

The Redemption of August

by Tom Purdom

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How can someone who is not a professional man of letters make an unknown audience understand what it means to live under the Germans? How can he convey the reality of Prussian despotism to people who live in a society that has never been deformed by such a catastrophe -- people who live in a *world* that has never been deformed by such a catastrophe? You have never been forced to stare at the sewage the German communications satellites pour into the living rooms of Europe. You have never been questioned by a German GD man who makes you concentrate on every word he utters while he speaks a human language with all the grace of someone who has spent his life grunting and barking. You have never seen a classroom of French children standing at attention while they sing -- in their own languages -- a "hymn" in praise of the very man -- the German Kaiser himself -- who is the ultimate symbol of their degradation.

I realize you may not know what a "communications satellite" is. I am assuming no one will read this for at least fifty years. If you happen to have opened the envelope before then, I can only tell you that someday people will transmit images -- pictures that move -- in the same way they now transmit radio and telephone messages. Every home will have a device that can receive such pictures. In theory, every citizen of the civilized world will be able to enjoy, inexpensively and conveniently, every work of genius ever created for the stage. The plays of Racine. the operas of Lully -- they will all, in theory, be at the disposal of the most isolated farmer.

In the milieu in which I endured most of my early life, however, there were few occasions on which the satellites transmitted such treasures. Hour after hour, day after day, the minds of the European people were distracted by cheap entertainments chosen by the fat-rumped oafs who had spread *Kultur* across Europe at the point of a bayonet.

One of my uncles spent six years of his life in prison because he had dared to resist our German "overseers" and the "friendly government" that shined their Prussian boots. I myself was forced to live in exile at the southern tip of Africa. From my twenty-third birthday until I was almost forty -- through all the most vigorous years of my young manhood -- I was cut off from my language... from the art, and music, and food and wine of my own people... from all the familiar daily realities that feed the soul of the true patriot.

* * *

My name is Alain Varess. I am writing this in the year 1914 but I was born in Lyon in 1971. Only two months ago. I was breathing the poisoned air of the ninth year of the twenty-first century. Anyone who happens to read this during the next few years will be convinced I am a lunatic. Fifty years from now -- when gigantic airplanes roar across the skies and human beings routinely use electronic entertainment devices -- my story will seem more believable. If Mr. "Greenway" is right, my readers may even be living with communications satellites and electronic information systems by then. And only a few years beyond that -- before the end of the century -- you will see the beginning of the research that brought me -- and the man I had come to foil -- on a journey through time itself.

I do not fully understand the scientific discoveries that brought me here. I was only an administrator --

an accountant -- at the observatory that employed me. I can only tell you the principle I used had something to do with the immense gravity fields that surround certain astronomical objects. One of the younger astronomers at the observatory realized that time could be twisted in some fashion and began to experiment with his ideas. He confided in a slightly older colleague who had become something of a confidante, she told me about it, and two years later I found myself standing near a rural road in France, with a coil rising behind me and a portable electronic device controlling the forces generated by the coil.

Even then the functionaries of the Prussian autocracy almost destroyed all my hopes. They didn't know I was about to vanish into the past, of course. They were pursuing me because they had discovered I had entered my native country on a forged passport. Fifteen minutes before I had planned to drive to the spot I had selected for my departure, a GD and a blue-coated collaborator arrived at the house where I was staying. The spray from a chemical self-defense device took care of the collaborator. A kick in the appropriate target left the sausage-bottom writhing on the lawn. By the time I turned out of the driveway, however, a helicopter -- a special kind of airplane -- was shadowing my truck as I raced down the road. Thirty German troops charged toward me as I stood in front of the coil, my hands clutching the bars of a bicycle, and waited for the forces I had unleashed to take effect.

* * *

There is no way anyone can tell you how it feels to be relocated in time. I had planned to arrive in June of 1914, so I could spend a month in Paris during its last summer as a free city, but it was two weeks before I could begin to truly savor the experience. There were whole days when I had to keep reminding myself that the people on the streets were solid beings and I couldn't walk right through them. The first few times I ate anything, I realized I didn't really believe the food could give my body any nourishment.

