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MURRAY LEINSTER

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a science fiction novel



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TIME
TUNNEL

MURRAY LEINSTER



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TIME TUNNEL

A PYRAMID BOOK

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TIME TUNNEL

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The affair of the time-tunnel began, so far as Harrison was concerned, with a series of events so improbable as to seem lunacy, but which appear to have been inevitable. In a cosmos designed to have human beings live in it, though, there would have to be some sort of safeguards against the consequences of their idiocy. The time-tunnel may have been such a safeguard. To some people, that seems a reasonable guess.

It was a brisk, sunshiny Parisian afternoon when the matter really turned up. Harrison sat at a sidewalk table outside the little cafe in the Rue Flamel. He'd never happened to notice its name. He sipped at an apéritif, thinking hard and trying not to believe what he was thinking about. He'd come from the Bibliothèque Nationale a good hour before. Today he'd found more of the completely incredible. He didn't believe it, but he knew it was true. His series of discoveries had reached the point where he simply couldn't tell himself any longer that they were coincidences. They weren't. And their implications were of a kind to make cold chills run up and down anybody's spine. A really sensible man would have torn up his notes, gotten drunk to confuse his memories, and then departed

on the earliest possible plane for home. There he would have denied to himself forever after that he had found what Harrison had discovered in the dusty manuscript section of the Bibliothèque Nationale.

But Harrison sipped at a drink and noted the small cold chills running up and down his spine. He resented them because he didn't believe in what caused them. But there they were. They had to do with the cosmos in general. Most men develop convictions about the cosmos and such beliefs come in two varieties. One kind is a conviction that the cosmos does not make sense. That it exists by chance and changes by chance and human beings do not matter. This view produces a fine complacency. The other kind is a belief that the cosmos does make sense, and was designed with the idea that people were going to live in it, and that what they do and what happens to them is important. This theory seems to be depressing.

Harrison had accepted the second view, but he was beginning to be frightened because of what he'd found in dusty, quill-pen-written pages in a library reading room. And he didn't like to be frightened.

It was a very pleasant autumn afternoon, though. Leaves had been falling, and they blew erratically about the pavement in appropriate fall colorings, and the sky showed through the nearly denuded branches of the trees that lined the Rue Flamel. There was nobody on the sidewalks. For minutes there had been no traffic going past the small cafe. It was just cold enough so that Harrison was the only customer at any of the outdoor tables.

Around him there were houses which had stood in their places for centuries and thereby acquired a self-satisfied air. From high overhead there came a rumbling, distant thunder. A jet had made the sound, but there was no use in trying to sight it. It had left its noise-trail far behind. It was now undoubtedly hidden by roofs or chimney-pots.

Then, at last, someone did come down the street. It was an extremely improbable occurrence, not that somebody should walk down the street, but who it happened to be. The odds against anything that actually happens are always enormous, when one considers the number of other things that could have happened instead. But certainly the odds were incalculably great that Pepe Ybarra, who had been at Brevard University with Harrison and had shared one course in statistical analysis with him, would *not* be walking down the Rue

Flamel at this particular moment, when Harrison had come upon the preposterous and doubted his own sanity.

But there he was. He came briskly toward the cafe. Harrison hadn't seen him for four years. The last time had been in Uxbridge, Pennsylvania, when Pepe was being hauled out of the Roland River by an also-dripping policeman who was going to arrest him within minutes, but was forced to accept Pepe's warmly grateful handshake beforehand. Now he was walking down the Rue Flamel on an autumn afternoon. It was not a probable occurrence, but it was the kind of thing that happens.

He greeted Harrison with a glad outcry.

"For the love of heaven! What are you doing here? Where've you been? What gives? How long have you been in Paris? Do you know any interesting girls?"

Harrison shook hands and Pepe dropped into a chair opposite him. He regarded Harrison with approving eyes.

"I've been here for two months," said Harrison wryly. "I don't know any girls, and I think I'm going to try to forget what I came for."

Pepe rapped on the table. He ordered a drink over his shoulder. To Harrison he said warmly, "Now we have fun! Where are you living? What are you doing? Why don't you know any girls?"

"I've been busy," said Harrison. He explained. "I've an elderly aunt. She offered to stake me to a Ph.D. And she said that since I lived here when I was a small boy—until I was twelve—I ought to try to get back my French. And I had a crazy sort of idea that fitted into the proposal. It was something Professor Carroll said once in a lecture. Remember him? So I came over to get back my French and dig up the material for my thesis. My aunt is pleased. I wish I'd never thought of it." Harrison was silent a moment. Then he changed the subject. "What have you been doing?"

Pepe sketched, with enthusiasm, his activities since Harrison had last seen him. He'd been home in Mexico. For a while he was in Tehuantepec. She was a lovely girl! Then he'd been in Tegucigalpa. She was charming! And then he'd been in Aguascalientes, and the name fitted! She was *una rubaya*, a red-head. Mmmmmmmh! But there'd been trouble there. His family had sent him to France until the affair blew over. Now he was being very virtuous. Seriously, what was Harrison doing in Paris?

"I've been digging," said Harrison, "in the manuscript section of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Did you know, Pepe,

that a century and a half before Pasteur, there was someone who described in detail the idea that living things too small to be seen—germs, in fact—could be responsible for contagious diseases?”*

Pepe accepted his drink, beaming. He nodded as he put it to his lips. Overhead, the dull rumble of the jet-sound died gradually away. A taxicab crossed the Rue Flamel at the next corner. Blowing fallen leaves made faint whispering sounds on the pavement.

“Pues?” said Pepe. He put down his glass. “What of it?”

“That’s a freak,” said Harrison. “But I just found in Cuvier’s notes—the naturalist, you know—that in 1804 a man named de Bassompierre wrote him a theory which might be of interest to a savant concerned with natural history. And he outlined, very clearly and simply, the Mendelian laws of heredity. But it happened to be more than half a century before Mendel discovered them.”

Pepe said, “That is not a freak?”

“No,” said Harrison with some grimness. “Last week I found in the laboratory notes of Ampère—the man who discovered so much about electricity, you know—that someone named de Bassompierre wrote him in 1805 to tell him very respectfully that there were such things as alternating currents. He explained in words of one syllable how they could be generated and what they could be used for.”

Pepe raised his eyebrows.

“This Bassompierre,” he observed, “was quite a character! You interest me strangely. In fact . . .”

“He was more than a character,” said Harrison. “He wrote to Laplace, the astronomer, assuring him that Mars had two moons, very small and very close to its surface. He also said that there were three planets beyond Saturn, and that the one next out had a period of eighty-four years and two moons, one retrograde. He suggested that it should be called Uranus. He added that in the year 1808 there would be a nova in Persis, (which there was!) and he signed himself very respectfully, de Bassompierre.”

“I am getting interested,” said Pepe. “There is a de Bassompierre in . . .”

*Note: This is historical fact. The theory was recorded with derisive gestures by John Asdruc, physician to Louis XIV of France. The germ theory was held by Augustine Hauptman and Christian Longius, among others M. L.

"Someone wrote to Jean-François Champollion," Harrison went on morbidly, "the Egyptologist. The Rosetta stone had just been discovered, but nobody could make use of it yet. The letter told him exactly how to decipher the Egyptian inscription. Champollion paid no attention for sixteen years. Then he tried the system suggested, but without referring to the letter, which he may have forgotten. It worked. But it had been described in 1806 by de Bassompierre."

"Evidently a universal genius," agreed Pepe. "But . . ."

"Lagrange, the mathematician," Harrison went on, distastefully, "had a correspondent who explained to him the principles of statistical analysis. He died before finishing his *Mécanique Analytique*, so there's no way to know if he paid any attention. But the description was so clear that you'd swear Professor Carroll wrote it. But it happened to be de Bassompierre. It was also de Bassompierre who around 1812 corresponded with the Académie des Sciences, and offered the interesting theory that atoms might be compared to miniature solar systems, with negatively charged particles orbiting complex nuclei of different masses. He added that all the elements heavier than bismuth would be found to be unstable, breaking down at different rates to other and lighter elements."

"Such statements," said Pepe with reserve, "are not easy to believe. After all, Madame Curie . . ."

"I know!" said Harrison fretfully. "It isn't possible. But this same de Bassompierre, who, by the way, died in 1858 at the age of ninety-one, also wrote to Desmarest, the geologist, and told him the facts of life about petroleum, including the products of fractional distillation. Do you see why I wish I'd never thought of looking up this stuff?"

Pepe sipped at his drink and put it down.

"I confess," he observed, "that I am interested in this de Bassompierre! I knew nothing of this! But where does it lead?"

"I'm afraid to find out," admitted Harrison. "But Talleyrand is said to have been his close friend, and Talleyrand never made a real mistake in guessing what would come next. Napoleon said he was possessed of a devil. Instead, he possessed the friendship of de Bassompierre. I can show you in Talleyrand's papers that he'd predicted the American civil war. Look, Pepe! De Bassompierre knew that there'd be a Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico, fifty years in what was then the future!"

He stopped. He felt queer. He had experienced a momentary

giddiness. It was almost unnoticeable, but it seemed as if the street changed subtly and the branches of the trees were no longer exactly as they had been. There was a doorway in a house on the opposite side of the street which abruptly looked wrong.

Pepe looked at him curiously.

"What's that?" he asked. "An Emperor Maximilian of Mexico? What are you talking about?"

Harrison turned pale. He remembered saying the words, "Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico." When he'd said them, they'd seemed perfectly reasonable. They were meaningful. But now they weren't. They were associated with somebody named Napoleon the Third, to be sure. And of course there'd been a Napoleon the Third, just as there'd been a Napoleon the Fourth, and so on. But somehow it had seemed wrong. And there had never been a Maximilian of Mexico.

"I suspect," he said in a sudden mixture of aversion and relief, "that I've cracked up. I've been talking nonsense."

But Pepe's expression had changed, also. He looked puzzled.

"I am not sure, but now it comes to me. I have a memory, a vague one. It seems to me that there was some story, perhaps a novel, about a Maximilian. His wife was named . . ."

"Carlotta," said Harrison.

"*Pero sí!*" agreed Pepe, relievedly. "Certainly! We read the same novel at some time or another! There have only been four Emperors of Mexico and none of them was named . . ."

He stopped short. His mouth dropped open. There was again a faint feeling of giddiness in the air. Again one could not be sure that he felt it. The branches of the trees again seemed changed, as if they'd grown differently from the way they'd looked before. A door across the street looked right again, where before it hadn't.

"Now, why the devil," demanded Pepe, "why did I say that? Of course there was an Emperor Maximilian! He was a fool! He spent his time compiling an official book of the etiquette to be observed in his court, while he and all his followers were being besieged by Juarez, who presently had him shot!** And Carlotta went mad and lived in Belgium until 1927! Why did I say there was no Emperor

**The writing of a book of etiquette was, historically, the principal interest of Maximilian while he was being besieged in Queretaro, before his capture and execution. M.L.

Maximilian? Why did I suspect that we had both merely read the same novel? And—*Dios mio!*—where did I get the idea that there had been four Mexican emperors? Am I insane?”

Harrison was still very pale.

“Let’s find out.” He rapped on the table. The waiter came. Harrison paid and tipped him. Then he said: “Do you know if there was ever an Emperor of Mexico?”

The waiter beamed.

“*Mais oui!* He was the Archduke Maximilian of Hapsburg, placed on the throne of Mexico by Napoleon the Third. He was shot by the Republicans at Queretaro. It is part of history, *m’sieur*, which I read as an amusement.”

Harrison gravely doubled the tip. He said, “*Merci,*” and he and Pepe rose from the table. As they went down the street together, Pepe said ruefully:

“Now, I wonder how many waiters in Mexico could have told us that! And it is our history! But why did I make such a fool of myself? Why did I? Do I seem to act strangely? Should I see a doctor? A psycho-analyst?”

Harrison said with some grimness:

“Remember Professor Carroll? I’d like to see him! He said something that started me off on this business. Remember? He said that the cosmos as known is merely the statistical probability that has the value of unity? I’d like to see him analyze the statistical probability of de Bassompierre!”

“Ah, yes! De Bassompierre! I . . .” Then Pepe stopped. After an instant he said, “I also thought of Professor Carroll today. There is a shop, a very curious one. The name is Carroll, Dubois et Cie. The window says that they are importers and exporters *d’ans* 1804. They display incredible objects, apparently from the Napoleonic period, but absolutely new and in perfect condition. They even offer reprints of the *Moniteur* of 1804. But they say, ‘exporters and importers!’”

Then he said indignantly:

“But why did I make so insane a statement about four emperors of Mexico? For seconds I believed tranquilly that that was the history of my country!”

Harrison shrugged. He remained absorbed in his own problem. Presently he said with a sort of mirthless amusement, “Would you like to hear something really insane, Pepe? Make one impossible assumption, and the matter of de Bassompierre and his correspondence becomes quite impos-

sible. There is only one fact to make the assumption unthinkable."

"What is the assumption?"

"If it were possible to travel in time," said Harrison, "and one had evidence that a man in the early 1800s knew about Mendel's laws, and that alternating current could be useful—when at the time even D.C. was of no use to anybody—and facts about astronomy the telescopes weren't good enough to find out, and how hieroglyphics could be deciphered, and perfectly valid principles of statistical analysis, and the real structure of atoms, and radioactivity, and what could be done with petroleum. *If* it were possible to travel in time, all those bits of information could be known to a man of Napoleon's era if he happened to be moderately well-informed and had traveled back to then from here and now."

"But you don't believe that!" protested Pepe.

"Of course not. But it explains every fact but one."

"The one fact it does not explain," said Pepe, "should be interesting."

"The fact is," Harrison told him, "that there was a man named Bassompierre, and he was a friend of Talleyrand's. He was born in 1767, he travelled in the Orient for several years, and he returned to France to discover that an imposter had assumed his identity and looted his estates. The imposter attacked him when he was unmasked, and was killed. So de Bassompierre resumed his station in society, corresponded with men of science—all this is in the official biographical material about him—and he was useful to Napoleon on one or two occasions but was highly regarded by the Bourbons when they returned. You see?"

Pepe frowned.

"There was a man named de Bassompierre!" said Harrison harassedly. "He was born two hundred-odd years ago! He died in 1858! He's authentic! There's no mystery about him. He couldn't be a time-traveller!"

"Ah, I am relieved!" said Pepe amiably. "You see, I understood that if one travelled into the past, he might by bad fortune happen to kill his grandfather as a youth. In such a case, he would not be born to go back in time to kill his grandfather. But if he were not born, he could not kill his grandfather, so he would be born to kill his grandfather. So he would not. So he would. And so on. I have considered that one could not travel into the past because of that little difficulty about one's grandfather."

"But in an exceptional case," said Harrison, "a case, for

instance, in which a time-traveller did not happen to kill his grandfather, that argument doesn't hold."

They went down the street together. Pepe made a grand gesture.

"Again, if one could travel in time, then even without killing one's grandfather one might change the past and therefore the present. Even the history books would have to change!"

"Yes," agreed Harrison wily. "There might not be an Emperor Maximilian, for example. There might not be a you. Or a me. We might not ever have existed. I'd deplore that!"

"But do you mean," protested Pepe, "that because for a few seconds it seemed to us that an historical character did not exist—" He grimaced. "Because for a few moments we were confused, do you mean that during those few moments history was—was other than as it is? That something else was temporarily true?"

"No-o-o-o," admitted Harrison. "But if it had been, who'd have noticed it? I agree that we went through a freak occurrence, a shared delusion, you might say. But if it had been real, how many people would have been talking about a thing when their memories changed and they could notice it?"

"That is nonsense," said Pepe with decision, "and it is not even amusing nonsense. You don't believe it any more than I do."

"Of course not," said Harrison. But he added unhappily, "At least I hope not. But this de Bassompierre business does stretch the long arm of coincidence completely out of joint. It's all in the library. I wish it weren't."

They strolled together. Pigeons flew overhead, careened and came back, and coasted down to where two or three energetic flappings would land them lightly. They began to inspect a place where a tiny wind-devil had heaped fallen leaves into a little pile. They moved suspiciously aside when Harrison and Pepe walked by.

"No," said Pepe firmly. "It is all quite ridiculous! I shall take you to the shop I mentioned, which reminded me of Professor Carroll. It is foolish that anyone should pretend to be in the business of importing and exporting commercial articles between now and the year eighteen hundred and four! Yet if time-travel were possible, there would certainly be somebody to make a business of it! And I have a grandmother who adores snuffboxes. We will go to the shop. If the snuffboxes are not too bad, I will buy her one, and you

will see if they still claim to import and export to 1804. But I will bet the snuffboxes are marked made in Japan!"

Harrison shrugged. He'd been worried. He'd come very close to being frightened. In fact, he had been frightened. But anticipations of modern discoveries had been made before. There'd been a bronze, planetary-gear computer brought up by a scuba diver from a Greek ship wrecked in the year 100, *B.C.* It could compute sunrise and sunset times and even eclipses. There'd been objects discovered near Damascus which were at least seven centuries old, and which were definitely and inexplicably electroplated. A craftsman presented a crystal goblet to the Emperor Nero, and then dashed it to the ground. It dented, but did not break. He hammered out the dent and gave it to the Emperor, who had him executed because his discovery would ruin the glass blowers of Rome. The goblet was possibly a plastic one.***

Yes. Anticipations of modern knowledge were not uncommon. But this was unusually disturbing.

It was a relief to have told Pepe about it, though. It was even reassuring for Pepe to have made that peculiar error about the history of his country. Of course the consequences of changes in the present brought about by time-travellers to the past would be horrifying to think about, if time-travel were possible. But Harrison now saw that it was wholly foolish. The evidence that had disturbed him wasn't explained away. But since he'd told about it he was able to be skeptical. Which was consoling.

Very, very thin and straight, a white pencil-line of vapor moved across the sky. It was the contrail of a jet, flying so high that even its roaring did not reach the ground. It was probably a member of that precautionary patrol which most of the larger cities of the earth maintained overhead night and day. There was no particular diplomatic crisis in the world at the moment—there were only two small brush-fire wars smouldering in the Far East and one United Nations force sitting on a trouble-spot nearer, with the usual turbulences in Africa and South America. A jet patrol above Paris did not mean that an unwarned atomic attack was more

***These items are reported in reputable histories, except the computer, which exists in an Athens museum and which I heard about from someone working on it from photographs, in the Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies. M.L.

likely than usual. But there was a jet patrol. There were also atomic submarines under the Arctic ice-pack, ready to send annihilation soaring toward predetermined targets in case of need, and there were NATO ships at sea prepared to launch other missiles, and there were cavernous missile bases in divers countries, ready to send intercontinental rockets beyond the atmosphere should the occasion require it.

But Harrison was used to hair-trigger preparations for mutual suicide by the more modern countries of the world. Such things didn't frighten him. They weren't new. Yet the idea that history might be changed, so that a totally different now might come about without warning, and that in that substituted present he might not even happen to have been born . . . That was something to send cold tingles down his spine! He was consciously glad that he'd talked it over with Pepe. It was absurd! He was glad that he could see it as absurd!

A second contrail, miles high, made another white streak across the sky. Harrison didn't notice.

"The shop I mentioned," said Pepe, "is just around the next corner. I did not go into it, because I saw a woman inside and she was stout and formidable and looked like a shopkeeper. Truly practical shopkeepers should realize that even reproductions of antiques should be sold by personable girls. But we will go there. We will inquire if they do import from and export to another century. It will be interesting. They will think us insane."

They turned the corner, and there was the shop. It was not a large one, and the sign, "*Carroll, Dubois et Cie*" was not conspicuous. The smaller lettering, saying that the firm were importers and exporters to the year 1804, looked strictly matter-of-fact. The shop seemed the most commonplace of all possible places of business.

Harrison looked in the window. There were flint-lock pistols of various sizes. No two were alike, except a pair of duelling-pistols of incredibly fine workmanship. There were sporting guns, flint-locks. There was a Jaeger, also a flint-lock. But more than that, there was a spread-open copy of the *Moniteur* for April 7th, 1804, announcing the suicide of someone named Pichegru in his prison cell. He had strangled himself with a silk handkerchief. It was an amazingly perfect replica of the official Napoleonic newspaper. But the paper itself was perfectly new and fresh. It simply could not be more than weeks old. At that, it would be a considerable publishing enterprise to find the type and the paper and make a convincing replica of any newspaper nearly two

hundred years old. And there were *Moniteurs* of other dates in the window. Harrison suddenly realized that there was seemingly a file for a month or more. And that was unreasonable!

He found himself reluctantly slipping back into the condition of mental stress and self-doubt that confiding in Pepe had seemed to end. There had been a man named de Bassompierre back in the days of Napoleon Bonaparte. He had given important people important, exact, and detailed information about various things that nobody knew until fifty and a hundred and a hundred and fifty years later. So Harrison felt acutely uncomfortable.

When Pepe opened the shop door and a bell tinkled he followed dismally inside. Then a girl, a very pretty girl, came out of the back of the shop and said politely:

"*Messieurs?*"

And Harrison's eyes popped wide. Against all reason and all likelihood, he knew this girl. Against all common sense, she was somebody he recognized immediately. The fact was, again, one of those that one evaluates according to whether he believes the cosmos makes sense, or that it does not. There were so many other things that could have happened instead of this, that it was almost unbelievable that at this exact moment he should meet and know this girl.

He said, startled:

"Valerie!"

She stared. She was astounded. Then she laughed in pure pleasure and held out both hands to him.

And all this was improbable in the extreme, but it was the sort of thing that does happen. The combination of improbability with commonplaceness seems to have been characteristic of the whole affair of the time-tunnels. It appears that inevitability was a part of the pattern, too.

2

When Harrison woke next morning, before he opened his eyes he was aware of violently conflicting emotional states. On the one hand, he wished bitterly that he had never essayed to write a doctoral thesis that called for research in the Bibliothèque Nationale. On the other, he felt a pleasant glow in recalling that through that research he'd sat down to brood where Pepe would find him, and because of the research Pepe had carried him to the shop of Carroll, Dubois et Cie, where he'd seen Valerie, and that she remembered him with pleasure approaching affection.

Neither of the feelings could be justified. The only possible explanation of his discoveries required either the acceptance of an idea that was plainly insane, or that he abandon his belief that the cosmos made sense. In the matter of Valerie . . . But there is never a rational reason for a man to rejoice that a certain pretty girl exists and that he has found her. The experience, however, is universal.

When he was clothed, it was still hard to be sure that he was in his right mind. Still, when he had his morning coffee he felt a definite exhilaration because Valerie had remembered him. They had lived in the same building when they were children. They both knew people long gone to a better world. Valerie remembered the small black dog he'd owned more than a dozen years before, and he remembered a kitten she'd forgotten. They recalled

fêtes, they recalled a Twelfth Night celebration of which Valerie became queen at the age of eleven by virtue of having the slice of cake with the bean in it, and they remembered the eccentricities of the concierge whom they had occasionally outwitted. In general, they'd reminisced with a fine enthusiasm. But it was not likely they'd have felt such really great pleasure if, say, Harrison had married somebody else in the years between or if Valerie had been less satisfactory to look at.

Now, today, Harrison finished his morning coffee and was pleased to remember that they would meet presently, secretly, because Valerie's aunt, Madame Carroll, did not approve of her knowing young men. The prospect made Harrison feel fully capable of facing a new day.

Then Pepe arrived, fuming.

"The French," he said bitterly, "they are a noble race! I've been asking about this Carroll, Dubois et Cie, and it's a monstrous thing! You saw me buy a snuffbox yesterday. I intended to send it to my grandmother. It would be just the thing for her handbag, to hold her hay-fever pills. But I examined it. And it is an outrage!"

Harrison blinked at him.

"What's the matter with it?"

"It is a work of art!" said Pepe indignantly. "It was made by an artist! A craftsman! If it were an antique, it would be priceless! But it was one of a drawer-full of similar snuffboxes, some inferior, to be sure, but others equally good. And I bought it for peanuts!"

Harrison blinked again. "I don't quite see . . ."

"Somebody made it!" said Pepe. "By hand! He is capable of magnificent work! This is magnificent! But he is turning out things to be sold by Carroll, Dubois et Cie as curios! Which is a crime! He should be found and told the facts of life! Your Valerie says that her uncle, M. Dubois, is off on a trip to secure more stock for the shop. She does not know where he went. You may remember that I was enthusiastic and asked where such things were manufactured. She does not know that, either! Don't you see what has happened?"

Harrison shook his head. He was unreasonably pleased at having rediscovered Valerie. It was something so unlikely that he wouldn't have dreamed of it occurring.

"I've no idea what you're talking about," he admitted.

"I've made inquiries," said Pepe. "I'm told that workmanship like that snuffbox would entitle a craftsman to plenty of money! If he made things of modern usefulness and

in the modern taste, he'd grow rich! But do you know what I paid for that snuffbox? Sixty-five hundred francs! Practically twenty dollars! Don't you see?"

"No," admitted Harrison again, "I don't."

"This Madame Carroll and this Monsieur Dubois have found a gifted craftsman," said Pepe angrily, "he is capable of masterpieces, and they have him making curios! Think of the skill and labor that went into this snuffbox! Think what they must have paid him for it, to offer it for sale as a curio for twenty dollars!"

Harrison blinked yet again.

"But . . ."

"The stupidity of it!" insisted Pepe, hotly. "The idiocy of it! As shopkeepers, this Madame Carroll and this *M'sieur* Dubois think only of how much they can get from miniature works of art they don't even recognize as works of art! They think only of a shopkeeper's profit! They keep a craftsman of the highest order turning out gems of skill and artistry so they can sell them to ignorant tourists! Like me!"

Harrison felt a very familiar depression creeping over him.

"Naturally Dubois would not let out where he gets his stock!" said Pepe scornfully. "Someone might find his workman and let him know what his skill is really worth! It isn't illegal to buy an artist's work for peanuts and sell it again at any price one can get. But it is an outrage!"

"The workmanship is that good?" asked Harrison forlornly.

"I spoke to an expert in such things," fumed Pepe, "and he said it could not be duplicated for ten times what I paid for it! But, he also said there is no large market for snuffboxes. I'll make a bet that these shopkeepers are too stupid to realize that work like this is different from any other curio product!"

Harrison swallowed. He felt a suspicion. But it was totally unrealistic to think that because there had been wildly unlikely coincidences in the immediate past, that there would be more wildly unlikely ones turning up in orderly succession. Yet . . .

"Pepe," he said unhappily, "you say it would take weeks to create that snuffbox. How many did you see, and how much time would be required to make them, by hand? And you saw the guns. They are not machine-made. They are strictly hand-craft products. How many man-years of labor do they represent? And there were some books in the shop, set in type of the Napoleonic period and printed on paper that simply is not made any more. How long to make the

paper and set the type and print and bind those books? And how much investment in printing replicas of even one issue of the *Moniteur*? There are weeks of the *Moniteur* in the window, if not months! Do you think small shopkeepers could finance all this? And do you think that people who could finance such an enterprise would pick out Carroll, Dubois et Cie for their only outlet?"

Pepe swore. Then he admitted:

"I didn't think of those angles. But what is the answer?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Harrison unhappily. "It's ridiculous to believe in the only explanation that would explain it."

"That someone travels from now to then?" Pepe snorted. "My dear fellow, that is nonsense! You know it is nonsense!"

"I agree with you," said Harrison regretfully. "But I've never noticed that being nonsensical keeps things from happening. Don't you ever read about politics?"

"I admit," Pepe conceded with dignity, "that foolish things are done by governments and great men, but I cannot do anything about them! But *if* there is a genuine artist working for a pittance so that a French shopkeeper can make a shrewd profit out of his commercial innocence . . . That I can do something about!"

"Such as what?" asked Harrison. Internally, he struggled against an appalling tendency to think in terms of the preposterous.

"I am going to the shop again," said Pepe sternly. "I won't talk to your Valerie, because you saw her first. But I shall say that I want a special bit of work done, only it will be necessary for me to discuss it with the workman. These shopkeepers will see the chance to make an inordinate profit. I will pay part of it in advance. They will gloat. And I will tell this workman what an idiot he is to work for what they pay him! I will advance him money to do such work for modern millionaires! If necessary, I'll send people to him who will pay him something adequate! Because he is an artist!"

Harrison stared at him in alarm.

"But look here!" he protested. "You can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"Why, Valerie! We were children together! And I knew this Madame Carroll when she was a skinny virgin, trying desperately to get herself a suitable husband! She's Valerie's aunt, and she was a tartar then and she's worse now!

Valerie lives with her! She doesn't want Valerie to know anybody because if she married, her aunt would have to pay a decent wage for somebody to help in the shop!"

Pepe snorted.

"You talked to her for fifteen minutes and you have a complete picture of the difficulties to romance with her! One doesn't learn such things unless there's some thought of evading them!"

Harris said indignantly:

"But she's a nice kid! I liked her when we were children! And dammit, I've been lonesome! I'm not interested in romance in the abstract, Pepe. You have to be a Frenchman or a Mexican to do that! But Valerie's a nice kid! And I don't want to make trouble for her!"

"She is not allowed to know young men," said Pepe in a detached tone. "Have you arranged to meet her, ah, privately?"

"Well . . . yes," Harrison admitted.

"And you do not want to make trouble for her!" said Pepe sardonically. "Ah, you rascal! In fifteen minutes you made her remember you, you learned about her tragic and unhappy life, and you made a date! You're a fast worker, my friend!"

Harrison said angrily:

"Look here, Pepe! I won't have that! I . . ."

Pepe waved his hand.

"Oh, I am helpless! I admit it! I've taken upon myself to rescue a skilled craftsman from peonage to French shopkeepers, than which there could be no worse slavery. But you can spoil things for me. You could tell Valerie of my noble purpose, and she could tell her aunt, which would spoil my altruistic scheme. So I'll make a deal with you."

Harrison glared at him. Pepe grinned.

"We go to the shop together. Again. Maybe Madame Carroll won't be there. In that case you can talk to Valerie. A bribe, eh? All I'll do is plant the idea of a specially-made article. If she or Dubois are there, I'll set up the idea of a fine swindle of which I'm to be the victim. Then they'll be amiable to you because you are my friend. They may even try to enlist you to help them swindle me! They . . ."

