Fool's Mate
By Andrew Greene

The day's first light caressed the grey sky, brushing away the stubborn fog and remnants of drizzling rain. Gregory Churchill (no relation to *The* Winston Churchill–a frequent mistake that Gregory often failed to correct) exited The Orangery Tea Room and paused for a moment on the threshold. Starring out across Kensington Park, Gregory gave a curt nod of appreciation, acknowledging the beauty of a thousand orbed rainbows as the sun's golden rays reflected off the dew laden blades grass.

Reaching into the inside pocket of his tailored suit jacket Gregory extracted a polished tobacco pipe which he promptly inserted into the corner of his mouth. Gregory had never so much as smoked a single leaf of tobacco in his fifty-three years, but in a world where appearances could dictate the difference between a posh office and florescent orange jumpsuits picking up litter alongside tube platforms, nothing exuded refinement and prestige quite like an antique pipe. **There was no need to actually smoke the pipe**. Of course, **it was all** really rather superfluous and unnecessary. With his pressed Italian suits, meticulously groomed hair, and the thick salt and pepper mustache strangling his upper lip like rampant wisteria vines, Gregory cut an impressive figure wherever he went.

"Excuse us laddy," squeaked an elderly man as he and his snowy haired wife, linked arm in arm, maneuvered past Gregory to stand in the cue that was beginning to form in front of the hostess booth. Waiters bustled to and fro between the indoor and outdoor dining areas, dispersing the pleasant aromas of floral teas, fresh baked pastries, and the clinking sounds of delicate porcelain mugs every time the front door swung open. **The wafting smells almost made Gregory turn right around and walk back inside!**

Gregory peered down at his watch, a large and cumbersome Rolex made of sterling silver, for perhaps the hundredth time since arriving at the Orangery. *4:05, plenty of time for a pleasant stroll.*

Today was just an average day for Gregory. A day where reputations could be made or ruined. A day of politics and other bureaucratic nonsense. As the leading political correspondent for *The London Times,* Gregory was constantly absorbed in London's diverse and urbane political scenes. Gregory turned his to attention toward Kensington Palace erected like a silent sentinel in the far corner of the open meadow, embracing the park and its inhabitants with its protective grandeur. Its rose colored bricks bathed the immediate area in a warm, reddish aura, causing everything in its radius to develop a faint blushed complexion. Kensington Palace was Gregory's eventual destination. Tonight was the annual Fundraising Gala, which would generate the necessary funding for corrupt parliamentary officials to return to their natural environment, the uncivilized wilds of stagnate governmental politics, for another term. Gregory, on principle, generally detested going to trivial functions such as tonight's Gala unless he was being paid for it, but he had been personally invited to attend the evening's festivities by none other than the Queen herself. Gregory, of course, had held many correspondences with the Queen over the years; after all, it was his job to introduce himself to and interview top-notch politicians.

Gregory loved his country, but he often wondered if he had been born in the wrong century. As a staunch monarchist, Gregory's political sentiments were rather old-fashioned and were considered by many to be irrelevant within a society that no longer recognized the merit of a solitary sovereign.

What ever happened to one, competent ruler who could actually get things done? Society has reduced the Queen and monarchy to a simple figurehead, while Parliament sits around

beating their wangers and arguing endlessly, never coming to a consensus on anything of importance. Such slothfulness and greed never hindered Queen Elizabeth I from leading England into its finest Golden Age. Indecision was not a factor when William the Conqueror led his army to victory at the Battle of Hastings. Hell, even King Henry VIII was a man of action; he wanted a new wife, so he challenged the Church and had six. Those were simpler times–they were effective and progressive times. God save her majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

He was well aware of the things his political marks said about him behind his back. That he was a raving loon and utterly mad, but it was all semantics as far as Gregory was concerned. Even he knew that his political ideals were outdated, but that was hardly the point. In the twenty plus years that Gregory had been working as a political correspondent, he had never once witnessed a single redeeming quality of the factitious parliamentary system. No one seemed to care what was said or done as long as they maintained the crucial majority necessary for reelection.