I had planned to ride to Paris by bicycle. I had even obtained a machine that had been built with the frame angles and proportions that had been standard in the early part of the century. With the bicycle and some bread and cheese. I could reach Paris without any currency. In Paris. I would sell the twelve small diamonds I had with me and the money problem would be solved.

It was a good plan, but of course nothing ever works out exactly the way you planned. Only a German staff officer could be foolish enough to believe he could foresee every eventuality. Five miles after I started pedaling, the bicycle developed a puncture. I had done very little bicycling in my own time and I discovered, after an hour of struggle, that I didn't know how to use my repair kit. My custom-made machine ended up hidden behind a bush.

Fortunately, I had also decided to take an expensive harmonica with me, just in case I needed to raise money before I reached Paris. Harmonicas hadn't changed much in ninety-five years -- even the brand name was the same -- and I sold mine in the next small town and bought a railroad ticket.

My hasty departure had also meant that I had taken a few items that hadn't been included in my original plans. I had been changing clothes when the German troops had arrived and I had been forced to leave my 1914 trousers in my bag and merely slip into my 1914 jacket. My wallet had still been tucked into the pocket of my twenty-first century trousers, so I arrived in my new environment with some plastic cards that twenty-first century people used for banking purposes and an electronic calculating device -- a kind of adding machine that was about the size and thickness of a calling card. I had also come through time with my container of disorientation gas clipped to my shirt pocket.

So I lived in Paris, in luxury, in the last innocent June of its history as the capital of a free republic. I ate in restaurants where Germans were regarded as foreigners. I sat in cafés and watched the comings and goings of the first truly free French men and women I had ever seen. I made love to young women who had never primped and wiggled in the hope that they might attract the touch of Teutonic paws. And on the last day of June -- as the newspapers were still reporting the first reactions to Franz Ferdinand's assassination -- I left for the Belgian border and my rendezvous with the mysterious "Greenway."

* * *

Three days later, I saw the man who had brought me on this bizarre adventure riding away from the center of town on his bicycle. I was returning to our mutual hotel after a visit to the railroad station and I knew it was him because I had identified him the night before at dinner. He was the only *anglais* in the town, he was the correct age, and he claimed he was taking photographs for a book he was writing on the French countryside, just as the Greenway I knew about had claimed.

It was now July 3. In a few days, according to my information, he would leave the hotel and take up residence on the Dinar farm. In less than thirty days, mobilization would be declared in France and Germany, and General von Kluck's hordes would begin their advance through the neutral soil of Belgium. The masterpiece of Prussian military morality -- the "Schlieffen Plan" that they speak of with such pride -- would begin with German troops crossing a border the apostles of *Kultur* had sworn to respect. The huge masses under von Kluck's command would push back the weaker French and British forces in front of them -- forces that were smaller than they might have been because no one in Paris or London had believed the animals on the other side of the Rhine would actually betray their oath and violate Belgian neutrality. Von Kluck's hordes would swing across France in a great arc that would take them behind Paris, and the French army would be surrounded less than six weeks after the commencement of hostilities.

That had been the German vision, and von Kluck had followed the plan to the letter and turned it into the reality that had disfigured my entire life. Every horror that had blighted my existence -- every second of the ninety-five years of shame and tyranny that had followed the surrender of the French army in September of 1914 -- had been the direct result of von Kluck's relentless execution of the maneuver the German General Staff had been planning for almost two decades.

There had been a moment, however, when Von Kluck had considered a modification in Schlieffen's scheme. Von Kluck has even admitted it in his memoirs. His men were tired. He believed the French army had exhausted itself with its unsuccessful attacks against the center of the German front. He did not know there were several reserve divisions still posted in Paris.

Von Kluck had been fully prepared to shorten the arc and swing *in front* of Paris -- where he could have been hit in the flank by the reserves the commander of the Paris sector still had under his command. He had avoided this blunder (as you can see if you read his memoirs with care) only because he had received an urgent radio message -- uncoded -- in which the German high command had warned him of the reserves and unequivocally ordered him to proceed with the original plan.