"It won't work," said Harrison.

"But I shall try it," said Pepe, still grinning. "You can't keep me from trying. But I'll let you come along if you like."

Very grudgingly, Harrison stood up. He was very far from happy. He was again unable to dismiss the completely

foolish ideas stemming from dusty, elaborately shaded handwritten documents in the Bibliothèque Nationale. They were too fantastic to be credited, but he needed badly to find some excuse for dismissing them. He needed the excuse more than ever today, because he'd been trying not to think of the possibility that if the past could be visited, it could be changed, and if it were changed the present might follow and he, in person, could vanish like a puff of smoke. And Valerie could vanish too!

"I'm crazy," he said bitterly, "but let's go!"

Pepe walked beside him with a splendid, self-satisfied air. Presently they walked down the Rue Flamel and past the little cafe where they'd encountered each other the day before.

"If Valerie tends the shop," Pepe observed, "I ask if I can have a special article made, and then I'll browse among the objects on sale while you chat. If her aunt is there, I'll do all the talking."

"We're fools!" said Harrison. "Morons! Idiots!"

"If you speak of my altruism," said Pepe cheerfully, "I agree. But if you speak of your interest in a very pretty girl, then I point out that nobody is ever as happy as while he is making a fool of himself over a woman. When, in addition, his intentions are honorable . . ."

They reached the corner. They came to the shop. Only Valerie was inside. She greeted Harrison with relief.

"I am so glad you came!" she said breathlessly. "Something happened, and I won't be able to meet you as we agreed! And you forgot to tell me where you are living, so I couldn't have sent you word!"

Pepe said benignly:

"Providence arranges that I benefit all my friends! I am responsible for your friend's presence, *Ma'mselle!*"

Harrison found himself yearning over Valerie. The idea that anything could happen to her was intolerable. The most imaginary of dangers, if it might affect her, was appalling.

"My aunt was called to St. Jean-sur-Seine," explained Valerie, looking at Harrison. "Her husband, *M'sieur* Carroll, was . . . difficult. A crisis in the business developed. He and my uncle *M'sieur* Dubois were unable to agree upon a course of action. They actually telephoned by long-distance! So she went to St. Jean-sur-Seine to decide the matter. And I cannot leave the shop. So we would have missed our appointment."

Harrison was elated that Valerie hadn't wanted to miss seeing him.

"Let us to business," said Pepe profoundly. "I wish, *Ma'mselle* Valerie, to arrange for an especially designed object. The workmanship of your manufacturer is superb. Can it be arranged to have something especially made for me?"

"My aunt will tell you," said Valerie politely. But her eyes went back to Harrison. "My uncle attends to buying the stock for the shop, *M'sieur* Ybarra, but my aunt really directs the business. You will have to consult her."

Her manner was strictly commercial, except when she looked at Harrison. Then she seemed glad to be alive. He knew the exquisite anguish of a young man who wants to be all-important to a girl, when he cannot believe that she is just as anxious to be all-important to him.

"Then," said Pepe, "I will look around the shop, if I may. These are very skillful reproductions."

"But they aren't reproductions," said Valerie. "They are all originals. No two are exactly alike. They are all made by hand by, as you said, very skilled craftsmen."

"But where?" demanded Pepe. "Where are they made?"

Valerie shrugged.

"My uncle, M. Dubois, keeps that information to himself. He goes away, and he comes back with the articles the shop deals in. I do not know where he goes. My aunt has never mentioned it. It was M. Carroll who determined that the business should call itself a business of import and export with the year 1804. My aunt conceded that it gave the shop individuality."

Pepe said, "Hm." He began to prowl about. He examined a shelf of brocades and fingered them with a knowledgeable air. Presently he was looking at the books Harrison had mentioned. There were not more than a dozen of them. He fingered the fly-leaves and muttered to himself. He looked at the guns. He tested the balance of a sporting weapon. It was a flint-lock, but it balanced as perfectly as the most modern of sporting rifles. Presently he was reading a *Moniteur*. The paper was fresh, like the paper of the books. He became absorbed.

Harrison found his tongue. It is, of course, characteristic of all people in highly emotional states that they want to talk about themselves. Harrison and Valerie had material for just such talk. They had shared memories of a reasonably happy childhood, but they did not confine themselves to that topic. Harrison listened while Valerie explained that the

death of her parents had sent her to boarding-school, and when that was ended there was only her aunt left to supervise her. Her aunt was then furiously occupied in directing the affairs of her brother, M. Dubois, but very suddenly there was a romance. Her aunt married, and there was a *ménage à quatre*, with Madame Carroll firmly directing the affairs of her husband and her brother as well as Valerie. And things did not go too well. But then, abruptly, the import-export business with the year 1804 began. The shop was opened and was immediately prosperous, but Madame Carroll ruled sternly that there must be the strictest of economy until it was thoroughly established and of course Valerie must help.

"M'mselle," said Pepe in a curiously muffled voice, "I take it that this issue of the *Moniteur*—"

"But of course, M'sieur Ybarra," said Valerie. "All of them are for sale. At one hundred francs the copy. You will find there the months of March and April, 1804."

"This one I buy!" said Pepe. "Of April second."

"They run, I think," said Valerie helpfully, "to the twenty-fifth. But when my uncle returns there will be later ones."

Pepe made an inarticulate sound.

"My great-great-grandfather Ybarra," he said after a moment, "visited Paris during Napoleon's time. He fought a duel with the Comte de Froude, and had his ear sliced. The account of the affair is here! I did not know the details, before."

"Indeed?" said Valerie politely. "That is doubtless interesting!"

She turned back to Harrison. She asked questions about what he had done with himself and what had happened to him in the past dozen years. He told her. He asked about Madame Carroll. He recalled her without affection. She'd been an acid personality, even then, with no patience with children. But since she was now Valerie's whole family—he did not think of her brother—it would be well to be informed.

Valerie explained with faint amusement that a small inheritance had fallen to her aunt, a tiny cottage in the town of St. Jean-sur-Seine, and that her aunt had gone there to make sure that she was not cheated of a single franc or centime. She left her brother in Paris. Then something happened. *Un Américain*, said Valerie, had been taken ill in the town. There was no hospital. There was no one to tend him. Since her aunt had to stay in St. Jean-sur-Seine anyhow, she undertook to care for the sick man for a reasonable fee. It would be so much clear profit. Eventually she came back

to Paris, married to him. He was a M. Carroll, and Valerie liked him very much. He was most intelligent. In fact, in *les États-Unis* he had been a professor in a university. But now he had no post. He possessed a small income, to be sure, but he would not attempt to secure a position in a university or even a *lycée*. Still, he was a very pleasant man. Valerie regretted that he remained at St. Jean-sur-Seine while Madame Carroll operated the shop in Paris.

Harrison came out of the absorption with which he'd listened.

"Wait!" he said uneasily. "This M. Carroll! He would not be called Henry? He would not be a professor of methodology? The university would not have been Brevard?"

But it was. He was ex-Professor Henry Carroll, formerly of Brevard University, who had given courses in methods of research, including statistical analysis, when Harrison and Pepe were undergraduates. He was married to Madame Carroll, who was Valerie's aunt, who was the sister of the M. Dubois who attended to purchases of stock for Carroll, Dubois et Cie, importers and exporters to the year 1804.

Harrison found the news startling. When Pepe disturbedly said that he would come back later about the thing he wanted made, Harrison hastily made arrangements with Valerie for the meeting that for today must be deferred. He went out of the shop with Pepe.

"This," said Pepe in an irritated tone, "this has me standing on my head! I have read the account of my great-great-grandfather's duel, and you are quite right. I have seen nothing that could not be explained away if you had not found those insane particulars in the Bibliothèque Nationale! But I no longer believe those explanations. I displease myself! I cannot tell you why, but I no longer disbelieve in anything, or else I believe in everything! I am not sure which!"

Harrison said:

"The Carroll of Carroll, Dubois and Company is Professor Henry Carroll, late of Brevard. We took a course in statistical analysis under him, as you recalled yesterday."

Pepe stared. Then he said slowly:

"He was thrown out of his job, as I remember. There was some scandal which would not have been scandal had it happened to us, but was a very grave matter for a professor of statistical analysis and allied subjects."

"He's at St. Jean-sur-Seine," said Harrison, "wherever that may be!"

"He was a good guy," said Pepe. "He didn't flunk anybody without good reason."

"A very good guy," agreed Harrison. "What made you change your mind about the stuff in the shop?"

"I did not say, but—you are right. I have changed my mind. I cannot tell you why. Cumulative evidence that not everything that is insane is necessarily untrue. More than that, I feel that action of some sort is necessary. We have credible proof of the starkly incredible. What do we do?"

Harrison frowned. He was at least as much upset as Pepe. But besides, there was Valerie. Unless the shop could be explained completely, past all suspicion that it existed upon the impossible, Harrison would be uneasy for himself but desperately uneasy for Valerie. He would be wondering in panicky fashion if his—and Valerie's—having been born might not be rescinded.

"I think," he said uncomfortably, "that we'd better go to see Carroll. It seems to follow. We found each other, by accident, which led to my finding Valerie, by accident, and brought it about, by accident, that she told me where he was. It seems to make a sort of pattern. I think we ought to follow it along."

"I didn't know you were superstitious," observed Pepe.

"Anyhow," said Harrison without conviction, "as former students of his, it would be only natural for us to pay him a visit. Pay our respects, so to speak."

"Oh, yes!" said Pepe ironically. "Oh, definitely! I spend much of my time looking up professors who used to try to educate me, to thank them for their efforts and display their lack of success. But in this case I agree. Absolutely!"

"Let's get a cab," said Harrison. "The American Express can tell us how to get there."

They walked until a raffish Parisian taxicab hove into sight. They climbed into it, with dignity. It took off at that hair-raising speed all Parisian taxicabs affect.

On the way, Harrison said reflectively, "Do you know, Pepe, this is a silly sort of thing for us to do! Carroll will probably think us crazy!"

"If he will only convince me of it," said Pepe, "I will be grateful to him forever!"

He sank back in his seat. The taxicab hurtled onward. Somewhere very high overhead, a jet-plane dove and circled and dove again. Somewhere on the high seas, the multinational crew of a NATO rocket-carrying surface ship went through a launching-drill, theoretically getting away all their

missiles at imaginary targets at intervals of twenty-two seconds each. There were atomic submarines under the arctic ice-pack. There were underground silos ready to fire transcontinental rockets if or when they received properly authenticated orders to do so. It was officially admitted that enough atomic warheads existed to make, if detonated, the very atmosphere of the earth lethal to all animal and vegetable life.

In a universe designed for human beings to live in, there would have to be safety-devices. People being as they are, it would be necessary. Harrison and Pepe found out where St. Jean-sur-Seine happened to be and promptly arranged to be transported there. They did not feel any high sense of mission, or that they acted with particular wisdom or to great effect. Perhaps there was no reason for any such sensations. Perhaps their journey was just another thing that happened.

A decision on whether or not the happenings that gave them so much concern amounted to a safety-device, of course, would depend on whether one considers that the universe makes sense, or that it does not.

3

The town of St. Jean-sur-Seine was remarkably like very many other small municipalities over the length and breadth of the French republic. When—as rarely happened—tourists stumbled upon it, they found it both unspoiled and unattractive. Some ate one meal at the principal cafe. Very, very few returned for a second. It had once had a foundry which had cast some guns for Napoleon's army. The guns were unsatisfactory, and the foundry closed down. For a time there had been a traffic in truffles, found by misguided pigs and subdued trained dogs for the benefit of men. But truffles, whose mode of propagation has never been satisfactorily settled, did not propagate with much energy near St. Jean-sur-Seine. That traffic died out. In the 1880's there was an epidemic of measles in which the entire civic body, including the mayor and the whole municipal administration, was simultaneously incapacitated. There had been a murder in the town in the early 1900's. There was no other history to impress a visitor.

Harrison and Pepe Ybarra arrived on an asthmatic bus in mid-afternoon. It took an inordinate time to locate *M. le Professeur* Carroll. Eventually they found someone who made the identification of *M. le Professeur* with the pleasantly regarded *Américain* Carroll. "*Il fréquente le chien et le chat,*" explained the citizen who finally realized whom they sought. "He talks to everyone." And therefore he had not been thought of as a professor.

He escorted them to point out, helpfully, a not particularly trim cottage built upon the site of some former industrial complex. It could only have been the cannon foundry of Napoleonic times. By that time the hour was not far from sunset. There was a bed of flowers outside the cottage, badly in need of attention. There was a section of antique stone wall with the remnants of window-openings to be detected. There were piles of stone, once painstakingly separated from the walls whose upper courses they had formed. Now they were moss-grown and grass-penetrated while they waited for purchasers to cart them away for other structures. No purchaser had appeared. Perhaps no new houses had been built.

Pepe said:

"*Dios mio!* He lives here?"

"I think," admitted Harrison, "that we're making fools of ourselves."

"Nothing," said Pepe, "would give me greater pleasure than to find proof of exactly that statement! Let's hope!"

He advanced to the door of the cottage. He knocked. There was a rustling inside. He knocked again. Dead silence. He knocked a third time.

There were footsteps. They seemed reluctant. The door opened a crack. An eye peered out. That was all. Then a voice said irritably, within:

"*Bien! Q'est?*"

Pepe turned astonished eyes to Harrison. There are voices one does not forget and which one recognizes even when they are speaking in French and one has heard them speaking only Mid-Western English with the words "Mary," "marry" and "merry" not to be told from one another. Harrison nodded. He swallowed.

The single eye continued to regard the two of them around the barely-cracked door. The familiar voice said impatiently:

"*Q'il est?*"

The possessor of the eye did not answer. Harrison raised his voice, in English:

"Professor Carroll, my name is Harrison and I have Pepe Ybarra with me. We took statistical analysis under you at Brevard. Remember?"

Silence for a moment. Then the familiar voice said:

"Now, what the hell?" It paused. "Wait a minute!"

There were scufflings. A woman's voice. Carroll's voice said in an undertone something like, "*Il n'parle.*" There was a grunting, and footsteps moved heavily away. Less heavy

footsteps went with them. The eye at the cracked door removed itself, but the door remained stationary, as if some one had his foot firmly against it to prevent its being opened by force. Carroll's voice said something indistinguishable—again in French—and then there were sounds as if someone had been impatiently brushed out of the way. Then the door opened. Carroll stared unbelievably at Harrison and at Pepe on his doorstep.

He was tall and broad as Harrison remembered him, but he was clothed like a Frenchman, which is to say as no professor of methodology and statistical analysis would ordinarily be clothed. He wore corduroy trousers, and his shirt looked as if his wife had made it. He wore French shoes.

He looked from one to the other, and shook his head in astonishment.

"It is Harrison!" he said profoundly. "And Ybarra! Who'd have believed it? What in hell are you doing in France? Particularly, what the hell are you doing in St. Jean-sur-Seine? And what are you doing on my door-step? Come in!"

He stepped aside. Harrison entered with Pepe close behind him. The room contained furniture of the sort an inhabitant of St. Jean-sur-Seine would consider tasteful. It was atrocious. It contained a short, plump Frenchman in a state of apparently desperate agitation. He was attired like a minor and not-too-prosperous *bourgeois* of the year approximately 1800. His shoes were clumsy. His stockings were of coarse worsted. The cloth of his major garments was homespun. He seemed to be entirely unconscious of any oddity in his apparel, and his costume had the look of having been worn as a matter of course. It did not look like fancy-dress. And he looked like a man in acute distress. As Harrison and Pepe entered, he wrung his hands. A door to another room closed decisively.

Carroll ignored the short man for a moment. He shook hands with his two visitors.

"This is a surprise!" he said in a tone compounded of curiosity and vexation. "I didn't think anybody knew where I was, or would give a damn if he did. How on earth did you happen to find me? And when you found out, why on earth . . . No. I won't ask why you bothered. You'll tell me."

Then he said abruptly, "This is my brother-in-law, M. Dubois." In French he said briskly, "These gentlemen were students of mine, some years ago. They have come to pay their respects."

The plump Frenchman in the astonishing costume seemed a trifle, a small trifle, relieved, without being wholly reassured. He said uncomfortably, "*Enchanté, messieurs.*"

"Have a chair," said Carroll, with the same briskness. He continued to ignore the plump man's costume. "Tell me what you've been doing, and that sort of thing. I take it you graduated, and you're doing Europe, and somehow—but Heaven knows how!—you heard of me pining away in obscurity and disgrace, and you've called on me for some irrational reason."

Pepe sat down, rather gingerly. He eyed the man in the antique-style garments. Harrison said awkwardly:

"I'm afraid you'll think I'm crazy, sir."

"Not at all! Not at all!" said Carroll. "Why should I?"

"Because," said Harrison, "I have to ask you—and I can't justify asking—if you're acquainted with a—that is—do you know . . ." He stopped. Then he said abruptly: "There's a man named de Bassompierre. Have you ever heard of him?"

"No," said Carroll briskly. "I haven't. Why?"

Harrison sweated. The plump Frenchman said:

"*Pardonnez-moi, messieurs, mais . . .*"

Carroll nodded to him and he went out, with something of the air of a man escaping agitation in one place to go and be more agitated somewhere else.

"This de Bassompierre," said Harrison painfully, "wrote to Cuvier and explained the Mendelian laws of heredity to him. In detail."

"He probably meant well," said Carroll charitably. "What of it?"

"He also told Ampère about alternating currents," said Harrison, "and Lagrange about statistical analysis, and Champollion about hieroglyphics. And he wrote to the Academy of Sciences about nuclear physics."

"If they wanted the information and didn't have it," said Carroll pleasantly, "I don't see why he shouldn't give it to them." Then he stopped short. He stared. Then he said very carefully: "Did you say Cuvier, and then Ampère, and then Lagrange?"

"And Champollion," said Pepe wily, "about hieroglyphics."

Carroll stared hard at Harrison, and then at Pepe, and then back again. He pursed his lips. Then he said with extreme care, "Would you mind telling me when this happened?"

"He wrote to Cuvier about the Mendelian laws," said Harrison, "in 1804. To Ampère, in 1807. To Laplace, whom I didn't mention before, in 1808. To the Academy of Sciences, in 1812."

Carroll remained conspicuously still for a long moment. Then he spoke more carefully still:

"And he told them, you say . . ."

Harrison repeated what he'd told Pepe the day before. The notes and correspondence of certain much-esteemed learned men, in the custody of the Bibliothèque Nationale, contained such-and-such items. One M. de Bassompierre had written to those learned men and had given them exact information which did not exist when he gave it. Harrison explained in detail, feeling the frustrated confusion of one who knows he is talking pure lunacy which happens to be fact.

But Carroll listened with intense and concentrated attention. When Harrison finished he said, distastefully, one abrasive phrase in pure Middle-Western English. It indicated that he was less than happy about what he'd just heard.

Then he said cagily:

"But why do you bring this news to me?"

Harrison stammered. Pepe spoke. He explained apologetically that the shop of Carroll, Dubois et Cie had aroused his interest. He'd taken Harrison there. He'd met *Ma'mselle* Valerie . . .

"Oh yes," said Carroll. "Nice girl. Pretty, too!"

Ma'mselle Valerie had known Harrison when they both were children. Telling him the news of her family, she'd mentioned Carroll, her uncle by marriage. Then Harrison spoke awkwardly:

"And I'd started my research because of something you'd said in class, sir. You said that the state of the cosmos at any given instant was merely the probability which under the circumstances had a value of one. And of course that implied all sorts of other probabilities which had cancelled each other out, so that a close examination of history ought to show some anomalies, things which once were fact, but whose factuality had been cancelled."

"I said that?" demanded Carroll.

"It follows from the first statement," explained Harrison. "It was interesting. So when I got a chance to go after a Ph.D. I started to do research on a well-documented period of history. I picked the Napoleonic era and started to look

for events which at the time had really happened, but later on turned out not to have happened at all."

Carroll shook his head, frowning.

"I shouldn't have said it," he said irritably. "It wasn't good sense. It wasn't even so, though I thought it was. A fact is a fact! But there are some damned queer ones! Go on!"

Harrison explained his painstaking search through the personal papers of historical characters. He repeated that somebody named de Bassompierre had passed on facts that nobody could possibly have known at the time.

"Wait a minute!" said Carroll darkly. "I wonder . . ."

He strode out of the room. He practically filled the doorway as he passed through it. A moment later his voice boomed in another part of the cottage. He sounded angry. A woman's voice joined his. There was a first-rate squabble. It ended with Carroll shouting. A door slammed, and he came back. The woman's voice continued, shrill and muffled.

"It wasn't my brother-in-law," said Carroll irritably. "He swears he didn't peddle such information. He wouldn't have the brains to do it anyhow. And God knows my wife wouldn't think of it! This is the devil of a mess!"

Harrison suddenly felt numb. He'd been clinging desperately to the hope that his discoveries were deceptions. He'd been lured to the shop by that hope, and then to St. Jean-sur-Seine and to this present place and moment. Carroll's history had let him hope that it would all turn out to be eccentricity, or mild lunacy, or something equally reassuring. But Carroll took him seriously! Carroll did not think him insane! Instead, he accepted the incredible statements without question and had moved to find out if the plump M. Dubois in the antique costume was responsible for the facts of which Harrison had told him.

"I—I—" said Harrison. Then he was unhappily silent.

"It's the devil!" said Carroll, scowling. "Using the thing was against my better judgement to begin with! I was an ass to. I was an ass from the beginning! But how the devil . . ."

Pepe stirred. It seemed to Harrison that Pepe was paler than ordinary.

"Professor, sir," asked Pepe unsteadily, "do you mean that these things we've been trying not to believe are—are not our delusions? It was very comforting to believe that I was slightly cracked. You see, this de Bassompierre . . ."

"Delusions?" said Carroll irritably. "Unfortunately, no! You aren't cracked that I can see. But who the devil has committed the insanity that I *can* see? Who else listened to

my lectures when I thought I was only casting pearls, and picked one up? You did," he nodded at Harrison, "and somebody else must have done the same. I may have played hell with the state of things in general!"

There were footsteps. The door to the inner room opened violently. A short, stout Frenchwoman with a red face entered with the stride of destiny. Her eyes were furious. Her speech, which began instantly, was a frenzied denunciation of Carroll, uttered with such speed and vehemence that individual words could not be distinguished. She waved her plump arms, glaring at him. She shook her fist in his face. She stamped her feet. Her denunciation reached a crescendo.

"*Les flics*," said Carroll sternly. "*Les flics*—"

She seemed to strangle. She subsided fiercely. She stood formidably still, her arms folded defiantly, her face crimson, her eyes snapping, breathing fast and furiously.

"The police," repeated Carroll firmly, switching to French to include her with Harrison and Pepe in the conversation, "would be interested to hear what you have just said of me. But these are my friends, former students from *les États Unis*. It appears that our enterprise has come to their attention, doubtless through some blunder M. Dubois has made. It is an emergency of importance. But perhaps it may aid in the solution of our previous trouble." To Harrison and Pepe he said, "I present you to my wife, Madame Carroll."

Harrison tried to bow politely. Pepe was more successful.

"And now," said Carroll firmly, "you will join your brother in watching over our other problem!"

He turned her around and guided her irresistibly back to the door. She squirmed. She resisted. He thrust her bodily into the other room and pulled the door shut. She made yelping outcries of fury. She went away, scolding shrilly. There was the apologetic murmur of the plump man's voice.

"I've made several mistakes in my life," said Carroll, "and I thought she was the worst. I seem to have been delirious when I married her. But this news you bring is really the very devil! We'll have to do something about it!"

He sat down, scowling. Pepe asked:

"Are we to understand, sir, that someone, somewhere, has made what one might call a time machine and is using it?"

"Of course not!" snapped Carroll. "A time machine is out of the question! But dammit, I must have said something that was more intelligent than I realized, and somebody must

have used it to upset a sorry scheme of things and now is working busily to make it sorrier! But who the devil is it, and how did he get back there?"

"Where?" asked Pepe.

"To 1804!" snapped Carroll. He waved his hands. "Getting there is possible enough. We supply our shop with goods by doing it! But who else? And why the same period? Dammit, that's too much of a coincidence!" He stopped. "Oh. You think of a time machine. It's quite unnecessary. You don't have to build an elevator to get to the second floor of a building. You simply have to find the stairs. Then you walk up. That's all. But this—"

He swept his hand through his hair, leaving it standing on end. It had been a notable habit of his, at Brevard.

"There are so damned few of them!" he said in exasperation. "Damned few! You don't think I live in a hole like this because I like it, do you? I'd say the odds were ten to the ninth against anybody finding a second possibility to the same period! There are more than that, no doubt, but find them! There's the rub!"

Harrison drew a deep breath. Somehow the garments worn by the plump man had helped him to believe that Carroll, who had ignored them, was eccentric rather than an authority about anything. But . . .

"Professor," he said painfully. "I started out not believing this stuff. Then I did. Then I roped Pepe into the business, and I managed to stop, but he came to believe it and again I thought it was likely. You seem to understand it. I'm messed up for the third or fourth time. Will you settle it so I'll know what to believe?"

Carroll shrugged. He stood up.

"Come along."

He opened the door through which Madame Carroll had been thrust some minutes before. Harrison followed, and Pepe came after.

The next room was a dining room. Windows on one side let in a certain amount of dusky twilight. The sun had set upon St. Jean-sur-Seine since their arrival at the cottage, but through the windows one could see grass and the stones awaiting a purchaser, and part of the still-standing massive wall of something built very long before. In the wall opposite those windows there were no glazed openings, but there was a door, a new door, crudely made of planks and covering an unseen opening beyond it. It was self-evi-

dent that on that side the wall of the dining room was practically underground. Stained plaster proved it.

"There was a foundry here once," said Carroll, continuing to frown at his own thoughts. "They were casting cannon for Napoleon's army. But with the inspired incompetence of which some people are capable, they managed to cast them with huge flaws so most of them blew up when proof-fired. It looked like intended treason to the Empire, so they shut down in a hurry. They left one gun in the mould in which it had been cast."

He opened the homemade inside door. Earth did cover that side-wall of the cottage. But there was a burrow beyond the door. It was a man-height high and roughly as wide as the doorway itself. There were some stones showing through the dug-away dirt. In the doorframe itself there was a throw-switch with wires leading somewhere. It was turned on. At one side of the burrow a mass of rusty iron protruded. It could be identified as a six-pounder cannon, muzzle up, without the cut-off end which was the next step in cannon-founding after casting. It had been abandoned, undisturbed, when the foundry closed down.

"That's it," said Carroll. "It hasn't been disturbed since casting was abandoned here. In fact, it hasn't been touched since the melted metal was poured into the mould. I'm going through here. Follow me closely. You'll be sick at your stomach for a moment."

He moved confidently ahead. He disappeared. Harrison blinked and stepped after him. He felt an instant of nausea so intense as almost to be a cramp and a sudden violent dizziness which was peculiarly like the almost imperceptible giddiness that had accompanied talking with Pepe about Maximilian of Mexico. Then there was light before him. Carroll reappeared, waiting for him. Pepe came blundering behind.

They were standing under the roof of a completely intact stone building, which was obviously no longer in use. It had been a foundry. There were brick furnaces and a heap of charcoal plus enormous bellows to be operated by hand. Such equipment indicated that the system of iron-founding practised here dated from before modern processes were devised. Vividly bright sunshine came through the cracks of plank shutters that closed all high-up windows. There was no cottage. None. Instead, the great roofed enclosure went undisturbed to where there had been a ruined, largely torn-

down wall. But now the wall was not torn down. It was erect and solid.

Harrison's eyes fixed themselves, fascinated, on the nearly vertical slivers of noonday sunshine. Out of the windows of the room he'd just left, the time was sunset.

Pepe said incredulously:

"This is—this is . . . When is it?"

The form of the question told of his complete, stunned acceptance of everything that common sense and experience still denied.

"This will be June tenth," said Carroll matter-of-factly, "and the year is eighteen-four. It's," he glanced at his watch, "eleven-forty A.M. Clock-time is different as well as calendar time at the two ends of the . . ." He shrugged. "I spoke of a stairway. It's more nearly a tunnel. A time-tunnel, which is a hundred sixty-odd years and some weeks, days and hours from one end to the other. We came through. We will now go back. I'm going to ask you to help me solve our current emergency, and then we'll set to work on the really big problem you've brought."

He motioned for Harrison to go before him. Harrison looked helpless. Carroll pointed to a small plank upon the ground. It looked like a threshold with no wall or door attached. Numbly, Harrison stepped over it and felt an intense digestive disturbance and a monumental giddiness. But he took one step more and he was in the burrow—the tunnel—with earth all around him and the home-made doorway before him. He stepped out into the cottage dining room. His forehead felt wet. He mopped it as Pepe came stumbling back, with Carroll matter-of-factly in his rear.

"I'm not going to ask you to not to tell anybody what you just saw," said Carroll casually. "You'd be an idiot if you did. But you've brought me a hell of a problem and I'd be foolish to try to be secretive with you. Come along!"

He opened another door, and they were in the kitchen of the cottage. The cooking arrangements were of that extreme primitiveness which an over-thrifty householder considers economy. There was a stair which evidently led to sleeping quarters overhead. There was a bench against one wall. The short, plump M. Dubois sat on that bench in his unbelievable garments. He held a remarkably large carving knife uncertainly in his hand. He looked woebegone. Beside him sat his sister, Madame Carroll, with a hatchet held firmly in her grip.

And, lying on the floor with his hands and feet securely

bound with cords, there was a third individual. He wore baggy corduroy trousers and a blue sash and a red-checked shirt. His expression alternated between extreme apprehension and peevish resentment. He looked at Harrison and Pepe with wide and at first scared eyes. But Harrison flinched when Madame Carroll burst into shrill and infuriated complaints, uttered with such rapidity that only one accustomed to her speed could have understood her.

"M. Harrison and M. Ybarra," said Carroll calmly, "are now involved with us. Not financially. They claim no share in the enterprise. Their interest is scientific only." To Harrison and Pepe he added: "Perhaps I should also introduce the gentleman yonder. He is a burglar. His name is Albert. He is our present problem."

