World are far too often excluded from intellectual pursuits, for no discernible reason.

PRINCESS MURAT  
 That's the mark of all patriarchal societies, isn't it.

PAUL  
 What about the Prince?

PRINCESS MURAT

I'm afraid he prefers horse racing and gambling more than anything else. He's been vacationing in Monte Carlo this month.

PAUL

Without you?

PRINCESS MURAT

I chose not to go. I wanted some time alone. (pause) He's supposed to be back the day after tomorrow.

PAUL

I see.

PRINCESS MURAT

Would you like to visit us at the Chateau next weekend? I could come get you at Hotel Breteuil.

PAUL

What a kind invitation. May I bring along my friend Arnous de Riviere?

PRINCESS MURAT

The chess master? Of course! I'd love to watch the two of you play a game.

EXT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-PATIO-AFTERNOON

Paul is playing a game with Journoud. De Riviere stands over them, stroking his beard. An old white haired man, M.CHAMOUILLET, watches attentively from an adjacent table.

PAUL

Check.  
 (Journoud moves)  
 Check.  
 (Journoud moves)  
 Checkmate.

Journoud pushes his pieces across the board.

CHAMOUILLET

(admiringly)  
 Very beautiful. Like La Bourdonnais.

PAUL  
Ah, La Bourdonnais!

DE RIVIERE  
Paul, this is Mr. Chamouillet. He used to play with La Bourdonnais here every day. Now he lives in the country.

CHAMOUILLET  
I never come to Paris anymore. But I came today just to see you play.

PAUL  
(gesturing to the board)  
Would you like to have a game?

The old man's eyes light up.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL LOBBY-EVENING

Paul and Edge are relaxing in big chairs.

PAUL  
You should have seen his face. I was touched. He played well, too.

EDGE  
But you won.

PAUL  
Yes.

PRINCE GALITZIN walks in. A bizarre looking man. He is wearing epaulets and high black boots. He has on a red military coat dangling medals, a shiny sword at his waist.

GALITZIN  
I am Prince Galitzin. I wish to see Mr. Morphy.

PAUL  
(amazed)  
I am he.

GALITZIN  
It is not possible. You are too young.

EDGE

Well, this is Paul Morphy.

PAUL

(amused)

Where do you come from?

GALITZIN

I first heard of your wonderful deeds on frontiers of Siberia. We had chess paper from Berlin.

PAUL

Have you really come all the way from Russia?

GALITZIN

Yes. You must come to St. Petersburg to meet Czar. He is great lover of chess.

PAUL

(glancing at Edge)

Perhaps one day I will.

GALITZIN

(stomping his boot)

Now!

PAUL

I beg your pardon?

GALITZIN

Czar has sent me to bring you to Palace tonight.

(He stomps harder.)

He is waiting!

CUT TO:

TWO GENDARMES are wrestling with "Prince Galatzin" near the front desk. THREE GUESTS watch from the bottom of the stairs. The police manage to push the maniac out the front door.

GALITZIN (O.C.)

No!...No! Paul Morphy must come...Czar will be angry!

Edge smiles and shakes his head a little. Paul looks at him in disbelief.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL-APARTMENT SUITE-LATE AFTERNOON

Paul is in his bathroom. He tips over a large ceramic bowl and pours water into the bathtub.

AT THE APARTMENT DOOR

Edge enters and looks over to see that Paul's bedroom door has been left open, and the one to the bathroom is ajar. He watches Paul step into the tub.

INT. PARIS OPERA HOUSE PRIVATE BOX-EVENING-NOVEMBER 2, 1858

The Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard stand side by side in the balcony, looking out. SOUND of the audience STIRRING in the theater. Suddenly there is sustained THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE.

DUKE OF BR.  
(excited)  
He's here.

C.ISOUARD  
(waving to Paul)  
Get ready!

They turn their backs to the theater and step up to the curtain at the entrance to the box.

OUTSIDE THE PRIVATE BOX

Paul walks up to the curtain and it is flung open.

The Duke and Count bow, then sweep their arms aside to reveal a chess table with one chair facing away from the stage! Paul appears miffed as he looks at this arrangement. He enters, sits down behind the White pieces and reaches out his hand...

ON THE CHESSBOARD

the king pawn is pushed two squares and Black does the same. Instantly the White Knight leaps to Bishop's third. The Black queen pawn is pushed one square. A pawn advance, Bishop sortie and pawn capture quickly follow. Pieces are exchanged, then a pawn. The White Bishop moves to Queen's Bishop fourth.

THE DUKE and COUNT

put their heads together and begin to whisper excitedly

PAUL

stares at them blankly and then turns to watch the actors

ON STAGE

a public square in Seville during the 18th Century. MUSICIANS and what appears to be a POOR STUDENT are serenading outside a house.

COUNT ALMAVIVA

(singing in Italian)

Here, laughing in heaven emerges  
the beautiful dawn, and you are not  
awake yet you can sleep like this?  
Arise, my sweet hope. Come, my dear  
idol; Render less painful, oh God,  
The arrow that wounds me...

A HAND

reaches over the board, picks up the Black Knight and places it on King's Bishop third.

PAUL

turns to look at the Duke and Count as the SOUND of the ARIA fades out. He appears very neutral to what he sees...

ON THE CHESSBOARD

the White Queen is moved to Knight three. The Black Queen goes to King two. Knight to Bishop three. A pawn is pushed. The White Bishop slides to Knight five. Pawn to Knight four. The White Knight captures a pawn protected by another pawn!

THE DUKE and COUNT

look to be satisfied as they confer animatedly. The Duke reaches out to take the offered Knight and regards his partner for approval. Count Isouard nods.

THE WHITE KNIGHT

is removed from the board. The White Bishop captures the Black pawn with check. The Queen Knight blocks. White castles Queenside. The Black Rook goes to Queen one. The White Rook takes the Black Knight.

THE DUKE and COUNT

take turns whispering in each other's ear. The Count first, to which the Duke shakes his head, and then the Duke, to which the Count nods.

PAUL



slides around the side of his seat as the SOUND of another ARIA fades in. He rests his arms on the railing of the balcony.

ON STAGE

Count Almaviva, still appearing in disguise, stands with FIGARO.

FIGARO

(singing in Italian)

Ah, bravo Figaro! Bravo,  
bravissimo! A most fortunate man  
indeed! Ready to do everything  
night and day, Always on the move.  
A cushier fate for a barber, A more  
noble life, is not to be had...

PAUL

turns to look over at the Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard. The Count reaches out and Paul swings back as his opponent picks up...

THE BLACK ROOK

is used to knock away the White Rook, which is removed and

COUNT ISOUARD

holds up the captured Rook and smiles at the Duke

PAUL

looks at them evenly and then down

ON THE CHESSBOARD

the White Rook goes to Queen one. The Black Queen is moved to King three. Instantly the White Bishop takes the Black Rook with check.

ON STAGE

FIGARO

(Everyone asks for me, Everyone  
wants me, Ladies, Young lads, Old  
men, Young girls: Here is the wig,  
The beard is ready, Here are the  
leeches...)

A HAND

reaches down and lifts the Black Knight. It takes the place of the White Bishop, which is removed. Black now has an extra piece on the board!

PAUL

stares at the position for a moment. He reaches out and places his hand on

THE WHITE QUEEN

is pushed towards the far end of the board...

ON STAGE

FIGARO  
(Figaro! Figaro! Figaro! Ah, what frenzy! Ah, what a crowd!)

ON THE BOARD

the White Queen stands at Queen's Knight eight. But it can be captured by the Black Knight at Queen two!!