But who had sent that message? The message on which the entire success of Schlieffen's plan had, in the end, depended? In the late 1940s, a small group of American academics had devoted large portions of their careers to that question. The leaders of the "Germanic Pan-European Hegemony" had never officially admitted it, but the testimony of several German staff officers had indicated that no one in German headquarters had ever transmitted such a message. In 1996, while I was browsing through a pile of second-hand books in Johannesburg, I came across a volume that had been written by a writer named Raymonde François Martinel who lived in the American city of Philadelphia and called himself L'Exile. It was entitled *The Conspiracies of August* and in its pages Martinel built a massive theory around the findings of a much more famous writer, Madeline Lescaut, who had investigated certain puzzling events that had taken place on a farm near the Belgian border. An Englishman named Greenway had rented a room there in the month of July 1914. When the German advance began, he told the Dinars daughter he was a British agent. He had a radio with him and he claimed he was supposed to transmit information on German troop movements. The daughter and her brother hid him when the Germans searched the farm for weapons. At one point, the brother tried to leave the house with a shotgun, so he could join some friends who were hoping to fire a few honest volleys at the German columns. "Greenway" became afraid the boy would attract attention to the farm. He threatened the boy with a knife and retrieved the gun in a confrontation in which he stabbed the young man in the thigh. The wound became infected. The boy lost his leg a few weeks later. Years after, when he heard about the controversy over the radio message, he wrote Madame Lescaut. By the time she got around to visiting his village, he had died of alcoholism and she had to piece the story together by interviewing his acquaintances.

To Raymonde the Exile, the story proved that Mr. Greenway was the primary reason he was scraping

out a living in a foreign city. Greenway had been a German spy, Raymonde asserted. He had somehow learned, from agents in Paris, of the forces still poised there. He had taken it upon himself to issue an order in the name of his superiors.

It was an entertaining, well-written book. I enjoyed the evening I devoted to it. There were many reasons, however, why the behavior of the "spy" made little sense to me. Could any German ever treat his chain of command so cavalierly? And then, years later, I discovered it might be possible to travel in time...

I have often been criticized for my "impetuosity," and it has, in fact, sometimes gotten me into trouble. Still, I had almost been arrested because I had decided to delay my departure by fifteen minutes and carefully reinspect my preparations. Now, seeing Greenway ride away on his bicycle, I grabbed a machine that had been left in front of the hotel. I had already managed to glance through his door and determine that he had a large trunk in his room. My trip to the train station had eliminated the possibility he had checked a package with the attendant.

For half an hour after we left the town, I followed him along the paved white road that passed by neat French farmhouses and well-kept fields -- a French countryside that had not been disfigured by hordes of automobiles, blocks of "country homes," and the other blessings of German "technical and economic progress." Eventually he turned onto a dirt side road and I stopped him in an isolated spot where we were alone with the wind that blew across the wheat fields on both sides of the road.

His eyes widened when I pointed my revolver at him. His hands shot up in the air with such alacrity I almost started laughing. I thought he would hand over his keys as soon as I demanded them but instead he started arguing with me. There was nothing in his trunk of any value, he insisted.

You must remember that my assault on the GD man and his French valet had been the first serious act of violence I had ever participated in. I had assumed Greenway would follow my instructions as soon as he saw the front of my revolver. It had never occurred to me he would stand there arguing with me.

I could have simply killed him, of course. I had already decided I was willing to go to the guillotine. For now, though, I merely wanted access to his radio.

I thought about knocking him out with the revolver and realized I didn't know where to hit him or how hard. Instead, I tried to silence his babbling by telling him the one thing that would convince him I was willing to pull the trigger.

"Give me the keys, monsieur. I don't want to kill you if I can avoid it but don't try to convince yourself I won't. It's the surest way I can make certain General von Kluck never receives your famous message. I've given up my whole life to keep you from making that transmission. If I have to go to the guillotine to stop you, I will."