Madame Carroll turned to them. Seething, she informed them that her husband was a fool of the most extreme imbecility. But for her he would be robbed, he would be destroyed, he would be murdered by such criminals as they observed had already made the attempt!

The bound man on the floor protested aggrievedly that he had not attempted murder. He had only intended a small, professional robbery. He was a burglar, not a murderer! They had only to ask the police, and they would certify that in all his career as a burglar he had never injured anybody but one *flic* who was standing eagerly underneath a window to trap him, when in his haste to escape he'd jumped out of the window and on him.

Madame Carroll silenced him with a wave of her hatchet. She was crimson with indignation, with desperation, perhaps with despair.

"What are we to do with him?" she demanded dramatically. "If we give him to the police it will become public! Our business will be revealed! We will have competitors thronging to offer higher prices than we can pay, and offering to sell for lower prices than we can afford! We shall be ruined, because of this scoundrel, this murderer!"

The bound man protested. They had held him captive for more than twelve hours, debating. It was illegal! Harrison said with a sort of stunned interest:

"The problem is that this Albert is a burglar?"

Carroll said vexedly that he'd been having a few glasses of wine in the town's least offensive bistro. This man, Albert, doubtless saw him there and considered it an opportunity. When Carroll went home earlier than usual, he found Albert ransacking his possessions. Albert struggled desperately when

Carroll seized him, but there he was. Carroll said ruefully, "And there he was, too, when Dubois came out of the time-tunnel. Which was unfortunate."

"Unfortunate?" cried Madame Carroll, in a passion. "It was a crime! You imbecile! This criminal . . ."

"Just a moment," said Pepe. "The gentleman is a burglar. He practises his profession privately, without witnesses. Perhaps he can understand that you prefer your business to be considered confidential, too."

The prisoner said shrewdly:

"Counterfeiting, eh? We can make a deal."

"For the sake of privacy," Pepe added, more nearly in his normal manner, "he can see that you might find it necessary to report to the police that M. Carroll was forced to injure him fatally in order to subdue him."

"That is not necessary!" objected Albert sharply. "It is not necessary at all! If I were a *flic*, perhaps! But since we are of similar professions . . ."

"The matter could be solved," said Pepe with a grand air, "by the use of professional courtesy and a gentleman's agreement."

"*C'est vrai!*" said Albert. "Naturally! I will pledge my honor not to speak of anything that has occurred here! That will settle everything!"

Carroll grunted. "Harrison, any ideas?"

Harrison moistened his lips. Somehow he was still thinking of those vertical rays of sunlight beyond the tunnel in the other room, whereas he could look out of a window here and see the deep-red glow of the sky above a just-descended sun. That bright sunshine bothered him horribly. It was appalling; upsetting!

"I think," he said awkwardly, "that I'd let him see what you just showed Pepe and me. I don't think it's likely that he'd tell about that!"

Carroll considered. Then he nodded. He picked up the bound man and walked effortlessly into the other room. Harrison heard the clatter of the opening door. There was silence.

Then Madame Carroll said bitterly, "It is unfortunate that one cannot . . ."

The hatchet in her hand moved suggestively. M. Dubois shivered. There was silence. A long silence. Then sounds in the next room again. The improvised door creaked and shut, and a moment later Carroll brought back the burglar. He laid him matter-of-factly on the floor. Albert's face was

ashen. His eyes rolled. Carroll regarded him meditatively, and then took a knife out of his pocket and opened it. He cut the cords which bound the prisoner.

"I think," he said, "that he is impressed."

"*M-mon Dieu!*" said the prisoner hoarsely, "*M-mon Dieu!*"

Harrison saw Carroll bending to lift the small, scared Albert to his feet. He helped. The little man's teeth chattered. Carroll nodded.

"Let him out, Harrison. Good idea! He won't talk!"

Harrison led the burglar through the dining room and the room which opened toward the street. The small criminal wavered and shook upon his feet. His teeth continued to chatter. Harrison said, frowning, "You'll attract attention if you stumble and shake like this! Have you any money?"

Albert shook his head. Harrison handed him half a dozen hundred-franc notes.

"Here," he said distastefully. "You need a drink. Several of them. If I were you, I think I'd have about as many as I could find room for. I wouldn't mind joining you! But anyhow I advise you to keep your mouth shut!"

"*Mais oui,*" gasped the former prisoner. "*Mon Dieu, oui!*"

Harrison opened the door for him. He watched as the little man went unsteadily out to the street and then turned to the left. There was a wine shop not more than a hundred yards away. The former prisoner headed for it. He walked fast. With purpose. Harrison watched him out of sight.

He went back to the kitchen. Carroll was saying briskly, "Get out of those clothes, Georges, and into something befitting a modern business man. Then we'll divide up the stock you brought back and Harrison and Ybarra and you will take it to Paris on the next bus out of town. If our friend Albert should be indiscreet, I'll be here alone and of course can deny everything. Naturally, I'll be believed."

He turned to Harrison.

"That's precaution. But you've brought a problem that's much more important than our own affairs! What you've told me is that most alarming news anybody could imagine! I don't think," he added, "that my brother-in-law can be responsible for what you report. He could take a modern scientific book back in time, but he wouldn't know where to place it. Anyhow, there is normally a sort of dynamic stability in the grand outline of events. But this de Bassompierre seems to be tapping at history like a stone-cutter tapping at a rock. Enough tappings, and the thing will crack! We've got to stop him! So we'll get this stock for the

shop to Paris and set about handling this de Bassompierre!"

Perhaps an hour later, Harrison and Pepe passed the wine shop a hundred yards from Carroll's cottage. A familiar figure drooped over a table inside. It was Albert the burglar. He was comatose. He had no troubles. Under the circumstances, he was probably wise.

But Pepe shifted his heavy parcel and said detachedly:

"I observe one sane and admirable result of our researches so far. So far as you are concerned, anyhow."

"What?" asked Harrison.

"You have found this Valerie," said Pepe. "She is charming. She remembers you with affection. True, her aunt is as unpleasant a character as one could wish to find, but now she will not object to your friendship. She will not dare. You know too much!"

Harrison wasn't altogether pleased with Pepe's viewpoint, but that was the way Pepe's mind worked. He changed the subject as he changed his own burden from his right hand to his left.

"Carroll's right," he said uneasily. "Something's got to be done about this de Bassompierre trying to change all of past history! Apparently there's no great damage done yet, but if he keeps on passing out information a hundred-odd years before its proper time. . . ."

"Yes," agreed Pepe. "From one point of view he should be strangled. Yet that would be unfortunate, since history says he was not."

He seemed to hesitate for a moment. Harrison said gloomily, "I think Carroll will use the time-tunnel to try to fix things up. If one can import snuffboxes from a former time, one can certainly argue with somebody in the past! He needs to be persuaded not to mess up all the present we know and the future we guess at."

"The present," said Pepe, "is not intolerable, but the future is less than satisfactory. I regret that I have to remain only a bystander. I mentioned that my great-great-grandfather, Ignacio Ybarra, was in Paris in 1804. Later, after the independence of the colony of Mexico, he was Ambassador to France. But if I went with you and Carroll to argue with this de Bassompierre, it might happen that by some unhappy accident I might meet and cause the death of my great-great-grandfather. In such a case, of course, I would not be born to be the cause of his death. So he would not meet an untimely fate, and I would be born to cause his death. So I would not be born. So I would. So I would not. And so on.

I prefer not to try to solve this paradox. I shall remain unwillingly a bystander.”

Harrison said nothing. They trudged on together to where the antiquated bus to Paris would be found. Presently Harrison ceased to think about Pepe, and Carroll, and Albert, and Madame Carroll, and even about whoever de Bassompierre might be and all the other things involved in the idea of a possibly—or certainly—variable history.

He thought about Valerie. He had a date with her for tomorrow. He cheered up.

4

Valerie smiled cheerfully at Harrison and said: "Shall we sit here?"

He agreed immediately, as he would have agreed to anything else she said. This was Bonmaison, and all about them there was the atmosphere of picnics and tranquil romance and all the natural and ordinary affairs which are the only truly important ones. Low down on the horizon, toward Paris, there was a white streak of vapor in the sky. It was unquestionably the contrail of a jet-plane flying so high that it was invisible. Only the train of moisture condensed upon flame-formed ions could be seen. The jet was part of that round-the-world patrol maintained over Paris—and London and New York and nearly all the great cities of the world—in case some person in authority somewhere should decide to start a war. But it did not apply to Bonmaison. It was a symptom of the insanity of human beings in a cosmos obviously designed for them to live in, but which they industriously prepare to make unlivable.

But at Bonmaison one did not think of such things. There, and at many similar places all over the world, people adhered to an almost universal conspiracy to pretend that international organizations and agreements had made the world really safe, and that the alarming situations of which one reads are actually only arrangements so the newspapers will have something to print.

Harrison could not fully act according to this conspiracy today. He'd encountered proof that possibilities existed which were more horrifying even than atomic war. If history changed, if past events were disrupted, if some day bygone events would cease to have occurred and other quite different events took their place, why, he might not ever have been! Much worse, even Valerie might not ever have existed!

Valerie had seemed to choose this spot for them to repose and talk comfortably, but she continued to look about her. People of no importance go to Bonmaison to sit on the grass and eat ices and solve such profound questions as to what degree unparalleled affection justifies recklessness, and to what degree one should be practical. Usually, the girls are the practical ones. But they are disappointed if the young men are not urgently impractical.

A carrousel made alleged music a little distance off. Children rode on it, gleefully. There were booths where young men were fleeced of five and ten-franc pieces as they tried to demonstrate to their companions their skill at complicated and rigged games. There were boats on the small meandering stream, and shirt-sleeved swains rowed clumsily while girls admired them. There were shrieks of laughter when Polichinelle behaved sadistically for the amusement of innocent childhood. There were other couples—many of them—who had either already settled themselves comfortably or still sauntered in quest of exactly the spot the precise development of their romance dictated.

"Perhaps," said Valerie reflectively, "over there might be more pleasant."

Again Harrison agreed. Pepe's prediction that Harrison would be tolerated as an acquaintance of Valerie had come true. Madame Carroll had smiled frigidly when Valerie presented him as a friend of her childhood. Now they were together at Bonmaison, and provided that Valerie returned very soon after sunset, they were permitted a temporary escape from Madame Carroll's direction.

Valerie looked contented. Harrison, of course, looked foolish. She sank gracefully to the ground and smiled warmly at him.

"Now," she pronounced, "now we can talk!"

And Harrison immediately found it impossible to find anything to say. He looked at her, and actually his manner of looking said many things Valerie appeared to find satisfactory.

"My aunt," she observed, ignoring his silence, "was very much pleased with this morning's business."

He managed to ask the obvious question.

"Why," said Valerie, "someone came into the shop and bought lavishly. Not as one buys for one's hobby or for curios, but in quantity! And he asked many questions about where such items were made. My aunt was discreet. He probed. He pumped. He tried to entrap her into revelations. She gave him no information."

Pepe had also had an idea of finding out where the shop's stock-in-trade was manufactured. Now he knew, and so did Harrison. Neither of them was much happier for the information. Apparently Valerie did not share it. She laughed a little.

"Ah, but he tried to find out where he could get such goods! He squirmed and sidled and tried innumerable tricks! He said he would like to have special items made. My aunt told him that she would take his order. Then he confessed that he was actually a dealer—as if she had not known!—and offered a price for information about the manufacturer!"

Pepe had intended something of this sort, too. Harrison listened emotionally to the sound of Valerie's voice.

"In the end," said Valerie pleurably, "they struck a bargain. On my aunt's terms! He is well known as an art dealer in England and in America. It is a splendid bit of business. She will order such items as he desires. He will pay extravagantly. My aunt suspects that he will probably age them artificially and sell them as true antiques. She does not do that, because she does not wish for trouble with the authorities. But what he does with them is not her affair. Still, she put heavy prices upon them!"

Harrison mumbled. Valerie continued:

"He bought all the very best items in the shop. More than my uncle just brought back! It will be necessary for him to make another trip immediately to get more!"

"Maybe," said Harrison, "it was good humor brought about by a good business deal that made her agree to let us come here today."

"*Mais non*," said Valerie wisely. "It was M. Carroll! Anyone but my aunt would be fond of him. But he angers her. He is not practical, and above all things my aunt is practical! Yet even she dares to go only so far! He told her that she must not offend you. He said that you were important to probable developments in the shop. He said that if you were offended, he would take measures. Ah, but my aunt was angry! She

brooded all the way back from St. Jean-sur-Seine! She likes to direct. She does not like to be directed."

Harrison did not want to think, with Valerie, of St. Jean-sur-Seine and the ghastly possibilities implied by the confirmation of all his most implausible suspicions. He wanted to think only of Valerie. But thinking of Valerie made him think of disasters that might come to her.

A soldier and a girl went by, and Harrison considered morbidly what could be the result of a mere few boxes of percussion-caps upon the history of Europe and the world, if they happened to be demonstrated ahead of their normal time.

Napoleon was not receptive to the idea of submarines, to be sure. The American Fulton had found that out. But he would grasp instantly the advantage of percussion-cap guns over the flint-locks his infantry used. Flint-locks, in action, missed fire three times in ten. Merely changing muskets to percussion guns would make the increased fire-power of his armies equivalent to two hundred thousand added soldiers. Napoleon would not miss a bet like that! There would be no trouble with manufacture. The technology of the early nineteenth century was quite up to the making of percussion-caps once the idea and the proof of its practicality was known.

Even one box of percussion-caps, put into the proper hands in 1804, would mean that the invasion of Russia in 1812 would be successful. The Russian armies would not be defeated, they would be destroyed. There would be no abdication. There would be no Hundred Days. Waterloo would never be fought. A million Frenchmen would not die before their reasonable time, and instead would live to become fathers instead of the left-overs from whom modern Frenchmen were descended. And of course the probability of exactly those persons marrying, who had married in the past that Harrison knew of, and of their having exactly those children they'd begotten in that same past, and of Valerie sharing his childhood and the two of them being here at this moment on the grassy sward of Bonmaison—it would be improbable past imagining!

Valerie talked, and he listened yearningly. Presently there was a movement nearby and someone grunted in satisfaction. Harrison looked up. There was Pepe, impeccably dressed, and beside him there was the much larger figure of Carroll.

"He was right," said Carroll largely, with a nod of his head at Pepe. "He said he knew where to find you. I didn't

know where you lived, but he'd mentioned his hotel, so I hunted him up to locate you." He switched to French. "Ah, Valerie! I trust to your kindness not to remember having seen me. There would be a great squabble to no purpose. My intentions in Paris are most innocent!"

Valerie said tranquilly:

"But of course! Did you know that M. Dubois makes another journey immediately? Someone came to the shop, a most eminent dealer in art-objects, and most of the shop's stock departed with him. It is necessary to get more."

Carroll shrugged.

"No harm in that that I can see. Harrison—"

"What?"

"This de Bassompierre, I have to talk to him! That's why I came to Paris."

Harrison started slightly. De Bassompierre had been born in 1767 and died in 1858 at the age of ninety-one. But—

"I'm ordering clothes and equipment for the purpose," said Carroll crisply. "But I need someone to go with me. This whole thing is your baby. I hope you'll go with me. Will you?"

Harrison swallowed. Then he looked at Valerie. She looked as if she did not understand. He looked back.

"It is really possible to do anything?"

"Naturally!" said Carroll. "You and Ybarra had an odd experience, remember? About the history of Mexico? It's proof of two things, no, three. One is that history can be changed. The second is that somebody's trying to change it. The third is that even when it's changed it has a tendency to change back. There's a sort of elasticity to events. Your theory that things which at one time are facts can cease to be facts has a certain amount of cockeyed sense to it. If something happens, and in consequence a given fact becomes inconsistent with the rest of the cosmos, it stops being a fact. It vanishes. History closes over it as water closes over a dropped stone. There are ripples, but they die away. People sometimes remember and even write it in their memoirs, but it isn't true any longer."

Harrison listened. He looked at Valerie. She looked patient, as a girl does when talk is about something unrelated to her own personal interests.

"You were looking for items of that sort," Carroll went on, "and you found something much more serious—someone deliberately setting out to change the course of history. If he isn't stopped, he'll stress the grand design of things be-

yond its elastic limit and things will stay changed! So something has to be done!"

Harrison was suddenly anxious about Valerie's opinion of this talk. If she thought Carroll was out of his mind, she'd think him—Harrison—no less demented. But her expression remained placidly unconcerned.

"So, I'm going to argue with him," said Carroll. "I've got to find his tunnel, too, and see that it's collapsed. We can't have this sort of thing going on! Dubois would be of no possible use to me in an enterprise like this! I could never make him see what it was all about. I want you to come along. The number of people I could ask—as a gifted understatement—is strictly limited. Ybarra would be handy, but he says no. He had a great-great-grandfather—"

"In all," said Pepe apologetically, "I had eight great-great-grandfathers. The one I've mentioned was one Ignacio Ybarra who spent some months in Paris in 1804. He made acquaintances there which later, when he returned as the Ambassador from newly independent Mexico—"

"He doesn't want anything to happen to him," finished Carroll, "through his great-great-grandson. It's reasonable! But I want you to go get yourself measured for an outfit befitting a well-to-do American travelling in Napoleon's time. I've picked out a tailor. He thinks the outfits are to be taken to Hollywood for a television show. Do you need money?"

Harrison shook his head.

"I insisted," said Carroll with some humor, "that I must be able to draw on the bank-account of Carroll, Dubois et Cie. My wife will burst with fury when she finds out I've done so! I've ordered books to do research on de Basompierre, memoirs, and so on. Ybarra is sympathetic enough to dig out the forms used for *laissez-passe* and the identity papers we'll need. Modern methods of forgery should take care of them. If you'll get yourself measured for clothes, we'll be all set. Right?"

Harrison nodded, more or less uneasily. Carroll said:

"Valerie, *mon chérie*, I count upon your friendship not to mention that I have come to Paris. It is agreed?"

"But of course!" said Valerie. She smiled at him.

Carroll strode away. Pepe followed. Harrison, looking after them, noticed for the first time that Carroll moved with a certain unconscious ease, so that he couldn't have passed as a man of no importance in any period of history.

Then Valerie said anxiously:

"You are to go to—where my uncle Georges goes to buy the stock for the shop?" she asked uneasily.

"It seems to be necessary," admitted Harrison.

"How long will you be gone?"

Harrison knew an irrational elation. That was the angle which first occurred to her!

There was no actual reason for him to seize upon such an item; to find his tongue working freely though his breathing became uncertain. He could have said the same things at any other time, and probably more effectively if he'd practised them beforehand. But he heard his mouth saying startling and impassioned things in a hoarse and quite inadequate manner. He overheard urgent insistences that he had remembered her from their childhood and had never been able to think romantically about anybody else, and a large number of other unconvincing statements which he believed implicitly as he made them.

Valerie did not seem to be offended. She listened, though, with every appearance of astonishment. And suddenly he was struck dumb by the realization that this was very hasty, and she might not believe any of it. He regarded her miserably.

"I—I hope you don't mind," he protested, panicked. "Only I—I would have had to say it sooner or later . . ."

Valerie rose from where she sat.

"I do not think we should stay here," she said primly.

She moved away. He followed her miserably, not noticing that they were not headed toward the carrousel or any of the other more thickly populated parts of Bonmaison. He stumbled in her wake.

She paused and looked around her. She did not seem astonished to find that they had arrived where they were not in sight of anybody else at all. But Harrison was astonished. He stared at her. She smiled very faintly.

Incredulously, he reached out his hands. She displayed no indignation.

Presently they ate ices together and Valerie was composed, though her eyes shone a little. She said:

"My aunt will be furious! But we will tell M. Carroll and he will force her to agree."

In his then emotional state, this impressed Harrison as the most brilliant and intelligent and admirable of all possible remarks.

When he got back to his hotel, Pepe was waiting for him. Pepe frowned.

"Look here!" he said indignantly. "I've been thinking about my great-great-grandfather, who was here in 1804. If anything happens to him—"

"Pepe," said Harrison raptly, "I'm going to marry Valerie! We decided on it today!"

"If Carroll goes back to 1804," fumed Pepe, "nobody can tell what will happen! You know the theory about what if a man kills his grandfather in the past. But it doesn't have to be him! If *anybody* went back in time and killed my great-great-grandfather, I wouldn't be born! And Carroll's going back!"

"She knew," said Harrison blissfully, "she knew the minute she saw me again, that I was the one she wanted to marry! The very minute, Pepe! The instant she recognized me as her old playmate!"

"So I'm not going to take any chances!" said Pepe fiercely. "There's de Bassompierre, too! I could blow up the damned time-tunnel, but de Bassompierre does seem to be doing some pretty undesirable stuff. So I'm going along! And I'm going to see that none of my ancestors get killed!"

Harrison beamed.

"That's fine!" he said, not really aware of what Pepe had said. "We're not going to tell Valerie's aunt just yet. There'd be fireworks. And anyhow it wouldn't be fair to Valerie to get married before I've made that trip with Carroll. It could be dangerous. I don't want her to be worried!"

Pepe stared at him. Hard. Then he said irritably:

"*Dios mio!* As if this business weren't bad enough without having only lunatics to carry it out!"

Harrison went to bed in that state of emotional semi-narcosis which is appropriate to a newly-engaged man. He was literally unaware that any other important thing had happened in the world. The newspapers of that afternoon announced a new international crisis. He didn't notice. It appeared that the mainland Chinese had exploded their first atomic bomb.

The significance of the fact was, of course, that the communist Chinese were now added to the nations threatening the world's precarious peace. There were cabinet meetings all over the world, where heads were shaken and helplessness admitted. It had not been expected that the Chinese would have the bomb so soon. The individuals who seemed to know most about it guessed that they hadn't developed it entirely by themselves. There were indefinite surmises that somebody had defected from the Russians, on the ground

that they were reactionary conservatives in their politics, and had carried information to Peking which made the bomb possible. It was even guessed that the defector had originally defected to Russia from France. There were despairing speculations where he—his identity was strongly suspected—would defect to next.

To people not newly engaged, the explosion of an atomic bomb by the communist Chinese seemed a very serious matter. Certain groups dusted off their "Better Red than Dead" placards to carry in new demonstrations of reaction to the news. On the other hand, much of the world grimly prepared to live up to an exactly opposite opinion.

But Harrison slept soundly. He waked next morning with an excellent appetite and in the most cheerful of moods. He tried to think of an excuse to visit the shop of Carroll, Dubois et Cie. and was regretfully unable to contrive one. He went to the tailors and felt remarkably idiotic while they showed him fabrics and styles and were astonished that a supposed television actor was not interested in clothes.

Later, though, M. Dubois called upon him.

"*M'sieur*," said the little man agitatedly, "my sister and I wish to implore your aid! The most horrible, the most criminal thing has happened! My sister is half-mad with grief! She is distracted! We implore your assistance!"

Harrison blinked at him.

"What's the matter? What's happened? What can I do?"

"You know of our business and its—unusual nature," said Dubois. His voice trembled, and Harrison found himself thinking that he must have had a very bad half-hour with Madame Carroll. "But perhaps you do not know that my brother-in-law has acknowledged that he plans a journey to the—ah—the place where I buy the stock for the shop! You did not know that? But you will see at once that it is unthinkable! It is horrible to contemplate! It would be ruinous! My sister is distracted!"

Harrison raised his eyebrows.

"I'm sorry that she feels badly," he said as soothingly as he could, "but after all it's not my business!"

"The arrangements for my journeying," protested Dubois. "They are most delicate! The business connections I have made—they should be cherished with the greatest circumspection! If the nature of our operations should become known, either here or—or at the other end, the result would be disaster!"

"More likely disbelief," said Harrison. "Nobody's likely to

credit the truth even if they hear it. They'll never guess it!"

Dubois waved trembling hands.

"I do not argue, *m'sieur*. I do not dispute. But I plead with you to help us avoid ruin! M. Carroll must not make this journey!"

"But it isn't any of my business!" protested Harrison. "There's nothing I can do about the plans Carroll makes! I've no influence."

"But you have, *m'sieur*! You are not being candid! He has spoken to Madame Carroll about you! He wishes her to treat you with distinction. He has commanded it! *M'sieur*, you do not realize the enormity M. Carroll has already committed, and who can tell what other enormity he plans?"

Harrison said nothing. Dubois mopped his forehead.

"*M'sieur*, he has withdrawn from the bank almost a fifth of the accumulated profits of the business! He has withdrawn money from the bank! My sister has now removed the rest and placed it where he cannot lay hands upon it, but *m'sieur*, if he will do this—" Dubois seemed about to strangle. "You should see my sister! She is pitiable! I almost fear for her reason! *Mon Dieu*, one is frightened by the violence of her suffering!"

Harrison rephrased the information in his own fashion. M. Dubois had been led by the nose through all his life by the tantrums of his sister, until he could imagine no more terrible an event than another tantrum. It was understandable that she would not want Carroll to travel where her brother had stolidly ventured. But it was certain that the worst of all possible crimes was the removal of money from where Madame Carroll controlled it, to any place or person where she did not.

"Still," said Harrison, "I don't see what I can do."

M. Dubois wept. Literally, he wept. Madame Carroll must have terrified him all the way down to his toes.

"*M'sieur*, use your influence with him! My sister, in her despair, authorizes me to promise that it will be to your advantage. I open myself to you! I fear for my sister's reason if M. Carroll carries out his insane plan! Therefore, I speak of *Ma'mselle* Valerie! It has always been my sister's ardent desire to place her in a situation of security, with a substantial fortune so that she can live happily. M. Carroll has placed that desire in extreme danger! He has taken a fifth of the profits of the shop! He has, in effect, robbed *Ma'mselle* Valerie of a fifth of the fortune she should inherit from my sister! Do you comprehend my meaning?"

"No," said Harrison.

"*Ma'mselle* Valerie is the most charming of girls," said Dubois imploringly. "She is virtuous, she is intelligent, she is affectionate. She will be my sister's heiress. And my sister is convinced that with tact and gentle persuasion she could be induced to consent to a marriage which—"

Harrison started.

"Which would have the most favorable of financial prospects," said Dubois desperately. "All that is required is that you persuade M. Carroll to abandon his mad project, return the money he has taken, and let things go on exactly as they were before! Nothing more than that, *m'sieur!* And you will be established for life!"

Harrison counted ten. He didn't even bother to think of the fact that Dubois simply proposed that if he obeyed Madame Carroll implicitly in this and all other matters for the rest of his life, she might—might!—leave him some money and in addition would promote an arrangement that he and Valerie had already concluded on their own. It was almost humorous, but not quite.

"I will have to consider it," he said. He didn't want to send Dubois back to his sister with news that would infuriate her more. So he said, "I would have to talk to Carroll and find out how determined he is. I would have to— Let it rest for the time being, M. Dubois! We will talk of it later."

M. Dubois argued vehemently. Presently he rose to leave.

"Let me tell you, *m'sieur,*" he said desperately, "My sister is distressed to distraction! I fear for her health if M. Carroll should proceed with this ill-advised action. Even more, I fear—"

But then he stopped short as if he'd clapped his own hand across his mouth. He went away, confused. And Harrison realized that he was genuinely frightened. He hadn't the imagination to see the hair-raising possibilities that Harrison and Carroll and Pepe saw, alone among the human population of earth. But he was frightened. And Harrison suddenly realized that Dubois was actually scared by his guess of what Madame Carroll might do if her husband—Carroll—did use the money due him for the use of his time-tunnel for his own purposes. It is commonplace among the students of homicide that murders are committed more often over money than for any other motive. It is also a commonplace that the amount of money involved may be trivial. To Madame Carroll, the money earned by Carroll, Dubois et Cie was the object of passion as genuine if not as understandable as that of a jealous

woman. She was capable of a crime of passion—over money.

So Harrison distastefully prepared to make another bus-trip to St. Jean-sur-Seine. He'd have to warn Carroll. He'd have to make Valerie understand . . .

But still something had to be done about de Bassompierre, back in the days of Napoleon Buonaparte! Something definitely had to be done! His activities could only be allowed to go on if one believed that the cosmos did not make sense; that there was no particular point in civilization, and that the human race didn't matter because it was only an accident, undesigned and without significance.

There have always been people believing this and earnestly laboring to create a state of things humanity could not survive. There will probably always be such people. Clearly, however, if they are wrong they won't succeed. If people are important, it has been arranged for them to survive. If the cosmos is designed for them to live in it, there must be some safety device built into it to prevent their extermination.

It didn't appear, though, that Harrison and Carroll and Pepe, and Madame Carroll and Valerie and M. Dubois together amounted to anything so important.

Quite the contrary.

5

The world rolled sedately upon its axis, and tides ebbed and flowed, and barometric highs produced winds flowing clockwise about their center in the Northern hemisphere, and counter-clockwise in the Southern. There were people who casually mentioned coriolis forces in connection with this subject. There were minor temblors in various places, and the people supposed to know about them explained that tectonic adjustments were their cause. There were forest-fires and forestry officials explained that the woodland floors had lacked humidity, and there were droughts and people spoke with exactness of water-tables and floods, when there was sure to be an authority on the subject to discourse on abnormal precipitation in terms of inches of rain-fall or acre-feet of run-off. But these were natural phenomena, about which it is always possible to speak with understanding and precision.

The Chinese, however, exploded an atomic bomb, and a spy-plane was shot down over Western Europe, and a U.S. anti-submarine force, having located a foreign submarine in Caribbean waters, zestfully practised trailing it in spite of its evasive tactics. They stayed over it—where they could have dropped depth-bombs if they'd wanted to—for seventy-two hours hand-running. Then it surfaced angrily and the squadron leader of the hunter-killer unit solicitously asked if it was in need of assistance.

It was not possible to make exact statements about happenings like that. They were things that people did. Unreasonably. Irrationally. On what seemed to different people appropriate occasions. But what seems appropriate to humans isn't necessarily reasonable.