ON STAGE

FIGARO  
(...Hey, Figaro! I'm here. Figaro here,...)

ON THE BOARD

a hand descends and replaces the White Queen with the Black Knight, and quickly withdraws. Paul's fingers grip the White Rook and push it deep into the enemy camp...

ON STAGE

FIGARO  
(...Figaro up, Figaro down. Bravo Figaro! Bravissimo!!)

ON THE BOARD

the White Rook stands at Queen's Rook Eight, next to the Black King, supported by the White Bishop at Knight five.

PAUL  
(looking up)  
Checkmate.

INT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-DAY

Edge, Delannoy, De Riviere, and Lesquesne sit at a table.  
PATRONS of the cafe in the background.

DELANNOY

What about arrangements for the  
match with Anderssen?

EDGE

Morphy insists that he must depart  
for America in November. But the  
professor can't come to Paris  
before mid-December.

LESQUESNE

How can Paul possibly leave Europe  
without playing the German  
champion?

DE RIVIERE

It makes no sense. His place in  
chess history will suffer.

EDGE

I have told him this repeatedly. I  
even solicited letters from all the  
chess clubs on the Continent urging  
him to stay the winter.

LESQUESNE

That was a good idea, Frederick.  
Everyone wants to see this match  
take place.

EDGE

It hasn't worked. His family is  
threatening to send somebody over  
here to ensure Paul's immediate  
return, by force if necessary.

DELANNOY

My God! Can they do that?

EDGE

I don't know. But time is running  
out.

EXT. FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE-LATE AFTERNOON

A DRIVER speeds a horse drawn carriage down the road.

EXT. MURAT CHATEAU-DUSK

The horse and carriage stand outside a palatial white residence.

INT. CHATEAU-DINING ROOM-SAME TIME

Princess Murat sits at the end of a long table resplendent with food. Paul is on one side, de Riviere on the other. At the far end of the table

PRINCE MURAT

looks over at Paul and lifts his glass of red wine, then glances at his wife.

PAUL

picks up a glass of water and nods his head to the Prince.

INT. CHATEAU-UPSTAIRS HALLWAY-AFTER SUPPER

Paul walks slowly down a hall followed closely behind by Princess Murat, then De Riviere and Prince Murat further back. Paul suddenly stops in front of...

A PAINTING

showing a green clad Mephistopheles, evil glare in his eyes, playing a game of chess with a worried looking boy, dressed in a red shirt with black vest. An Angel watches the youth.

PAUL

appears transfixed by the artwork. He moves right up to it.

PRINCESS MURAT

I thought you might find this painting interesting. Friedrich Retzsch, "The Game of Life."

DE RIVIERE

walks in close to the canvas and studies it intently.

PAUL

(astonished)

It's a game of chess between Satan and a boy. They're playing for the boy's soul, aren't they?

PRINCESS MURAT

Yes. It's a battle of the seven deadly sins against the seven virtues.

DE RIVIERE

I'm afraid the boy is doomed. His position looks quite hopeless.

PAUL

I think I can take the boy's side and put up a successful defense.

DE RIVIERE

What? Even you couldn't save this game, Paul. It's impossible!

PAUL

But I believe that I can. Why don't we try, Arnous. You will play for the Devil and I shall stand for the boy.

PRINCESS MURAT

How fascinating! Let's retire to the chess table and see.

Princess Murat turns and walks towards the staircase and the others start to follow.

DE RIVIERE

(to Paul)

Why do I have to be the Devil?

PAUL

Somebody must, and you've got the beard for it.

Princess Murat turns and laughs heartily. Paul and De Riviere follow her down the stairs and Prince Murat after them.

CUT TO:

INT. SITTING ROOM-SHORTLY AFTER

Paul sits at a wide table opposite de Riviere. Princess Murat is between them, resting her arms on the table, one on top of the other. Prince Murat is in an armchair smoking a pipe.

ON THE CHESSBOARD

The White King is surrounded in the center by a Black Queen, two Rooks, a Bishop and two Knights, with only a Queen, Rook and Bishop to defend it.

PAUL  
(capturing the Queen)  
I'll take Her Majesty. Check.

DE RIVIERE  
(moving a piece)  
Knight interposes.

PAUL  
Yes, of course.  
(he moves his rook)  
Check again.

DE RIVIERE  
(confidently)  
This square with the King.

Paul takes a moment to think. He plays a move and De Riviere replies momentarily. Paul moves. De Riviere studies the board for several seconds and responds.

HANDS

take turns reaching out. The White Queen goes to Bishop's fourth. The Black Bishop checks the White King. The King moves. A pawn is pushed and captured by a Bishop. The Knight checks.

PAUL  
Queen takes Knight.

DE RIVIERE  
(placing it)  
I move my Rook here.

PAUL  
Queen to Rook three... Now Arnous,  
can you say that the Devil has a  
winning advantage?

DE RIVIERE

No. The position is unclear. Maybe  
it's a draw.

PRINCESS MURAT

sits up straight and turns her head slowly to Paul.

PRINCESS MURAT

Paul, you saved the boy's soul!

PAUL

His virtues are safe for now, but  
the game of life goes on.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL LOBBY-A RAINY AFTERNOON

Edge comes up to the front door under a large black  
umbrella.

IN THE HALLWAY OUTSIDE THEIR APARTMENT

Edge is opening the door.

INSIDE THE APARTMENT

Edge enters and stops in his tracks. Paul is lying  
motionless on the floor.

EDGE

(frantically)

Paul!!

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL-APARTMENT SUITE-LATER

Dr. Singer comes out of the bedroom carrying his medical  
bag. Edge is waiting nervously.

EDGE

(rushing up to him)

Will he be all right?

DR. SINGER

I hope so. It's a bad case of  
influenza. I've administered a  
powerful sedative. I want him to  
sleep for a long time.

EDGE  
What can I do?

DR. SINGER  
He's running a high fever right  
now. You can keep a cool washcloth  
on his forehead.

Edge nods in agreement.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL-PAUL'S BEDROOM-LATER THAT EVENING

Edge walks over to a ceramic basin filled with water. He  
drops a washcloth in and then wrings it out.

ON THE BED

Paul is sleeping. Edge goes over and sits in a chair beside  
the bed. He removes the old washcloth. He leans down to  
gently kiss Paul's forehead. He sits up again, then places  
the fresh wash cloth.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL-APARTMENT SUITE-TWO DAYS LATER

Edge dozes on his chair by the bed. Paul's head rests on the  
pillow. On his exposed arm there are several fat leeches.  
He stirs and wakes up. Edge sits up abruptly.

PAUL  
(confused)  
What happened?

EDGE  
You fainted Paul. You've been  
rather ill for the last few days.

PAUL  
I feel positively feeble.

EDGE  
Well the doctor has been taking  
blood. You've lost quite a bit.

PAUL  
How much?

EDGE  
Three or four pints I would  
estimate.



PAUL  
 (alarmed)  
 Then there's only a quart left!

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL-APARTMENT SUITE-ANOTHER DAY

Dr. Singer comes out of Paul's bedroom. Edge is waiting.

EDGE  
 How does it look?

DR. SINGER  
 He seems to be improving. I think  
 he will be all right.

EDGE  
 Thank you for taking such good care  
 of him through this.

The doctor removes an envelope from his pocket and hands it  
 to Edge.

DR. SINGER  
 (confidentially)  
 Here is that letter to the Morphy  
 family you asked me to write.

EDGE  
 (excited)  
 You've done it!

DR. SINGER  
 Yes. I have informed them as to the  
 inadvisability of a winter crossing  
 for Paul in his weakened state.