He shut up as soon as he understood. Then his whole face lit up with excitement -- the same excitement I have seen, now and then, on the faces of scientific researchers who have hit on some new idea that catches their fancy. The babbling started again and I realized, as I listened to that flow of anglicized French, that he had again forgotten about the gun. All he could think of was the fact that I was a time traveler, too. That, and the fact that my presence indicated he had "succeeded."

My voice erupted from me in a bellow that was, I suspect, also a cry of pain. "GIVE ME YOUR KEYS. And give me the knife on your ankle, too. I know about that also."

This time he got himself under control. He handed me the knife. He gave me the keys. He took off his tie and let me bind his wrists to the frame of his bicycle. But all the while he went on talking, endlessly talking, trying to convince me he and I should "exchange information about our alternative histories," trying to persuade me I should support his lunatic assault on the destiny of civilization.

I slashed both his tires with his own knife and left him still mouthing words at me as I rode away. There was a moment, as I turned onto the paved road, when I actually threw back my head and laughed in triumph.

Had anyone in the whole history of the French people ever done anything that could be compared to this? Everything the so-called "Englishman" had said made it clear that all my hypotheses had been correct. He had indeed come here to transmit the mysterious radio message that had forced General von Kluck to ignore the considerations that were telling him he should modify the Schlieffen Plan. And he had

made the journey -- every sentence he had uttered had proved it! -- because he came from a society in which von Kluck had followed his natural instincts, the Schlieffen Plan had failed, and France had eventually struggled through to victory! I had lived my entire life in a world in which the source of every calamity had been a conspirator who had arrogantly altered the natural course of history.

* * *

The maid was working in Greenway's room when I got back to the hotel. I had to hide in my own room until she finished. I knew I had found the radio when I dug through the things in Greenway's trunk and found a metal box in the bottom right hand corner. When I tried to pull the box out of the trunk, however, I discovered it had been welded to the bottom. I searched desperately for the lock and cursed when I realized the meaning of the four brass disks on the left side of the box. The disks appeared to be buttons, but they were actually an electronic device. Greenway had secured the box with an electronic combination lock disguised as a mechanical contrivance.

Once again I managed to control my infamous impetuosity. I checked the corridor before I left the room. I walked calmly and carefully through the hotel café and maintained my pace and demeanor as I proceeded from the hotel to a store only a hundred meters away. I purchased a sturdy long-handled ax and had it neatly wrapped before I carried it back to his room and locked the door behind me.

This time it was I who found myself facing a gun. There had been another knife, it seemed -- a folding knife which wasn't mentioned in Madame Lescaut's account. He had cut himself free and managed to beg a ride on a passing truck.

I was confident he wouldn't shoot me. He was obviously not interested in any action that might attract serious notice. I put down the ax when he told me to and once again had to listen while he ranted at me.

I had been assuming he was a German agent who had been transported to the past by German conspirators who were trying to rectify the mistakes of their generals. Now it occurred to me he might actually be a megalomaniac who believed he could singlehandedly legislate the destiny of the entire human race. According to him, the entire twentieth century had been a series of unmitigated disasters -- and every nightmare in his catalogue had taken place merely because the German barbarians had failed in their attempt to conquer France. In the future he came from, the Schlieffen Plan had indeed failed because von Kluck had modified his original orders. The war, he claimed, had turned into a "stalemate" in which millions of men had died in frontal attacks against fixed positions that stretched across the entire map of Europe. After that there had been a second war which had been even worse than the first. There had been massacres and revolutions, and eventually -- as a direct result of the failure of the Schlieffen Plan and the outbreak of the second German attempt to conquer Europe -- the development of "superbombs" that could destroy entire cities. He was here, I was to believe, because the entire human race would be wiped out if he didn't make sure Kaiser Wilhelm's hoodlums became the masters of Europe.

Even if he was a German agent, he was giving me many reasons to think he was not a trained professional agent. He talked like many of the scientists and scholars I had known. He was a slight, somewhat bony man with a protruding stomach. He was holding his gun as if it were a harmless piece of pipe.