There was the fact, for example, that M. Dubois came gloomily to St. Jean-sur-Seine, carrying a very considerable number of very elaborate small bottles of perfume. The weather in St. Jean-sur-Seine was clear and mild. M. Dubois arrived on the last wheezing bus, nearly four hours after sunset. He trudged to the cottage in which Carroll endured the tedium of existence in a provincial small town with no alleviation whatever. Harrison and Carroll greeted him pleasantly. Tacitly, all argument was avoided. Carroll even cooked an omelet for his brother-in-law by way of refreshment. To be sure, M. Dubois took Harrison aside and asked him disturbedly if there were any chance of Carroll putting his money back in Madame Carroll's hands and abandoning his mad project of a journey into France *d'ans* 1804. Harrison said that the prospects were not yet good. Dubois sighed heavily.

The time was then well after midnight. Carroll went casually through the improvised doorway in the sitting-room and along the burrowed passage-way beyond. He came back to observe that rain fell heavily in St. Jean-sur-Seine in the year 1804 and it was deep night there, now.

M. Dubois went prosaically about his preparations. He was deliberate and took a good deal of time about it. Harrison went through the time-tunnel himself and stood for a moment upon the plank threshold between centuries. The then-intact, disused foundry resounded with the heavy drumming of rain upon its roof. The air smelled of wetness. The blackness of the night was unrelieved. Of course the foundry would be particularly dark, but in the time at this end of the tunnel there was nowhere outside of houses where there was any light whatever. On the entire continent of Europe there was no single room in which candles gave as much light as modern men considered a minimum for comfort.

Far away, over at the horizon, there was a dull rumble of thunder. If anything moved anywhere on the earth it might be a lumbering coach with twin candle-lanterns to cast a feeble glimmer before it. But nobody moved faster than five miles an hour—seven at the utmost—even in the daytime. At night three miles an hour was fast travelling. Especially

in rainy weather the overwhelming majority of people went home at sundown and stayed there.

Harrison returned to the dining room of the cottage. Uncomfortably, he looked out of a window and saw stars in the heavens. And even in St. Jean-sur-Seine, in modern times there were street lamps. Occasional buildings had lighted windows in them. Desolate and dreary as the little town was in the world of today, it was infinitely more liveable than the same town of nearly two centuries before. There had been much progress in how to do things. It was regrettable that there was less progress in knowledge of things worth doing.

Dubois, presently, would walk heavily through the home-made doorway. He would move through the tunnel which in feet and inches was of negligible length, but which had a difference of a hundred and sixty-odd years, some weeks, and a certain number of hours between its ends. He would come out where there was no cottage; where a ruined, disused cannon-foundry was not ruined but only disused, and where Napoleon was Emperor of the French and all the world waited for him to lead an armada of flat-bottomed boats in the invasion of England.

It was not reasonable for so remarkable an achievement as a time-tunnel to be used only to deliver exotic perfumery to Paris in which very few people bathed. It was not reasonable for the return-traffic to be ornamental snuff-boxes, out-of-date newspapers and flint-lock pistols to be used as paper-weights. The fate of Europe hung in the balance at one end of the time-tunnel, where Napoleon reigned. At the other end the survival of the human race was in question. The tunnel could have been used to adjust both situations. But it was actually used to keep a shop going.

M. Dubois packed his stock-in-trade into saddlebags under the eyes of Carroll and of Harrison. He had already changed to a costume suited to another time.

"I notice," said Carroll, in the tone of one who politely tries to make conversation, "that you specialize now. At first you carried an assortment of products through the tunnel. Now you seem to take only perfume."

M. Dubois said depressedly, yet with a certain pride:

"These perfumes have no competition where I market them. I have a business connection and it is mere routine to deliver these and collect for them. These are the most valuable objects I can transport with strict legality."

"Ah," said Carroll pleasantly, "then as a member of the firm I must be getting rich!"

Dubois said painedly:

"Madame, my sister, considers that if the business is permitted to go on as it has done, some security for one's old age should be possible. But only if the business goes on as it has!"

Carroll shook his head. Dubois strapped up the second saddlebag.

"Georges," said Carroll. "You are a very efficient man in your way. Granted that you have a particular correspondent in Paris, who buys all you take to him, you must have an arrangement with someone in St. Jean-sur-Seine for horses and so on. And they simply must consider you a smuggler! Has it occurred to you that some day they may decide to rob you? You couldn't very well protest. Not to Napoleon's police!"

Dubois said indignantly:

"But I do not deal with law-breakers! My arrangements are with persons of discretion and reputation!"

"But you wouldn't tell me who they are?"

M. Dubois looked appalled. He did not answer.

"My poor Georges!" said Carroll kindly. "My wife, your sister, rules us both intolerably! She sends you back to eighteen-four when you have not rested from your last journey! She is prostrated because I want to use some of my own well-earned money, and takes elaborate precautions so I cannot get so much more as would buy me Caporals! What do we get out of this slavery of ours?"

Dubois said with dignity:

"I do not bandy words with you. I do what is appropriate. What is estimable. I have great confidence in the judgment of my sister. Her advice has invariably been correct. And I find that so long as I behave with circumspection, following the ordinary rules of prudence, there is nothing to fear in an occasional journey to—ah—the place where I conduct business."

He picked up the two saddlebags.

"*M'sieur*," this was to Harrison, "I trust you will continue your discussions with M. Carroll and come to a desirable conclusion."

He opened the crude door in the dining room. As it opened, there was a flash of light from the farther end. A roll of thunder followed immediately. The muted sound of rain could be heard. Air came into the dining-room from the tunnel

and the year 1804. It was cool, wet air. It smelled of rain and green stuff and freshness.

"Georges," said Carroll, "is it wise for you to go out into such a storm?"

The sky outside the cottage was full of stars, but thunder again rumbled faintly through the time-tunnel.

"That," said Dubois reprovingly, "is one of the inconveniences of business. But no one will be about the streets. I should be well on my way before daybreak."

He went heavily into the time-tunnel, carrying his saddlebags. Carroll grimaced. When Dubois had vanished he said almost sympathetically:

"He is not altogether absurd, this brother-in-law of mine. Except with his sister, he is even valiant in his own way. If she had married a Landru, who would have cut her throat, or if he had married a woman able to defend him from my wife, he might have been a poet or a psychoanalyst or perhaps a driver of racing automobiles. Something foolish and satisfying, at any rate. But—"

He shrugged and closed the door through which Dubois had vanished. Harrison was struck, suddenly, by the extreme commonplaceness of the transportation system between eras. He stirred restlessly. One expects the remarkable to be accomplished by remarkable means, but nothing out of the ordinary was apparent in this room or in the tunnel itself. There was no complex array of scientific apparatus. There was an ordinary dipole switch outside, just beyond the door. It was turned on. There was a door, which when opened disclosed a crudely-dug opening into heaped-up earth. It looked like it might be an improvised vegetable cellar. There was a mass of rusty iron sticking out of the dug-away dirt at one place. That was all.

At the moment Dubois went through, there'd been a lightning-flash which certainly wasn't from the sky outside the cottage. But it was only a flicker of brightness in the untidy excavation. Afterward, there was only the lamp-light from the dining-room on the damp earth of the tunnel. Now, though the door was closed, there came the muted, almost completely muffled sound of thunder which did not originate in the twentieth century.

Harrison stirred again. He was moved to ask questions. Carroll had shown no particular pride in what might be called a time-tunnel. Having made it, he seemed to accept it as casually as a pot or pan or other item of domestic equipment. It was used to keep a shop supplied with articles

of commerce not otherwise available. It did not appear to matter to him that it should, if demonstrated, call for the redesign of the entire public view of what the universe was like.

Then Harrison suddenly realized a completely confusing fact. If Carroll did reveal his discovery of a process by which men of modern times could travel into the past, he might be much admired and he might contribute as much to human knowledge as was popularly credited to Einstein. But inevitably there would be other time-tunnels made. Inevitably, sooner or later someone would fail to consider the elastic limit of reality. Eventually somebody would change the past in a manner to modify the present. Ultimately, some modification would come about in which Carroll had not discovered how to make a time-tunnel.

Harrison tried to think it out. He arrived at pure frustration.

Suddenly there were sounds beyond the clumsy door. It pushed open. Harrison started to his feet. He was instantly convinced that somehow somebody from the past had stumbled on the tunnel-mouth and now came through it. Anything or anybody might appear.

But M. Dubois came back out of the tunnel. He carried the saddlebags, as before. But he also carried a mass of bundled-up cloths.

He looked at the fabric in his hand.

"I went," he said unhappily, "to the place where we arranged a door to the foundry that could be opened for our own use. I was about to open it and start on my journey when I stumbled on something that should not be there. This is it. I thought it wise to bring it into the light to look at it."

Carroll took the stuff from his hand. He spread it out. There was a pair of baggy corduroy trousers. They had been neatly folded. There was a blue sash. There was a red checked shirt. They were not garments worn by the lower orders in 1804. They were garments of the late twentieth century. They were, in fact, the clothes worn by the burglar named Albert when his fate was discussed in this same cottage's kitchen. But Dubois had brought them from the intact disused foundry of 1804.

Carroll swore. Harrison was alarmed. M. Dubois looked woodenly at the garments. Plainly, somebody had gone through the time-tunnel without authority. Somebody from the late twentieth century was loose in the early nineteenth.

That somebody was a small, reedy burglar named Albert. Anything—absolutely anything—could happen!

"Ah!" said Dubois. "These belonged to the burglar of the other day. He has somehow gone through the tunnel again. There he must have robbed someone else of clothing so he can mingle unnoticed by the people about him. My sister will be relieved."

"Relieved!" snorted Carroll. "Relieved!"

"My sister has been distressed," said Dubois, "that he might become drunk, tell strange things, and so draw attention to this house. Even attention is undesirable! But I have rented the foundry building, in 1804. I said that I wished it ultimately for the storage of grain. I can employ a watchman . . . I will see about it."

He picked up his saddlebags and moved to the clumsy door again. He went through it. This time he closed it behind him. Carroll stared after him.

"The cold-blooded—cold-blooded—" Carroll searched for a word which was strong enough. He burst out with it, "Business man! But my wife figured that one out! I said I was going through. She figured out a watchman to threaten me that I couldn't get back. So I wouldn't interfere with her damned shop-keeping! Damnation!"

Harrison said uneasily:

"But there is that poor devil of an Albert marooned yonder. What'll he do? And how did he get the nerve to go through the tunnel, anyhow? He must have done it while you were in Paris!"

"No doubt," said Carroll furiously, hardly paying any attention. "But my wife has got me really angry!"

He paced up and down the room, kicking furniture out of the way. Harrison went to the tunnel door, and hesitated, and went through again. It occurred to him that so casually to change from one era to another was only less ridiculous than to do it for no better reason than to peer into the blackness of the foundry and to listen to the falling rain.

He stood, carefully with the threshold-plank under his foot so he could not fail to find the way back again. The rain fell and fell and fell. There was no sound anywhere except falling water. Then a lightning flash and after it a peal of thunder, and presently a lightning flash again. It was a wet night. Rain water beat into the shuttered foundry in the most minute of mist drops. Somewhere out yonder Dubois trudged through the downpour in the stygian streets of St. Jean-sur-Seine of 1804. He was firmly intent upon the con-

duct of business with whatever law-abiding and reputable business men believed him a smuggler.

Then, above the drumming of the rain, there came the booming of a fire-arm. A voice shouted loudly:

"Thieves! Burglars! Assassins!"

There was another explosion. Harrison believed it the second barrel of a shot-gun. He was wrong. It was a second flint-lock pistol.

He stood still. It would not be discreet for a man in twentieth-century costume to join the neighbors who would throng to aid a fellow-citizen two centuries back in time. He had a momentary feeling of anxiety that Dubois might be involved. But that was not too likely. It would much more plausibly be Albert. If the small burglar had gone through the time-tunnel a second time, after being carried through it first by Carroll and being frightened horribly by the experience, he had probably made use of his professional experience. Certainly he'd abandoned his own garments as not suited for the times, and he'd undoubtedly stolen substitutes. He might be practising his profession for further aids to survival in a time which was not his own.

Nothing happened. Long, long minutes passed. Doubtless there were angry citizens helping a fellow-householder search for a burglar. Probably there was a humming of indignant talk. But Harrison heard nothing. The rain drowned out all lesser noises.

He stood still, listening, for what seemed an interminable period. In theory, he was aware that this was a remarkable experience. Albert or no Albert, here and sheltered in the disused and wholly intact foundry, he was surrounded by the France of Napoleon Buonaparte. Across the ocean Thomas Jefferson was still alive, and Robert Fulton had not yet assembled the inventions of other men to constitute a steamboat. In Hawaii admiring warriors still dined on enemies whose bravery in battle merited the tribute. The Great Auk was not yet extinct, and buffalo roamed the Great American Plains by the millions. Harrison realized that simply standing here was a startling thing to do.

But it was not very exciting. The rain poured down, drumming on the foundry roof. Astonishing as being here might be, it became tedious. Regardless of its splendid meaningfulness, nevertheless he was simply standing in the middle of the night, while rain fell in a perfectly ordinary fashion. And nothing happened.

He had actually turned to go back into the time-tunnel

when someone swore sharply in the disused foundry. The profanity was strictly modern French. The intonation said that somebody had barked his shin in the darkness and that he did not like it.

Harrison listened with all his ears. The rainfall drowned out minor noises. But more profanity came. Someone muttered peevishly.

Harrison said:

"Albert, if you want to get back where you came from, come this way."

Dead silence, save for the rainfall.

"A few nights ago," said Harrison conversationally, "I suggested to *M'sieur* Carroll that you be turned loose. I gave you some hundred-franc notes and advised you to get drunk. You did. Now if you want to get back where you came from—"

A voice said in astonishment:

"*Mon Dieu! C'est—Oui, m'sieur!* I very much want to get back!"

"Then come along," said Harrison. "You could get in a lot of trouble, staying here!"

He waited. He heard sounds, which he realized were Albert's approach. The small burglar stumbled, and Harrison spoke again to give him direction. Presently an outstretched hand touched Harrison. Albert drew in his breath sharply.

"Right!" said Harrison. "This way!"

He withdrew, and went through the area of giddiness and nausea. Then he went on into the dining room of the cottage. Albert came stumbling after him. He was soaked. Saturated. He'd been out in the rain storm in which Dubois travelled now.

"Carroll," said Harrison, "here's Albert again."

Carroll scowled. Albert said with an air of immense relief:

"*M'sieur*, I am like the false coin. I return. I express my regret that I am again a problem to you. And, *m'sieur*," he added gracefully to Harrison, "I congratulate you that I am a burglar and not an assassin. I could have knifed you in the dark. You should be more cautious. But I am grateful. I thank you."

Carroll growled:

"I thought you had enough of—beyond that tunnel! How the devil did you get back through it?" Then he said, "and why?"

The little man shrugged. He looked down at his costume. It did not fit him, but it had possessed a sort of *bourgeois*

splendor before it was saturated with the rain. The only thing that could be said for it now was that at a sufficient distance he would seem to be clothed for the early 1800's.

"There are your other clothes," said Carroll coldly. He pointed. "You won't want to be seen at this end of the tunnel in what you've got on. Change!"

Albert obediently began to strip off the elaborately be-frogged coat. There was a clanking, and coins rolled to the floor. They glistened gold. He looked fearfully at Harrison and Carroll. Neither stirred. He hastily picked up the coins.

"Better take a good look at them," growled Carroll. "They won't be easy to spend!"

The little burglar squinted. His mouth dropped open.

"But—*m'sieur!* These are not— There is the head of Napoleon, and there are the words "twenty francs" upon it, but—"

"Twenty francs gold," said Carroll, grunting again. "Before the franc was devalued. In money of today a gold napoleon is worth—hm—somewhere around twelve hundred depreciated paper francs. But you'll be asked where you got them."

Albert looked at him inquisitively.

"I'll buy them," said Carroll reluctantly.

"At what price, *m'sieur?*"

"Twelve hundred paper francs apiece," Carroll told him impatiently. To Harrison he said almost angrily: "They're stolen, but we can't send them back. And I'll need some gold-pieces presently! I didn't expect ever to become a receiver of stolen goods!"

"A most generous one, *M'sieur!*" said Albert profoundly. "It is a pleasure to do business with you!"

He counted the golden disks. There was a good double-handful. He put them in Carroll's hands and waited expectantly. Carroll counted them, in turn, and leafed out bills to a suitable total.

"How," asked Harrison, "did you get the nerve to go through that tunnel a second time?"

Albert tucked the modern currency away as he donned his present-day costume.

"I am a Frenchman, *m'sieur,*" he said firmly. "I had an experience which was impossible. But I had had it. So I said to myself, '*C'est n'pas logique!*' So it was necessary for me to learn if it was true. Therefore I repeated it. But then there were difficulties. I could not find my way back until the *m'sieur* here—" he bowed to Harrison—"called to me."

"You may go, this time," said Carroll sourly, "but don't come back again! Next time you'll be in real trouble!"

"*M'sieur,*" said Albert, "I shall not intrude again. But if you should need someone of my talents— It is a pleasure to deal with you!"

Harrison ushered him out and came back.

"I'll get the devil of a good lock," said Carroll, "and put it on that door! Maybe I'd better make the door stronger. I've no mind to be the sponsor of a crime-wave in St. Jean-sur-Seine in the time of Ybarra's great-great-grandfather!"

Harrison paced up and down the room.

"Things pile up," he said restlessly, "and we're getting nowhere fast!"

"My wife," said Carroll drily, "thinks I'm impractical. Maybe you do too. But we can't go hunting de Bassompierre in twentieth-century clothes! I've arranged for proper costumes. We have to wait for them. We'll need money of the period if we're to move about freely. I'm working on that, as you just observed. Also there's information about de Bassompierre. We need all we can get, if we're to persuade him to change his course of conduct and tell us where the other time-tunnel is. But still it's incredible that somebody else made another to the same period!"

Harrison stopped his pacing and opened his mouth to speak. Then he closed it and went back to restless stridings.

"You probably think," said Carroll evenly, "that I'm impractical about the time-tunnel itself. Why pick a hole like St. Jean-sur-Seine for my researches? Why bury myself here? Maybe you wonder why a supposedly sane man would marry the woman I did or how I came to be disgraced, discredited, despised in my profession?"

"I didn't mean—"

"I'll tell you," said Carroll with a fine air of candor. "I was stupid! I taught my classes that reality was the probability which had a numerical value of one. Remember? Then one day I overheard myself telling my students that time is the measure of things that change. And a little later I was astonished to hear myself say that an unchanging object is not affected by time."

"Yes-s-s-s," agreed Harrison. "That should be true."

Harrison's expression grew sardonic.

"It was a dogmatic statement," he said, "and I should have let that sleeping dogma lie. But I tried to test it experimentally. It looked like melted metal, solidified, would change at the moment it became solid. But if it wasn't

moved, wasn't stirred, wasn't bothered, it shouldn't change again. It should—. I spare you the details, but it should be possible to make what I've called a time-tunnel back from now—whenever that was—for the number of hours, minutes, seconds, and so on between 'now' and the freezing of the metal. The trouble was that when that distance in time was short—days or weeks or thereabouts—the tunnels were unstable. They might last milliseconds. They might not. To prove that they existed at all required very special equipment. Like a fool I wrote an article about it. Foolishly, they printed it in a learned magazine. And then I caught the devil!"

"And?"

"You needed very special equipment to prove my results. Nobody else had it. But they didn't need it to discredit me! If time-travel was possible, a man might go into the past and kill his grandfather—"

"I know that one," said Harrison. "Pepe—Ybarra, that is—sprang it on me. In theory, if a man went back in time and killed his grandfather, he wouldn't be born to do it."

"But facts," said Carroll stubbornly, "are facts! If he did it, it would be done! If he killed his grandfather, his grandfather would have been killed, impossible or not!" Then he said wryly, "Anyhow, nobody else had the equipment to try my experiments. But the reputation of a young girl is a lot harder to hurt than the reputation of a researcher! I was denounced as a liar, a faker, a forger—practically a murderer of my own grandfather. Professionally, I was ruined!"

"I'm—sorry," said Harrison.

"So am I," said Carroll. "Because I got mad. I resolved to prove I was right. My trouble was having a short time-length to work with. I needed a metal casting that had solidified a long while ago and had never been moved. By pure chance I heard that this foundry shut up shop so fast it left its last cannon in the mould. So I had to have that cannon, undisturbed. That meant I had to have this cottage. And—the woman who is now Madame Carroll had just inherited it!"

Harrison said:

"And you married her for it?"

"No. I'm not *that* big a fool. I tried to buy it. She kept trying to get the last franc out of me. I must have acted rich. I offered twice its value and she asked three times. I agreed to three times and she demanded four. I fretted. I was taken ill. And she nursed me. Maybe she hoped to find out how far I'd go from hearing my delirium! Anyhow, one day

the *maire* came to my room wearing his sash of office. And he married us! I must have been delirious at the time! But there it was! When I recovered, there was the devil of a row! She'd married me for money, and I wanted to spend it on scientific experiments! Harrison, you wouldn't believe such rows could end without homicides! But I made the time-tunnel, of nearly two centuries' reach. And it is stable! It can last forever! But—do you see the charming, ironic fact?"

"No-o-o. . . ."

"I found out that the past can be changed, and therefore the present, but there is no conceivable way to know what change will produce what result! I daren't use it, Harrison, not even to regain my reputation! It's too dangerous to be used by anybody but shopkeepers like my wife and *M'sieur Dubois!*"

Carroll grimaced.

"So I let them use it for a shop's supply of curios! I was a fool, but you can't say I wasn't practical, turning a means of time-travel into a shopkeeper's supply of back-number newspapers and similar oddments!"

He strode out of the room. Harrison looked after him. He felt singularly helpless. He was.

For the next three days he was acutely uncomfortable. He did not think it wise to write to Valerie because Madame Carroll would read the letter. He had to wait without being sure what he waited for. Once, half-heartedly, he tried to inform himself about the France he would presently visit. He learned that in 1804 handkerchiefs were not carried for the utilitarian purposes of more recent times. Smoking was practised, but snuff was more elegant. The reputations of many of the members of the Imperial court—including the Imperial family—were approximately those of domestic animals. And he learned that the sanitary arrangements in cities of the first decade of the 1800's were not primitive. They were non-existent.

He was waked on the third night after Dubois' departure. There was a terrific pounding on the home-made door to the time-tunnel. Carroll was there before him, unfastening the elaborate lock he'd installed the day after Albert's reappearance.

He opened the door. A sneeze came through it. Another sneeze. Strangling coughs. A moan.

M. Dubois came feebly into the cottage dining room from the year 1804. His eyes watered. His nose ran. He was half-

starved and disreputably dirty, and he had a fever of thirty-eight degrees centigrade. Between coughs, sneezes, and moans of despair he confided to Carroll that he had been continually soaked to the skin for the past three days; that his horse had been stolen, and that his saddlebags with their precious contents of high-priced perfume were buried at the foot of a large tree a kilometer down-stream from a bridge beyond the village of St. Fiacre on the way to Paris.

Carroll gave him hot rum-and-water and got him into dry clothing. He put the plump little man to bed, where he moaned and wheezed and coughed himself into exhausted sleep.

Pepe Ybarra arrived next morning with the costumes and forged identity-papers and other documents to be filled in as the occasion demanded. He had a certain quantity of counterfeit *assignats*—authentic ones were too ancient to have a chance of passing unquestioned—and a note for Harrison from Valerie. The note was not remarkable at its beginning, but Harrison read the last page with enormous apprehension.

Valerie mentioned as a curious experience that she was in the shop, quite alone, when she felt oddly giddy for a moment. Then it seemed to her that the shop was strange. It was not the shop of Carroll, Dubois et Cie at all, but a place where pots and pans were on sale for housewives. And she was there to purchase something. She was not astonished. It seemed quite natural. Then she heard someone—perhaps the shop-keeper—moving in the back room as if to come and wait on her. She waited to be waited on. And then she felt the giddiness again and she was once more in her aunt's place of business and everything was as it should be. Then she was astounded. But she said that she had felt much *ennui* and undoubtedly had dozed for a moment and this peculiar dream was the result. It was the more singular because Harrison was not in it. She did not even think of him in it. He was, she confessed, present in most of her more ordinary dreams.

He went frantically to Carroll. Valerie had evidently had an experience like the one they'd shared, when he was convinced there'd never been a Maximilian, and Pepe had been sure there'd been four emperors of Mexico. The happening was pointless, and so was Valerie's, but there'd been a moment when she did not think of him! There'd been a temporary, substitute present in which she'd never met him! It could be a present in which he'd never been born! Something had to be done! This crazy de Bassompierre was trying to change past history! He was succeeding! At any

moment another such thing might happen, and Carroll could talk all he pleased about history's modulus of elasticity and claim that events could be changed and of their own nature change back again. But there was also such a thing as an elastic limit! If the past were changed enough, it would stay changed! Something had to be done!

It was pure coincidence, of course, but while Harrison protested in a frenzy of apprehension, some eight thousand miles away the mainland Chinese exploded a second atomic bomb. It appeared that they intended a series of such explosions, by which they'd acquire the experience to make them equal to the other atom-armed nations in their ability to make earth uninhabitable.

Naturally, this was inconsistent with the theory that the cosmos was designed for people to live in, and therefore nothing would happen to stop them from doing it. This seemed to imply that humans didn't count; everything was chance; that the cosmos did not make sense, after all.

Which was deplorable.

6

Carroll made a definitely handsome figure in the costume of a well-to-do traveller in the France of an earlier time. He did not seem as ornamental as Harrison expected, but that was because he wore travelling-clothes. There were hessian-cloth breeches and high boots, and he wore an enormous cloak and a three-cornered hat. He didn't wear a periwig; such things went out of style during the 1790's. But he was impressive enough so that Harrison felt a little less foolish in his own get-up. He decided that nobody would look at him while Carroll was around.

Pepe, in a sports costume strictly of the present, regarded the two of them with uneasy eyes.

"I don't like this business of you going to Paris and me staying behind!" he said bitterly. "After all, it's my great-great-grandparents who're in Paris! And if anything happens—"

"Look!" said Harrison, fiercely. "Valerie went through a temporarily changed present—a time-shift—like we did. And in it there wasn't any shop of Carroll, Dubois et Cie! It was a pots-and-pans shop! And Valerie'd never met me! She didn't know I existed! Maybe I didn't! The normal past came back to her, as it did to us, but I can't have that sort of thing happening! We've got to get to Paris and find de Bassompierre! Fast!"

"But my great-great—"

"Dammit!" snapped Harrison. "If anything happened to your great-great-grandfather you'd never have existed and you wouldn't have spotted that shop and I'd never have seen Valerie again! I'll take better care of your great-great-grandfather than you would! But we can't waste time! We've lost enough waiting for these clothes!"

There came a knock on the outside door of the cottage. There should be no callers here. Pepe jumped. Carroll said irritably:

"My wife can't have gotten here this soon! Answer the door, Ybarra, and get rid of whoever's there."

Pepe went uneasily into the next room. Harrison drew a deep breath. He was feverishly anxious to start the search for de Bassompierre and the rival time-tunnel which obviously wasn't being used with proper regard to the elastic limits of history. It must be that de Bassompierre didn't realize the damage he was doing and the destruction he must cause, by passing out twentieth-century information in the early nineteenth. A reasoned explanation would certainly make him stop. Harrison was prepared to make any imaginable bargain as an inducement.

He heard the door open in the other room. There was a murmur of voices. Pepe tried to dismiss someone. That someone objected. Pepe was impatient. The someone else was firm. The door closed. Two sets of footsteps sounded inside. Pepe said, from the other room:

"Stay here! I will speak to M. Carroll—"

The voice of Albert the burglar said respectfully:

"Say that Albert needs most urgently to make a proposal of interest to him."

Carroll raised his eyebrows. He said angrily:

"Bring him in, Ybarra!"

Pepe came in, excessively uneasy. Behind him marched the reedy small burglar. He carried a parcel wrapped in newspaper and tied with string. His eyes widened as he saw Carroll's attire. He beamed when he saw Harrison similarly clad.

"What the devil do you want?" demanded Carroll.

"*M'sieur*," said Albert politely, "I came to make a proposal. Beyond that door I had an experience which you know about. I made a splendid haul, of which you are aware. You, *m'sieur*, purchased some small things I brought back. *N'est-ce pas?*"

"I told you not to come back here again!" snapped Carroll.

"But *m'sieur*," protested Albert. "It is a matter of business!"

You cannot dream how primitive, how foolish are the locks of the citizens of—beyond that doorway! It would be ridiculous to abandon such an opportunity! So I have come, *m'sieur*, to propose a business arrangement. Let us say that I can acquire more such coins as you purchased for twelve hundred francs each. I will sell them to you for six hundred francs each! All I ask is the use of your doorway—did you call it a tunnel?—to pass through and after a suitable interval to return through! You evidently plan to make a journey yourselves. I am prepared for a journey also. Behold!”

He opened the newspaper-wrapped parcel. He spread out a costume of the very early eighteen hundreds. It was not the apparel of a rich man. It was not even the costume of a *bourgeois*. It was what a servant would wear. A lackey. Albert held it up with pride.

“There is no *costumier* in St. Jean-sur-Seine,” he confided. “So I took a bus. Last night I examined the stock of a business supplying costumes to actors and persons attending fancy-dress balls. I chose this. Before, I could not move about freely at the other end of the tunnel. I was not clothed to pass unnoticed. But I observed from hiding. This is suitable. This is perfection! Now, *m'sieur*, I am prepared! It remains only to conclude an arrangement with you!”

There was silence. Carroll swore. Then Harrison spoke urgently, willing to make any sort of settlement that would get things in motion.

“We considered,” he said impatiently, “that we ought to have a servant, but we couldn't imagine one. Maybe Albert would be willing to postpone his—professional activities to help us for a few days. He could—er—look over the ground. If he would play the part of a lackey for a few days—”

He made a hurried mental reservation, of course, that Albert would be rewarded for his efforts, but that his proposal for transportation to and from a life of crime in Napoleonic France would not actually be accepted. Harrison had fretted himself into a fever for haste, while waiting for the clothes he now wore. He wanted to get moving.