It's disgusting. Politics have been reduced to a damn popularity contest. I know I am certainly not a winner. No one is.

Gregory had long ago discovered the solution which allowed him to distance himself from the political nonsense and remain as objective as possible. By maintaining his archaic and obsolete monarchist principles, Gregory could effectively marginalize his world into two distinct shades: black and white, those who can get things done and those who can't. This objectivity is what made him so good at his job. He never had to choose a side. If the British people were too stupid to realize that their elected champions were ruining the country with petty squabbles and indecisiveness, then perhaps they needed to be governed

by a single ruler, who could force them into doing the things they needed to do for the sake of progress and well-being.

Yes, Gregory had his reservations where government and politics were concerned, but he was damn good at his job–the best; perhaps even too good. The Gala was sure to be a monstrous bore. Everyone was well aware that Gregory was going to be in attendance tonight. The politicians who would be attending tonight's festivities dreaded Gregory's pen and the effect it could have on their careers if they were foolish enough to make the egregious error of one wrong statement or action. **Just ask Elliot Morley, David Chaytor, and Jim Devine. If it hadn't been for one particularly scathing article Gregory had wrote a few months prior, the three Members of Parliament would still be falsifying government accounts to this day.** Everyone was sure to be on their best behaviors tonight. Some may call this fear, but Gregory preferred to think of it as well earned respect.

However, Gregory still had ample time to collect his thoughts before making his way toward the Palace for an evening of debauchery and double speak. The Gala was scheduled to begin at precisely five o'clock, and it would be terrible form indeed if Gregory were to arrive so much as one minute late. *Whoever it was that decided arriving "fashionably late" was more favorable than arriving in a punctual manner was a blithering idiot.* Furthermore, Gregory adamantly refused to embarrass the Queen after she had been kind enough to extend to him an invitation to tonight's event.

Gregory stepped out from under the awning of The Orangery, wincing as the sun assailed his eyes, and began his stroll down the paved walkway through Kensington Park. Shadows danced and flickered through the archway of closely planted trees, creating the illusion of wooden fingers reaching down toward unsuspecting walkers. Occasionally, Gregory would

salute the casual passerby with a tip of his pipe or a simple “Good day,” as they meandered through the park, enjoying the rare sunlight and vitamin D.

A bushy-tailed squirrel scampered down from its lofty den and ran across the walkway mere inches from Gregory’s stomping feet. Following the squirrel’s erratic route as it dodged and weaved its way through the clusters of park goers arranging towels and blankets on the damp grass Gregory spied a solitary figure sitting at one of the only vacant park tables. Peering closer, Gregory observed that the figure was a man whose receding hairline and hobbled shoulders hinted at an age closer to sixty than fifty. Opened in front of the man was a square box. The elderly gentlemen, his back hunched over the container as if trying to hide some devious secret, was removing several small objects from the confines of the mysterious box. Gregory, his line of sight hindered by the distance and awkward posture of the sitting figure, was unable to identify the many contents being removed from the square box. **A random gust of wind pressed eagerly at his back as if urging him toward the table.** His curiosity thoroughly perked, Gregory **approached the lone figure**.

Unobstructed by the man’s back, Gregory now realized that the square box was a chess board. Its checkered marbled top was fastened on one side by two brass hinges, allowing easy access to the thirty-two black and white carved soapstone pieces stored inside.

Chess, a true gentleman’s sport. Gregory checked his watch once again–4:15. *A man should not have to play a game of chance alone. Surely one game will not take too long to play,* thought Gregory as he walked toward the elderly chap. ***Besides, it has been ages since I last played. I was pretty good once wasn’t I? Cambridge Chess Champion.***

The man looked up from the chess board and flashed a gaping grin as Gregory approached the stone table and benches. The man’s smile stretched effortlessly to hollow eyes,

twinkling with the vast greyness of hardship and world-wearied sagacity. His few remaining teeth were stained a mustard yellow flecked with black plaque and decay. Sitting on the corner of the table within arm's reach was a steaming Café Nero cup and a worn **Blakemar pipe** still burning from the last drag. The red cherry continued to smolder with the same determination and vigor evident in the man's weathered face.

