

The Insanity of George Gregory Harris

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The man's name was Henri. He was distinguished-looking, being possessed of the kind of nose one would expect a mathematician to have – short and to the point. Paris sat on the aisle seat, ready to leave should the lecture prove too tiring, but with an excellent view of the lecturer who had traveled from France to present the fruit of his work for the first very time in America. Henri Poincaré busied himself at the front, shuffling papers, mumbling to himself, clearing his throat. Every few moments the gentleman's eyes would rise to the gathering crowd and flick amongst the patrons of his great ideas, as if to ensure that people were indeed coming to see him, to reassure himself that he mattered in some way to the world. Paris followed Poincaré's darting eyes, watching the cream of Washington society arrive at the highly publicized lecture of one of the world's foremost mathematicians. It made even the silliest of debutantes appear intellectual. Naturally, they were all stylish, well-groomed, and rather supercilious.

Then there came a man who fit none of these categories. Lean and dark, he stood out from the moving mass due to an extremely unfashionable crop of thick black hair that tumbled with spirit over a finely turned collar and reached down to shoulders that attempted with no success to break free from the confining space of a suit that was at least a size too small. No woman accompanied him, and he seemed to care little for the simpering ladies who turned admiring glances upon his person. His eyes were fixed, with a kind of fascination, upon the figure of Henri Poincaré. Paris' eyes were thereafter fixed on the stranger. He had no interest in mathematics or the theories on which Poincaré began to eagerly expound. The stranger, however – the stranger was extremely interested. He seated himself at a distance from Paris, down closer towards the stage and far away from the gleaming doors through which he had entered. He was dressed as one who was disgustingly rich but had precious little time to spend shopping; rather he sent a fashion-challenged manservant to find his clothes and did not even take the time to be properly measured. Paris noticed his habit of staring. Blinking seemed to be an afterthought the stranger remembered only every few minutes. He was also disdainful of breathing. His chest remained still while all others in the room heaved great breaths and blew air in and out in the extreme heat of the room. Washington society disliked being together in one room in the

height of summer. The stranger, however, gave no indication the temperature was at all uncomfortable. He matched perfectly the description provided by the Department. Paris had found his man.

He was so intent upon the dark-haired man that it came as a surprise to him when Poincaré's booming voice interrupted his thoughts. "Galileo," the mathematician boomed, impressively placing a hand on either side of the podium and leaning forward intently. "Galileo once said that mathematics is the language of nature, and 'its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures.'" Paris supposed this was true. "Mathematics!" cried Poincaré, shaking a finger towards heaven. "Mathematics is the thing. It ties together everything in this universe. Mathematics is in all things, and all things are mathematical. Your beautiful face, madam" – and he gestured to a sour-looking matron in the front row – "is lovely to look upon because of its fine, symmetrical form, because mathematically it is perfectly aligned – yes?"

The stranger edged forward in his seat. Paris unconsciously did the same.

"The self-similarity of a fern leaf," continued the mathematician, hands gesturing wildly, "is an incredible, detailed work of art that contains numbers and equations beyond the comprehension of all those present here, even I. But, I get ahead of myself, yes?" He chuckled to himself, and even his chuckle bore the mark of his French origins.

Paris' eyes flew back to the stranger. The man sat at such an angle that only a fraction of the right side of his face was visible to Paris, but his body language spoke volumes. Attentive, straight-backed, utterly still. The mathematician held him captive, just as the stranger himself had caught the attention of the Department. Paris shifted his eyes back to the speaker.

"The real reason for this lecture is a theory I have been involved with for years now, and one I believe you will find very interesting," Poincaré continued, smiling enigmatically at the crowd of at least four hundred that sat before him. "It is called the Three-Body Problem." A ripple of interest or confusion – it was not evident which one was the general consensus of the room – spread throughout the assembly. "My work is based upon the theory that, using Sir Isaac Newton's Law of Inverse Squares, I can predict the motion of three or more attracted independent masses based on their original velocity, mass, and position – bodies such as the sun, the moon, and the earth."