“Hm,” said Carroll drily. “That's an idea! And he has his own wardrobe, too!” He said formidably to Albert: “Will you play the part of a lackey for M. Harrison and me and pledge your word not to steal from us for—say—three days? We will pay you, of course. But you will not rob us—”

“Not conceivably, *m'sieur*!” protested Albert.

“And at the end of three days we will decide whether or

not you can be trusted. Then we will make some arrangement, but I do not promise what it will be!"

"We begin at once?" asked Albert hopefully.

"At once," agreed Carroll.

Albert instantly stripped off baggy corduroy trousers, a blue sash, and a red-checked shirt. He put on the costume from the newspaper parcel. He began to transfer a series of small metal objects—like thin files turned into varied button-hooks—to his newly-donned clothing.

"Wait!" said Harrison. "Those are pick-locks, aren't they? You'd better leave them behind!"

"But *m'sieur!*" protested Albert, "I would feel unclothed without them!"

Carroll said tolerantly:

"Let them go, so long as he doesn't use them."

"*Alors!*" said Albert briskly. "I am ready!" He regarded the saddlebags lying on the floor. They were obviously Harrison's and Carroll's baggage for a trip into the past. He pointed to them and said, "*Messieurs?*"

Carroll nodded. He stood. Harrison shook his unfamiliar cloak to a more tidy arrangement. He felt absurd, clothed like this. But he wanted to make haste.

"Keep the door locked," said Carroll, "and don't let anybody through but us. I'm taking a chance on Albert, but nevertheless—"

Pepe looked extremely unhappy. Carroll opened the door. Albert festooned himself with saddlebags with a professional sort of air. Carroll went through the door first. Harrison followed, and after him came Albert with his burdens. There was the wrenching discomfort and giddiness of time-translation in the tunnel. They arrived in the resonant emptiness of the disused foundry. It was night. Very far away, a cock crowed. There was no other sound in the town of St. Jean-sur-Seine in the year 1804.

Albert said softly:

"*Messieurs*, I know the way to the door you established."

Carroll grunted for him to lead. They followed, stumbling. They went past the huge, cold brick furnaces which were but the vaguest of objects inside the building. Harrison heard the saddlebags brushing against what was probably a giant, man-handled bellows. A turn. Another turn. Albert said:

"Here, *messieurs!*"

A hinge squeaked. There was a slightly lesser darkness ahead. Albert went through. He waited for them. As Carroll came through last, Albert murmured admiringly:

"An excellent idea, that door! It cannot be detected from outside! Now—we go to Paris? You wish post-horses?"

"Naturally," said Carroll. He added: "We were landed from a boat, you understand."

"*Mais non!*" protested Albert. "I have listened to many conversations! You travelled by carriage, *messieurs*, and it broke down. So your driver departed to secure aid, and you reason naturally enough that he had gone to assemble brigands to rob and murder you. So when he had gone you came on to St. Jean-sur-Seine, and you proceed toward Paris. That is most probable!"

"Very well," agreed Carroll. "That's the story."

"*Allons!*" said Albert gaily.

They went along the unpaved street. Dark structures rose about them. Harrison continued to feel the need for haste. It did occur to him to wonder how Albert could take so calmly—after reflection—the utterly preposterous fact that there were two St. Jean-sur-Seines, remarkably similar in the streets and buildings that dated back for centuries, yet thoroughly different in all other respects. But he couldn't make any satisfying guess about Albert.

He stumbled. The street was not only unpaved, it was rough. He became aware of smells. They were noisome. They turned a corner. They went past a particularly redolent compost heap, doubtless prized by the man to whom it belonged. There was a small, flickering, yellowish glow some distance ahead.

"There is the inn," said Albert. "You may recognize it. The money is kept in a wooden shoe behind a cheese. Or it was."

They went on until they saw a whiskered man in an apron, dozing over what might be a counter. One candle vaguely illuminated the room in which he napped. The smell of wine was strong.

"Holloa!" said Albert briskly. "Up! Up! You have customers! We demand three horses, immediately!"

There followed confusion, beginning with the half-awake whiskered man, who was truculent until he saw the majestic appearance of Carroll and Harrison in their flowing cloaks. He shouted, and presently a hostler appeared, and then another, and another. There was argument. Debate. Bargaining. Harrison grew unbearably impatient. The innkeeper waved his arms. Albert spoke confidentially to him.

Horses appeared. There was more argument. Then the three of them were mounted. They trotted away through the narrow, abysmally dark streets. There were no lights anywhere. St. Jean-sur-Seine could have been a town of mausoleums for any sign of life it displayed except that twice, as the horses moved through the blackness, there were scurrings as of mice, only larger. They would be rats. There were smells. Incredible smells. It was a very great relief to get out of the town and to open country.

Harrison relaxed a little. He'd been impatient to get into the time where the destruction of all he knew was in process of arrangement. Now he wanted feverishly to get to work upon those eccentricities of the time-space continuum which nobody knew about or could be convinced of aside from himself and Carroll and Pepe and perhaps Albert the burglar. It had seemed urgently necessary to get into clothes that wouldn't draw attention and start to do something about the most appalling possibility the human race had ever faced. He had the clothing. He moved toward the action. Now he wanted to know what that action would be. Then he'd be impatient to start it.

He raised the question of how they could make de Bassompierre cooperate, even to the collapsing of the other tunnel. How—?

"I don't know!" said Carroll. "I've got a sort of *dossier* on him. Bourriene—Napoleon's secretary—mentioned him as a scoundrel who used perfume as lavishly as Napoleon himself, but added that he still stank in decent men's nostrils. Fouché—the secret police minister—used him but didn't trust him. Cambacières the consul despised him and even Savary would have nothing to do with him. Madame d'Epinay said he was a perfumed villain and Madame de Staël wouldn't let him in her house. And they were pretty tolerant people, too!"

"It looks," said Harrison, discouraged, "like he's a pretty low specimen!"

"You have a certain gift for understatement, Harrison," said Carroll. "But this whole thing is bad! My damned tunnel should never have been made! Before that, I shouldn't have lectured. When I contrived some interesting theories I should have kept them to myself instead of spouting them to young and eager minds, among which yours must be included, though you didn't make a time-tunnel and somebody else did. I made a fool of myself and I may have brought the ultimate

disaster on the human race. And my only alibi is that I didn't mean to do it."

Harrison said in alarm:

"But you haven't given up hope?"

"The devil, no!" said Carroll. "I've been storing up information that might be useful. Now that we're starting out though, I have to figure out how to use it. I suggest that you let me!"

Harrison fell uneasily silent. The three horses went on through the night. The stars were few and very faint. A mistiness in the air made the Milky Way invisible. The ground on either side was abysmally dark. Where trees overhung the road—and France of this period had many more trees than it would have later—the blackness was absolute.

He racked his brains. He'd been doing little else for days, pending the arrival of suitable garments for a journey back in time. All his ideas were stale.

He tried to see things from a new viewpoint. After all, he'd been in normal time when he tried to think before, and there was inevitably a certain abstract quality in his estimate of what was practical. This period couldn't seem entirely real.

Now, though, he rode through darkness. It was real blackness. His horse was a real horse. It plodded on doggedly through the night. He breathed the air of early nineteenth-century France. There were thirty millions of people about him, of whom not one would ever see Valerie's next birthday. They were actual people. They had innumerable hopes and fears and aspirations. They loved each other, and lied to each other and betrayed each other and made magnificent sacrifices for each other. They cherished their country, and they dodged its taxes, and they died for it very valiantly—and they were fortunate not to know as much of its future history as Harrison did.

They were particularly fortunate not to realize that presently, truly and actually, other persons would take their places and they would not be remembered any more, and those who succeeded them in this nation and on this continent and on this world would make exactly the same mistakes they had.

To know this, genuinely, would be intolerable. Harrison almost came to realize it, and hastily thrust the thought away. He rode on, brooding, and presently thought of Valerie. He resolutely kept his mind on her and avoided even attempts to

make plans for winning friends and influencing de Bas-sompierre.

Long, long hours later there was a grayness in the air, and presently the black shapes of trees were vaguely limned against it. Again presently they rode through a pre-dawn mistiness in which the trees and the roadway and all other objects appeared as ghostly, vaporous shapelessnesses, which took form and substance as they drew near, and when within yards were solid and real. But then as the horses plodded onward they became unsubstantial and ghostlike again, and vanished in the grayness left behind.

But Harrison's sense of frustration returned as the light grew brighter. He was tired, and he was impatient with himself because he felt commonplace fatigue upon the most desperately necessary enterprise in human history. It was also for Valerie, and therefore he should be superior to mere physical weariness. He remembered that he'd felt a certain scorn of Dubois when he returned wretched and wheezing from sad adventure in the rain now ended. Now he felt some scorn of himself.

Dubois had ridden his horse off a flooded-over bridge some distance beyond the village of St. Fiacre. He'd managed to get ashore while his horse went splashing down-stream. He'd followed it down the stream-bank, and managed to catch it as it came ashore, just in time to hide from some remarkably rough-looking characters who'd also seen it swimming and were hunting for it too. They began to search interestedly for it, and Dubois slipped off the saddlebags and drove the animal out to where they could find it without finding him as well. The horse satisfied them. They caught it and went off with it, doubtless to sell it. And Dubois hid the saddlebags and trudged back to the foundry, wheezing and developing a chest-cold on the way.

There were chickens cackling, off in the mist.

"That'll be a village. St. Fiacre, most likely," said Harrison restlessly. "I suppose we'll stop to eat."

"Naturally," said Carroll. He yawned. "I've been thinking of my sins. Thinking of breakfast will be a welcome change."

An angular shape appeared at the side of the road. It was a house. Another. And another. They were suddenly in a village, whose houses were characterless and dismal. It was a small place; there could hardly be a hundred houses altogether. But there were more than a hundred smells.

Harrison suddenly thought of another frustration that was possible. He said:

"I just thought of a complication. Albert has no papers. Maybe they'll be asked for. The police of this time are inquisitive."

Carroll grunted. He turned in his saddle and looked at Albert. Albert was unalarmed. He turned back.

"We'll worry about it after breakfast."

They drew rein at the village inn. The fact that it was an inn was made evident by the combined smell of wine, cooking, smoke, and of the stable attached to it. Albert leaped to the ground. He took charge with a fine assurance. He bustled here and there, commanding this service and that for Harrison and Carroll. Once, as he passed close by Harrison, he observed zestfully:

"C'est comme les films!"

They breakfasted, which in this area was more than rolls and coffee. They had eggs, fresh. Meat, not fresh. The bread was coarse. There was no coffee at all, which was a result of the subsisting war with England. Obviously coffee and sugar and colonial products generally were in short supply.

Albert's voice raised in a fine, infuriated tone. This inn, like the one in St. Jean-sur-Seine, was a post-house. Horses were to be had. There was a document that travellers by post should carry, but Albert quarrelled so shrilly over the animals offered that the question did not come up.

Presently, fed, they rode on. The morning mist dissolved away and sunshine played upon the trees and roadway. To someone acquainted with France of a later date, the amount of uncultivated land was astonishing. Presently Carroll said drily:

"Albert, you saw me about to pay for my breakfast with a gold napoleon. You slipped smaller coins into my hand."

"The innkeeper could not have made change, *m'sieur*," said Albert discreetly. "I thought you would not wish a long discussion, and I—happened to have coins such as he would expect. You can repay me at your leisure, *m'sieur*."

Harrison frowned. Carroll grunted. After a hundred yards or so he asked:

"Do you happen to have identity papers now, Albert?"

"But yes, *m'sieur*."

Harrison said hotly:

"Look here, Carroll! Albert will be making changes in the course of future events all along our route! He's stolen identity-papers and he undoubtedly robbed the inn-keeper! I know you say history isn't easily upset, and we're going after somebody working at it deliberately! But if this keeps up—"

"It is not important," said Carroll, "that every small detail in a given time be left undisturbed by travellers from another period, like ourselves. The important thing is that nothing inconsistent with the time takes place. And to travel in France of this year with a completely honest servant . . . It could smash the Empire!"

Harrison found the statement irritating. He was filled with anxiety about Valerie and his own future and the existence of everything he'd ever known. He was bound rather splendidly upon the rescue of Valerie from danger. Most men imagine deeds of derring-do to be performed for the girls they happen at that time to adore. But Harrison could not satisfy himself with dreams. He really did have to perform the most remarkable feat that history would never record. He had to change the past so the time he considered the present would return to a proper stability. Such a feat seemed highly abstract, but it had to be accomplished in a world of plodding post-horses and malodorous towns, and upstart scheming emperors and grandiose proclamations and—in short—in a world of very unsatisfactory reality.

They rode, and rode. Presently Carroll said:

"There's supposed to be a bridge somewhere near here."

Almost as he spoke the unpaved highway turned, and there was the bridge. It was not an impressive one. It was made of roughly squared timbers with pit-sawed planks for a road. Some of the planks had floated away in an obviously recent flooding. With a foot of water over it, any horse could be expected to get into trouble when crossing it.

"To the left, downstream, and perhaps a kilometer," said Carroll, "there ought to be a large tree beside the stream with a lightning-gash down its trunk."

They picked their way off the highway beside the stream. The water had been higher. The stream meandered. Some distance down it there was a drowned pig, already swollen, caught in the brushwood near the water. Beyond that place a man of distinctly unprepossessing appearance gazed at

them from the stream's other side. He pushed bushes away and vanished when he saw that he was observed.

There appeared a huge tree, taller than its fellows. It almost leaned over the stream and there was a long slash down its trunk, where lightning had run downward under the bark and turned the sap to steam.

"This should be it," observed Carroll. He reined in.

Albert said helpfully:

"*M'sieur*, would it be that something is hidden here?"

"It would," agreed Carroll.

Albert dismounted. He delicately plucked a leaf from the ground. He held it up.

"There is mud on the top side of this," he pointed out. "The *m'sieur* who hid something here does not know how to strew leaves over a hidden thing. The mud should always be underneath."

He scratched away at dirt under a layer of dropped leaves. The dirt was soft. He plunged his hand down into the loose stuff. He tugged. He brought out two saddlebags and brushed them off. He offered them to Carroll.

"You can carry them," said Carroll.

Albert re-mounted. He listened suddenly.

"I trust," he observed, "that the *messieurs* have pistols. It seems that persons approach with stealth."

Carroll grunted. He took out two over-sized flint-lock pistols and examined them carefully.

"Do you know how to check a priming, Harrison?" he asked. "If not, lift the frizzen and squint to see if the priming powder's still there."

He demonstrated. Harrison looked at his own two weapons. He felt some indignation about this irrelevant emergency. It was absurd to be in danger from brigands when the future of all the world was in danger and only he and Carroll were doing anything practical about it. It was ridiculous!

"I," said Albert, "have no pistols. So I will depart now."

He rode toward the highway, looking behind him. Carroll grunted:

"There's one of them!"

He swung his horse about and spurred it. It bounded forward, toward a figure which had believed itself creeping unnoticed toward him. Harrison dashed in his wake. A man leaped up and fled to one side, howling in terror. Harrison saw another to the left in the act of lifting a heavy musket

to bear upon Carroll. Harrison plunged at him, shouting angrily:

"Watch out, Carroll!"

"Coming!" said Carroll.

On the instant the musket boomed thunderously. The man who'd fired it raised it frantically for use as a club when Harrison bore down on him. Harrison leaned far forward and thrust his pistol-muzzle forward like a stabbing weapon. He pulled trigger and was deafened by the roar. He heard Carroll fire.

Then the two horses, made uncontrollable by terror, plunged madly through the underbrush toward the road from which they'd come. There was a mighty thrashing ahead of them. They overtook Albert and Harrison struggled to get his mount in hand. He succeeded just as they broke out of the brush at the roadside.

Strangely, there was little comment when they had rejoined each other. Harrison was unhappy. He rode beside Carroll without speaking until after they'd crossed the bridge with due care for the missing planks. Then Carroll said:

"We may as well trot our horses for a while."

And as the animals moved more swiftly, Harrison said:

"I poked my pistol at that character until it almost touched him. I wanted to be sure he wasn't killed. He might be somebody's great-great-grandfather."

Then he was suddenly sick. A man of modern times is not accustomed to death and destruction on a small scale. He thinks with composure of atomic war, and he is not disturbed by the statistic of so many tens of thousands of persons killed each year by automobiles. But it is unnerving to think of having used a pistol on a brigand to keep from being murdered by him. That is not part of the pattern of existence in the latter part of the twentieth century.

They rode on, and on. Presently they let their horses drop back to a steady, purposeful walk. Harrison said painfully:

"We'd better reload our pistols."

He managed his own, clumsily, more by theory than any actual knowledge of the art. From somewhere in the depths of his mind he recalled that the charge for a muzzle-loader was enough powder to cover the ball held ready in the palm of one's hand. They had powder and ball and coarse paper patches, carried as part of the authentic cos-

tume of the time. They reloaded as they rode. They overtook an ox-car heading as they were headed.

"How far to Paris?" asked Harrison when it had been left behind.

"Dubois makes it in a day and a night," said Carroll.

Harrison went on gloomily. What savor of adventure this journey might have possessed was gone now. Men had matter-of-factly intended to kill him for what possessions he carried with him. It was not a glamorous affair. From now on, Harrison would regard this enterprise as something to be accomplished for the benefit of two people who would presently be Mr. and Mrs. Harrison. It was no longer splendid and romantic. It was something that had to be done. Grimly.

It was very late when Paris appeared before them. Its buildings made a jagged edge to the horizon on ahead. Harrison said:

"I've thought of a possible way to find de Bassompierre."

Carroll turned his head. Harrison explained. M. Dubois might have thought of it, if he'd needed to discover somebody from the world of Madame Carroll who'd been translated back to the time of the Empress Josephine. It was quite commonplace.

"Try it, by all means," said Carroll. "I've got another approach. You try your way and I'll try mine."

Albert, riding subduedly in the rear, said:

"Pardon, *messieurs*. If I am informed of the purpose of your journey, it might be well . . . Perhaps I can find information which will serve you."

Carroll said:

"We want to find a man called de Bassompierre. We want to talk to him. If you should hear of such a person, it will be well worth your while."

"We will see, *m'sieur*," said Albert. "Have you a choice of an inn in the city yonder, and do you know where it is to be found?"

Carroll named the inn used by Dubois on his journeys to this extraordinary metropolis which gradually spread out to either side as they approached it.

Albert settled back in his saddle. Again Harrison wondered how Albert accounted to himself for the totally unimaginable world the time-tunnel had opened to him. But again he dismissed the question. The three horsemen rode forward into the Paris of 1804. Night fell before they quite reached it and they rode into a blackness more dense and

more abysmal than anywhere outside the city. There was smoke, to dim the stars. There were tall buildings, to channel movement within narrow, malodorous, winding canyons. Only occasionally did a candle burn in a lantern—more often glazed with horn than with glass—and there were only rare and widely separated moving lights carried by lackeys or burning faintly in lurching coaches to break the look of gloom and desolation.

It was coincidence, of course, but in a peculiarly simultaneous fashion, at just that moment in the latter part of the twentieth century, a supersonic passenger plane crossing the Arctic had its radio equipment go dead. Therefore it did not give the usual continuous advance notice of its identity, course, and speed. This would have caused no more than a precautionary alert, but—this was where the danger lay—a second plane's radio went out at the same instant. Radar immediately reported the suspicious fact of two supersonic objects without identification moving across the North Pole. The immediate consequence was a yellow alert. Then there came a third unfortunate report, of a possible contact with a surfacing submarine off the Atlantic coast of the United States.

Automatically, the situation developed in gravity. Strategic air-force planes, aloft with the weapons they were meant to carry, swerved from their rendezvous patterns and moved toward their assigned positions of maximum availability for counter-bombardment. If the unidentified objects over the Pole and the possible rocket-firing submarine were not completely explained within five minutes, there would be a condition red alert over all the Western Hemisphere. Counter-measures would begin. Warning was already transmitted to Europe. All the world was ready for that Armageddon which all the world wearily expected almost any day.

But in the inn in Paris, Harrison followed a candle-bearing inn servant to the rooms assigned to him and to Carroll. Albert followed with the saddlebags. It was Albert who suspiciously examined the beds. It was he who pointed out by the feeble candle-light that the beds were already inhabited. The candle-bearer was astonished that anybody would expect the beds of an inn to be free of insects.

Wearily, Harrison prepared to go to sleep on the floor.

The tense situation in the latter half of the twentieth century could provide, of course, conclusive evidence about whether the universe made sense or not. Obviously, if the cosmos was designed for human beings to live in, it would

have built-in safeguards so that human beings could continue to live in it. They would not be destroyed by an atomic war set off by accident—not if the universe was designed with meaning.

But on the other hand, if it didn't make sense; if all was chance and random happen-chance—

7

Next morning Harrison waked and breakfasted—badly, because there was no coffee—and presently set out upon a business errand. Paris of 1804 was a city of half a million people. It had no railroads. It had no police in any modern sense of the word. Save for certain particular avenues, its streets were unpaved. It had no street-lights; not electric, not gas, not oil, not even publicly provided candles. It was supplied with food by creaking, oilless farm-wagons, except for such foodstuff as came down the Seine by barge and was distributed in unbelievably clumsy carts. It had no potable water-supply. There were wells and cisterns and buckets, to be sure, but nobody who could help it ever drank water. The reason was that there was then no known objection to the use of wells for drowning puppies and the like, and most well-water was unwholesome in the extreme.

There were not even horse-drawn omnibusses in Paris. The city had no sewers. Its streets had no street-signs, because only a small part of the population could read or write, and signs would have been useless. In all its sprawling noisomeness there was not one water-tap, nor any way more convenient than flint and steel to make a fire. There was not one postage-stamp in all of France, and cotton cloth was practically unknown. All fabric was linen or wool or, rarely, silk. In all the world nobody had conceived of power which was not water-power or animal-power, save in

Holland where some folk got motion from the winds by wind mills. In all of France, though, every horse power of usable energy save water mills was provided by a horse, and only three people then alive had ever conceived of a steamship, and all of them were across the ocean in America.

It did not seem that such a city could exist in a cosmos in which human beings were intended to survive. Humans had invented cities, apparently, with something of the invincible wrong-headedness that in Harrison's own era had made them construct atomic bombs. It appeared that throughout all the ages mankind had tried zestfully to arrange for its own extinction. It was difficult to think of Paris as anything but a vast device for the development and propagation of diseases. The death-rate was unbelievable. Ignorance of sanitation was unimaginable. And in a city whose most aristocratic quarters swarmed with flies, the idea of filth-borne disease did not exist and the washing of one's face and body was done for cosmetic reasons only. Nobody—not even surgeons—dreamed of washing for any abstruse idea of cleanliness. The slums were like the dens of beasts, and their inhabitants took on much of the quality of their environment.

But even so, matters were better than in older times. There had been a time when it was said that Paris could be smelled down-wind for thirty leagues. Now it could hardly be detected for more than fifteen. But to Harrison the improvement was not noticeable.

He left the inn with Albert in his wake, carrying Dubois' saddlebags over his shoulder. Harrison saw the citizens of Paris going about their business. Some were sturdy and well-fed and complacent. Some looked hawklike and tense, which was a reasonable response to the state of things at that time. There were beggars. There were children performing the office of scavengers. Judging by their starveling look, it was not profitable occupation.

The two of them—Harrison and Albert—went almost wordlessly from the middle-middle-class quarter in which the inn operated, to an upper-middle-class section where no inns were to be seen. Here the people were better dressed. There were fewer beggars. Begging is not a paying proposition where people are well-to-do. There were stepping-stones at some of the corners. Presently they came to a wider street than usual. It had a cobblestone surface, which was remarkable.

"This," said Harrison over his shoulder—Albert followed respectfully behind him, as a servant should—"this is probably the street we are looking for."

"But yes, *m'sieur*," said Albert cheerfully. "Paris has changed much since I saw it last week, but I think this is the Boulevard des Italiens. The perfumer you look for should have his shop in that direction."

He waved his hand. Harrison accepted the direction. He turned, Albert following as before. A vast and stately coach, drawn by four horses, rolled and lumbered down the street. It was accompanied by outriders, servants in livery prepared to defend it against brigands in the rude environment outside the metropolis, or to force aside any traffic that got in the coach's way. There were other horsemen on the street. Hoofs clattered on the cobblestones. There was a sedan chair, occupied by a bearded man with lace at his collar. There was—

Harrison said suddenly:

"Albert, you just said that Paris has changed."

"Yes, *m'sieur*, it is very different indeed."

Harrison said with a sort of grim curiosity:

"How do you account for it? St. Jean-sur-Seine, on this side of M. Carroll's tunnel, is very different too. You must have some explanation for yourself!"

Albert was behind him, but somehow he knew that Albert shrugged.

"*M'sieur*, you know that I was a burglar by profession. I did not say that I had retired, save for strictly amateur moments. But I am professionally retired, *m'sieur*, and since I do not need to struggle for a competence any longer, I have adopted a hobby. The strangeness you speak of fits in admirably with it. If you think of explaining matters to me, I beg you not to do so."

Harrison blinked. He went on. Albert followed. A knot of perhaps a dozen cavalymen came down the street, their horses' hoofs clattering loudly. The uniforms of the cavalymen were ornate, but untidy and soiled. Evidently elaborate equipment was worn as service dress.

"When I retired, *m'sieur*," said Albert comfortably, "I resolved that I would change all I did not like about my life as a burglar. For success, you will comprehend, I had constantly to plan, to anticipate, to foresee. Nothing is more fatal to a burglar than to be surprised! One must anticipate everything!"

"I can see that," said Harrison. A bugle blew somewhere. No one paid any attention.

"So for my hobby in retirement," said Albert, "instead of avoiding surprises, I sought them! I became an *amateur*—a connoisseur of surprises! I began to live a life of adventure, such as the demands of my profession had forbidden. Each morning I would say to myself, 'Albert, at any instant absolutely anything is more than likely to happen!' And the thought was pleasing, but it was unfortunately not quite true. It is terribly difficult to arrange surprises for oneself! But when M. Carroll had once taken me through his tunnel—ah, I was terrified! But I forced myself to go through again. Whatever happened was bound to be a surprise! And so it was! I was surprised at the strange St. Jean-sur-Seine that I encountered. I was surprised at the costumes, at the inhabitants, when I could not return, when you called to me, when M. Carroll bought the gold-pieces I had acquired! Everything was astonishing! So long as I have no explanation for this *milieu, m'sieur*, I shall find surprises. I may say that it was surprising to find what is practically paradise for a competent burglar! I revel in all this, *M'sieur Harrison!* I would regret infinitely if I became able to anticipate events here, as one cannot help doing in St. Jean-sur-Seine the other side of M. Carroll's tunnel!"

Fifty yards ahead, a footman in livery held the heads of two horses. The livery was distinctive. Harrison had noted other uniformed servants, but all were distinctively French. This was different. Harrison was somehow reminded of the paintings of Goya. He guessed at a Spanish origin for the costume of this lackey.

"*M'sieur,*" said Albert behind him, "there is the perfumer's."

The held horses were in front of the perfumer's shop. Harrison nodded and walked ahead. He turned into the shop.

It was not an ordinary place of business. It looked like a drawing-room for the reception of persons of rank. There were carpets. There were paintings. There was statuary and there were silken hangings. But it was a shop, because a man in the costume of a well-to-do *bourgeois* listened patiently while a dark-haired man in riding clothes rated him icily for having failed to fill some order. The dark-haired man haughtily refrained from anger, but in Spanish-accented French he gave the perfumer the devil.

"But, *M'sieur Ybarra,*" said the perfumer politely, "Madame the Empress herself sent a lady-in-waiting to secure all of that special perfume that I possessed! She wishes to have

it exclusively for herself! I could not refuse to obey her command! But when more arrives—”

“It is not often,” said the dark man coldly, “that I dispute with a merchant. But this I say, the *Señora* Ybarra ordered you to furnish her this special perfume! And you will do it or my lackeys will make you regret your failure!”

Harrison had started slightly at the name Ybarra when the perfumer spoke it. Its second use made him stare. But there was a certain family resemblance between this man and Pepe.

“Pardon,” he said politely, “but perhaps my errand will solve the difficulty.”

The dark man stared haughtily at him. Harrison told himself that this arrogant young man was Pepe’s great-great-grandfather-to-be. It was an odd sensation. He said pleasantly:

“I travel in France for pleasure—” It was not true, but he could hardly tell his real purpose—“and some few days back I stopped at an inn . . .”

He told the story he’d made ready before. He said that he’d found a poor devil of a merchant in the inn, sneezing his head off and in sad estate after an encounter with brigands. He’d had to hide in a stream from them, and he’d gotten back to the inn with his precious stock-in-trade, but he was still fearful that the robbers would come to the inn itself to plunder him. So he had begged Harrison, as a gentleman whom brigands might hesitate to rob, to carry his treasure to Paris where it would be safe.

“His treasure, he said,” added Harrison amiably, “was perfume. It may be—”

The perfumer stared at the saddlebags. Albert handed them over and stood respectfully against the wall.

“*M’sieur*, was the merchant’s name Dubois?”

“Probably,” said Harrison. “I think so. He was short and plump and miserable.”

“Ah, *M’sieur* Ybarra!” said the perfumer, “This is providential! Let me make sure.” He opened the saddlebags and sniffed rapidly at one bottle after another. “But yes! The perfume that Madame the Empress has chosen to have exclusively for herself! *M’sieur*,”—this to Harrison—“my obligation to you has no limit! Now I can serve *M’sieur* Ybarra to the limit of his desires! I beg you to name any way in which I can discharge my gratitude for your condescension to this Dubois!”

Harrison said mildly:

"I will be happy if you supply M. Ybarra with whatever he wishes. But, to be truthful, I am most anxious to make the acquaintance of a M. de Bassompierre. If among your patrons—"

The dark-haired man—Pepe's great-great-grandfather—said with dignity:

"I have his acquaintance. He has been in Paris. He is not here now. I expect to see him within a week."