"**Good day ter yer, sir**," the man greeted in a voice that was oddly airy despite his gruff appearance. Every other word was accentuated with a slight, wheezing gasp, breaking the cadence of his cheerful salutation.

"And a good day to you as well." Gregory's eyes raked over the man, taking in his ragged appearance. Areas of the man's wrinkled skin were visible through the many holes that dotted his faded denim jeans and oil splattered t-shirt, reminding Gregory of The Orangery's Swiss cheese and smoked turkey mini-sandwiches. The voluminous pockets of the man's tattered green overcoat bulged and sagged with the various trinkets undoubtedly hidden within its sodden folds. "**Would you care for a spot of company and a quick game of chess**?"

"**Well, right, it's been orhile since I've played a game wiv some bloke uvver than meself, so I would be 'appy for yer ter join me**," the man replied through the toothy grin still stretched tightly across his mouth. "The name be Monte by the way."

"It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance Monte. My name is Gregory Churchill," Gregory replied, reaching across the table to shake Monte's hand, but instead of returning the handshake, Monte handed **him** a filthy old dish rag.

"For the seats. They be still a wee damp. Hate for yer ter mess up them fancy clothes yer wearin'."

“Thank you, sir. That is mighty considerate of you.” Gregory took the soiled rag delicately between his fingers, holding it away from his spotless body, and began drying the stone bench opposite of where Monte was patiently sitting.

“**No need ter thank me, Gregory, but please call me Monte. Me ole dad’s name were Sir. I'm only Monte.”**

“Certainly, Monte,” said Gregory as he handed back the damp rag and sat down.

Monte flashed another gap-toothed smile and continued to set up his remaining pieces on the chess board with trembling hands. Gregory mimicked Monte and began to set up his own black figurines on their respective squares. Monte didn’t know it, but Gregory preferred playing black in a game of chess. Sure, white always had the advantage of going first, but Gregory had found it was always better to wait and see what moves his opponent made first. Defense is the best offense, or so they say. Patience is the best virtue…or so they say.

“What part of the city do you call home, Monte?” Gregory asked as he hurried to finish arranging his feudal battalions on the checkered battlefield. Small talk was one of those implied rules of conduct that a true gentlemen should honor in a game of chess.

“Between Cadogan and Eaton.”

“Oh really?” Gregory replied, unable to mask his skepticism and surprise. Cadogan and Eaton were located in Chelsea, one of London’s most expensive boroughs. He never would have expected that Monte lived in one of the city’s most pristine quarters judging from his ragged appearance.

“Oh, right, it’s awright I guess. It’s pretty noisy and busy durin’ the day, but after the bloomin' tube shuts dahn 'round eleven, right, it be mighty quite. Warm too.”

"I see. Well, I am sure that it is very **agreeable**," Gregory hesitantly offered. He was beginning to realize that Monte's residence was undoubtedly between Cadogan and Eaton but located underground. His cozy home was probably nothing more than a box propped up with two sticks in a nook alongside the underground tracks; a box with just enough room to curl up in at night once the droves of London commuters were forced aboveground to find alternative means of transportation. The realization made Gregory more than a little uncomfortable. He had spent the vast majority of his life mingling with London's elite upper-class and was grossly inexperienced in dealing with people like Monte, who lived on the streets. What on Earth were they going to talk about? The weather? That conversation would certainly not last long–wet and dreary.

"I'm not so sure I understand wotcha mean by 'agreeable,' but I'm all set up and ready ter play if yer are."