This news seemed to bewilder some in the crowd, yet others leaned forward in rapt attention, enthralled by the words still to come out of Poincaré's mouth.

“These bodies, as I shall demonstrate, all have gravitational pulls on one another, unable to make a movement without affecting the others. They are locked in a system with each other from which they cannot escape, always in a constant state of cause and effect.” He paused and surveyed his audience. “Now, some of you may scoff at my ability to predict the future, as you might call it.” The mathematician raised his hands and gave a humble shrug. “And rightly so. But we live in a world, ladies and gentlemen, of science. An *age* of science. We want proof, do we not, that our existence is worthwhile? That randomness is a figment of our imagination, in order to give purpose to otherwise senseless acts? Well, we have proof. We have worth. There are patterns, my friends – *patterns* in the world and in nature that defy the very thought of random selection! Do you know what the core of Sir Isaac Newton’s work was?...it was finding the patterns in our world that give this planet laws and explanations, and the mathematics I am about to explain to you are only the tip of the iceberg.” He took a breath and stared defiantly out at the audience. “*Only the tip*, ladies and gentlemen.”

The stranger moved ever so slightly forward.

Order, Poincaré was saying, from chaos.

It was not comforting, coming home to an empty house. His thoughts overwhelmed him. Paris tossed his hat carelessly on the duvet; there was nobody to worry that it would be mussed. Equally carelessly, he opened the package that had been waiting at his door, addressed as usual in the firm hand of a Department man, but the return address traced it to a woman in Massachusetts. One could never be too careful. He held up the single slip of paper to the lamp, and frowned.

It looked to be many years old, possibly even more than two decades. The writing was faded and the paper yellowed. Paris sighed inwardly and sat thoughtlessly upon his hat, squinting to make sense of the small lettering; images of the lecture he had just attended blurred with the page before his eyes. Eventually the infamous words of John Wilkes Booth slowly took shape in the dim light: *Sic Semper Tyrannis*. There was not a man in the Department who did not know what that meant.

Moving purposefully, Paris pushed the slip into his pocket, stood, and threw on the overcoat. The oil lamp was reduced to a meager flame. A dagger, waiting as always on the bureau beside the door, was slipped into one boot to join the revolver already hidden on his person. Again, one could never be too careful.

“What’s this?”

Paris flung the package down on Orville’s desk and waited impatiently while the man finished his paperwork, slipped off his spectacles, and leaned back in his chair to stretch before even affording Paris a glance. When he did, he spoke without once looking at the package itself. “*Sic Semper Tyrannis?*”

“Thus always to tyrants,” Paris enunciated slowly.

“I know what it says,” responded Orville gruffly. “I sent it to you.”

“Where did you find it?”

“Researchers found it. Buried in a barn in northern Virginia. I wasted no time in getting it to you, but it seems I could have sent for you and saved myself the trouble as I will clearly have to explain it to you.”

“Do you realize what this is – ?”

Orville stood abruptly, and his large frame appeared even larger in the cramped office. He was tall, he was old, and he was the most ornery man Paris knew. “The motto of the Commonwealth of Virginia, is it not? The words uttered by Booth as his boots hit the stage of the Ford Theatre, leaving Lincoln crippled and dying behind him?”

Paris eyed the man suspiciously. “What has this got to do with the man I followed at Poincaré’s lecture, Orville?” The possibilities were impossibly perfect. So many pieces could not fall into place in one night.

His superior thrust frustrated fingers through his gray thinning hair. “Did you get a good look at him, at all, Howard? Did you write your report?”