EDGE  
 You are a Godsend, Dr. Singer. The  
 contest with Anderssen appeared  
 very unlikely without your help.

DR. SINGER  
 Well Mr. Edge, if Paul manoeuvres  
 as cleverly in his games with  
 Anderssen as you have in bringing  
 about the match, I think he should  
 win it.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL-APARTMENT SUITE-TWO WEEKS LATER

Paul is sitting by the window in his dressing gown. He looks  
 out at the flower gardens. Edge enters the apartment.

EDGE  
 (walking over)  
 How is the patient doing?

PAUL  
 Much better these last few days,  
 thank you Fred.

EDGE  
 I've got some news that should  
 cheer you even more.

PAUL  
 What is it?

EDGE  
 Adolf Anderssen is on his way from  
 Breslau and we expect him to arrive  
 in Paris tomorrow morning.

PAUL  
 (gleefully)  
 The German champion! Did you send  
 him the money I won from Harrwitz  
 to cover his travel expenses?

EDGE  
 Yes, of course.

PAUL  
 (excited)  
 Fred, I feel the chess fever coming  
 over me. Get the board and I'll  
 show you some of Anderssen's games.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL BANQUET ROOM-DAY

Paul and ADOLF ANDERSSEN are playing while Edge, de Riviere,  
 Journoud, Lesquesne, Preti, and U.S. AMBASSADOR JAMES  
 MORTIMER sit or stand close to the chess table.

EDGE(V.O.)  
 I have never seen a nobler-hearted  
 gentleman than Herr Anderssen. He  
 would sit at the board and examine  
 the frightful positions into which  
 Morphy had forced him, until his  
 whole face was radiant with  
 admiration of his antagonist's  
 strategy, and then laughing  
 outright he would commence  
 re-setting the pieces for another  
 game.

## INT. RESTAURANT FOY-EVENING

Paul, Edge, de Riviere, Journoud, Lequesne, Mortimer, and Anderssen are seated around a table full of food and wine.

ANDERSSEN

(lifting his glass)

To Paul Morphy; the finest chess player who ever existed. He would doubtless have beaten La Bourdonnais himself.

Paul nods to Anderssen and all the men drink.

MORTIMER

(to Anderssen)

At Regence some of them are saying that you didn't play as well here as you did against Dufresene.

ANDERSSEN

(laughing heartily)

No, Mr. Ambassador. You see, Mr. Morphy wouldn't let me. It's useless to struggle against him, he is like a piece of machinery that is sure to come to a certain conclusion.

DE RIVIERE

(lightly)

What will Von der Lasa and Max Lange have to say about this defeat when you get back to Germany?

ANDERSSEN

(good naturedly)

Well, they won't be happy with me in Berlin. But I'm sure he is the greatest player who ever lived. I shall tell them Mr. Morphy will come show you himself.

Paul appears charmed by the gracious things that Anderssen is saying about him. He smiles at Edge, who looks back and lifts his glass.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL-PAUL'S ROOM-MORNING

Paul is sleeping. He opens his eyes and turns his head to reveal Edge in the bed next to him. Edge gazes at Paul tenderly and begins to reach for him, but before there is any touch Paul looks the other way and abruptly gets up.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL-DINING ROOM-SAME MORNING

Paul and Edge are eating breakfast. Edge has the *Illustrated London News* at his elbow.

EDGE

There's actually a nice comment about one of your wins over Anderssen here in Staunton's column.

PAUL

(not looking up)  
It's easy for him to be complimentary now, isn't it. Now that he has finally decided not to play me.

EDGE

Well, everyone knows it's no fault of yours that the match didn't come off.

Paul continues eating his crepes.

EDGE

(tentatively)  
What are your plans for the day?

PAUL

(irritably)  
I'm not going to the Cafe de la Regence.

He suddenly pulls his napkin from his lap and stands up.

PAUL (CON'T)

I think I'll take a walk. I'll be back later.

EDGE

Right.

Paul strides off but his gloves are still next to his plate on the table. Edge removes the black notebook from his coat pocket and gets out his pencil.

AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE DINING ROOM

On his way out Paul stops and turns around to look back at Edge. He sees his secretary scribbling away.

AT THE BREAKFAST TABLE

Edge is still writing when a shadow comes over the page.

PAUL

I forgot my gloves.  
 (He picks them up)  
 What do you write in that black  
 book of yours?

EDGE

(defensively)  
 Oh, you know, just some little  
 reminders to myself about this and  
 that. Train schedules, hotel  
 addresses, that sort of thing.

PAUL

It sounds pretty trivial to me.

EDGE

(feigning indifference)  
 Oh it is. Very trivial. I just  
 scribble down any little thing that  
 comes to mind. It's not important  
 at all.

PAUL

(suspiciously)  
 I don't suppose that it is.

He turns his back and walks off. Edge watches him go.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL-APARTMENT SUITE-TWO DAYS LATER

The living room is empty.

PAUL (O.C.)

Do you have a clean razor?

Paul momentarily emerges from his bedroom.

PAUL

(looking around)  
 Is anybody here?

INT. MAIN POST OFFICE-SAME TIME

Edge is at the wicket. The CLERK hands him three letters.

IN THE APARTMENT

Paul is at the door of Edge's room and he ventures in. He surveys the room as he moves over to the bureau.

EXT. RUE DU DAUPHIN-SAME TIME

Edge is walking briskly down the street.

IN EDGE'S BEDROOM

Paul opens a drawer and sees a gleaming straight razor. He goes to remove it when he notices the black notebook. He picks it up and opens it.

INT. HOTEL BRETEUIL LOBBY-SAME TIME

Edge is at the reception area getting his key from the desk man.

IN THE LIVING ROOM OF THE APARTMENT

Paul is sitting in an armchair reading from the notebook. His jaw flexes.

IN THE STAIRWAY

Edge is walking up.

ON THE CHAIR

Paul turns a page. His eyes dart back and forth rapidly.

IN THE HALLWAY

Edge strides down the corridor.

ON THE CHAIR

Paul's eyes are wide and wild.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

Edge turns the key in the latch.

INSIDE THE DOOR

Edge enters and sees Paul sitting in the living room. He walks over.

EDGE

(sorting them)

You've got a letter from Fiske and one from Charles Maurian as well.

He looks up and sees that Paul is staring at him very intensely. Edge notices his black notebook on the lamp table next to Paul.

PAUL

(sarcastically)

Ever the ardent reporter, aren't we Mr. Edge?

EDGE

I see you've taken the liberty to go through my belongings.

PAUL

I was looking for a razor when I found this.

(He picks up the notebook)

Train schedules? Hotel addresses? It seems you've been keeping track of a lot more than that.

EDGE

(defensively)

I'm only recording history. I haven't written anything that could possibly offend you.

PAUL

(bristling)

Nothing that could possibly offend me?

(He opens the notebook)

"He frightened his adversaries, not by his strength, but by his personal appearance. This boy of twenty one, of slim figure and FACE LIKE A GIRL IN HER TEENS.

EDGE

There is no need to shout.

PAUL

What is that intended to suggest?

EDGE

Nothing.

PAUL

(disgustedly)

"Positively appalled the chess warriors of the Old World--NARCISSUS DEFYING THE TITANS."

Paul snaps the notebook shut and flings it at Edge. It hits him in the chest and falls to the floor at his feet. He slowly bends down to pick it up.

PAUL (CON'T)

What do you plan to do with it, Edge?

EDGE

I expect to publish this as the chronicle of a great champion's campaign in Europe.

PAUL

I've told you before how I feel about publicity, or any pecuniary rewards connected to my chess games. You haven't got my permission to publish that.