"What did you do in your own time?" I asked.

He looked startled -- as if he couldn't understand why I would ask a personal question -- and then told me he was a physicist. At some place near London, he maintained. He had worked with collision accelerators -- a concept I was familiar with -- and experimented with some elementary particles I had never heard of called "quarks." He had worked out the whole concept of time travel all by himself, he asserted, and embarked on his journey through time entirely on his own, in total secrecy, because he felt it was his duty to save the world from the horrors that would befall it if the Schlieffen Plan failed. He had always been interested in history, he claimed (an odd enthusiasm for a physicist), and he had conceived his whole mad scheme merely because he had always felt von Kluck's decision to modify the Schlieffen Plan had been one of the turning points of twentieth century history.

Some of the things he said about scientific matters sounded like phrases from the conversations I had heard in the cafeteria at the observatory. But did that really make any difference? Couldn't a group of German conspirators have used a real physicist as an agent? They couldn't have known he would have to deal with someone like me, after all.

My face must have flashed him a warning. He stepped back and took a two-handed aim at my leg.

"Don't think I won't shoot. I caught you in this room with my trunk open. There's nothing wrong with any of my papers. I'd like to avoid attracting attention if I can. But don't think I won't wound you enough to keep you out of my way for a few weeks."

I raised my hands and backed out of the room. That night I heard a commotion in the hall and heard him supervising two men who were moving his things out of the hotel.

* * *

The first letter was delivered four days later. It was a shock to realize the boy who brought it was Léon Dinar -- the young man who would lose his leg in a few weeks. He was obviously a stolid fellow but he was puzzled about the whole business. It wasn't hard to use his curiosity to get him talking. Greenway had arrived earlier than he had originally arranged and had been locked in his room ever since. He had told Monsieur Dinar he wanted to observe the day-to-day workings of the farm. Now he claimed he was working on his book and couldn't be interrupted.

Léon didn't mind the bicycle ride into town because he had a "friend" who lived there. He was still young enough, under all that muscle, that it wasn't hard to guess the sex of the friend. I made sure I gave him the kind of tip that would buy him a lengthy dalliance at the local sweet shop and told him I would have a reply for him the next evening, if he was willing to make another trip into town.

The letter itself was a recapitulation of Greenway's rantings, organized with more care and fleshed out with more detail. Once again I had to hear about the masses of young men who were mowed down by the machine guns as they came out of the trenches, the great city-destroying bombs and the threat they created for civilization....

It was a narrative that was so detailed and even logical that I would have been a fool if I hadn't realized it had to have some relation to a factual record. There was one detail, in fact, which was so monstrous it was hard to believe anyone -- least of all a German agent -- could have invented it. During the second war, he asserted, the Prussian automatons had given their allegiance to a tyrant who had followed the perverted instincts of the German soul to their logical conclusion and used the technological advances of modern society to systematically gas and burn millions of people.

I pondered that section of his letter for almost an hour after I first read it. Could any German agent have said that about his own people?

But how could I possibly believe his claim that the allied generals had wasted the manpower of their countries in the massive frontal attacks he dwelled on with such relish? I could believe the German generals could have done that. The English might have behaved that way, too. But the generals of my own nation? With their tradition of military dash and brilliance? My own father had followed the progress of the Japanese armies as they had advanced across China behind armored cars and dive-bombing airplanes later in the century. Was I supposed to believe European generals couldn't think of that, too? During a war that was supposed to have lasted several years?

It didn't matter. Even if every word he wrote was true, how could it matter? One fact remained. Even if he happened to be telling the literal, unadorned truth -- and I did not believe he was -- wouldn't all the French soldiers who died in the battles described in his letter have wanted a world in which civilization and justice eventually triumphed? Wasn't it better to die fighting than to live through the century of shame and barbarism he had brought upon the nation that was the very soul and tutor of Europe?