“In the five minutes I spent at home today, indeed I did,” Paris shot back. He gave Orville a look and began pacing the small length of the room, recapturing the stranger in his mind’s eye. “He was tall, unkempt. He hardly blinked. His clothes were ill-fitting, so strong was his frame.” He remembered the man standing after the lecture, quickly, and moving swiftly towards the lecture hall’s exit as he buttoned up his overcoat. Odd for a man to wear an overcoat in June. “His suit.” Paris paused. “His suit was decidedly outdated. By decades.”

Orville nodded firmly, as if to say he had been suspicious of it all along.

Paris let his gaze slide over to his superior. Words ran through his mind, unwilling to be voiced.

“You have his ticket, of course?”

Silently, Paris withdrew a small paper from his pocket, the ticket signed by the imposing stranger with the outdated clothing. He then reached with his other hand for the package lying on the desk. Having removed the faded parchment from the envelope, he held it up to the light, and felt the corner of his mouth tip up. “Orville,” he said.

“It is about time something went right around this place,” Orville harrumphed, and sat back down with a deep sigh.

Paris’ eyes scanned first the words on the ticket, then those of John Wilkes Booth, and of Marcus Junius Brutus, and of countless others. Each letter on both pages was unquestionably formed by the same determined hand. “I will have to send these to the analysts,” he muttered. “But they will not change my mind. The man must be found.”

Orville nodded, a cigar now clamped between his teeth, eyes fixed on the distant wall. “I have it upon good authority,” he said, as if to himself, “that he will not long stay away from Monsieur Poincaré.”

Paris spent little time in arriving back at his apartment, shedding his hat, boots and weapons. It would be a long night, but he relished the task before him. He had worked for far too long to let this chance slip away. The elusive last piece to the puzzle the Department had been trying to solve for thirty years was now, at last, in his hands. The words of Poincaré swirled around in his mind as he stared intently at the blank pages before him, as he dipped his quill into the ink well on the desk. The lantern flickered. And the words began to make a muddled sort of sense.

“I can now determine the motion of these bodies based on Newtonian equations,” Poincaré announced grandly.

“And if you did not know their initial positions?”

Poincaré halted, momentarily confused. “I beg your pardon?”

It was the stranger. “Can you predict their future motions if something in the equation is tampered with? The velocity of one of the bodies, for example?”

The mathematician was not amused. “I am not dealing in what-ifs, young man. I deal with fact.”

“But if a factor was changed? What then?”

“Chaos, sir. A chain of unpredictable events spiraling towards chaos.”

The stranger had a fascination with the predictability factor. The what-ifs. *Sic Semper Tyrannis*. His name, scrawled in such a careless yet determined hand. George Gregory Harris. *If something in the equation had been tampered with*. Chaos.

He began to scribble the thoughts that were racing through his mind, trying to find the theme, desperate to locate the answer behind all the confusion. *Thus always to tyrants. And if you did not know their initial positions? I deal with fact. George Gregory Harris. George Gregory Harris. John Wilkes Booth. A barn in northern Virginia. Sic Semper Tyrannis. He will not long stay away from Monsieur Poincaré.*

What did it mean? Paris stared at the page, willing it to make sense.

The Department had been trying for thirty years now to cover up the first assassination attempt on Abraham Lincoln's life in 1861. The whys and wherefores of those actions were shrouded in mystery; additionally, their efforts were a success only because the plot was not *provable* – it was only speculated. Paris sat back and expelled a loud breath – who was George Gregory Harris? What was his connection to John Wilkes Booth? – for a connection there must be, considering the page bearing both his handwriting and the assassin's words that had been found in the very barn Booth had so infamously taken refuge in. Why was he so interested in the mathematics of Henri Poincaré? His clothes, though of the finest material, were horribly outdated. Why?

It was a ridiculous thought.

Shoving his hands back in his hair, Paris sat for a moment in uncomprehending silence.

Harris had wanted him there.

He had sat so suspiciously close. He had to know he would be followed; he had flaunted his suspicious activities without remorse. And here he was in Washington, D.C., right under the Department's nose. Yes, it had been a conscious decision to be at the lecture in such dangerous waters. Did he know of the Department's existence?