"Oh yes, I am ready–wait a moment…Surely you do not mean to play like *that!"* In his scrutiny of Monte's appearance, Gregory had failed to notice the bizarre formation of Monte's white figurines. Rather than protecting the noble pieces with a line of eight pawns, Monte had reversed the ranks and placed the two rooks, two knights, two bishops, the queen, and the king on the front lines in front of the pawns.

"Like what?"

"The way you have your pieces set up. The pawns are supposed to be in front of the other pieces. Surely you know that, right?"

"Well, this be the way me por taught me ter play, right, so I reckon it'll be awright," replied Monte as he moved the king-side bishop two diagonal squares to the right.

Gregory eyed Monte with an expression ranging between insulted incredulity and mild amusement. *I do believe he may be mad in the head. Does he honestly expect to win? His king is entirely exposed! Does he even know how to play chess?*

Gregory had half a mind to stand up and walk away right then and there. Why should he waste his precious time humoring a man he scarcely knew? Especially a man who was so obviously enchanted by the notion that he could actually pose a challenge to Gregory using such unorthodox tactics. What would such a victory, and Gregory was quite certain he would overwhelm and defeat Monte, say about Gregory's character? That he beat a mad man in chess? Gregory could almost picture the headline now: **"BREAKING NEWS: Political Writer Annihilates Raving Lunatic in Chess Game."** It would be entirely too easy, but Gregory had no choice but to continue playing.

A true gentleman always plays a game to its ultimate conclusion, and Monte has already made his first move. The game has begun, and now I must finish it. ***Besides, I have time before my engagement this evening, so I may as well humor the man for this one game.***

What is more, Gregory had always been a competitive man, and he could just imagine the immense satisfaction he would feel when he defeated the ragged man before him.

"**It be yer turn, Gregory**."

"Ah yes, so it is." Gregory moved his queen-side pawn two squares forward. *The Sicilian Defense. The poor man has no idea that he has already lost this game. It will not be much longer now*.

The opening moves of the game passed in an uneventful blur as Gregory and Monte conducted their respective pieces into position. Each passing minute was accentuated by the soft

cooing of pigeons as they alighted and gathered on the ground around the stone table. The blue-green plumages shimmered as the sun's rays shown down. As if conducted by an invisible baton, the flock of birds cocked their heads in a unified motion with the timing and precision of a synchronized swim team. They peered up at Gregory and Monte with black beady eyes, begging for scraps of bread or other leftover foods, but the bird's relentless pleas were ignored by the warring pair. Neither Monte nor Gregory had been successful in capturing an opposing piece, but the center of the board was beginning to crowd, and Gregory was finally prepared to begin his assault.

Gregory moved one of his bishops across the board, capturing Monte's queen. He tried to hide the smugness he felt after taking Monte's most valuable piece, but he couldn't contain the small smile that crept into the corners of his mouth.

"I must ask you something, Monte. It is apparent to me that you understand the basic concepts of the game and how the pieces move, but do you know how to play the *right* way?"

"**The right way is 'ow yer be decidin' ter 'ave a look at it**," Monte replied, moving a knight to take the black bishop that had just toppled his queen. **"I do know 'ow most uvver folk play the game. That's probably why I always be playin' by meself. No bloke wants ter play the way I be playin'. This is the way that makes sense ter me. It's 'ow me ole por taught it ter me, right, and 'e were pretty darn good, so I reckon if it worked for 'im, it'll be workin' for me."**

"I am sure your father was a fine man. He taught you chess after all, and that is the mark of fine gentleman indeed, but there is a reason why a chess board is set up the way it is. The purpose of all the pieces is to protect your own king and defeat your opponent's." **Gregory**

waved his arms across the board, indicating Monte's own king. "Surely you do not mean to suggest that it is better to have the king on the front lines in the heart of danger?"

Monte flashed another toothy grin, but this smile didn't quite reach his ears. It was the kind of smile one usually reserved for the very young and the shriveled old; a smile tinged with sadness and pity, giving Monte's rough face a ghastly countenance.

"Spoken like a right true king, Mr. Gregory. Be it really the fate of *all* the pawns ter sacrifice themselves for the king?"