* * *

I sent him the best answers I could -- anything that would keep him writing. Léon went back and forth

between us every day for a week. Eventually I advised Léon that the man residing in his father's house was a spy who had been planted by the Germans because they believed the assassination of the Austrian Archduke would soon lead to war. I myself, I asserted, was a government agent who was attempting to amass conclusive proof of Greenway's identity.

One night I bicycled back to the farm with Léon and slipped off my bicycle long before Greenway could have seen me coming up the road. I worked my way through the fields behind the house and joined Léon at the back door. Greenway always opened the door to his room when Léon came back from the town with a message, the boy had told me. The two of us could easily take such a small man by surprise and force our way in.

The door to Greenway's room creaked open as I was creeping up the stairs behind Léon's big back. The "Englishman" had apparently seen Léon leave his bike in front of the house and wondered why it had taken him so long to bring his latest message.

This time I was the one who drew his revolver. Greenway hesitated, with one hand on the door, and I pushed my way around Léon and scrambled toward him.

He kicked at me and we grappled like lunatics at the top of the stairs. Once I caught a maddening, tantalizing glimpse of his trunk as I swayed in front of his door.

A blinding pain shot up my leg. My grip on his wrists loosened and he kicked me again and slipped free. The door slammed. I heard the bolt slide into place.

I turned around, still bent over with anguish, and saw Léon looking up at me with a smile on his over-sized face. The oaf had actually thought the whole thing was amusing! I bellowed at him, and then realized his sister was standing at the bottom of the stairs. Her parents crowded in behind her and I straightened up, in spite of the pain, and tried to concoct an explanation that would satisfy minds that had not been dulled by three generations of Teutonic occupation.

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Naturally, Greenway now tried to convince Léon's sister he was a British agent, just as he had in Madame Lescaut's account. He even showed Estelle the radio and some credentials he had managed to counterfeit. Léon continued to bring me letters, but he was obviously confused.

But Greenway knew, as well as I did, that I could end all his dreams merely by saying a few words to the right German officers when the gray-coated hordes eventually tramped past the Dinars' house. Estelle might be able to hide him and his radio from the standard German search for shotguns and sporting rifles -- but could she hide him from searchers who had been informed that they should look for a British agent and a hidden wireless? The thought of cooperating with the Prussian sadists might make me cringe, but it was, ironically, the simplest way to assure their ultimate defeat.

So now his letters began to dwell on a new suggestion. Why shouldn't he and I join forces and try to approach the leaders of the world? We already had his radio, he argued, as proof we came from a more advanced era. Between us, we could put together "predictions" of the next few weeks that would provide even more proof. He had become a wealthy man in England, he maintained, by taking advantage of the British passion for betting on sporting events. His contacts might not get him to the prime minister, but they could easily lead to a meeting with the "adventurous, imaginative politician" who was currently First Lord of the Admiralty.

I probably would have rejected the idea out of hand if he hadn't suggested we contact Winston Churchill. The only other name he could suggest was the novelist H.G. Wells -- a man who had spent the next thirty years hailing the German conquerors for their "unification of Europe"! The First Lord of the Admiralty, on the other hand, had been one of my heroes since I had been a child. He alone, of all British politicians, had recognized that no British government could accept a conquest which had been based on the violation of Belgian neutrality. He alone, for the rest of his life, had steadfastly stood by the French people.

I could even imagine Churchill might believe our story. His love of bold ideas was legendary. And I had, of course, a piece of evidence that would throw the most determined skeptic into turmoil. A

politician with a limited knowledge of technical matters might not understand why Greenway's radio was significantly different from a contemporary wireless. My calculator would seem like a miracle to anyone who watched it multiply two numbers.

And wouldn't it be better, assuming Churchill listened to us, if we could save France from defeat and help her avoid the trials of a protracted war, too?