He allowed his mind to travel down the unlikely path. Harris, in his dated clothing, had attended a lecture on the theories of mathematical chaos, or the lack thereof. He had been intrigued by the lecturer's insistence that he could prove the future movement of any body based on its initial velocity, mass, and position. He had even challenged that insistence. Why? Because he wanted to know what would happen if one of those elements was tweaked, nudged just a bit so as to throw off its predictability. Harris had strong Southern sympathies. He had appeared on the

Department's list of Suspicious People only one week ago, before which he had never been heard of. Yet in that small amount of time his name had been found in numerous telegrams of the Ku Klux Klan, an organization many assumed to be defunct. The Klan's discussion of him had been brief – the Department knew little more than that Harris was valuable, a 'character essential to us,' et cetera. Nothing more.

What was his plan? Where had he come from? Why were the words *Sic Semper Tyrannis* so faded, and its paper so yellowed? Paris could give a reason to that question, but its outlandish nature did not lend any credibility whatsoever. He dismissed the notion. Men could not travel the length of time; it was absurd.

And if you did not know their initial positions?...Chaos. A chain of unpredictable events spiraling towards chaos.

'Sic Semper Tyrannis' was associated, especially among those in the Department, with the assassination of Abraham Lincoln by John Wilkes Booth.

Paris closed his eyes and thought.

"You left your window open."

He had not even been aware he had fallen asleep. The man's voice was unfamiliar; Paris could smell the scent of the streets on him. He did not open his eyes.

"You can hear me. Your breathing has changed. So listen, Howard, and learn." It was a deep voice, laced with Southern sweetness. "I saw you at that lecture today, as you saw me. I asked a question for your benefit; I hope you were listening."

Paris did not stir.

"Poincaré has interesting theories, does he not? Predicting the future. So complicated a task, and yet, I feel I understand his theory. What is more interesting to me, as you know, is the unpredictability of those systems he speaks of. What if I changed one small, almost unnoticeable aspect of those systems, hmm? What if I changed it" – and now his voice was right beside Paris' right ear – "and you were unable to fix it, Howard? What then?"

Paris lunged upright, eyes searching. A shadow darted behind him, and it was gone in the moment it took him to spin around. He stared, breathing heavily, at his open window, light curtains blowing softly to and fro in the night breeze.

Lincoln. Harris was after Lincoln.

Twenty-six years after the president's death, Harris was going to assassinate him.

“You're mad.”

“He was in my house, Orville!” Paris shot back. “I know what the man said.”

Orville paced up and down, puffing spiritedly on his cigar. For a moment he turned and stared in disbelief at Paris, then strode back to the desk and planted two hands solidly on either side. “Howard. You are proposing that a man from 1865 – nearly thirty years ago – traveled through time in order to obtain some...some *object* so that he could then return to 1865 to assassinate Abraham Lincoln, when he's already been killed once! That is what you are saying. Listen to yourself, man!” He hit the desk, gazing with a kind of desperation at Paris. “Those are the ravings of a lunatic!”

“And how are *you* going to explain his words, Orville?” demanded Paris, voice raised. “John Wilkes Booth was shot in the same barn that, may I remind you, Harris' *Sic Semper Tyrannis* was discovered –”

“And what does that prove?” Orville shouted. “The Department is here to ensure the protection of the Union as envisioned by President Lincoln. We are not here to fabricate silly what-ifs about events that have already transpired and no longer have effect upon our work.”