EDGE

I don't believe I need your permission, Paul. This is solely a reportage of events in your public character.

PAUL

It is not.

EDGE

I maintain that it is. I'm confident my publishers will agree.

There is a silence of several seconds during which the two men do not take their eyes off each other.

PAUL

You are dismissed Mr. Edge.

EDGE

(shocked)

What?



PAUL

Your services are no longer  
required.

EDGE

(in disbelief)

My services are no longer required?

PAUL

That is what I said, Mr. Edge.

EDGE

I shall pack my suitcase and leave  
this afternoon.

PAUL

(coldly)

Good-bye.

EDGE(V.O.)

Dear Fiske. I no longer have  
anything to hope for from your  
young countryman and friend. I can  
from the depths of my soul declare,  
that had it not been for me, you  
wouldn't have seen twenty of  
Morphy's games. I neglected my  
wife and abandoned her  
broken-hearted to look after him.  
When he leaves Europe I can say 'I  
made you stay and play Anderssen  
when you wanted to depart. I nursed  
you when ill. I have been a lover,  
a brother, a mother to you. I have  
made you an idol, a god; all that  
is great, magnanimous, true, noble  
and sublime. And in return you have  
hated and maligned me.' I have  
written nothing of this in my book,  
and yet Morphy will never open its  
pages without a blush, or close  
them without a sigh. Burn this  
letter Fiske, and forget the  
contents.

INT. PARIS RESTAURANT-EVENING

Lesquesne, de Riviere, Journoud, Delannoy and THREE DOZEN  
AMATEURS of chess are gathered. Paul stands alone before  
them. ST. AMANT concludes a speech and everyone applauds. He  
crowns the marble bust of Paul with a laurel wreath.

INT. PARIS CAFE-AFTERNOON

Paul and Princess Murat sit at a table in front of a big window. She stands up and so does Paul. She kisses him on the cheek and exits. He watches her come out on the street and walk to her waiting carriage. The Princess turns and lifts her hand. Paul waves. She gets in and the carriage drives off.

EXT. PORT OF LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND-MORNING-APRIL 30, 1859

Paul carries a single suitcase as he walks towards the ocean liner *Persia*.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. N.Y. NEWSPAPER OFFICE-DAY

FISKE

is reading the letter, his large luminous eyes moving slightly.

VOICE OVER ENDS

INT. REVERE HOUSE BOSTON-NIGHT-MAY 31 1859

A gala testimonial dinner. OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES addresses a HUGE THROG OF DIGNITARIES seated in the auditorium.

DOCTOR HOLMES

(at a podium)

There is no gap in the forest,  
there is no fresh trodden waste in  
the prairie, which has not heard  
the name of the New Orleans boy,  
who left the nursery of his youth,  
like one of those fabulous heroes  
of whom our childhood loved to  
read, and came back bearing with  
him the spoils of giants whom he  
had slain, after overthrowing their  
castles and appropriating the  
allegiance of their Queens...I give  
you Paul Morphy, chess champion of  
the world!

There is a LOUD and sustained OVATION. Everyone gets to their feet and the CHEERING escalates. Paul finally stands in the front row and turns to face them. He bows his head and then lifts it and looks to different places, waving and nodding.

INT. MORPHY RESIDENCE-MUSIC ROOM-MORNING

Telcide sits on a couch reading the *Boston Journal*.

ON THE FRONT PAGE

TRIUMPHANT MORPHY RETURNS

She folds the newspaper by her side and looks off.

INT NEW ORLEANS CHESS CLUB-EVENING

Standing and CLAPPING are Eustis, McConnell, Charles, and TWO DOZEN MEMBERS. Paul nods a little and smiles at more accolades. The clapping stops and they surround him closely.

INT. MORPHY RESIDENCE SITTING ROOM-DAY

Telcide and Paul are sitting across from each other but neither speaks for a moment. Paul shifts in his chair.

TELCIDE

(breaking the silence)

I really think it's for the best,  
don't you?

PAUL

Oh...yes. I was ready to take a  
break from it anyway.

TELCIDE

Then it's a promise?

PAUL

(hesitantly)

Yes. But I do want to honor my  
contract with the New York Ledger  
to edit their chess department.

TELCIDE

I have no great objection to that,  
as long as it doesn't interfere  
with your career.

PAUL

It won't. The column will only require a little correspondence every so often.

TELCIDE

It's just the public matches that I find somewhat of an undignified spectacle.

PAUL

(looking down)

They can be, sometimes.

TELCIDE

(satisfied)

Of course you can still play the occasional game with Charles Maurian in private.

INT. HOME OF CHARLES MAURIAN-EVENING

Charles and Paul are sitting at the chessboard.

CHARLES

(moving a piece)

You know Paul, there is nobody who can tell you not to play chess.(pause) Not even your mother.

PAUL

(playing immediately)

I know that Charles. But the truth is I'm getting weary of all the attention myself.

CHARLES

Didn't you enjoy being the toast of the town in Paris? You even played a game with the Emperor of France!

PAUL

(smiling at the memory)

Paris was exciting. But my mother is right. All of this adulation over some chess victories is undignified.

CHARLES

(sitting back)

Undignified? You beat Paulsen, Lowenthal, Harrwitz and Anderssen.

(more)

CHARLES

Staunton was afraid to play you.  
What is so undignified about being  
the best chess player in the world?

EXT. NICOLE DUPREY'S HOUSE-AFTERNOON

Paul is at the front door. It opens and he enters.

INT. SITTING ROOM-MINUTES LATER

Paul is having lemonade with Nicole, MR. DUPREY and MRS. DUPREY.

MRS. DUPREY

Well it certainly seems like you  
had yourself quite an adventure  
over there.

PAUL

I must admit that it was an  
eventful voyage.  
(smiling at Nicole)  
But I'm happy to be back home now.

NICOLE

(enthusiastically)  
Tell them what you got in New York,  
Paul.

PAUL

(protesting mildly)  
No, Nicole.

NICOLE

Oh Paul!  
(to her parents)  
They gave him a beautiful watch set  
with diamonds...a silver laurel  
wreath. And a collection of  
chessmen made of gold!

MR. DUPREY

Is that a fact? They must be very  
valuable.

PAUL

Their worth to me is more symbolic  
than anything else sir.

MR. DUPREY

(coyly)

Tell me, is there much money to be made from these chess matches? I haven't ever thought about it until now.

PAUL

(aggravated)

I don't play chess for money Mr. Duprey. I've never treated it as any kind of profession.

NICOLE

(hotly)

Daddy I told you Paul is going to be a lawyer. You know that.

MRS. DUPREY

Of course he does darling.

PAUL

I plan to begin practicing as soon as I can arrange it.

MR. DUPREY

Well, these could be difficult times to undertake any venture.(pause) Have you ever thought about going into politics?

PAUL

I can't say that I have.

MR. DUPREY

That's what we need down here--more good leaders.

MRS. DUPREY

We met Jefferson Davis at a party in Montgomery last month.

MR. DUPREY

Now there's a man of great vision. Are you familiar with his views Mr. Morphy?

PAUL

I have read some of his statements in the newspaper.

MR. DUPREY  
 (grinning into his chest)  
 Isn't he a man of great vision, Mr.  
 Morphy?

PAUL  
 (evasively)  
 I really couldn't say.

Mr. Duprey's grin slowly disappears. He scrutinizes Paul. Nicole glances at her father and looks nervously at her beau.

INT. MORPHY RESIDENCE SITTING ROOM-DAY

Paul stands by the window looking out. Tata is polishing silver from a cabinet across the room. Edward comes in with their cousin Edgar Hincks and Henry Percy.