Harrison's pulse had leaped at the beginning of the statement. Then he was bitterly disappointed. The perfumer regarded him shrewdly before he tactfully offered Ybarra whatever he chose of the saddlebags' contents. It occurred to Harrison, despite his disappointment, that his willingness to sell the Empress' special perfume to someone else came from the fact that Josephine would buy anything from anybody, but paying for it was another matter.

Ybarra, with vast dignity, ordered the entire shipment of the Empress' perfume delivered to his wife. Madame—*Señora*—Ybarra would be pleased. He added negligently that his major-domo would have orders to pay the price in gold on its delivery. Which was grandeur. Gold was at a premium in Paris because of the English war.

Before he left, he assured Harrison profoundly that he would inform M. de Bassompierre that M. Harrison of *les États-Unis* wished urgently to speak to him.

He left, but before Harrison could leave the perfumer made a gesture asking him to stay.

"*M'sieur*," he said warmly, "I am deeply in your debt."

"Then you can give me a receipt," said Harrison amiably.

"But of course!" The perfumer wrote out a receipt with a quill pen. "And I should pay for the merchandise—"

"When Dubois comes to you for the money," said Harrison. He did not want to have to account to Madame Carroll for any business transaction. "I am not in business."

The perfumer reflected. Then he said very carefully:

"You said you wished to meet M. de Bassompierre. Have you paid your respects to the American ambassador as yet?"

When Harrison shook his head, the perfumer said with even greater care:

"I suggest it, *m'sieur*. He may give you valuable advice."

"About M. de Bassompierre's reputation?"

The perfumer shrugged.

"I am in your debt," he said. "I simply urge you to visit the American ambassador. I say no more."

He bowed. Harrison went out. In the street he said to Albert:

"The man we want to find has so foul a reputation that even a tradesman tells me I'd better ask questions about him before I make his acquaintance. The devil!"

He made the same comment to Carroll when Carroll returned to the inn near sundown. By that time he was depressed. He was desperately impatient to do something about de Bassompierre. He felt that within a week almost any change in the state of things in this period might have produced catastrophes in his own—and Valerie's—era.

"In a week," said Carroll comfortably, "we'll move to a more respectable address and bribe Ybarra's footman to tip us when de Bassompierre turns up. I enjoyed myself today, Harrison!"

Harrison spoke restlessly, not paying attention.

"A week . . . Anything could happen in a week, back where we came from! History's changing between now and the time we were born! It's changed at least twice and each time it changed back but—"

"I'm arranging that," said Carroll blandly. "I begin to think I can handle de Bassompierre! But I still want to find out about that other time-tunnel! You see, Harrison, I went to see Cuvier, the naturalist, today. What name do you think I sent in to him?" He grinned. "I sent in my name as de Bassompierre! Do you see the point?"

Harrison gazed at him, appalled. Carroll grinned more widely.

"Think it over! Cuvier received me, a splendid, stout, gray-bearded character with a magnificent sense of his own importance! And my name was de Bassompierre! I congratulated him upon his eminence. I said that I'd been travelling for some years, but on my return to France I'd heard of nothing but his fame. I implied that nobody considered Napoleon especially important, compared to Cuvier! He thawed. He warmed up. We began to talk natural history. We discussed the recapitulation of primitive forms in the developing embryo. We discussed the metamorphosis of insects. We had the devil of a good time, Harrison! In spite of my disillusionment and disgrace, I was born to be a college professor, and we talked shop. I made a definite impression on Cuvier! He won't forget me! I said that I planned to go to

the United States to study the Red Indians. He almost begged me to stay here and meet his *confrères* . . .”

Harrison said stridently:

“But look here! That—that—”

“That,” said Carroll amiably “means that the real de Bassompierre will be indignantly shown the door if he ever attempts to meet Cuvier! Cuvier knows M. de Bassompierre! Me! He will have no use for anybody else using that name! Tomorrow I visit the Marquis de La Place. We call him Laplace. I’ll dredge up some astronomy and flattery to deliver. When I’m through, anything de Bassompierre attempts to say to any learned man will be indignantly ignored! You see?”

Harrison hesitated. He didn’t feel at ease in scheming. He couldn’t estimate the effectiveness of devious behavior. But his own efforts had produced nothing, so far. At least Carroll was getting something done. He was discrediting de Bassompierre in advance. Maybe this was why he, Harrison, had found the intellectual dynamite in the Bibliothèque Nationale completely disregarded. Maybe this trick of Carroll’s had prevented de Bassompierre’s letters from having any effect!

But still there was the other time-tunnel to be discovered, through which de Bassompierre had gotten the information he’d tried to disseminate before its proper time.

He yielded. He knew frustration and the need for patience. He was excessively worried about Valerie. She’d be imagining all sorts of dangers for him. She’d imagine bandits and diseases and hardships and infections. Maybe she knew that in this period it was considered certain that everyone would have smallpox as, at a later date, everybody was sure to catch the measles. She’d be worried.

It is typical of the romantic human male that he believes the girl he cherishes worries only about him. The girls, in turn, are convinced that romantic young men worry only about them. And they are right. Harrison, for example, was not disturbed about the possibility of atomic war in the time he’d come from. That prospect was so familiar that he didn’t worry about it at all. Anyhow he knew nothing of a yellow alert brought about by failure of radios on two supersonic passenger planes at once. He hadn’t heard of counter-attacks almost ordered because of an amorous sperm whale leaping out of the water to impress a coy lady whale off the Atlantic Coast of North America. Radar had reported the whale as a possible rocket-launching submarine, and it was a very close call indeed.

Actually, if the situation had gone unresolved for just about five minutes more, unlimited catastrophe could have resulted. But Harrison did not think about such things. He worried about Valerie worrying about him, and he sweated in anguish whenever it occurred to him that Valerie might feel a slight dizziness, and find herself in a changed present in which she was married to somebody else. And that that present wouldn't change back.

In accomplished fact, of course, a sea patrol plane had dropped a flare where the possible submarine contact was reported by radar. It photographed the sperm-whale courtship in progress. It so reported. And an Arctic patrol plane intercepted one of the two muted but properly lighted passenger planes over the Arctic, and made passes at it when it did not reply to radio signals. That patrol plane herded it back to its airport of departure. And the co-pilot of the other muted plane found a loose wire in his plane's equipment, and fixed it, and there was no longer a condition of yellow alert.

That whole matter ended with ponderous praise from high military officers on the splendid efficiency of response to a supposed emergency by the men and planes under their command. Et cetera and et cet. And that was the end of the incident.

Valerie knew nothing about it. Her aunt was in St. Jean-sur-Seine, tending M. Dubois and Valerie was in complete charge of the shop. She knew of nothing to worry about except a discrepancy of twenty-two francs in the cash drawer. There was that much too much on hand. Valerie really worried only about Harrison.

The rest of the affair of the time-tunnel continued in typically irrational fashion. Only commonplace things happened to the people involved, but they happened for preposterous reasons. There was also something of the inevitable about the various incidents, as if the cosmos had really been designed for people to live in and it would remain possible to survive despite their most earnest efforts to the contrary.

Naturally, then, Harrison's life remained a mixture of the unpredictable and the tedious. He remained in 1804. In Paris. He was seen in suitable public places and was casually accepted as a travelling American who must be rich to travel from so remote and savage a place as *les États-Unis*. He kept his ears feverishly open for any clue however faint to the spread of information from the twentieth century into the

nineteenth. If such leakage could be discovered, it would indicate another time-tunnel in operation.

The only thing suspicious was that jokes told in the United States after nearly two hundred years were essentially the jokes told in the France of Napoleon. But they would probably be told centuries later still, and still be laughed at.

Carroll had a better time. He visited prominent scientists. He presented himself as M. de Bassompierre, returned to France after long travel, and filled with reverence for the learned men of the time. He discussed mathematics with Lagrange, and the fact that he'd specialized in statistical analysis made him a discerning and marvelously welcome visitor. He talked electricity with Ampère, and they got along so splendidly that Ampère made him stay to dinner and they talked garrulously of the recent discoveries made by M. Faraday in England.

"I've been careful," he told Harrison satisfiedly on the fifth night of their stay in Paris. "I haven't told them anything they don't know already. But I can understand what they're driving at. When they say something, I know what they mean. And it's pathetic how grateful they are to be admired by somebody who realizes what they should be admired for!"

"I'm going to send Albert to make a deal with Ybarra's footman," said Harrison restlessly. "De Bassompierre should be back in town in a day or so." He added. "I can't help worrying about Valerie. There's always the chance that another time slip will happen. I know! There's a modulus of elasticity in historic events. They can be stretched, in fact as well as by historians, and they can snap back. But there must be an elastic limit, too, and if they're stretched just so far they won't go back to normal! They'll stay stretched! I'm thinking that we could go back and find—"

He made a helpless gesture. Everything that had happened or that he'd done had been drudgery or common sense, and there was no feeling of achievement. Right now it was a painful business, simply sitting and waiting for the fate of all the world he knew to be decided by something it wasn't time for him to do yet.

Albert, however, seemed to enjoy life. Upon occasion he attended Carroll or Harrison when they went somewhere that an attending lackey was called for. Once Harrison went to the theater and saw Thalma playing a translation—and revision—of the *School for Scandal*. Nobody mentioned its English origin. Harrison thought it intolerably over-acted.

Once he saw the Emperor, in an open carriage with a cavalry guard, driving like mad for somewhere or other. Doubtless he saw other historic figures, but nobody identified them and he didn't know. Which was the sort of thing that will happen to any stranger in any city. But it was not amusing. Only Albert wore the air of someone who loves the life he lives.

Once Harrison asked him almost enviously if Paris-this-side-of-the-tunnel was still as diverting as at the beginning. Albert said zestfully:

"Ah, *m'sieur*, you would have to be a retired burglar to realize what it is like! The locks are of an age of barbarism! The strong-boxes, one could make better ones of cheese! Had I a farm-wagon, and if I were not retired, I could load it to capacity without an atom of risk!"

"Look here, Albert," said Harrison firmly, "you can't go burgling here! We can't risk anything like that! Our mission—"

Albert said reproachfully:

"But did I not tell you that I am retired? Of course on my first visit to St. Jean-sur-Seine this side of the tunnel, —you comprehend, *m'sieur*! There was an emergency! As was the need for identity papers. But I have acted truly only as an amateur here! It would be undignified to take advantage! These childish locks, these prehistoric strong-boxes . . . I would be ashamed! I have had but one real temptation since we arrived, *M'sieur* Harrison!"

Harrison regarded him suspiciously:

"Resist it!" he warned. "You could ruin everything! And the task M. Carroll and I have set ourselves is so important that I do not know how to tell you of its necessity! You mustn't risk burglaries here, Albert!"

"The danger is over," said Albert. "I yielded to the temptation at two hours after midnight last night. Strictly as an amateur, *m'sieur*! It is ended. Do not reproach me! I achieved what no man of my former profession has ever achieved in all of history! There was once a Colonel Blood who attempted it in England, but—"

Harrison's blood tended to run cold.

"What did you do?" he demanded.

"*M'sieur*," said Albert, grinning, "I ventured into the establishment of the jeweller who had made the crown for the Emperor's coronation. And I, *m'sieur*, took the crown in my hands, and I sat upon the throne made ready for the coronation ceremony, and—I crowned myself, *m'sieur*! No

other burglar in all of history, retired or active, has ever had an Emperor's crown in his hands with a way to carry it away quite open, but who instead has simply crowned himself with it. But I did!"

Harrison tried to swallow.

"The crown," confided Albert, "was a trifle small. It would have had to be altered to fit me. But in any case my action was purely that of an amateur. I pursued a hobby, only. So I put it back in its place and only you and I know of the event. But consider, *m'sieur!* Where but beyond M. Carroll's tunnel could such a thing occur? Here it is true that anything at all—even that I did not take such trumpery—anything at all is much more than likely to happen!"

Albert went proudly away and Harrison held his head.

He already had a nightmarish suspicion that at any instant he might do something, without even knowing it, which would cause something else to happen, and that something else would cause something other, and so on and so on until by the late twentieth century all of Europe would be totally unlike the Europe he'd known. And—this was especially nightmarish—if the future from here, which was the present as he knew it, if the future from here was changed, when he went back to it he would never meet Valerie. Or, he might not have been born.

Curiously, though, he only worried about possible disasters in the line of danger he'd discovered. He didn't think of the longer-established perils the twentieth century tried not to think about. For example, he didn't worry at all about atomic war. He didn't think of it.

But it was danger enough. Harrison had known without interest of the explosion of an atomic bomb by China. He was in his own time then, and absorbed in his romance with Valerie. He had not noticed that the Chinese atomic potentiality was said to be the work of a Frenchman who'd decided that the Russians were political reactionaries. He'd been unaware of a near escape from nuclear war when a sperm whale and two plane radios conking out nearly touched off a red alert. He'd missed the explosion of the second Chinese bomb, which emphasized the message of the first. But now, when he was separated from Valerie by nearly two centuries, the real danger, the deadly danger, the certain catastrophe which meant the end of the world took place.

The Chinese exploded a fifty megaton bomb. In less than

three calendar weeks the celestial kingdom had changed from a seemingly sleeping giant to a modern atomic-armed Great Power. But it was different from the other great powers. Its rulers were calmly prepared to lose half or more than half of their population in war. So they could—and would—start a war if they were crossed.

They said so, frankly. To begin with, they demanded the surrender of Formosa, with no guarantees for its population. They observed that China was now the greatest of great powers, and it expected to exercise much influence in the world from this time on. And it wanted Formosa surrendered as the first exercise of that influence.

There was the dubious possibility that it bluffed; that it didn't have the atomic weapons needed to smash the rest of the world while being blasted from without. If it bluffed, it might be destroyed. If it didn't bluff, history would simply come to an end. So the rest of the world dreadingly prepared to act as if it were a bluff, and call it. There wasn't anything else to do except surrender. Which wasn't worth while.

Harrison was in the Inn when Pepe Ybarra arrived from St. Jean-sur-Seine with the news. Pepe had been prepared to travel with the others. Now he arrived dusty and exhausted and pale, and gave them the news. Madame Carroll tended her brother, still sneezing and still coughing but likely to survive until the bombs began to fall. Valerie was anxious about Harrison. But Pepe was beside himself.

The Chinese could start atomic war. They would. Some damned renegade Frenchman, defecting from Russia, had given the Chinese the bomb. One crazy, fanatic Frenchman. And the world was doomed. Even the atmosphere of Earth would become poisonous when enough bombs had been detonated in it. Not one animal or plant or moss or lichen would survive. Perhaps no fish or crustacean in all the world's seas would continue to live. It might be that not even single-celled creatures would go on abstractedly feeding upon organic debris, with pauses to multiply by division, in the deepest trenches of the ocean's depths. It was at least probable that Earth would die to the last least quasi-living virus particle under its skies. And history would end.

From one viewpoint this would appear to settle permanently the abstract question of whether or not the universe made sense. If war came and Earth died, it didn't make sense. The cosmos would not have been designed with any special solicitude for the human race. If humanity could de-

stroy itself, it was merely an unedifying random happening on an unimportant planet.

But—there were still the time-tunnels. There was strong reason to believe that through the time-tunnels the past could be changed. If the past changed, the present must also change. If the present changed, the future must be modified. And since it appeared in the early nineteenth century that history would end in the late twentieth—why—if the present in the nineteenth century could be changed sufficiently, it might change the state of things in the twentieth so that history might stagger along for a few more chapters.

Pepe was a tragic figure, explaining the situation to Harrison and Carroll.

“But we can do something!” he said savagely. “Even if we can’t guess what the result will be, it can’t be worse than is getting ready to happen now! We start things! We do things! It’s a gamble, but to hell with that! We can’t lose and we might win!”

He turned to Carroll.

“Look!” he said fiercely. “You know science! Give Napoleon something—smokeless powder, percussion caps, dynamite! Start new industries! Give them steam-engines! Let ’em have dynamos. Show them how to prevent diseases and then they can get to work on how to cure them! Do something—*anything*—to change the future, whatever the future may turn out to be! Anything’s better than what will happen otherwise!”

Harrison was deathly pale.

“Right!” he said evenly. “You attend to that, Carroll. I’ve got something else that has to be done first. I’m going back—”

“Are you crazy?” demanded Pepe. “We’ve got to do things here!”

Harrison began to change to clothing in which a man travelling by post-horse would seem merely to be a man in a hurry.

“Surely,” he said grimly. “We do have to do things back here! But Valerie’s not in this time. There’ll be bombs and devastation and fall out where she is! I’m getting Valerie!”

“But—”

“Dammit!” said Harrison violently. “If I were with her when bombs began to fall, don’t you think I’d try to get her into a bomb shelter or a fall-out shelter where she’d be safe?”

“But there’ll be no place—”

"No?" Harrison jerked on his riding-boots. "Can you think of a better shelter against atom bombs or fall out than the year eighteen hundred and four?"

He snatched up the clumsy flint-lock pistols that were essential parts of a gentleman's travelling costume. With a peculiarly practised gesture, he made sure of their priming.

8

But all four of them started back to St. Jean-sur-Seine, instead of one. Harrison and Carroll and Pepe Ybarra and Albert set out together and at once. Pepe was a pathetic figure. He was exhausted when he arrived, and once he'd told his story he seemed to sink into bitter despair. But he would not stay in Paris while they went back to St. Jean-sur-Seine. He seemed to think that continual urging would make them take the actions which would be the wildest and most reckless of gambles, but still might give the world he remembered at least a faint chance of surviving. Otherwise there could be no hope.

His reasoning was emotional, and therefore simple. They alone were able to treat two widely separated historical moments as separate present times. But one of those presents followed the other. Therefore events in the later were at least partly determined by what happened in the earlier. They could change what happened in that earlier. They could then find out what resulted in the later. They couldn't predetermine the result of what they did, because the cosmos is much too complex to be manipulated for one's individual ends. But by changes, and if necessary changes of those changes, they should ultimately arrive at a tolerable—at least non-lethal—latter part of the twentieth century. It was by no means sure. But they should try it.

Carroll soothingly agreed with him. But nevertheless they

made their way out of the city. Once they had to stop, at the barriers where the *octroi* was due. All persons entering and leaving the city had to pay this tax, but the collectors were sleepy and bored, even when three gentlemen and one manservant seemed in such haste at such an unseemly hour. Carroll paid the toll for all of them by the light of a flaring torch. When they rode on he said annoyedly:

"Damnation! It's lucky you came when you did, Ybarra! I didn't realize how low my funds were getting! Did you bring any currency of this period?"

Pepe said dully:

"There were some coins. I used them. Madame Carroll sold them to me. She is indignant because you haven't gotten back with new stock for the shop."

Carroll grunted.

"And we didn't collect for the perfume, either! I'll catch the devil when we get back!" They went on through the darkness. Carroll said, "Harrison, you're planning to bring Valerie back to 1804 for safety. I'm sure your intentions are honorable. But I have a question. I didn't bring enough money here to live on indefinitely. You'll need to. How are you going to do it?"

Harrison had been absorbed in the frantic necessity to get back to St. Jean-sur-Seine, and from there to Paris, and then to explain to Valerie the desperate need for her to go through the time-tunnel with him to reside in the period of Napoleon. She'd need to stay there until either atomic war destroyed the world they were born in, or his and Carroll's actions made that war unlikely. He'd been worried for fear she'd hesitate to take so drastic a step. Now he had a new worry. They'd need money on which to live, even in 1804. He set a corner of his mind to work on that problem. It was a part of the commonplaceness of all the preposterous angles of this whole business of travel in time. But mostly he tried feverishly to calculate whether the war would have begun before he could get to St. Jean-sur-Seine, and from there to Paris, and back through the tunnel with Valerie.

Carroll spoke again in the darkness, with the horses' hoofs making muffled sounds on the roadway.

"Yes . . . Money's something we've got to think about. Hm . . . Albert, have you any to speak of? Money that's good here?"

"But yes, *m'sieur*," said Albert apologetically. "I do not anticipate events, as I told *M'sieur* Harrison. I prefer sur-

prises. But the kind of surprises I prefer are more likely when one has money. I will be happy to share with you."

To Harrison this sounded nightmarish. To worry about money when all the world of his generation seemed certain to commit suicide very shortly, seemed insane. But it no longer seemed peculiar to him to be clothed in the costume and to be riding on this highway of a hundred years before his grandfather was born.

"Better think it over," said Carroll, very seriously. "I suspect Harrison will emigrate to this period, with Valerie. If you're wise, you'll probably do the same. In that case you'll need all the money you've got."

"I can always get more, *m'sieur*," said Albert. "I have retired, but for emergencies . . ."

"Another problem," said Carroll, reflectively. "For you, Harrison. Valerie will need clothes of this period, at the beginning, anyhow. And we can't risk waiting for them to be made for her."

Pepe said fiercely:

"The thing to do is to prevent the need of it! To do things! Now! What can you do after the bombs fall?"

"That's the odd part," said Carroll. "In your experience you've known that things that had happened changed, and hadn't. Maximilian and the four emperors of Mexico, for example. If we change things so bombs didn't fall, even after they did, it'll be all the same, apparently . . . But somehow I don't think they'll fall."

"Why?"

"It wouldn't be sensible!" said Carroll vexedly. "It would mean that there was no point in existence! Coincidences would be only coincidences! There'd be no meaning in meaning. Nothing would mean anything, but we humans have been designed to see meanings! Patterns wouldn't exist, and design wouldn't exist, but we're designed to see design and discover patterns, and it makes no more sense for us to be equipped to discover what isn't there, than it would make sense for an animal to exist with needs that the universe didn't supply. We've got to do something, yes! But there's something for us to do! There apparently always has been. I suppose there always will be."

Pepe was silent. But it was a scornful silence. Harrison worried. Albert seemed to be puzzling quietly in the darkness as the horses went on. Carroll did not object when Harrison pressed the pace.

"To be practical, again," said Carroll, "if you don't decide to keep them for yourself, which would be wise if you decide to stay here, we'll buy your gold pieces, Albert. Certainly M. Harrison has decided to emigrate to this time, because he and *Ma'mselle* Valerie will be married and he wishes safety for her. He'll need gold pieces, but I could not honorably advise you to sell them. They're always worth something and paper need not be. You may need them."

"But *m'sieur*!" said Albert politely, "I can always get more! I am retired, but for emergencies—"

"We've got to get more perfume, too," said Carroll, to Harrison. "Dammit, we need capital! We need working capital! There's no way to know how long we'll be here! But of course we can tell through the tunnel when we've succeeded. You've got to think of clothes for Valerie! She can't go around in modern dress. Not here! And we can't wait for clothes to be made!"

Harrison's mind dwelt harassedly on that problem for a moment. He thought of the *costumier* from whom Albert had secured his lackey's outfit. That might or might not be a possibility. But he wanted Valerie safely on this side of the tunnel at the earliest possible instant. She'd pass through the tunnel practically only over Madame Carroll's dead body, of course . . ."

Pepe said bitterly:

"You haven't said a word, yet, about doing something to keep the Chinese from starting a war! Damn people who won't let other people live the way they want!"

Harrison heard Albert speak solicitously, and realized for the first time that out of habit they'd talked in French and that he could catch every word.

"*M'sieur* Carroll, will you tell me who attempts to change my way of life? I am a Frenchman, and I resist such things!"

The four post-horses went on through the night. Harrison heard Carroll explaining the consequences of time-travel as practised through his time-tunnel. It was not information to spread abroad, yet there was no particular need to refuse to tell it, because nobody who hadn't passed through the tunnel would believe either that it existed or that anybody who claimed to have passed through it was sane. It was a secret which would keep itself. Nobody who told it would be believed. Albert had even insisted that he did not want to understand the strangeness beyond the tunnel. But as Carroll explained, now he asked questions.

"Ah!" he said profoundly, "it is as if it were a way to walk through a tunnel into a motion picture, and the only way out were that same tunnel. Eh?"

Carroll agreed. He went on. Presently Albert was asking: "But *m'sieur*, how did you make the tunnel in the wall act as a tunnel into the past?"

Here Carroll was less than explicit. Harrison only half-way listened. He had learned, said Carroll, of a cannon left in the mould in which it was cast. It therefore provided a fixed point in time. So it was possible to use it to produce an opening, a passage way, a tunnel between two eras. The statement was less than a complete explanation to Harrison. He could follow the statement that if one went through it on a Wednesday and remained a day, that one would come back into Thursday. But Harrison was not clear in his mind why every time one passed through it from the twentieth century one arrived at a later date in the nineteenth. It seemed, however, somehow to be tied in with the fact that if the time-tunnel ever collapsed it could never be reconstituted. It would be gone forever. A fresh item of once-melted metal which hadn't been disturbed since its solidification would have to be found, and the new time-tunnel would only be of the length—duration, time-interval—between the time of the freezing of the metal and the formation of the tunnel.

Albert said respectfully:

"But suppose, *m'sieur*, that one went through a tunnel and then it collapsed?"

Carroll observed that tunnels of short period were unstable. If only of days or weeks they did collapse. But a tunnel a century in extent should last indefinitely. The tunnel in St. Jean-sur-Seine had almost two centuries between its ends. It could be broken and then would be gone forever, but it was inherently stable.

They covered the first distance between post-houses in little more than an hour. They changed horses and got fresh ones. They went on again through the night. Pepe was utterly weary. He'd ridden from St. Jean-sur-Seine to Paris without rest, and now was headed back to St. Jean-sur-Seine with no time out for repose.

The third post-house was an inn, and there was a coach in its courtyard. There were four liveried outriders, heavily armed, and they had stirred the inn awake and torches burned smokily and hostlers scurried about trying to supply horses while cooks supplied some sort of midnight refreshment for a scowling man in a black velvet cloak.

Pepe sagged in his saddle while Albert arranged for fresh horses. Carroll dismounted and went into the inn. Harrison paced back and forth, to loosen up his muscles after unaccustomed riding. Someone came out of the inn with a tray. He approached the coach with it. Harrison saw two heads at the coach windows. One was a girl of about Valerie's age, with Valerie's coloring. Her expression was infinitely sad. The other was an older woman, possibly in her middle thirties wearing the headdress of a Spanish widow. She had a plump figure and a cheerful expression. She looked like someone it would be pleasant to have around. She opened the door, received the tray, and drew it into the coach. The door closed again.

Carroll came out of the inn. Albert had disappeared. There came a sudden uproar. The inn servants rushed. The liveried outriders went to see. When a single bellowing voice could be picked out, howling curses, the scowling man in the black velvet cloak went authoritatively to end the tumult.

He returned, followed by his coachman, dripping and enraged. Some person unknown had up-ended a wooden bucket of water on the coachman's head and left the bucket sticking there. The bucket had had to be broken to get it off. Now the man in the black velvet cloak was icily angry with the coachman and savage with the outriders.

In minutes, the coach's horses were back in place and it went rolling and rumbling toward Paris. The horses of the outriders made a steady mutter on the highway.

The four from the twentieth century rode away from Paris, on the way to St. Jean-sur-Seine. Pepe was utterly exhausted. It would be literally impossible for him to continue for another day and night of top-speed travel. Two post-houses beyond the inn, Harrison said anxiously:

"Carroll, we're going to lose time with Pepe! He'd better stop for a few hours! You stay here with him! I'll ride on ahead!"

Carroll said:

"Better not. I've got things to do, too! Albert, will you stay here to take care of M. Ybarra and get him to the tunnel at the earliest practical instant? M. Harrison and I should ride on. It's urgent."

"But certainly, *m'sieur*," said Albert. "I myself would relish rest. I have moved about a great deal, by night."

Carroll arranged with the post-master for Pepe to have accommodations at the post-house. Albert would sleep on the

floor of the same room. Harrison verified that the door opened inward. It couldn't be opened without waking Albert. Pepe stumbled up the stairs and collapsed, worn out.

Carroll and Harrison went on. They rode at a headlong pace, and walked their horses for a time, and went on again at top speed. It was the way to make the best time without exhausting their mounts. They arrived at post-houses, and changed horses, and continued their race against time and fate and the zestful efforts of the human race to destroy itself. Their rate of travel was unprecedented, in the France of 1804, except for couriers bearing military messages. The sky was just beginning to gray at the east when St. Jean-sur-Seine appeared.

They took a considerable risk. They unsaddled their horses and turned them loose. They hid their saddles. The horses being from the last post-house would eventually turn up at this one. And Harrison and Carroll made their way into the town on foot. But they reached the foundry and got into it unseen by any of the local citizenry.

There was tumult when Madame Carroll unlocked the door of the time-tunnel and let them into the cottage of their own era. Even M. Dubois came stumbling down the stairs in his nightshirt. He was evidently still treated as an invalid by Madame Carroll. She demanded fiercely to see the articles Carroll should have purchased and brought back with him for her new and profitable art-dealer customer. Ominously she began to open the saddlebags Carroll and Harrison had brought. Her face crimsoned with fury as she found no fresh stock for the business of Carroll, Dubois et Cie. She did not even find currency to pay for the perfume M. Dubois had risked his life to deliver! Then she tore open a bag which was not a saddlebag, and which Harrison didn't recognize, though he'd probably carried it. She flung out its contents and displayed truly impressive rage. Because the contents of this bag—of all imaginable objects—was female garments.

Harrison was very weary, but he came back to full wakefulness at sight of a woman's costume among their possessions. Then he remembered, vividly, the travelling coach in the inn-yard which was the third post-station out of Paris. There had been tumult, out of sight, and then the disclosure of a wooden bucket jammed down on the head of the coachman who drove that carriage. Everyone had gone to see what the uproar meant.

"That was Albert," he said to Carroll, while Madame Carroll rose to unprecedented speed and fury in her denunci-

ation. "Albert made the uproar so he could get this out of the coach's trunk. Probably because he was bound to be surprised when he opened it!"

Carroll nodded. He looked at his red-faced, vociferating wife. He picked her up and carried her, kicking and yelping, into the kitchen. Harrison heard him ascend the stairs. He heard a door slam. A lock clicked. Carroll came downstairs again.

"Georges," he said to the trembling Dubois, "can you tell me the time?" He looked out the window. "Clock time is different," he commented to Harrison. "I tend to forget it. It was dawn at the other end of the tunnel. Get changed, Harrison! We've got to catch the bus to Paris!"