Monte's blunt redirect temporarily caught Gregory off guard. *What kind of question is that?*

"Why, of course it is! The king is the end and the means of the game. If this were a proper battle, the king would command his troops, and they in return would follow his orders to the death, if that be the circumstance, all for the privilege and opportunity to uphold the honor of their lord! If the king were to fall in valiant combat, his troops would inevitably descend into anarchy and chaos."

Monte merely shook his head, shrugged his hobbled shoulders, and returned his attention to the board. "Sometimes the common folks be the most important. Even more important than the king and queen. **Besides, times be different now, right. We durnt even 'ave a king 'nymore**." His moved his knight, capturing one of Gregory's black pawns, knocking it over on the marbled surface. The 'thud' of the falling pawn reverberated up Gregory's fingers and arm as he swept his remaining bishop diagonally across the full length of the board.

"Check," he mumbled through clinched teeth. The shadowed outline of Gregory's square jaw grew more distinct as he swallowed the words struggling to force their way free past his tongue and iron-pursed lips. *Who does this man think he is, and how dare he make such*

insinuations! Does he think so little of our royal majesty? It is a man's duty, no– honor, to protect his liege. ***Look at him***. ***Monte is the perfect example of why we need a single ruler. Look at him! He's completely lost and mad without someone guiding him!*** Gregory abruptly halted his internal rant. This was just a game–a simple game of chess. Such outbursts were utterly unwarranted and ungentlemanly of him. *But something about* ***this man*** *really gets under my skin. How can he just sit there and be so…flippant? So…calm and collected?*

Monte moved his queen-side rook, capturing Gregory's second bishop and eliminating the immediate threat to his king. Monte leaned back on the stone bench and reached into one of the many pockets of his green overcoat and pulled forth a box of matches. Picking up the corncob pipe from edge of the table, Monte brought the stem to his cracked lips, struck a match, and began to relight the densely packed tobacco. With a few audible 'puffs,' the cherry blazed to life once again. Monte took a deep draft, allowing the thick smoke to circulate through his lungs before exhaling through his nose and mouth with a resounding 'whoosh.' The smoke, smelling faintly of amaretto and vanilla, escaped his respiratory orifices in an opaque milky tendril, wavering in the air before Monte's grey eyes in a surreal cloud that expanded and collapsed in on itself, creating a bleached series of evanescent contours and images that continued to hang suspended in the humid air before being wafted away by the breeze.

As the game progressed, Gregory continued to pursue Monte's king around the 8x8 board but was unable to secure the crucial checkmate. Meanwhile, Monte's white knight was beginning to sow havoc amongst its black opponents. It had singlehandedly captured the majority of Gregory's pawns in addition to a rook, a bishop, and one knight, opening up the center of the board and allowing Monte to finally deploy his pawns from the safety of the rear line and move them across the checkered surface.

Gregory stared at the board with a profound intensity, studying the positions of his and Monte's remaining pieces, racking his brain for potential strategies that would allow him to defeat Monte and end the game. The faint wrinkles of age grew more pronounced as his brow furrowed in frustration, plowing cavernous gullies that puckered across his forehead with the same visible texture of tanned leather. Gregory peered to his immediate left at the growing pile of white figurines and considered those pieces he had already defeated: both of Monte's rooks and bishops, one knight, and his queen–Gregory's deliberations were interrupted mid-thought as Monte captured one of the three remaining black pawns with his knight.

Gregory moved his queen forward with the intention of capturing Monte's knight, but the erratic "L-shaped" movements of the knight made it difficult to predict where it would land next on the board. The stalemate lasted for several turns, an evasive dance between queen and chivalric knight, until finally, Gregory's queen was successful in ensnaring the knight against the far edge of the chess board. Gregory marched his queen four squares horizontally and captured the knight; however, in his impatience to rid himself of the troublesome knight, Gregory failed to notice the sole white pawn protecting the knight's diagonal flank. By the time he realized his fatal mistake, Gregory had already removed his fingers from the soapstone figurine and could only watch in stunned silence as his queen was toppled by the inferior pawn. His breathing grew more rapid as his nostrils flared with the swelling passions that Gregory could no longer contain.