I had now read over a dozen of Greenway's lengthy letters and I was no longer so certain he was the tool of a monstrous conspiracy some Teutonic fanatics had hatched in a future society in which von Kluck's march had met with the fate it deserved. He had told me many things about himself in his letters and some of them did, indeed, indicate that he might very well be the person he asserted he was -- a lonely man who had brooded over the state of the world in the isolation of his study. He was even a bird-watcher -- the traditional diversion of the solitary Englishman. According to one of his letters, he had decided to leave his own time -- which was apparently sometime in the early 1980s -- because one of the world leaders of the era -- an American president! if I understood him -- was leading his country into a military buildup that would, Greenway had decided, "inevitably end in a war that would destroy civilization." His career as a scientist, he claimed, had been "mediocre." He had always known, he said, that if he ever discovered anything important, it would be by sheer accident. He had kept his discoveries to himself -- and made the journey on his own initiative--because he had believed this was his opportunity to finally do something significant for the world.

It was a picture that fitted my own observations of scientists. Many men in those occupations turn to politics when they realize they will never be the Pasteurs or the Curies they dreamed of being. Many of them find it easy to convince themselves that their superior knowledge of science must be accompanied by a superior understanding of political questions.

I paced the floor of my room. Greenway's letters became more and more agitated. On the 27th of July -- six days before the first German boots would tramp into Belgium -- I agreed to meet him the next evening.

* * *

I was supposed to get off my bicycle a hundred yards from the house and let him see me. Then -- when he was sure I couldn't slip into the house while he was out of his room -- he would come down and we would meet on the road and discuss our next move.

Instead, he was waiting for me behind a hedge when I got off the bike at the appointed place. Again, I found myself looking at his revolver.

I had realized he might do something like this and I had deliberately left my jacket at the hotel and bicycled in my vest. I raised my hands as soon as he revealed himself and twisted from side to side so he could see I couldn't possibly have a gun.

"I'm unarmed," I said. "I want you to understand that. I'm no threat."

His voice sounded choked and raspy -- as if he hadn't talked to anyone in several days. "I just want the calculator, Alain. Just give me that and then you can go."

I shrugged. "It's what I came to do."

"It's the only way I can be sure it will get to the right people. I can't stay here while you're running around loose and I can't assume you've had a change of heart. I still want you to join me later -- after I've made the initial contacts."

I shrugged again. "The calculator is in my vest pocket. What do you want me to do with it?"

"Lay it on the ground. Then step back three steps. And don't think I won't shoot. Once I've got that thing in my hands, it won't matter if I cripple you for life."

I took the calculator out of my vest and counted off three steps after I laid it down. He frowned at me, not completely convinced I was harmless, and stepped forward with his eyes fixed on my face.

There was a moment when his gaze wavered. He was bending over the calculator and he had apparently yielded to the impulse to press the buttons and satisfy himself it really worked.

I had been afraid he would realize one of the "pens" in my vest pocket was twice as thick as it should

be, but apparently they still didn't have disorientation gases in the society he had come from. He looked up as I stepped toward him but he still wasn't prepared to shoot. The tight stream of liquid leaped out of the generator and formed a cloud in front of his face. I slipped to one side -- just in case he fired -- and he sat down and stared at me with the same stupid look I had seen on the face of the GD man.

Estelle was working in the kitchen but this time I could forget legalities. She slumped to the floor in her turn and I grabbed the small hatchet her family kept near the rear door.

Greenway had fortified his bedroom door with a spring-loaded lock after my last visit but by now I was berserk. The hatchet smashed against wood and metal. More blows knocked the lock off his chest. I raised the hatchet above my head and the blade fell on the metal box and its Satanic contents.

I had considered the possibility he might buy a replacement for his radio and then realized it was a pointless concern. He needed a portable, easily concealed, battery-powered instrument that could send a strong message across fifty kilometers. Nothing like that existed in the milieu we were living in. Every blow of my ax destroyed components that would not be replaceable for at least fifty years.

He was already standing in the yard when I raced outside, but what did it matter? I had his gun in my belt. I had the calculator. His radio was in ruins. I pointed the gas device at him and he raised his hands in front of his face and stepped back.