He began to strip off his costume of the early nineteenth century. M. Dubois, trembling, helped him find his garments of the late twentieth. He produced Harrison's clothes. Carroll said detachedly:

"Georges, what are the Chinese doing? Have they bombed Formosa yet?"

M. Dubois' mouth dropped open. He could imagine nothing more irrelevant—with his sister kicking her heels and screaming on the floor above—than a question about international politics or Far Eastern Affairs.

"My—my sister," he said, trembling, "I fear for her health! She is in—such extreme distress! She has waited so anxiously to receive the shipment from—where I purchased the stock for the shop! She is beside herself! I fear—"

"We're leaving for Paris," Carroll told him. "Listen to me, Georges! I'll be back perhaps tonight, if anybody is left alive. Then I'll return to my wife every centime that's left of my money. Listen! I—will—return—to—my—wife—what—money—is—left! Tell her that. Tell her I've spent only a fraction of it! I'll give her back nearly all the money I drew out of the bank! She'll rage, but she'll still be a rich woman and she knows it! And without me she would not have been rich! I'm going back through the tunnel and perhaps—just possibly!—everything will go on as it has, except that I will live in Paris of 1804 and send you the goods you want in the shop and you will not ever have to go through the tunnel again—and she'll be more prosperous than ever before!"

M. Dubois seized upon the faintest possible hope of calming his sister.

"That—that would be admirable," he said, still trembling, "But, until it occurs—"

"She'll raise hell. Of course!" Carroll fished in the pockets

of his contemporary costume. "Damnation! She cleaned out my pockets! Lucky I put my money in another bank! Harrison, have you any modern currency to pay the bus fare to Paris?"

A little later they left the cottage. Harrison remembered to give warning that Pepe and Albert were still to arrive, probably twelve hours or so from now. The town of St. Jean-sur-Seine looked remarkably familiar, because it looked like parts of Paris of 1804. There were minor modifications—such as street-lights—but it was very similar, quaint and unspoiled and unattractive.

The bus waited, wheezing. Harrison bought a newspaper. The mainland Chinese had consented to delay the bombing of Formosa. They said blandly that they would not consider a change in their demand for its surrender, but if the people of Formosa chose to rise against their criminal *bourgeois* rulers, the mainland government would give them a reasonable time in which to do it. In effect, they offered to regard the people of the island more kindly if before surrendering they killed everybody the mainlanders disliked. They would give five days' grace for the suggested murders if the murderers-to-be asked nicely.

The rest of the news story dealt with negotiations, with profound statements by the President of France, the debates in the United Nations, the remarkable refusal of some African countries to join in the United Nations protest, and so on. But it was not the exclusive news story on the first page. There had been a fire, and much editorial eloquence described the destruction of that ancient wooden building on the Rue Colbert which was precious to the hearts of all Frenchmen because in it had lived Julie d'Arnaud, mistress of Charles VII of France. It was considered the most ancient wooden structure still standing in Paris, and its leaden roof had resisted the rains and storms of six hundred years. There was also, on an inside page, an editorial about the tragedy, to France, that the Chinese threat to the rest of the world had come about through a French scientist, defected first to Russia and then to China. But Carroll did not read that editorial. It was unfortunate. It named the Frenchman.

Carroll read only the nuclear news. He put the paper aside.

"Better cash in your letter of credit," he observed as the bus rolled on. "If we have to spend possibly months working on the future, from back where we'll be, we don't want to be having to try to find employment back there! I don't know

whether I told you about calling on Gay-Lussac, the chemist. He envisions great things for the science of chemistry. Of course he doesn't believe that organic compounds can ever be synthesized, but he has an idea that precious stones may some day be synthesized. He's very hopeful about artificial diamonds."

Harrison was thinking anxiously about Valerie. He said absently:

"I think it's been done."

"Not gem stones," said Carroll regretfully. "If we could take some of them back . . ."

Something clicked in Harrison's mind. The part of it that he'd set to worry about money made a clamor against the rest. But he stared out the bus window. If the universe was not especially designed for humans to live in, then presently these fields would be thin dust or mud, with stark, bare trees in frozen gestures above a world on which there was nothing green anywhere. Houses that men had built would be abraded by desert winds blowing foolishly here and there. Eventually they would fall, but they would not decay because there would be no decay-bacteria alive to feed on them. There would be sunrises and sunsets with no eyes to see them, and there would be sounds of wind and rain and thunder, but no ears to hear.

He turned suddenly from the window.

"Synthetic rubies," he said. "Synthetic sapphires. That's the answer! At cents per carat. They're real rubies and sapphires. They're genuine. They simply aren't natural ones. And there are cultured opals, too. They're genuine. They just aren't wild. They're cultivated."

Carroll said wryly:

"I suspect my wife never happened to think of that! Yes. We'll get some. But not for trade. In case of emergency only. I don't mind Albert stealing. It's his nature. But I've a quaint objection to acting like a tradesman."

Harrison made no comment. His thoughts went back to Valerie.

The bus reached Paris. Harrison went to the Express office. He acquired flat packets of currency for his letter of credit. He got a cab to the shop of Carroll, Dubois et Cie. The streets were the same. There was a blockade across the front of a scene of much destruction by a recent fire. It was that very, very old wooden house once occupied by the mistress of a forgotten king. From one gaunt blackened timber there dangled a peculiar glittering shape of metal. It was

like an icicle, except that solidified lead from the roof had formed it.

Harrison saw posters on the kiosks where newspapers were sold. Russia offered alliance with the West. India considered a non-aggression pact with China. *Les États-Unis* announced that the bombardment of Formosa would be considered an act of war. England attempted to negotiate a compromise. France warned the world that it would use the atom in its own defense. The Scandinavian countries joined Switzerland in proclaiming their unalterable policy of neutrality. West Germany demanded atom bombs for its own defense. But there were no gatherings of people to buy newspapers. The public was accustomed to crises.

Harrison's cab stopped before the shop. There was an elderly customer inside. He chatted amiably and interminably before he purchased a copy of the *Moniteur* of March 20th, 1804. It contained a mention of his great-grandfather. He confided gleefully that he would yellow it with coffee and antique its texture with a flat-iron, and frame it for his descendants to consider an original.

He went out, chuckling to himself. And Harrison acted as an engaged man is likely to, when he has not seen his particular girl for well over a week.

Presently he explained the situation. Valerie smiled at him and objected that the shop had to be kept open. She could not leave Paris. Harrison spread out the newspaper and pointed out that Paris was not likely to exist for more than a limited number of days. Valerie permitted him to kiss her and said regretfully that her aunt would be frantic if she lost money by the closing of the shop for a single day.

When Carroll appeared at dusk Harrison was in a highly unstable condition. Valerie wanted to do as he asked, but she was alarmed. She tried to change the subject. She told him that she had witnessed part of the conflagration when the most ancient wooden building in Paris burned. He wouldn't listen. She had to come to St. Jean-sur-Seine and go through the tunnel.

But Carroll's arrival solved the problem. Carroll explained that though Harrison had not been present at the time, her aunt wished Valerie to come at once to St. Jean-sur-Seine to receive instructions about the shop. It was, of course, a whopping lie. Harrison couldn't lie to Valerie—at least, not yet—but he didn't feel that he had to contradict so useful a prevarication.

They took the seven o'clock bus out of Paris. They

reached St. Jean-sur-Seine. Valerie dutifully delivered to her aunt the contents of the shop's cash drawer. Madame Carroll retired with her, immediately, to count the money and demand precise and particular accounts of every transaction and sale.

Pepe and Albert arrived later, from 1804. Pepe was again in a passion of desperate anxiety, and the newspapers Carroll had brought from Paris were not in the least reassuring. The tone of all the news accounts was that this was another crisis; a grave and indeed an appalling crisis. But every one found room on its front page for a news item about the destruction of the residence of the mistress of a long-ago king. Not one made the statement that history could be about to end, the human race to become extinct, and that it would thereby be demonstrated that the universe was not designed for humans to live in, because they were going to stop living in it. Pepe read, and reached the verge of tears. He had a grandmother who was in Tegucigalpa, but that would be no safer than anywhere else on earth.

"I saw your great-great-grandfather," Harrison told him. "I provided him with perfume for your great-great-grandmother."

He hadn't thought to tell Pepe about it before. But Albert interposed as Pepe would have asked morbid questions.

"*M'sieur*, my clothing of this period—"

"Ask Dubois," said Harrison. "Hold it! Are you going to stay in this time? This side of the tunnel?"

"*M'sieur*," said Albert in a subdued tone, "I think I shall do so. I could not possibly do anything more magnificent than I achieved in the jewellers' you know of. I wore Napoleon's crown before he did! I shall remain here and contemplate that achievement. I shall retire contentedly even from my hobby! I shall make a hobby of my recollections!"

"Read these newspapers," commanded Harrison, "and if you don't change your mind I've a pocketful of paper currency with which to buy any gold pieces you may have accumulated."

Albert waved the papers aside. He shook his head.

"*M'sieur*," he said firmly, "*M'sieur* Carroll explained to me the France behind the tunnel. I now understand it. Unhappily I can now anticipate events in it. I even understand your and M. Carroll's intention to change the past so the present will become other than as it is. But that cannot be predicted! It is impossible to guess what it may be! And it will no longer be my hobby, but it will give me pleasure to ob-

serve. So as a former connoisseur of surprises I shall remain at this end of the tunnel to see what comes next. I shall be surprised at anything that happens, and most of all if nothing happens. So I will be happy to exchange my napoleons for the paper money of modern France!"

He dumped out the contents of his individual saddlebags. Gold coins seemed to cover the floor. He stacked them matter-of-factly while Harrison counted his paper money. Albert named a sum. Harrison paid it. There was paper money left over. Harrison said:

"You may as well take this too."

"No, *m'sieur*," said Albert proudly. "We are friends. If you will arrange to get my proper costume for the present time, I will leave you and return to my retirement."

Dubois came down the stairs. He looked precariously relieved. His sister seemed to be talking almost tranquilly with Valerie. She had even determined that Valerie should wear the female costume of 1804 in the shop. It would make the shop distinctive. And if Carroll would take up his residence in the era of Napoleon, and if he would supply from that period the stock she required, M. Dubois need never again risk pneumonia by travelling in the past. And M. Dubois was almost cheerful, because his sister was less agitated than he'd seen her for months.

He gave Albert his corduroy trousers and sash and the red-checked shirt. Albert put them on and stuffed his pockets with paper money. He swaggered to the door. Then he stopped. He returned to shake hands emotionally with Carroll and Pepe and Harrison. Then, from apparently nowhere, he produced a much-folded scrap of paper. He pressed it into Harrison's hand.

"Do not read this," he said unhappily, "until I have gone."

He went swiftly to the door, gazed back at them as if through brimming eyes, and went out. They heard his footsteps hastening away.

Harrison unfolded the paper. Crudely written with a strictly improvised pen, he read:

"Monsieur; I have to confess. It was after I had put the bucket on the coachman's head and taken the parcel from the coach that I learned from the innkeeper that the gentleman in the black cloak was M. de Bassompierre. Then I dared not reveal it. I weep that I disarranged your plans. I beg your forgiveness,

Albert."

Carroll said:

"The devil! We missed a possibly lucky break! But it's too late to repair it now! We're starting back, anyhow. Get into your 1804 clothes, Harrison. Ybarra, you don't have to change. Pack these books with that newspaper. The paper should convince de Bassompierre when we find him again! You've got a good lot of cash, Harrison!"

Harrison looked up. He was startled by what he'd just found out.

"Albert told me how much I owed him, and I paid him. But he figured the napoleons at six hundred francs each, instead of twelve!"

"That was the bargain he offered," said Carroll dryly. "A most admirable character! But get changed. We want to get moving!"

Harrison changed. And he was thinking morbidly that he hadn't yet gotten Valerie to consent to move into the past as an atom-bomb-proof shelter when he heard her come down the stairs from the upper floor. He looked yearningly at the door of the kitchen, to which the stairs descended.

She came through that door, smiling. She looked to Harrison for approval. She wore the costume looted from the coach at the post-house.

"*Ma tante*," she said demurely, "told me to try on the costume I am to wear in the shop. Does it become me?"

Harrison could only babble. Anguish filled him. Valerie mustn't share the disaster due to come upon the earth! He remembered the fields and towns and highways on the way to Paris. He'd imagined them as they seemed certain to become if the events of 1804 were not changed so definitely that reality could not cover them up by making them never to have been. He'd pictured all living things as alive no longer. Trees no longer in leaf. Grass no longer green. Cities no longer inhabited. All solid ground mere lifeless dust or else thick mud; all the seas empty of life; the air never echoing the sounds of birds or insects or anything but thunder and rain and wind and surf with no ears anywhere to hear. . . .

"Listen!" he said thickly, "Come through the tunnel with me, Valerie. I want to talk to you!"

She followed him unquestioningly. He warned her of the symptoms she'd feel during the passage through the tunnel. Then they were together in the resonant, echoing emptiness of the foundry building which did not exist in the same century as the cottage.

He tried to explain. She looked about her. She was as-

tonished. There was brand new daylight filtering through the cracks in boarded-up windows of the foundry. But it was deep night outside the cottage! Here it was day! He explained that oddity, desperately aware that what he told her was no less preposterous than what she saw.

Carroll appeared behind them. He carried saddlebags. He put them down, nodded, and said:

"There is going to be an argument with your aunt, Valerie. For some unknown reason I feel responsibility for her. I shall try to persuade her to join us. Heaven knows why!"

He went back through the tunnel and therefore nearly two centuries into what was here the future. Valerie said uneasily, "But is this the arrangement my uncle uses to get the merchandise for the shop?"

"He came through here, yes," said Harrison. "You see—"

He tried again to explain. She put her hand tremblingly upon his arm. He ceased to explain. There were matters much more urgent than explanations. Carroll returned with more saddlebags. He deposited them and said dryly, "I'm only Valerie's uncle by marriage, Harrison, but I think I should ask your intentions!"

Harrison swore at him and then hastily apologized to Valerie.

"The war has begun," said Carroll. At Harrison's violent reaction he explained. "No, not the world war. Not atomic war. But my wife is in action. I've told her I want her to come through the tunnel because I intend for Valerie to stay there until the war scare's over. She can't imagine such a thing. She hasn't bothered to refuse. She's just working up to a completed description, in detail, of my criminal insanity."

He went back. Valerie said shakily, "Should—should I try to calm her?"

"Have you ever managed it?" asked Harrison. "Look! There's going to be atomic war! But Carroll and Pepe and I have some faint chance of preventing it! We don't know what will take its place, but I won't let anything happen to you! I won't do it!"

Pepe came out of the tunnel, carrying bags. He put them down. He said distressedly:

"*Dios mio!* If Carroll does persuade her to come—"

He made an appalled gesture. He went back. Valerie said: "I am frightened. Of my aunt. Not—of anything else."

Perhaps ten minutes later Carroll came through again. M. Dubois came with him. Dubois said agitatedly:

"Valerie, your aunt commands that you return! At once!

She is agitated! She is angry! I have never seen her so angry! Come!"

Valerie stirred in Harrison's arms. He tightened them about her. She said faintly:

"I—I cannot!"

"But your aunt demands it! She threatens—she threatens—"

Pepe came out of the tunnel with a last parcel. He said with some grimness:

"She swears that if *Ma'mselle* Valerie does not return at once that she will disown her forever! She will endure this state of things no longer! She will abandon her and—"

Carroll said kindly:

"Maybe you can calm her down, Georges. This thing is more important than her getting her way again. Better try to make her see it."

Dubois went shakily back to the world of the future. Almost instantly thereafter Madame Carroll's voice reached them. It was thin and muted by its passage through time, just a muttering. Madame Carroll cried out fiercely in the totally uncontrolled fury of a bad-tempered woman. Her voice sounded far away but shrieking. Then things came flying out into the foundry. They were the twentieth-century garments Valerie had removed to put on the costume for the shop. Madame Carroll's voice shrieked like the ghost of an outcry of rage.

Then there came a peculiar, echoing, musical sound. It was like the string of some incredible harp, plucked once and then very gradually dying away. It seemed to make all the ground hereabouts vibrate. Their bodies vibrated with it. It ended.

Carroll jumped, startled and angry.

"Damnation! She saw me throw a switch on to make the tunnel! To make a threat, she's thrown it off! And the tunnel's collapsed and can't be made again! We're stuck here!"

9

Four days later they arrived at an inn still a few hours' journey from Paris. As inns go, it was distinctly an improvement on most such stopping places in the France of the period. Harrison felt that their appearance was improved, too. Carroll and Valerie rode grandly in the lumbering coach they'd acquired. He was the uncle by marriage and he wore the air of an uncle-in-fact. He'd mentioned that she ought to have a maid along as a travelling companion, but an extra pair of listening ears would have been a nuisance. Harrison and Pepe rode beside the coach, armed as a matter of course. Pepe's regard for Harrison's priority with Valerie made him act with the perfect, amiable disinterest of a cousin. Harrison had the role of fiancé. He could not have played any other. He tended to bristle when anybody tried to look into the coach where Valerie was. There were two mounted lackeys trailing behind. They resembled Albert solely in being wholly without conscience.

All these semblances of respectability had been secured by the use of gold napoleons and a swaggering air, plus complete disregard of the literal truth. Carroll seemed to take pleasure in inventing grotesque but convincing lies to make whatever they did seem perfectly natural.

The coach turned into the inn courtyard and there was another coach already there. A liveried servant held the horses of the other vehicle. There were yet other horses,

saddled and tied to hitching posts. There was a cheerful, comfortable bustle round about. There was smoke from a badly drawing chimney. There was the smell of strongly-odored cooking. The courtyard was mostly mud, though straw had been spread here and there for better footing.

"Ybarra," said Carroll amiably, "see if we can get suitable quarters here."

Pepe beckoned to one of their two lackeys, rode to where the ground was not wholly mud, and dismounted. He tossed his reins to the lackey and went inside.

"I think," said Carroll reflectively, "that I'll call myself de Bassompierre from now on. I'm anxious to find that character! I shall expect to make a deal with him for the use of his time-tunnel. But that's in addition to reforming him so he won't write to learned men."

Harrison bent over to look inside the coach.

"Are you all right, Valerie? Comfortable?"

She smiled at him. He felt a desperate pride in her. But she felt safe, and she felt approved of, and a girl can face most things with such assurances.

The time and place and atmosphere were totally commonplace, for Napoleonic France. There was nothing remarkable in view. Some two or three post-stages to the south-east lay Paris. In it candles and torches prepared to substitute, feebly, for the light by which people saw during the day. Travelling coaches like theirs would be hastening to arrive at stopping places for the night. In an hour all of France would be indoors. Nothing out of the ordinary appeared to be in prospect. But actually the ordinary is remarkable. Nothing ever happens unless the odds against it are astronomical. Nobody in all of history has ever anticipated an event and had it come out in all its details as it was foreseen.

Certainly nobody could have guessed at any imaginable actual linkage between the pause of a particular travelling coach in the France of 1804 and the events on the island of Formosa nine thousand miles away and nearly two centuries later. But the events were intimately connected.

The island of Formosa lay in bright sunshine under threat of destruction by atomic bombs from the mainland. One would have anticipated swarming panic and flight, especially by foreigners. One would have looked to see its harbors empty and its cities seething masses of humanity, frenziedly killing other humans, in the hope that through murder they could avoid being murdered from the sky.

But it wasn't that way at all. There were ships steaming

away from it at topmost speed, to be sure. But there were other ships rushing toward it at full speed ahead. Its harbors were crowded with vessels, taking on refugees to the limit of sitting-down space on their decks. As they were loaded, they headed away to the nearest unthreatened harbor to discharge them and go back for more. There was an incredible stream of planes flying to and from the island. Every air field was devoted exclusively to the landing, loading, and dispatch of a most motley assortment of flying machines, which descended to take in passengers and immediately flew away again.

There were no men in uniform among the refugees. Women, yes. Children, in multitudes. Ships of the sea and air swarmed to carry away as many of its helpless population as could be removed. But among the men left behind there was no resignation. There was no despair. There was fury and resolve, instead. When a flying transport landed and brought a ground-to-air missile and a crew to launch it, there was grim rejoicing. Formosa was going to attempt a defense against atomic attack. The military of a hundred nations wanted passionately to know whether defense was possible. All the world had defenses of which much was hoped, but too little known, just as all the world had bombs for attack. If Formosa could be defended, then war need not mean despair. But if Formosa could be bombed against all-out defense, then there was not much point to anything. Already it was understood that if war came all the West would act as one. It was more than suspected, though, that some nations had made private bargains to send their rockets at Chinese-chosen targets, in return for a promise of more-than-slave-status when the Chinese ruled the earth. But Formosa would be defended. If there was no longer any real hope of avoiding nuclear war, there was at least some sort of hope for humanity's survival.

This was the situation nine thousand miles, a hundred-odd years, some weeks and days and a few hours from the inn courtyard where Harrison assured himself that Valerie was comfortable. There was another coach in the yard. Pepe was inside the inn, asking questions. It seemed that nothing could conceivably be more unconnected than the situation in this inn yard in Napoleon's time and the situation on Formosa nearly two hundred years later.

In the later time and far-away place, a broadcast was received. It was from the mainland government, and it was bland and confident. It announced that planes carrying

atomic bombs would shortly appear over Formosa. If they were fired on, they would drop their bombs and a full-scale bombardment by all the mainland air force would follow. If they were not fired on, the granted time for revolt and surrender would still be allowed. The broadcast seemed incredible, but the local military rejoiced by anticipation. No planes would ever reach Formosa to drop bombs! An air umbrella already existed above the island. Ground-to-air missile crews were already on twenty-four-hour alert. When and as the radar screen notified approaching planes, they would be blasted to atoms!

Then the Chinese bombers came. The radars detected them at once. But they could not locate them. The Chinese had a radar jamming device, as effective as the radio jamming device used within the iron curtain. The radar showed something in the sky. But they said it existed at all altitudes up to eighty thousand feet, and at every spot along an eighty-mile front. It was a target worse than useless to shoot at.

Presently the clumsy Chinese bombers circled placidly over Formosa. They stayed an infuriating six thousand feet up. They were vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire. To anti-missile missiles. They were sitting ducks! But they couldn't be detected on the way to Formosa, and when they arrived defense was useless.

They were not fired on, and they circled placidly until night fell. Then they climbed up and up and up until they couldn't be spotted by telescopes, and then they went away. It was not possible to trail them. The radar jamming radiation dimmed and dimmed. Presently it stopped. It had been demonstrated that Formosa could be bombed whenever the mainland Chinese felt like bombing it.

So could any other city in the world.

In the inn yard in France, somebody in the other, waiting coach summoned a servant to the coach window. That servant turned to look at the coach with Harrison close by it and Carroll and Valerie still within.

Pepe came out of the inn; hastily, almost running. It was dusk, now, though the sky was still a lucent blue overhead. Pepe came hastily across the mud and straw. He reached the coach-side.

"He's in there," panted Pepe. "I saw him! De Bassompierre! To make sure, I asked the innkeeper! He's sitting there with food and wine before him! The man whose coach Albert robbed!"

Carroll was instantly outside the coach.

"Ah! And this is a good place to talk to him!"

"But Valerie—"

"Stay with her," commanded Carroll. "This is going to take time, anyhow. There'll be argument. You can bring her in later."

He went swiftly after Pepe. Harrison looked irresolutely after them. But, servants or no servants, he wasn't going to leave Valerie alone in the coach in an inn yard of this period!

"This is bad!" he said restlessly. "We've got to talk to him, but—"

A voice said obsequiously:

"Your Excellency's pardon! Madame de Cespedes begs that she may speak to you!"

Harrison swung about. A liveried servant from the other coach stood hat in hand beside him. He bowed.

"Madame de Cespedes, Excellency, begs your Excellency's aid in a matter of life and death! She is in the coach yonder."

The lackey's French was thick with a Spanish accent. Harrison recognized his livery. He'd seen it outside the door of a perfumer's shop in Paris. Ybarra.

He gestured to his own lackey to bring the coach after him. He rode to the other coach. He started. Peering appealingly at him from the coach window, he saw the woman who with a dark-haired girl had been in the travelling coach six days previously, when Albert abstracted a travelling case from the coach's trunk. She had looked plump and good-natured then. Now, as then, she wore the headdress of a Spanish widow. Then, but not now, she looked amiable and contented. Now she was composed but fiercely in earnest.

"*M'sieur*," she said desperately, "I am in most great need of the aid of a gentleman. I am the *Comtesse* de Cespedes. I am the sister-in-law of *Don* Ignacio Ybarra. His wife and I—we have been robbed of our jewels by *M'sieur* de Bassompierre, who is in the inn yonder. My servants do not dare lay hands upon a gentleman. I beg your aid!"

Valerie in the coach had followed closely enough to hear every word. Now she said warmly:

"But of course, Madame! *M'sieur* Harrison and his friends will be happy to serve you!"

Harrison closed his mouth; opened it, and suddenly saw the possibilities. De Bassompierre had the very worst of all possible reputations. They had need to stop him from changing the past to bring about who-knew-what—but certainly atomic war—to the time they'd come from. If they could prove him a common thief, he must meet any terms they

chose to set, including the revelation of the other time-tunnel Carroll at once could not believe in and could not fully deny. In short, Madame Cespedes' predicament might be the solution to their problem.

He gave crisp orders to the lackeys, who led the two coaches to where it was possible for a woman to alight without spoiling her foot-gear. He helped Valerie to the ground, and then the slightly chubby occupant of the other coach. Grandly, he escorted them into the inn.

They entered a large, smoke-stained, odorous room in which a huge fire burned. There were some rough tables. Some travelers, by their attire merchants or the like, ate rather noisily by one wall. At the choicest table, because nearest the fire, sat the scowling, becaped individual Albert and this innkeeper had identified as M. de Bassompierre. Carroll loomed over him, stiffly polite but not to be put off. Pepe stood nearby, in a state of inexplicable agitation. The scowling man waved Carroll aside, as one too insignificant to be listened to.

Then Madame de Cespedes said in a clear, indignant voice: "That is he! *Messieurs*, I ask you to request him to return my and my sister-in-law's jewels!"

De Bassompierre jerked his head around. His face went blank. Then he ground his teeth. Madame de Cespedes, despite her plumpness, was a perfect picture of dignity and contempt.

"*M'sieur* de Bassompierre," she said icily, "you greeted me in my brother-in-law's coach on the Avenue des Italiens today, as I waited for my sister-in-law. You dismounted and spoke to me at the coach door. And *m'sieur*, I smelled perfume upon you. And it was a very special perfume, possessed only by my sister-in-law and Her Majesty the Empress herself! You went on. I sent a servant to call my sister-in-law. I told her of the event. We went immediately and my sister-in-law found her perfume disturbed and her jewels gone. Mine were gone, also. My sister-in-law instantly sent servants in search of her husband, *Don* Ignacio Ybarra. I ordered the coachman to drive me in the direction you had taken, to keep watch for you. I have overtaken you. Now, in the presence of these gentlemen I request that you return my jewels and those of my sister-in-law!"

Madame de Cespedes was a small woman, but her manner was dignity itself. She held her head high.

De Bassompierre said roughly:

"I have never seen this woman before. I know nothing of her jewels!"

He stood up, arrogantly.

"I do not care to know you or her!"

He flung his cloak about himself. His hidden hand took an odd position, if as threatening the use of a weapon. Carroll made an exactly similar gesture. The innkeeper came waddling anxiously:

"*Messieurs! Messieurs!* I beg you—"

Pepe said imploringly, and Harrison wondered even then why he was so disturbed, "Let's talk this over! M. de Basompierre, we mean no harm! To the contrary, we've been looking for you very urgently—"

He stammered suddenly. To recite, in public, the facts of time-travel to a man just accused of robbery is not the most convincing way to argue with him. Pepe realized the fact.

"*Messieurs!*" protested the innkeeper "I beg you not to quarrel in my inn! There is all outdoors to quarrel in! I beg—"

"Give us a room where we can be alone," snapped Carroll, not taking his eyes from the arrogant dark man. "I agree that there is no need to quarrel! I prove it! *M'sieur*—" Then he said, very distinctly: "United Nations! Communist Russia! Electronics! Railroads! Airplanes! Those words will tell you where we come from!"

The dark man sneered. Pepe was trembling, deathly white. Harrison found that he bitterly regretted that he had left his pistols in their saddle holsters. Then the dark man said, again arrogantly:

"If they are code words for recognition, I do not know them. But I take it you think you have business with me?"

"Very much so," said Carroll coldly. Over his shoulder he said, in English: "Harrison, what the devil's this robbery business?"

"It seems the truth," said Harrison. "And if he's de Basompierre we've got him where we want him."

"Then we negotiate," said Carroll, again in English, "for the use of his time-tunnel and other assurances." He switched back to French to command the landlord to show them to a private room. "There is no need for violence."

"*Mais non!*" chattered the landlord. "This way, *messieurs!* this way!"

He backed before them. He came to a door. He opened it. He bowed them through it, babbling. A candle burned on a table. The dark man noted the position of the windows.

"You may speak," he said harshly. "Of what?"

Pepe edged close to Harrison. He whispered in English:

"Harrison, what's this? Who's the woman? What's she got to do with our affairs?"

"She's Madame de Cespedes," said Harrison in the same language. "She says he robbed her and Ybarra's wife. Your great-great-grandmother. She's Ybarra's sister-in-law."

"*Dios mio!*" panted Pepe. "*Dios mio!*"

The dark man said scornfully:

"I hear words which may be *l'Anglais*. Are you English spies who hope to bribe me to aid you?"

Pepe chattered hoarsely in Harrison's ear:

"This is awful! I told you I had a great-great-grandfather in Paris! You met him! But I've got two! M-madame de Cespedes is going to marry de Bassompierre! They'll have a daughter who'll marry Ignacio Ybarra's son, who'll be born next year or the year after! So she's to be my great-great-grandmother too! And-and de-de Bassompierre's another great-great-grandfather of mine! So if anything happens . . . I won't be born!"