"How have I not defeated you yet? This is complete and utter madness!" Gregory's face was a kaleidoscope of emotions ranging from beet red anger to pale white disbelief. "The way you play this game defies all logic and reason yet you continue to play, and what is more, you continue to harass and capture my pieces! How are you doing this? Why have you not lost yet?" Gregory paused, and in an emblematic gesture to regain some of his lost composure, straightened

the lapels of his suit jacket and shimmied the knot of his blue and white striped tie up against the bobbing apple suspended in his throat. His mouth hung slightly ajar, gaping in shock at his own hot-blooded outburst. Never before had Gregory abandoned his calm and indifferent composure, even though his long career had inevitably pitted him against some of London's most despicable and frustratingly incompetent politicians. **But Monte was different. At this point, Gregory no longer cared for the game as just a game; it had become so much more. Monte had to be defeated, and Gregory knew deep down that he had to be the one to defeat him. No one else would be able to grasp the significance of such a victory.**

"Well, Sir, it be really simple actually," Monte replied. If he was offended by Gregory's volatile outburst, Monte hid it well behind his steely grey eyes.

"How can it be so simple? You are playing the game incorrectly, yet you are still winning! How does that merit a *simple* explanation; it makes no sense! None at all!"

"It be like I said. Sometimes the common folk be more important than the chuffin' bigger folk. Chess ain't so different from real life. It be all about 'ow yer 'ave a look at fings"

"Stop speaking in riddles–"

"Mr. Gregory, please let me finish and I will do me best ter explain wot I be meaning. Sometimes it be the king and the higher folk's job ter sacrifice themselves for the common folk, folk just like you and me ole self."

"You are mistaken," **Gregory replied leaning slightly forward across the table.** "The common people are *obligated* to serve their king or queen–their honor demands it of them. Any self-respecting and proper gentleman knows and accepts that. Loyal subjects should not expect

those above their station to sacrifice themselves. **Besides, the common people are incapable of making the important decisions. Just look at the current state of our government.**

"Now, don't be copping me wrong, Gregory. I be lovin' me country and the queen too, and I 'ave always been loyal and wotnot ter me crown and me country. All I be sayin' is that them in charge need ter be 'ave a lookin' after them they be expectin' loyalty from."

Monte moved a pawn one space forward, causing Gregory to turn his attention to the board. For the second time in only five minutes, Gregory found himself struggling to contain his emotions at the game's newest development. Four of Monte's six remaining pawns had crossed the entire length of the board and were just one turn away from being promoted. The last of Gregory's confidence drained out of him, causing his proud shoulders to deflate and his back to sink into the stone bench as he realized all of his hard work in capturing Monte's noble pieces was for nothing. Gregory moved his remaining knight forward. *Maybe I can reach his king before he regains all his pieces,* but even to Gregory the thought seemed unlikely.

Monte peered up at Gregory and continued to speak. **"If the government be 'elpin' the common folk and makin' their life just a wee bit easier, right, ffen the blokes can 'elp the government in return… I sure would be likin' me queen back if yer don't mind, Mister Gregory,"** Monte said as he moved one of the four pawns into a vacant black square on Gregory's side of the board.

Gregory returned Monte's queen, pressing it rather forcefully into the palm of his outstretched hand. Monte's grey eyes searched Gregory as if expecting him to react to his latest move and political ruminations. Gregory continued to ignore Monte and moved his knight two squares forward and one square over. Suddenly, his hand began to shake as his desperation reached its peak. *I am not going to win.*

“Chess is the same way. If the king and 'is sorts make some sacrifices and do some good for the common man, ffen the common man can make it across the chess board and cop them pieces back. The king just 'as ter be 'avin' a wee patience and be trustin' that 'is subjects will make ev’ryfink right in the end and win the game… Could yer ’and me one of me bishops?” asked Monte, moving yet another pawn into Gregory’s territory.