PAUL  
 Hello Edgar, Henry.

EDWARD  
 We've been down to the Induction  
 Office, Paul. We just signed up  
 with the Seventh Regiment.

PAUL  
 (jolted)  
 The Louisiana Tigers! You all  
 joined the Confederate Army?

Henry and Edgar nod solemnly from a big couch where they are sitting in the middle of the room.

EDWARD  
 Yes siree little brother. We'll get  
 our marching orders any day now.

PAUL  
 (to himself)  
 Oh God.

EDWARD  
 Why don't you take a walk over  
 there yourself, Paul. It's located  
 right across from Jackson Square.

PAUL  
 I know where it is.

EDWARD

Well then?

PAUL

I don't think secession is the right course.

EDWARD

The Federal Government is trying to tell us what kind of a society to have in the South. They want to destroy our way of life *and* our traditions.

PAUL

(unconvinced)

Is that so?

EDWARD

Why, they're even saying we can't have Negroes working on the plantations.

PAUL

Maybe we ought to reconsider the question of slavery, Edward.

EDWARD

What is there to reconsider? Southern land owners brought Negro families from Africa, so they could work together here, instead of starving in villages.

PAUL

You should say *bought*, not brought. And those sugar cane and cotton barons have made a huge profit from that hard labor all these years.

EDWARD

Well of course they have. Are we supposed to be ashamed of that now? What's wrong with having servants.

PAUL

Cotton pickers and sugar cane cutters are not servants, Edward. They are slaves.

EDWARD

(turning to the maid)

Tata, haven't you been happy here?



PAUL  
Why don't you leave her out of  
this.

EDWARD  
Shut up Paul.

Paul stares at him. Edgar and Henry glance at each other.

EDWARD (CON'T)  
(not unkindly)  
Well, haven't you Tata? Have we  
ever mistreated you?

TATA  
Missus Telcide always be'n very  
kine to me. An' the Judge when he  
was 'live too.

She exits the room nervously. Edward looks over at Paul triumphantly.

PAUL  
You know that's not the issue.

EDWARD  
(defiantly)  
What is the issue then?

PAUL  
The abolitionists believe the  
ownership of one human being by  
another is unjust and immoral. And  
I agree with that. I can see--

EDWARD  
(aggressively)  
What can you see! The only thing  
you can see are those little wooden  
men you've been pushing around all  
this time.

PAUL  
I fail to comprehend what that has  
to do with--

EDWARD  
(nastier)  
Oh, you're very brave over a  
chessboard, aren't you Paul. Why  
don't you join up and show us what  
you can do on a real battlefield.

PAUL  
I don't believe in war, Edward.  
Call me a pacifist if you want.

EDWARD  
(to Edgar)  
A pacifist, Edgar. How do you like  
that. That's a genteel way of  
saying coward, isn't it?

EDGAR  
(uncomfortable)  
I don't know.

EDWARD  
(approaching Paul)  
Well I do. And I'll call you a  
coward. You, with all your Yankee  
friends in New York. That's what  
you are Paul. A coward and a  
traitor.

PAUL  
(incited)  
Take that back. I am not a traitor.  
You take that back right now!

EDWARD  
I don't think I will.

Edward shoves Paul on both shoulders. Paul is backed up a  
step. Edward hits Paul harder the same way so that Paul is  
pushed further back.

EDGAR

stands up and takes a few steps in their direction.

EDGAR  
Leave him be, Edward. He's your  
brother.

HENRY

grabs Edgar's arm from behind.

HENRY  
Let them settle it, Edgar.

Edward drives Paul in the shoulders a third time, even  
harder than before.

PAUL

If you do that one more time I'm  
going to hit you back.

EDWARD

(turning to the others)

Oh! Did you hear that?

(to Paul)

But I thought you were a pacifist  
Paul.

Edward shoves Paul again. Paul immediately slaps him hard in the face. Edward punches Paul in the head and knocks him into an end table which crashes down. Paul scrambles up and tackles Edward into a big chair and everything goes over.

TELCIDE

arrives at the door followed by Tata, as the fight continues.

TELCIDE

(distraught)

Stop it!...Stop it now!!

Edward hits Paul in the mouth with a straight right but Paul takes the punch and grabs his arms. They wrestle in close until Edgar and Henry pull them apart. Edward storms out. Henry has another look at Paul before he follows.

EDGAR

(intimately)

I didn't want to see that. I'm not  
happy about fighting in this war,  
cousin. I just don't feel like I  
have any choice.

PAUL

(quietly)

I will pray for you all.

Edgar turns and leaves. Paul dabs at a little blood coming from his lower lip with the back of his hand. Telcide sinks into a chair against the wall and holds her head in one hand.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS-OLD QUARTER-AFTERNOON

Paul is walking along the street and passes some PEDESTRIANS before coming to a corner. At an outdoor terrasse he sees Nicole sitting with Alice Percy and a YOUNG WOMAN.

EXT-RESTAURANT-MOMENTS LATER

Paul approaches the table as Alice nudges Nicole, who is not looking up. The young woman stares blankly at Paul.

PAUL  
Good afternoon, ladies.

Alice and her friend leave the table, glancing coolly at Paul. Nicole remains frozen in her seat, staring down at the table. SEVERAL DINERS look over at Paul and whisper to each other.

PAUL (CON'T)  
May I sit down?

NICOLE  
(avoiding eye contact)  
If you must.

Paul pulls out one of the white wrought iron chairs and steps around it. He stares down a NOSY MAN who is still ogling him from an adjacent table, before settling into his seat.

PAUL  
What's the matter?

NICOLE  
(shifting her eyes)  
I have never been so embarrassed in all my life.

PAUL  
Why?

NICOLE  
(bitterly)  
Don't you know why?

PAUL  
Why don't you just tell me.

NICOLE  
(vehemently)  
I think everyone in the Old Quarter must know by now.

PAUL  
(looking away and back)  
What do they know?

NICOLE  
 (eying him coldly)  
 They know that you're a coward.

PAUL  
 Why do you say that?

NICOLE  
 Don't try to hide it. Alice Percy  
 told me what happened. Now  
 everybody is saying that you're  
 afraid to fight.  
 (She begins to cry)  
 I'm so humiliated.

PAUL  
 I'm not afraid to fight.

NICOLE  
 Yes you are!

PAUL  
 Nicole, what are you saying?

NICOLE  
 (distracted)  
 Leave me alone. I don't ever want  
 to see you again.

PAUL  
 (stunned)  
 But...Nicole...What about our  
 plans?

Nicole abruptly stands up. PEOPLE at the nearby tables turn to look.

NICOLE  
 (raising her voice)  
 All you can do is play chess. I  
 could never marry you!

She turns her back on him and sweeps out of the patio. All the PATRONS are watching. Paul remains frozen in his chair.

INT. HOME OF CHARLES MAURIAN-SITTING ROOM-EVENING

Paul and Charles are sitting in big chairs.

CHARLES  
 (shaking his head)

(more)

CHARLES  
That's awful. You must have felt  
like sinking through a crack in the  
patio.

PAUL  
I did. It was terrible. But I still  
love her, Charles.

CHARLES  
I'm afraid it seems to be a love  
lost now, Paul.

PAUL  
There's only one way to win her  
back. I will have to join the  
Confederate Army after all.

CHARLES  
(alarmed)  
You don't believe in this war,  
Paul. Neither do I. Do you want to  
get shot on some God-forsaken  
battlefield just to impress a  
woman?

PAUL  
There's more to it than that,  
Charles. Whether I like it or not,  
I am a public figure. People are  
questioning my loyalty and sense of  
duty. I have to do something.