I almost laughed when I looked back and saw him following me on his own bicycle. He was almost fifteen years older than I, after all. Then I realized he was gaining on me. I had already ridden out to the farm. I had put all my strength into the work I had done with the ax. I had been in a state of agitation from the moment he pulled his pistol on me.

I took the revolver out of my belt and managed to dump the bullets onto the road as I pedaled. Then I waved the gun itself at him and hurled it into a wheat field. This was not the time to shoot someone. There was only one more thing I could do for France -- and I intended to do it.

I had hoped he might stop and try to retrieve the gun but he kept coming. His face was so inflamed he looked like he had been lying on a beach. I bent over the handlebars as if I was sprinting through the last mile of the Tour de France and managed to put some extra meters between us. Then my breath ran out and he closed the distance I had gained and cut my lead by another meter.

It was, in retrospect, a mixture of the grandiose and the comic that only a Gallic mind could truly appreciate. It was one of the decisive moments in European history. The fate of every man and woman born in the twentieth century hung on the outcome -- and the entire scene consisted of two breathless middle-aged men frantically pedaling bicycles along a rural road!

I could have handed him the calculator, of course. I could even understand why he might have decided he couldn't trust me. But suppose I did give it to him -- and then discovered he really was, after all, a German time traveler who had been sent here to reverse the natural course of history? Even if he really was the solitary megalomaniac he claimed to be -- suppose he took his story to the leaders of Europe and only the Germans believed him? Hadn't he already proved, by the very scheme that had brought him here, that he was a brooding fanatic who would help the Prussian hordes crush Europe beneath their boots if he believed that was the only way he could achieve his aims?

Two or three farm trucks lumbered past us. A salesman's automobile pattered by in the opposite direction. I veered around a horse-drawn wagon loaded with produce and a moment later my frenzied pursuer rolled past the horse's head.

I realized he was going to catch up with me anyway and decided to slow down in the hope the presence of the wagon driver might help him get his rage under control. He reached out to grab my shoulder as he pulled abreast and I veered toward the edge of the road as I pulled the gas device out of my pocket.

The bicycle slid out from under me. I fell toward Greenway and we collapsed in a tangle of limbs and machinery. Tubing pressed painfully against my back. He managed to roll onto me and I covered my face and neck with my arms when I saw his fists falling toward me.

His fists pounded on my chest as if he was trying to stun me by stopping my heart. The horse neighed somewhere above me. I felt a little stabbing pain in my rib cage -- as if a sharp corner had been pushed into my skin -- and almost smiled when I understood the irony of the situation.

* * *

I have no idea where Greenway is now. He may, at this very moment, be sitting in some room -- in England? in Germany? -- staring helplessly at the useless, bent object he himself mangled in his rage.

Today is August 6 -- Liège Day, the Day of Ultimate Horror, the day when the Kaiser's arrogant henchmen committed the crime that every honorable spirit will remember from now until the end of time. Only a few hours ago, when the city of Liège ignored a German ultimatum and refused to surrender, a German zeppelin flew over the city and killed nine defenseless civilians by dropping bombs from the air. Every year of my life, from the time I was a few years old, I commemorated August 6 with all the ceremonies I was permitted to attend. As a boy in France. I was a part of that irrepressible minority who attended secret memorial services and wore mourning clothes to school. In the years of my exile, I always participated in the silent march through the streets of Johannesburg that my fellow expatriates organized as an annual reminder of the nightmares that lurk in the German soul. This time, I shall honor the Martyred Nine by reporting for induction in the army of the French Republic. It took most of my last cash to arrange a proper set of identification papers, but I'm certain no one will look too closely at the results.

All around me brave young men are singing as they march toward the frontier, their faces alive with the belief they are fighting the greatest evil the world has ever known. With them it is only belief -- the intuition of minds that have not been clouded by the Teutonic fog that lay across the nation I was raised in. This time, there shall be someone marching in their ranks who fights from knowledge -- someone who has actually seen the horrors of the world they and their descendants will live in, if they let themselves be defeated.

August will never again be remembered as a month in which evil won its greatest victory. August 6 will never again be a day that mankind must remember with shame and anguish.

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