“It–it cannot be that simple. Surely, you must have cheated somehow,” was all Gregory managed to stammer in response. His voice, no longer bloated with his own self-assumed pomp and circumstance, was scarcely an audible whisper as he hung his head and stared at the board. He moved his knight one final time, knowing full well that any move he made would be futile in those final moments of the game.

“**I ain’t no cheat, and I can promise yer that, init? Yes sir I can. Never did cheat a day in me life. It be seemin' ter me, right, Mister Gregory, that yor forgettin' that yer be a common folk just like meself.”Monte moved his queen five spaces diagonally, positioning the white figurine before Gregory’s king. “I fink that be check mate.”**

Gregory could only gape at his defeated king. Every avenue of escape was obstructed by Monte’s resurrected queen and bishop. As Monte began to remove the remaining pieces from the checkered surface, Gregory remained in a speechless stupor. When Monte opened the marbled top and returned the soapstone pieces to their black satin compartment, Gregory could only stare into the roughhewn grain of the stone table, every detail and every flaw magnified 100x under his piercing scrutiny. No words were to be found behind Gregory’s pouting lips, only silence. Nothing more needed to be said. Monte’s guileless opinion of government was so tantalizingly simple, so *infallible*, that Gregory’s mind was wiped clean of any potential confutations. As if anything he said could honestly contend with Monte’s simplistic reasoning anyway; a clean slate.

However, despite Monte's obvious good intentions and naïve principles, Gregory hated him for it all. He hated that Monte, a poor man from under the streets, had beaten him at his own game and had made it seem natural, something to be expected. But most of all, Gregory hated that Monte's words had burrowed under his skin, sprouted roots, and had begun to blossom. Gregory, contrary to everything he thought he believed in, agreed with Monte.

Well, maybe not agree, but for the first time in twenty years, Gregory began to doubt his own beliefs. Perhaps the world *was* that simple. Maybe—just maybe—the world was more than just black and white; a neutral grey.

Gregory was afraid of grey.

Anything that had ever been affected by the nonaligned, boring aura of grey immediately became indistinguishable and undefined. Gregory had spent his whole life trying to compartmentalize his world and making informed decisions based upon his own objective reasoning, but Monte, a simple, carefree, commoner, had blurred the bold outlines Gregory had long ago drawn. Perhaps his objectivity and self-assumed role as London's political pariah had blinded him to the reality of his world. Perhaps Monte's simple assessment of politics and the role of the upper, middle, and lower man was the truth. Perhaps everyone was grey and Gregory had quite simply been too blinded by his own importance and archaic principles to see that everyone has an essential role to play. So many new and unanswered questions, and Gregory could only sit and continue to stare at the stone table, searching for answers that may or may not have been hidden within the rough grain. Maybe it was time to abandon the old ways of thinking and finally choose a side and be helpful for once.

"Good game, Mr. Gregory."

Gregory looked up and saw Monte's hand outstretched before him. Gregory's arm, moving on impulse and habit alone, lifted with a mechanical sluggishness and hesitantly gripped Monte's offered hand.

"Mayhaps we will play again someday. I be likin' that very much I fink," and with that, Monte tucked the chess board under his left arm, turned on his heels, and began to walk away down the paved walkway through Kensington Park.

Gregory's eyes continued to follow Monte until he was nothing more than an indistinguishable speck against the darkening horizon, where the green verdure of the unadulterated park merged seamlessly with the London skyline. The silhouette of Monte's departing figure was oddly framed by the sublime radiance of the sun's final rays as it fell behind the edge of the world, casting a collage of purple and red hues across the evening sky.

Gregory peered down at the gaudy face of his Rolex, deciphered the pointing hands, and continued to sit undaunted on the stone bench, thinking of pawns, kings, and other trivialities that no longer seemed to matter.

5:16.

Intelligibility