CHARLES  
What can you do?

PAUL  
I'll go to Richmond and speak to  
General Beauregard. He's an old  
friend of the family. Surely I can  
get an appointment to his staff.

INT. TRAIN/EXT. COUNTRYSIDE-DAY

Paul is in his seat reading a book. The train pulls to a  
stop at a railway crossing. Paul lifts his head and looks  
out the window.

A CONFEDERATE CAVALRY TROOP

is riding by in front of the train. DOZENS OF SOLDIERS sit tall and proud in their saddles, wearing clean gray coats and hats, swords glinting at their sides. The Rebel flag snaps in the wind. The hoofs of the HORSES drum up a SOUND that vibrates in the window next to Paul.

INT. HEADQUARTERS OF GENERAL BEAUREGARD-RICHMOND-EVENING

Paul is waiting on a wooden bench before the wide marble floor of a grand old public hall. The SOUND of BOOT STEPS and in a moment a smart looking LIEUTENANT strides up.

LIEUTENANT

General Beauregard will see you now.

INT. GENERAL BEAUREGARD'S OFFICE-MOMENTS LATER

A large map of the U.S. on the wall with blue and gray flag pins stuck all over it. A big wooden desk covered with more rolled up maps, a pistol, binoculars, and paperwork.

GENERAL PIERRE BEAUREGARD, a big man, sits on a swivel chair behind the desk and examines Paul standing at attention in the middle of the small room.

GEN.BEAUREGARD

You know Paul, your father was a very remarkable man. Not only did he possess a brilliant legal mind, but he had a keen perception of Southern political trends as well. In fact, he predicted to me years ago that the current conflict would ultimately transpire.

PAUL

(impressed)  
Did he really?

GEN.BEAUREGARD

Yes. And I might add that his prescience was not confined solely to affairs of the state.

PAUL

What do you mean sir?

GEN.BEAUREGARD

Well, he once told me that some day you would come to me for the very  
(more)

GEN.BEAUREGARD  
purpose that you are here this  
evening.

PAUL  
(surprised)  
He did?

GEN.BEAUREGARD  
(standing up)  
Yes.  
(pacing into the corner)  
And at that time he made me promise  
not to grant any request on your  
part to serve in a military  
capacity.

PAUL  
But why?

GEN.BEAUREGARD  
(returning to his desk)  
Because he knew then what I know  
now. That your heart is not in  
this, Paul. And therefore you would  
make a failure of it.

PAUL  
(protesting)  
But I'm willing to serve.

GEN.BEAUREGARD  
There's a big difference here  
between willing, and able.

PAUL  
(proudly)  
What makes you think I'm not able,  
General Beauregard?

GEN.BEAUREGARD  
You haven't had any kind of  
military training. You've been  
playing chess, Paul. Playing it  
better than anyone else in the  
world I might add. And I will tell  
you that I am very proud of what  
you have accomplished son.

PAUL  
Then don't you think I deserve a  
chance?



GEN. BEAUREGARD

(sitting down)

Yes, I do. And I'll tell you what. I will even break my promise to Alonzo. I will make you an officer in this army right now if you can look me in the eyes and tell me that you are mentally and physically prepared to lead men into battle.

(pause)

Can you tell me here tonight that you are ready to die for this Cause?

Paul looks at the General and then shakes his head.

INT. MORPHY RESIDENCE-PAUL'S BEDROOM-DAY

In the closet Paul rifles his coats along the rack on their hangars, pulling several of them off.

ON THE BED

A suitcase is snapped shut and lifted up.

EXT. PARIS-BY THE SEINE-DAY

Paul sits on a bench next to the river, looking off.

SLOW FADE TO BLACK

EXT. CAFE DE LA REGENCE-AFTERNOON

Paul stands just outside the door. He looks in through the doorpane.

INT. CAFE-SAME TIME

The cafe is crowded with BOHEMIANS, ARTISTS, STUDENTS, and NE'ER DO WELLS. Journoud and de Riviere are playing chess at a table while Lesquesne looks on.

JOURNOUD

(looking up)

Is that Paul Morphy at the door?

DE RIVIERE  
 (turning around)  
 My God, it is!

They all stare in amazement.

LESQUESNE  
 What is he doing there. Why doesn't  
 he come in?

Delannoy arrives at their table.

DELANNOY  
 Did you see who is standing outside  
 the door?

DE RIVIERE  
 (getting up)  
 For heaven's sake, I'm going to ask  
 him to come in.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

PAUL

looks down at something he holds in his hand.

ON A GOLD WATCH

there are chessmen representing the hours.

De Riviere steps out of the cafe.

DE RIVIERE  
 Paul! When did you return to Paris?

PAUL  
 (distantly)  
 About one year ago.

DE RIVIERE  
 (astonished)  
 Where have you been hiding all this  
 time?

PAUL  
 I've been living with my mother and  
 sister on the Right Bank.

DE RIVIERE  
 Why haven't you come by? Kolisch  
 asked me if I knew what you were  
 doing. And the Russian, Petroff. We  
 could have arranged a match.

PAUL  
I hardly play chess anymore.

DE RIVIERE  
Well, never mind. Why don't you  
come in now. We've got a nice  
table. Everyone will be so happy--

PAUL  
(firmly)  
No, thank you. I can't stay. I just  
passed by to see it one more time.

DE RIVIERE  
I understand.

PAUL  
(holding it out)  
Arnous, can you give me whatever  
you think is fair for this?

DE RIVIERE  
(taking it)  
This is the watch you won in New  
York! You don't have to sell it,  
Paul. I can lend you some money.

PAUL  
I'm returning to America. I might  
never have a chance to repay you.  
So I prefer to sell it.

DE RIVIERE  
Are you sure?

PAUL  
Yes.(pause) I know you will take  
good care of it.

De Riviere nods.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET-DAY

Paul is walking along rather slowly as PEOPLE pass in both  
directions. Mathew Brady stops to watch him go by.

MATHEW BRADY  
(calling out)  
Mr. Morphy. Paul Morphy!

PAUL  
 (turning back)  
 Have we met?

MATHEW BRADY  
 I'm Mathew Brady. I took  
 photographs of you during the First  
 American Chess Congress.

PAUL  
 Of course. I'm terribly sorry I  
 didn't recognize you. I've met so  
 many people in my life.

MATHEW BRADY  
 It's quite all right. You know I  
 received a remarkable number of  
 requests for prints of the portrait  
 I took of you.

PAUL  
 (smiling faintly)  
 Are you still in the photography  
 business, Mr. Brady?

MATHEW BRADY  
 Yes, I am.  
 (handing him a card)  
 I have an exhibition showing at  
 this gallery. Perhaps you would  
 like to see it.

INT. ART GALLERY-FOYER-SHORTLY AFTER

Paul walks in and passes a placard placed on an easel.

ON THE PLACARD

CIVIL WAR

THE DEAD OF ANTIETAM

INT. ART GALLERY-EXHIBITION HALL-MOMENTS LATER

Paul walks along looking at the collection. He stops at  
 a photograph of a Confederate soldier lying in a ditch. The  
 boy's head is thrown back on the embankment and his face is  
 covered with blood. His eyes stare lifelessly into the sky.

PAUL

suddenly bursts into tears. His shoulders begin to shake and he lowers his head and turns it as he cries softly. Nearby a MAN and WOMAN look over at him sympathetically. Paul notices them and quickly composes himself.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY PARK-LATE AFTERNOON.

Paul sits on a bench with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. SEVERAL NEW YORKERS pass in each direction.

INT. HOME OF CHARLES MAURIAN-EVENING

Paul and Charles are starting a chess game. Paul removes his Queen's Knight from the board and moves his king pawn.