Harrison blinked. There was the sound of another arrival in the inn yard. There were the creakings of a heavy coach, and very, very many horses made hoof sounds on the ground. Then Carroll said suavely:

"*M'sieur*, I believe we share a secret with you, but you cannot believe we share it! I mention more words. Métro! Underground! Eiffel Tower! World War Two! Those names have meanings to us. Will you deny that they have meanings to you?"

The dark man stared.

"I'll give you proof you can't deny!" said Carroll coldly. "I'll—"

Harrison said:

"Look! What we want is important, but Madame de Cespedes has been robbed. If he'll give back her jewels we'll get along better."

"No!" snapped Carroll. "We'll take up the jewels later. First, hold this!"

He thrust a small and very elegant flint-lock pistol into Harrison's hand. It was probably from the stock of the shop. It was grotesque to be holding it, and embarrassing to wonder what exactly he should do with it. There was no present excuse to hold it aimed at de Bassompierre. It was an awkward situation to be in. Carroll went out. Long seconds passed.

Then a voice outside the building boomed:

"De Bassompierre! De Bassompierre! Holà!"

The face of the dark man filled with astonishment. The voice that called "De Bassompierre" was not an authoritative voice. It was a friendly one, calling recognition in a tone of pleased surprise. But the greeting was for someone outside the inn, not inside. The same voice boomed on in a lower, confidential tone. Harrison's scalp crawled. He knew what was going on in the other man's mind. Somebody else had been called by his name. That somebody else was now in conversation with the person who'd called him. It would be a nightmarish sensation to anybody. But—

The door opened. A short, stout, beaming man marched in, saying over his shoulder:

"Nonsense, de Bassompierre! It was the most pleasant of surprises to see you, but an even greater pleasure—"

He saw Valerie and the plump Madame de Cespedes. He stopped and removed his hat with something of a flourish.

"Pardon."

A thin man in a long gray cloak followed him into the room. This man limped slightly. Carroll, his face singularly set and grim, followed the second individual. Madame de Cespedes gave a cry of satisfaction.

"M. de Talleyrand! Ah, you can attend to everything! This scoundrel has robbed my sister-in-law and myself! These gentlemen were trying to make him yield his booty. These two and that gentleman also."

The thin man in the gray cloak smiled pleasantly. He looked at the man in the black velvet cloak, and de Bassompierre sweated suddenly. Charles Maurice Talleyrand de Périgord, once Bishop of Autun, now Grand Chamberlain of the Empire, and eventually to be Prince of Benevento, was not a welcome sight to a man accused of robbery despite his supposed status as a gentleman. When Talleyrand smiled gently and benignly upon de Bassompierre, and Valerie and Madame de Cespedes and Harrison and Pepe, all but de Bassompierre felt comforted. De Bassompierre sweated and went starkly white.

"Ah!" said Talleyrand, in a mild tone but in a voice which even his enemies admitted was strong and deep, "but Madame, we will have to look into this! Pray tell me—"

Madame de Cespedes told with dignity the story she'd told before, as an accusation of de Bassompierre. That he'd stopped at her coach door and she smelled the perfume only her sister and the Empress possessed. The quick suspicion

and investigation. The valiant, angry pursuit by coach of de Bassompierre on horseback.

"M. de Bassompierre?" asked Talleyrand mildly. "You are sure it was he?"

"Yes! He!" said Madame with superb indignation, pointing to the dark man, now very pale indeed.

The short stout man who'd first entered the room now said indignantly:

"But Madame! You are mistaken! He may be a robber, but he is not M. de Bassompierre! I have the honor to be acquainted with M. de Bassompierre! We have talked often together! He is my friend! Not five men in France have the knowledge of the sciences that he possesses! Madame, you are mistaken! *He* is not M. de Bassompierre! M. de Bassompierre stands there!"

He extended a fat hand dramatically toward Carroll.

Harrison's scalp crawled again. Carroll, his features still peculiarly set, bowed politely. Valerie drew in her breath sharply. Pepe uttered an inarticulate sound. Madame de Cespedes gasped.

"As surely," pronounced the stout man firmly, "as surely as my name is Georges Léopold Cretièn Frédéric Dagobert Cuvier, the name of this gentleman is de Bassompierre, and of that—that robber and imposter—I do not know!"

The tall man with the slight limp spread out his hands.

"So it would appear," he said as mildly as before. "But let us make quite certain. *M'sieur*," he bowed with infinite politeness to the dark man, "Madame de Cespedes accuses you of the robbery of her jewels. Where are they?"

De Bassompierre could have been half-mad of bewilderment. Perhaps he was half-mad with despair. Tracked down—when it should have been impossible—after a robbery of which he should not have been suspected, he was denied his own name and found someone else credited with his identity. And this before the second or third most powerful man in France!

Talleyrand's smile faded. His face in repose was not benign. It was utterly, terrifyingly cold. He repeated:

"*M'sieur?*"

The man in the black cloak reacted in a fashion which in a woman would have been called hysterical. He cried out in a terrible voice. His hand darted inside his cloak, and Harrison instinctively leaped before Valerie. The hand came out with a pistol in it. Harrison shouted fiercely. He was not really aware of what he did. But the heavy pistol roared,

and the smaller weapon in Harrison's hand made a lighter sound in the same fraction of an instant.

Then the room was full of stinging powder-smoke. The figure in the dark cloak seemed to stagger toward a window, as if to carry out his purpose and leap out to flee. But he did not reach it. He went somehow bonelessly down to the floor. The candle, after wild leapings and gyrations of its flame, steadied and gave light again. Harrison, numbed with sudden horror, realized that Carroll was in front of Madame de Cespedes as he was where he would shield Valerie.

"*Dios mio!*" said Pepe in a thin voice, "*Ah, Dios mio!*"

Then Talleyrand's voice said with perfect mildness:

"But we should be quite certain! M. Cuvier, you are certainly impartial, and as a naturalist you may feel less of repugnance. Will you see if Madame de Cespedes' and Madame Ybarra's jewels have been recovered?"

The stout man knelt on the floor. Harrison swallowed. Cuvier looked up.

"A necklace, at least," he said professionally. "And—ah! Yes. Rings. Bracelets. He had stuffed his garments with jewels!"

Talleyrand said inexorably:

"But one more question. He has been proved a thief, and has paid for it. *M'sieur*, you are called de Bassompierre. Have you proof that that is correct?"

Harrison felt Valerie grow tense. His own scalp crawled yet again. Carroll stood quite still for a moment, except that one hand dabbled a handkerchief at his temple. Blood flowed where a bullet had just barely grazed the skin. Half an inch to the right and he would have been a dead man. A quarter-inch and he'd have had a serious wound. But now there was only a small, steady welling of red stuff which tried to run down his cheek.

"Can you," repeated Talleyrand politely, "prove that you are M. de Bassompierre?"

Carroll dabbed at his temple again. Then he said carefully:

"I have been travelling for some years, M. de Talleyrand. I have the usual papers, but they could be forged. But since Madame de Cespedes' jewels are found, perhaps these . . ."

His hand disappeared. It came out with a small cloth bag in it. He unknotted the string and poured out a dazzling array of cut stones. There were rubies and sapphires, all of them large. None was under two carats and most were nearer five. Harrison said to himself, "Synthetics!" He was not

surprised when a pearl necklace slithered snakily out on top of the rest.

"They are cut," said Talleyrand, "in a strange fashion. I would guess the Orient."

Carroll brought out a second bag. He displayed its contents.

"There are more," he said, "but these—"

"They prove," said Talleyrand in gentle cynicism, "that you cannot be other than a gentleman of rank. It is modesty not to claim a dukedom, M. de Bassompierre!"

Then there was confusion. Valerie whispered warmly to Harrison:

"Oh, my dear! You made a shield of your body for me, when he drew that dreadful pistol!"

Harrison felt numb. He'd killed someone. Perhaps he'd saved Carroll's life, but it had been completely automatic. He was numbed by the shock of what had happened.

"I have an escort," said Talleyrand benignly. "M. Cuvier and myself planned to dine here and then drive on to Paris. On a metalled road one may doze while travelling. If you will join us we will make a grand cavalcade that bandits would not dream of hailing."

Talleyrand went out the door, limping slightly. Cuvier followed him. Carroll said in a queer voice:

"Harrison, he didn't know about a time-tunnel! He didn't know at all! Do you suppose there is one? What the devil has happened?"

Harrison shook his head. Then his eyes fell upon Pepe's face. Pepe looked like a desperately ill man. And Harrison suddenly realized what was the matter.

Pepe had confided to him that besides his great-great-grandfather Ybarra, in Paris, he'd had another great-great-grandfather, who was de Bassompierre. And his great-great-grandfather had been killed, without arranging for Pepe to possess a mere great-grandfather. Pepe had apparently never been born, and the fact would have to appear. One would expect him to vanish instantly.

Nearly two hundred years later, plus some weeks and days and hours, and nine thousand miles away, some millions of people were vaguely aware of a fugitive sort of dizziness. It was very slight. Not one of all the innumerable people who experienced it was really sure that he or she had actually felt giddy. In any case there seemed to be no consequences. None at all. The world rolled on its axis and the sun shone and rain fell and everything proceeded—well—it

seemed to proceed exactly as usual. Nobody noticed any change.

But there were changes in the time of Napoleon. M. Georges Léopold Cretien Frédéric Dagobert Cuvier, perpetual secretary of the Institut Nationale in the natural and physical sciences, made sure that all the jewelry belonging to Madame de Cespedes and the *Doña* Mercedes Ybarra was removed from the cadaver of someone who insolently and for years had posed as M. de Bassompierre. Before that task was complete, the *Señor Don* Ignacio Ybarra came pounding up to the inn on horseback, with an accompanying dozen troopers borrowed from the military governor of Paris.

He was infinitely relieved and grateful to find his widowed sister-in-law quite safe and again in possession of the jewels which were her and his wife's treasures. He was admiring of Carroll and Harrison—but Pepe's stricken pallor did not attract him—for their services to his sister-in-law and himself. He recognized Harrison as having been kind to a poor devil of a merchant named Dubois, and that his kindness at that time had secured a full shipment of the Empress' exclusive perfume for his wife. He mentioned that the perfume was the cause of the pseudo de Bassompierre's immediate detection as a thief. He was polite—but with vast dignity—to M. Talleyrand de Périgord, who happened to be Grand Chamberlain of France, but naturally would not awe the head of a great family in the Spanish colony of Mexico.

They dined; Carroll with some appetite, Harrison with very little, and Pepe with none at all. He was convinced that he had never been born, because his great-great-grandfather had been killed before his eyes, without having begotten a great-grandmother who was necessary for Pepe's existence. Valerie regarded Harrison with shining eyes because he'd put his body between her and danger. Madame de Cespedes ate composedly and with careful moderation because of a slight plumpness which to a widow of thirty-and-something was undesirable.

M. Talleyrand asked questions. They were searching questions. Toward the end of the meal Carroll gave him the newspaper he'd left the candle-lit room to get, when he'd met the newly-alighted Cuvier and Talleyrand. The newspaper was of the late twentieth century. It developed that the cavalry escort had not been provided with a meal. M. Talleyrand ordered a delay while he read the newspaper and they were fed. He set up six candles for good light and perused the

newspaper carefully and with an enigmatic expression. When he had finished, he took Carroll aside for a conference.

Therefore it was very late when the three coaches set out for Paris with their escort augmented by the troopers who'd come with Ybarra. They would arrive in Paris not long before sunrise. But on a metalled highway—and the rest of their journey would be on cobblestones—one might doze.

Valerie rode with Madame de Cespedes, and the *Señor Don Ignacio Ybarra* rode with Cuvier and Talleyrand for the conversation. With plenty of escort outside, Carroll and Harrison and Pepe rode and tried to relax in a heavy coach swaying on an uneven cobblestone highway. The interior of the coach was abysmally dark. Harrison still felt numb and shocked. Pepe was practically wordless because he considered that he should not be alive. Carroll was partly disturbed and partly satisfied.

"De Bassompierre," said Carroll, frowning, "didn't recognize words a time-traveller to our era would certainly have recognized. So I have to revise my opinion. There was no second time-tunnel. But the identity of the de Bassompierre who wrote those letters you learned of, Harrison, is still in doubt. For the moment the name is mine. But Talleyrand is too shrewd a man to attempt to deceive. That's why I loaned him the newspaper. He suspects that I may—just possibly—have told him the truth. He is resolved to find out. I could be of great value to him, if I'm not a liar."

Harrison numbly did not comment. Pepe remained speechless. He swayed and stirred with the motion of the coach in the darkness. From time to time he moistened his lips.

"He wants to be sure I really know French history before it happens," said Carroll meditatively. "He set me a test. Napoleon has twelve hundred flat-bottomed boats ready to land a hundred and twenty thousand men and ten thousand horses on the English coast. Talleyrand asked me when the invasion will take place. I've told him never, because Napoleon will make a fool of himself and send an insulting note to Russia, and Russia will get ready to declare war, and that will be no time to invade England! It'll never be time for it."

"But—"

"Historically," said Carroll, "those are the facts. I've simply stated them before they become factual. Talleyrand has probably guessed what's in the cards, anyhow. He knows Napoleon. But he was interested that I could tell him. He read every word in that newspaper. He's a brilliant man, Talleyrand!"

The coach swayed and lurched and rolled and rumbled. If one were weary enough, it might be possible to sleep. But one would have to be very weary! Harrison said helplessly:

"I can't understand it! De Bassompierre was supposed to be Pepe's great-great-grandfather! And he's dead. And there's Pepe."

Carroll sat up sharply.

"What's that?"

"It's Pepe's family tree," said Harrison. "Madame de Cespedes is the widow of *Doña Mercedes Ybarra's* brother. That's where the sister-in-law business comes in. Pepe's family tree says that de Bassompierre married her, and they had a daughter who married Ignacio Ybarra's son—whom he hasn't got yet—some time in the 1820's when Ybarra's back as ambassador from Mexico. And they'll be Pepe's great-grandparents. But de Bassompierre is dead. So he can't marry Madame de Cespedes. So Ignacio Ybarra's son can't marry his daughter, so he can't be Pepe's great-great-grandfather. Therefore Pepe's great-grandfather won't exist, naturally his grandfather can't beget his father, and if none of them ever exists, why, Pepe couldn't be born!"

Carroll said skeptically:

"How do you feel, Ybarra? Do you feel anything missing since you lost a great-great-grandfather?"

"I feel horrible," said Pepe in a thin voice. "I'm waiting to just vanish. It's not pleasant."

There were hoofbeats on the cobbled highway over which the coach rolled toward Paris. There were three coaches in train, with cavalymen to escort the Grand Chamberlain, troopers brought to help Pepe's great-great-grandfather—the living one—to seize de Bassompierre, and the liveried lackeys belonging to each coach separately. There was a very considerable clatter as they made their way through the night.

Harrison spoke suddenly, in an astonished voice:

"Look here! We're going at this thing the wrong way! Look at it in a new fashion! Our whole point—the basis of everything we've been trying to do—is that the past can be changed! We want to change it because the consequences of the things that formerly had happened were appalling. The consequences! You see?"

Carroll shook his head in the blackness.

"I agree with what you say, but I don't know where you go from there."

"Why—why—if a thing has consequences, it is real! It is actual! It hasn't been changed from something that hap-

pened into something that didn't! It hasn't—unhappened! It's really a part of the actual past and its consequences are really a part of the present. But an event that has no consequences wasn't a real event and didn't happen. That's clear, isn't it?"

"Clear," admitted Carroll, "but not lucid. What follows?"

"Look at Pepe," said Harrison, almost stridently. "He considers that he's lost an essential ancestor and must silently fade away. But if he didn't have a full set of ancestors he wouldn't have been born! If de Bassompierre was his great-great-grandfather and died before marrying Madame de Cespedes, Pepe wouldn't have had one great-grand-mother, one grand-father, one father—or himself. He wouldn't be! But there he sits! So he must be the consequences of marriages—call them events—which had consequences! That were actual! That didn't unhappen! And therefore nothing which would make him impossible can have taken place—such as the premature killing of his great-great-grandfather!"

"I admit the logic," said Carroll. "But de Bassompierre—"

"Ask Cuvier," said Harrison triumphantly, "if de Bassompierre was killed! Ask Talleyrand! Ask Gay-Lussac and Lagrange and Champollion. No. Not Champollion. He's a prig. But ask Laplace! You ask! They'll think you're crazy! Because you're de Bassompierre, now! You can write letters about science. Who else could? You've the beginning of a friendship with Talleyrand. Who else can advise him about French history in advance, so he'll call the turn for the rest of his life without one blunder? There isn't any other time-tunnel! You'll—"

Harrison found himself tripping over his own words. He stopped, for the breath he'd lost in his haste to get the thing said.

Carroll said surprisedly:

"Well, I'll be damned! Maybe you've something there! Ybarra! Ybarra! How'd you like to be my great-great-grandson?"

Pepe said in a thin voice:

"What's this? A joke?"

Carroll stirred. Harrison knew, despite the darkness in the coach, that he'd run one hand through his hair and left it standing on end, which had been a familiar gesture in his classroom in Brevard University a couple of centuries from now.

"When you think of it," said Carroll thoughtfully, "it is perfectly reasonable! After all, this is 1804 and I certainly haven't gotten married in 1804! Or 1803 or 1802 or any year

before that! So that as of the first of August in 1804, I have never been married! Quaint, eh? And if I'm the Bassompierre who'll write the letters you'll discover, Harrison, nearly a score of decades in the future, I will die in 1858 at the age of ninety-one. And that will be almost a safe century before Valerie's aunt comes into the world! So I obviously can't marry her!" he added. "Somehow I am not moved to tears."

Harrison said, with the beginning of doubt:

"But you did marry her . . . If you hadn't married her there'd have been no Carroll, Dubois et Cie, I wouldn't have met Valerie, I wouldn't have found you, and you wouldn't have come back here. None of this would have happened!"

"True," agreed Carroll, with a vast calm. "But you're on no rational foundation either, Harrison! This is eighteen-four, and you were born at least a century and a half in the future. If you stay here you'll die of old age some decades before you're born! What are you going to do about that?"

The clatter of horses' hoofs outside was suddenly muffled, as if they trotted over earth washed by rain upon the cobblestone military highway. Carroll said reflectively:

"Anyhow, she looks good-natured . . ." He stirred. Then his tone changed. "Do you know, Ybarra wasn't a very good student at Brevard. But I didn't flunk him. Perhaps it was unconscious great-great-grandparental favoritism! Eh?"

Harrison did not like Paris. Pepe liked it less. Valerie liked it least of all. There were the smells. There were the shocking differences in social status which had been destroyed, in theory, by the Revolution of the 1790's, but had now been reestablished by the Emperor Napoleon. He was already Emperor of the French and would shortly be crowned by the Pope. These things offended Valerie. And there were others.

They had taken lodgings—the four of them—in the same building in which Ignacio Ybarra and his wife lodged in considerable grandeur. To that house there came a coach, one day, bringing a dark-haired girl with an expression of habitual sadness. She was the girl they'd seen in the post house yard when Albert unwittingly stole female garments from the coach's boot. She was an orphaned female connection of the Ybarra family. Pepe's great-great-grandfather—he was actually a year or so younger than Pepe—had generously provided her with a dowry and arranged a marriage for her. He'd sent de Bassompierre to bring her to Paris, duly chaperoned by Madame de Cespedes. She now came to pay her

respects. Her expression of sadness was now heart-breaking. Valerie did not like this period of time. Pepe restlessly explored the city. Carroll spend much time with Talleyrand.

They'd been in Paris for two weeks, and Harrison was about to make depressed inquiries for an estate to which he and Valerie could retire after their marriage, when Carroll came zestfully to him. He spread out one of the newspapers of the twentieth century, now creased and beginning to be tattered. It had seemed to fascinate Talleyrand. He'd read even the advertisements over and over again, and cynically decided that he preferred the period in which he had been born.

"Harrison! Look at this!"

Harrison read where Carroll pointed. He'd bought the paper in Paris of the twentieth century when they went back for Valerie before the bombs should fall. It was an item in a grieved editorial, speaking of the tragedy it was for France that one of her sons, a renegade of renegades, had given the atom bomb to China. Disgracefully, it was a French nuclear scientist who'd first defected to Russia and then, dissatisfied by the reactionary policies of that nation, defected again to China. The editorial named him. The name was de Bassompierre.

"Talleyrand pointed it out," said Carroll. "I guessed that this de Bassompierre could be my great-great-grandson, but more probably would be the great-great-grandson of the man who'd been impersonating me. Talleyrand looked very cynical, but he politely accepted my statement. Do you see?"

Harrison felt what might be called tentative relief.

"Maybe it's all right, and if so I'm certainly glad. But—"

"The newspaper," said Carroll, "is a remarkable invention. It enlightens, it informs, and sometimes it solves problems. I have two problems, Harrison. One is that Ybarra's great-great-grandfather has hinted that he would consider the arrangement of a marriage between Madame Cespedes and myself. She is moderately dowered, and with my wealth in rubies and sapphires it would be an admirable match. And she seems to be an amiable woman."

Harrison said restlessly:

"I suppose it's all right . . ."

"But," said Carroll, "there is Valerie. I suspect she'd consider me a bigamist. Which is my second problem. Our time-tunnel was destroyed. But I would like to know that in causing the death of this de Bassompierre who stole jewels and perfumery together, we prevented him from having a

renegade great-great-grandson who would defect to the Russians and then the Chinese with very practical knowledge of how to make atomic bombs. If we prevented him from existing, and thereby avoided an atomic war, I would be pleased. But without a time-tunnel to our own era there is no way to be sure. I would like, Harrison, to feel that I helped avoid the extermination of the human race!"

"But there's no way to make a time-tunnel—"

"Unless you know of metal," said Carroll, "which has not been disturbed since it solidified from a melted state. But that's why I eulogize the press."

He turned back to the first page of the newspaper. He put down his finger on the news account of the conflagration that had destroyed the oldest wooden house in Paris. That very ancient dwelling in the Rue Colbert had belonged to Julie d'Arnaud, mistress of Charles VII in ages past. It had still been covered with the quarter-inch-thick leaden roof originally placed upon it. The roof had melted, of course, from the fire.

"I saw the ruin," said Harrison. "On the way to the shop to try to persuade Valerie—" He stopped. "I saw what looked like an icicle, only it was lead from the melted-down roof, freezing to solidity as it dripped down. Do you mean—?"

"Talleyrand," said Carroll, "has agreed that it would be interesting to find out. There may be pools of solidified lead among the ruins. He's arranged to borrow the house, which isn't burned down here. I'm to make the necessary technical devices. Perfectly simple!"

Harrison said yearningly:

"If only everything's all right and the war is cancelled! Valerie would like so much to leave here."

"So would Ybarra," said Carroll benignly. "I've no reason to leave and plenty of reason to stay. For one thing, I have some letters to write during the next few years. And for a reason affecting Ybarra." He said vexedly, "Dammit, if I'm to be Ybarra's great-great-grandfather, it seems I should be able to call him by his first name! But I can't seem to do it! Anyhow, I think I can make a new time-tunnel. If there hasn't been war, rather, if the war-scare is over, you and Valerie and Ybarra can go back to your own time, which won't be mine any longer."

"Is there anything I can do to help?" asked Harrison feverishly.

The house was empty and even in the early nineteenth century smelled musty and ancient. Harrison and Valerie and Pepe rode to it in Carroll's coach. Carroll had set up the technical part of the performance. It was irritatingly simple, but Harrison could make nothing of the circuit. Talleyrand, inscrutably smiling, looked on.

"It looks like everything's all right," said Carroll. "Nothing seems to have happened to Paris, but it's been daylight. I've been waiting for dark, when somebody can appear from nowhere with a chance of not being seen. Change your clothes, Harrison, and you can make a trip through to get a newspaper. If all's well—Valerie's clothes are ready for her too. And—ah—those of my great-great-grandson-to-be."

It happened that the time-tunnel existed at a spot closely corresponding to a doorway in the ancient house. Harrison went through. Giddiness. A spasm of nausea. Then he smelled charred wooden beams and wetness and ashes. He heard taxicabs. He heard the sounds of up-to-date Paris. It was night. There was a newspaper kiosk not far away. He went to it and bought newspapers. He scanned the headlines by the light of street lamps as he hurried back to the barricaded, blackened ruin of an old, old, heavy-beamed house.

"It happened!" he said exultantly, back in the First Empire. "The headlines are about a *monte pietá* scandal in Boulogne! There's been a row in the Chamber of Deputies about a political appointment! There was an explosion in a coal mine in the Ruhr! Nothing about China! Nothing about Formosa! Nothing about atomic war! Not on the front pages, anyhow. We did it!"

So, very shortly, three figures in perfectly ordinary twentieth-century costume emerged inconspicuously from the scorched ruins and ashes of the very ancient residence of the mistress of a forgotten king. Immediately afterward there was a peculiar musical noise, like the string of a gigantic harp plucked once and then allowed to die away.

The sun shone placidly upon Formosa. People moved without haste through its cities' crowded streets. There were steamships in its harbors, some of them languidly loading cargo, or unloading it, or laying at anchor. Nobody thought of killing anybody else except for strictly personal reasons. There was no haste. There was no tumult. There was no war or rumor of war. It was as placid and commonplace and tranquil a picture as, say, the great wide flight of steps before the principal entrance to the Louvre. Above and upon

those steps pigeons fluttered. In the wide street before it, taxicabs trundled and on the sidewalks children walked sedately with grown-ups. Harrison was on those steps, and Valerie was with him, and they had come to see a picture Pepe had urged them to look at. Pepe seemed somewhat embarrassed about it.

They entered the splendid building. They consulted the memorandum Pepe had given them. They consulted a guard, who gave them directions. They wandered vaguely through the vast corridors. Presently they found what they were looking for.

It was a portrait by Antoine Jean Gros, though not of his best period. It was a bit late for that. It had been painted in the 1830's, when Gros had passed his peak, but it was still a highly satisfactory piece of work. They stared at it, and Valerie shrank a little closer to Harrison. The portrait stared back at them. Humorously.

"It—it is he!" said Valerie breathlessly.

Harrison nodded. He read the identification plate. It read, "*Portrait of M. de Bassompierre as an Alchemist.*" There was other data, but Harrison did not need it. The portrait was of Carroll. He was older than when they'd left him a few days since. Naturally! He wore over his alchemists' robe a cordon and the badge of one of the highest Bourbon decorations. Behind him, for background, there were various cryptic symbols and bits of alchemical apparatus. And there was a glowing design which didn't belong in a picture painted in the 1830's. It was a perfectly modern symbol for an atom of something or other, but it didn't belong so far back. Yet it belonged in a picture of Carroll, if he'd had it painted expressly to tell somebody in the remote future that he'd made out all right.

They didn't comment. They looked, and looked, and then they went quietly away. And as they went down the wide, long steps to the street again, Harrison said:

"He handled it just right. De Bassompierre didn't have a son, which he would have had but for our appearance on the scene. But Carroll, marrying Madame de Cespedes as he, had a daughter—so there wasn't a renegade to give China the bomb. So Carroll wrote those letters to Cuvier and Ampère and Lagrange and all the rest. If he hadn't written them, there might have been other changes. When, our present de Bassompierre didn't have a son, no other changes were needed—"

He felt slightly giddy. He stopped. It was not a marked

giddiness. It was not easy to be sure he felt it. Still, Valerie pressed closer to him again, and for an instant it seemed that all the world blurred just a little. Buildings became indistinct and clarified again not exactly as they'd been. The taxicabs were longer and lower. The noises of the city became confused, and then cleared again. Harrison blinked.

A cannon boomed somewhere, and the humming of innumerable saucer-shaped aircraft overhead wavered in a peculiarly flute-like fashion. The cannon boomed again. Of course! The guns were firing a salute to the brand-new son and heir of Napoleon the Fifth, born that morning and already King of Rome.

Harrison watched the ground-cars, floating swiftly through the streets of Paris, not on wheels, like the coaches of ancient days, but on sustaining columns of rushing air. The costumes were familiar, too; men wearing furs and women garbed in those modern, brilliant, and practical fabrics of metal foil.

"Nothing's changed!" said Harrison, in satisfaction. "Nothing!"

He and Valerie continued down the steps. Halfway to the bottom, there was the feeling of giddiness again. It was very slight, and the fresh blurring of all outlines and their re-solidification happened so quietly and quickly that one could ignore it. A chuffing taxicab with badly-worn tires came to a halt at the curb in response to Harrison's gesture. He helped Valerie in. He felt slightly puzzled; just slightly. But then he didn't remember what he'd been puzzled about.

"Yes," said Harrison. "Nothing's changed at all. Just there's no more threat of immediate atomic war."

And he was quite right. Nothing had changed. Not so one would notice. It couldn't. Because Paris was part of the cosmos and the cosmos was made for people to live in. And since it happens that humans will always try industriously to destroy themselves there have to be safety devices built into the scheme of things. So they go into operation if atomic war becomes really inevitable, for one example. They may turn up as time-tunnels, or somebody going back in time and accidentally killing their grandfathers, or—or.

But it could be anything. For example, a man needn't kill his own grandfather. If somebody else, however accidentally, killed somebody who was somebody else's great-great-grandfather, and this happened before his great-grandfather was fathered, then obviously his great-grandfather could not have existed to carry on the family name, nor his father, nor he

himself. And a radical nuclear scientist would never be born to defect to Russia and afterward to China. Somebody else might be born instead. For instance, Pepe.

It was perfectly simple. The mainland Chinese didn't have an atom bomb. They'd never had one. They'd never fired off even low-yield ones, and certainly no fifty-megaton ones. They hadn't exploded any atomic bombs at all. So there'd never been a threat to Formosa or the rest of the world, and therefore no time-tunnel, and therefore no Carroll, Dubois et Cie, and therefore

Harrison thrust things out of his mind. They would only be confusing. They were useless.

"Nothing's changed!" said Harrison doggedly. "Facts are facts! And if they're impossible, they're still facts!"

It was true. Harrison was pleased that it was true.

He and his wife went back to their hotel.



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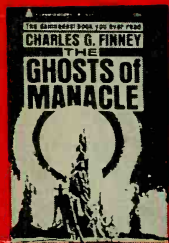
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