CHARLES

(moving a pawn)

We had another letter at the Chess Club from the organizing committee of the Cleveland tournament.

PAUL

(moving his knight)

What now?

CHARLES

They wrote to see if you could yet be convinced to enter.

PAUL

I keep telling everyone that I have no desire to play in formal competitions anymore.

CHARLES

Chess enthusiasts everywhere are hoping you will change your mind, Paul.

PAUL

Charles, I am twenty eight years old and people think I am nothing but a chess player. Nobody seems to remember that I have a law degree.

CHARLES

I don't think that's necessarily so.

PAUL

In any case it's time for me to look to my future as a lawyer. That is, after all, what I have been educated for.

CHARLES

But is it really what you want to do?

PAUL

(impatiently)

Of course it is. And now that the war is over conditions are better to establish a legal practice.

EXT. 12 EXCHANGE PLACE-NEW ORLEANS-DAY

Paul is at the top of a ladder on the verandah of an old wood frame building. He is hanging up a shingle

PAUL MORPHY

Attorney at Law  
Upstairs

INT. PAUL'S LAW OFFICE-TWO WEEKS LATER

Paul is sitting idly at his desk in the dreary office.

INT. LAW OFFICE STAIRS-SAME TIME

A WOMAN climbs up with a BOY holding her hand.

IN PAUL'S OFFICE

There is a KNOCK on the door.

PAUL

(sitting up)

It's open. Come in.

The woman enters with the boy, whom she positions in front of her and places her hands on his shoulders.

WOMAN

(smiling widely)

How do you do Mr. Morphy. We've been wanting to meet you for a long time. My husband purchased a book about you by your secretary Frederick Milne Edge.

PAUL  
 (controlling himself)  
 That's very nice.

WOMAN  
 We read about your exploits and  
 triumphs in Europe with great  
 interest!

PAUL  
 (curtly)  
 What manner of counsel may I offer  
 you?

WOMAN  
 Counsel?

PAUL  
 (glancing at the child)  
 Yes. This is a law office Madam. I  
 assume that you came here to  
 discuss a legal matter with me.

WOMAN  
 A legal matter?  
 (laughing)  
 Oh, heavens no! You see my son  
 here, his name is Christopher, has  
 taken a shine to chess. My husband  
 and I thought you might like to  
 give our little boy chess lessons?

Paul looks at the woman as if he would like to strangle her.

INT. MORPHY RESIDENCE-MUSIC ROOM-DAY

Telcide is giving a private piano lesson to a YOUNG GIRL.  
 Paul enters the room and walks up very deliberately.

PAUL  
 I thought you should be the first  
 to know. I have finally determined  
 the cause of our present  
 predicament.

TELCIDE  
 (embarrassed)  
 What are you talking about Paul?

PAUL  
 I'm referring to my inheritance.  
 There's hardly anything left of it.  
 And now I know why.

TELCIDE

What are you saying?

PAUL

I'm telling you that my patrimony  
has been stolen.  
Misappropriated--to be more  
precise--by John Sybrandt.

TELCIDE

(taken aback)

Malvina and John?

PAUL

Ever since he began administering  
the estate my money has  
mysteriously vanished. He won't get  
away with it though. I'm taking him  
to court!

INT. PAUL'S LAW OFFICE-LATE NIGHT

Paul sits in the dim room. There is a pile of documents on  
top of the desk. He is holding an open folder and reading,  
then writes something down.

INT. LOUISIANA STATE COURTROOM-DAY

Sybrandt is on the stand below the JUDGE. Paul is pacing in  
the middle of the floor. Telcide and Helena sit together.  
Malvina and Charles are in different places among the MANY  
SPECTATORS. At a table is Sybrandt's DEFENSE LAWYER.

PAUL

Mr. Sybrandt, you've told the court  
that your occupation has been that  
of a broker in the cotton trade.

SYBRANDT

(calmly)

That has been one of my interests.

PAUL

Isn't it a fact that a majority of  
businessmen in that industry  
suffered considerable financial  
losses during the war?

SYBRANDT

The foreign embargo did adversely  
affect many investors, yes.



PAUL  
(aggressively)  
And yet your personal fortune  
increased from eighteen sixty to  
eighteen sixty five, didn't it?

DEF.LAWYER  
(standing up)  
Objection your Honor.

JUDGE  
Sustained.

PAUL  
(regrouping)  
Well, after the war didn't you  
purchase an expensive property  
outside Paris, complete with  
stables and servant's quarters?

DEF.LAWYER  
(on his feet)  
Objection. Irrelevant.

JUDGE  
(considering it)  
Overruled.  
(to Sybrandt)  
You may answer the question.

SYBRANDT  
Over the years my wife and I  
managed our finances so that we  
could invest in property.

PAUL  
(bitingly)  
Oh, I'm sure you have. (pause) Mr.  
Sybrandt, did you become executor  
to the estate of Alonzo Morphy  
immediately after his death?

SYBRANDT  
According to the last will and  
testament, yes.

PAUL  
And what was the net worth of the  
estate at that time?

SYBRANDT  
I don't recall the exact figure.

PAUL  
 (aggressively)  
 It was one hundred and forty six  
 thousand one hundred and sixty two  
 dollars...and fifty four cents.

JUDGE  
 What is your question, Mr. Morphy?

PAUL  
 (bearing in)  
 As executor, did you have  
 independent access to the bank  
 capital of Judge Morphy's estate?

SYBRANDT  
 I did.

PAUL  
 (raising his voice)  
 And that would have included money  
 bequeathed to me, which I was to  
 receive at the age of twenty-one?

SYBRANDT  
 Yes.

PAUL  
 (bursting out)  
 You could have taken money which  
 belonged to me without anyone  
 knowing, isn't that true?

DEF.LAWYER  
 (jumping up)  
 I object to the form of that  
 question.

The large crowd begins to MURMUR excitedly.

JUDGE  
 (banging his gavel)  
 Order in the Court!

INT. LOUISIANA STATE COURTHOUSE-SAME DAY

A number of PEOPLE stand in the hallway. Malvina sits on a  
 bench with Sybrandt standing over her. Down the hall Telcide  
 rests with her hands in her lap. Their eyes meet.

INT. COURTROOM-AFTER THE RECESS

Paul is on the stand.

DEF.LAWYER  
(approaching)  
You stated that you are a lawyer  
by profession Mr. Morphy.

PAUL  
That is what I said.

DEF.LAWYER  
Are you presently established in a  
legal practice sir?

PAUL  
(uncomfortably)  
I have an office at Twelve Exchange  
Place, Upstairs.

DEF.LAWYER  
(smiling tightly)  
And do you have many clients?

PAUL  
(reluctantly)  
Not very many.

DEF.LAWYER  
Are you engaged in the litigation  
of any cases aside from this one?

PAUL  
I am not.

DEF.LAWYER  
(moving to his desk)  
Now I'd like to ask you some  
questions about your first voyage  
to Europe.  
(checking his notes)  
On that occasion you remained  
overseas for nearly one year. Is  
that right?

PAUL  
I was in London four months in  
total and I spent close to seven  
months in Paris.

DEF.LAWYER  
Do you have many friends in London  
and Paris Mr. Morphy?

PAUL  
More friends in Paris than in  
London I would say.

DEF.LAWYER  
And were you residing with your  
friends during that stay in Europe?

PAUL  
Of course not. It would be impolite  
to impose on people like that.

DEF.LAWYER  
Then would it be fair to say,  
during all of the time you were  
abroad, and on several trips to New  
York City, that you always made  
your own arrangements for  
accommodation?

PAUL  
Yes, I did.

DEF.LAWYER  
And where was that?

PAUL  
(caught up)  
I stayed at Lowe's in London, which  
has the finest suites in the city.  
And the Hotel Breteuil in Paris. It  
has a splendid lobby and a  
wonderful restaurant overlooking  
the flower gardens. In New York I  
used to put up at the St. Nicholas  
because it is so close to the opera  
and theaters but later I stopped at  
the St. Denis...the menu there  
is...superb.

The courtroom has gone completely still. Telcide appears  
deflated. Charles looks down to his hands. Malvina closes  
her eyes. Sybrandt shakes his head slowly.

DEF.LAWYER  
No further questions Your Honor.

JUDGE  
You may step down Mr. Morphy.

Paul returns to his place at the plaintiff's table and sinks  
into his chair.

JUDGE (CON'T)

I am prepared to rule on this matter forthwith. Mr. Morphy, I find that you have offered the Court no proof of your claim against John Sybrandt. Therefore this case is dismissed.

He bangs his GAVEL hard.

CUT TO:

INT. BARBER SHOP-LATE AFTERNOON

A STRAIGHT RAZOR

moving back and forth on the strop, glinting in the light.

PAUL'S EYEBALLS

rolling as they follow the sharp razor from side to side.

THE BARBER

brings the razor to Paul's face and begins to shave him.

AT THE DOOR

MR. BINDER, a stout middle aged man enters with MRS. BINDER, a small lady.

BARBER

(straightening up)

Good day Mr. Binder. The hair brush you ordered is right behind me.

BINDER

moves in the general direction of the barber chair as the barber turns his attention and the razor back to

PAUL

suddenly leaps up and charges at Binder. He gets his hands around Binder's neck. Mrs. Binder SCREAMS.

Binder pushes Paul away. Paul immediately tries to get at him again but the two men jump in and hold him back.

MR. BINDER

Are you crazy? What did you do that for?

PAUL  
 (hysterically)  
 You were planning to bump his arm  
 just now and have him cut my  
 throat.

MR. BINDER  
 You must be mad.

PAUL  
 (raging)  
 The two of you conspired to murder  
 me here and make it look like an  
 accident!

BARBER  
 (offended)  
 That is preposterous. We did  
 nothing of the sort.

Paul breaks free and lunges at Binder again. Mrs. Binder  
 SHRIEKS.

BARBER (CON'T)  
 (to the others)  
 Get him out of here! Get him  
 out before there really is an  
 accident.

EXT. BARBER SHOP-SAME TIME

The door is flung open but Paul manages to grab onto the jam  
 while the two men struggle to push him onto the sidewalk.

PAUL  
 (shouting at Binder)  
 I challenge you to a duel, sir. You  
 may choose the weapons. Pistols or  
 swords. I prefer swords.

ON THE STREET CORNER

Edward comes rushing up with Helena trailing behind.

EDWARD  
 Let go of him!

He takes hold of Paul's arm and at the sight of his brother  
 Paul stops struggling. Edward gently guides him onto the  
 sidewalk.

MRS. BINDER  
 (screaming out the door)  
 You're crazy.  
 (to Edward)  
 He assaulted my husband  
 (to Paul)  
 You're insane.

EDWARD  
 (forcefully)  
 Madam, I'll thank you kindly to  
 stop hollering at my brother right  
 now!

Mr. Binder takes Mrs. Binder inside and the two men follow.  
 The barber shuts the door.

ON THE SIDEWALK

Edward removes a handkerchief and gently wipes the remaining  
 lather off Paul's cheeks and jaw. There is a concerned but  
 tender expression on Edward's face. Helena watches.  
 Edward puts his arm around Paul's shoulder and leads him  
 away.

CHARLES(V.O.)  
 Dear Sirs: It is unfortunately too  
 true that Paul's mind has been  
 deranged of late. I regret to  
 inform you that the reports about  
 him assaulting a gentleman in a  
 barber shop are accurate. As a  
 result of that incident, and some  
 other disturbing behavior, he was  
 taken to an Asylum for the purpose  
 of committing him there. But on the  
 grounds of the Sanitarium he asked  
 the Sisters in charge on what legal  
 basis they had the authority to  
 keep him. He told them he was a  
 lawyer and that he would prosecute  
 them if they violated his rights.  
 After that, they asked his mother  
 to take him home.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREET/INTERIOR CARRIAGE-DAY

Paul sits in the back of the open carriage with Charles.  
 Facing them on the other seat are Telcide and Edward. Paul  
 appears very content as the carriage rolls along.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY-A LITTLE LATER

The "ride in the country" continues. Paul looks around a little uncertainly. Telcide looks down as Edward and Charles glance at Paul and then quickly away.

EXT. GATES OF THE SANITARIUM-SOON AFTER

They turn in at a sign that says

LOUISIANA RETREAT

IN THE CARRIAGE

Paul sits upright and looks back at the sign. He turns to the others with a frightened expression on his face.

EXT. GROUNDS OF THE LOUISIANA RETREAT

The carriage is stopped outside an ominous looking old stone building. Paul is speaking very animatedly to THREE NUNS. TWO MEN IN WHITE COATS stand nearby.

VOICE OVER ENDS

INT. MORPHY HOUSE-PAUL'S BEDROOM-JULY 10 1884

Paul is standing in front of the mirror impeccably dressed. He puts the finishing touches to his bow tie.

CUT TO:

JUST INSIDE THE FRONT DOOR

Paul hears the SOUND of the CLOCK TOLLING. He opens the door and steps outside.

INT. ST. LOUIS CATHEDRAL-SAME DAY

Afternoon mass. Paul is kneeling in the front row. Several other PARISHIONERS are seated behind him. The FATHER arrives in front of Paul with a host.

FATHER  
(holding it out)  
This is the body of Christ.

Paul extends his tongue to accept the host.



INT. CATHEDRAL-AFTER THE MASS

The pews have emptied out. Paul stands alone next to a large pillar. He gestures and nods as if he is greeting people or having a conversation. Then he genuflects over and over.

EXT. JACKSON SQUARE MARKET-EARLY AFTERNOON

Paul is purchasing a bouquet of flowers from a FLOWER GIRL. She pins a carnation to his jacket lapel.

CUT TO:

ANOTHER PART OF THE MARKET

Paul is at a stand where BLACK WOMEN wearing colorful bandannas are selling coconut pralines. Paul is buying some.

BLACK WOMAN  
 (handing him a bag)  
 It sho' is hot today Misser Mo'phy,  
 ain't it? No breeze neither.

Paul smiles and nods to her.

EXT. BACK YARD OF EDWARD'S HOUSE-SAME DAY

Paul is kneeling down as THREE YOUNG CHILDREN scurry back and forth playing tag. A little girl, REGINA, runs up to him and puts her arm around his neck. Paul gives her a candy.

REGINA  
 Thank you, Uncle Paul.

INT. EDWARD'S HOUSE-SAME TIME

Edward is watching from a window. His wife Alice shortly arrives at his side and looks out.

ALICE  
 (softly)  
 He seems to be doing better now.

EDWARD  
 Yes.

IN THE YARD

Paul playfully chases after the children and they run around LAUGHING with delight. FADE TO BLACK.

SOUND OF THE CHILDREN PLAYING continues for several more seconds and then slowly FADES AWAY.

END TITLES

Paul Morphy died later that afternoon. The effect of entering a cold bath after hours in the hot sun is said to have caused apoplexy, or congestion of the brain. He was forty-seven.

"His name made a great noise in Paris during that sojourn; it echoes there still."

Delannoy