Paris thrust his fingers through his hair in frustration. “Do you not see, Orville?” He took the page he had covered in ink the instant Harris had disappeared. He pointed to the center. “At the very middle of all of this we have Lincoln. Why? Lincoln held the Union together. *Lincoln* was the reason slavery came to an end, the reason why we exist as the United States today. Without Lincoln...” he raised his brows pointedly. “Here we have Poincaré. Poincaré is a mathematician of the highest order, a brilliant man of science. Both Harris and I heard his lecture on what he calls the “Three-Body Problem,” a mathematical situation in which he can predict the future movement of a system based on the original velocity, mass, and position. And yet, if one of those original settings are changed even the slightest bit, Poincaré admitted that the result would be utterly unpredictable at best.” He shook the paper excitedly in Orville's face. Orville's scowl deepened. “It would be utterly unpredictable because if each event is irregular, how could you possibly make an educated guess at what the next movement will be when each one that came before changed the

direction of the entire system? You couldn't, Orville, and that is what Harris wants. He is basing his assassination plot on this theory of Poincaré's – or rather, the opposite of his theory. Rather than order, he wants chaos – and to achieve it, he only has to alter one small moment in the course of history to change it forever." He took a breath. "Admittedly, Poincaré could not explicitly outline a chaotic order of events – Harris rather caught the man off his guard – but it is not about the equations or systems of mathematics, not for us. For *us* it is about the fact that Harris undoubtedly intends on basing his scheme on the possibility of chaos as a result of order. Poincaré spoke of order from chaos at his lecture – and Harris is merely turning it backwards."

Orville stared silently at him for a moment. "You are telling me that George Gregory Harris is a time-traveling madman who picked the year 1891 out of a hat, showed up dressed in the fashions of the Civil War, aligned himself with the Ku Klux Klan in the timespan of a week, discovered that Poincaré was in town, attended the lecture, and then decided to travel back in time to 1865 to assassinate Lincoln before Booth can by tinkering with timing or some other such factor, and thus setting off a chain of events that would destroy Lincoln and ultimately the United States of America, throwing the western hemisphere into a state of general chaos."

Paris raised his brows. "No. I am saying that George Gregory Harris, though indeed a time-traveling madman, knew exactly when Poincaré was going to speak, and having aligned himself with the Klan, knew the Department would be sending a man to the lecture as well. Which means he knows about the Department. How? He is not from 1865, but *1861*, when the Department was founded!" He slapped the back of his hand against the diagram he still held in his hand, covered in ink splotches and conspiracy theories. "There were only four men present at the founding, isn't that right, Orville? Our late director, Adam Haswell" – he pointed to the names on the diagram as he spoke – "John Haswell, his brother, William Nighy, and who else?"

Orville narrowed his eyes. "Paris..."

"That's right, his name is lost to history! He disappeared, and the Department's founding fathers never spoke of him, now did they?" Paris waved his diagram in triumph. "And you remember the date, don't you, Orville?"

The answer came, very grudgingly. "January 1st, 1861."

"January 1st, 1861! And the first assassination attempt on Lincoln's life?"

At last Orville caught on. His eyes widened beneath his heavy brows. “That is an entirely different matter, Howard. We have no proof.”

“No proof?” Paris looked at him incredulously. “Do you need a piece of paper that says, ‘George Gregory Harris intended to assassinate Abraham Lincoln at the Calvert Street Station in Baltimore but was unable to due to the following complications?’ You know the facts, Orville. The train captains reported rumors of an assassination plot that would be put into action as Lincoln traveled through Baltimore on his way to Washington for the inauguration. We know the train tracks themselves were tampered with. We know Cipriano Ferrandini was accused of plotting against the president, though he was never indicted. Allan Pinkerton, the detective hired for the case, went to extreme lengths to protect Lincoln, and why? Not because he was *suspicious* of a plot, but because he *knew* there was a plot. Requiring a president to sneak into Washington under cover of darkness, dressed in a disguise – it was a humiliating process at best, one Pinkerton only insisted upon because it was necessary for Lincoln’s survival.” Paris looked straight at Orville. “But Harris’ words, they frighten me, Orville. He means to change the course of human events through a single alteration in the fabric of the history of the United States. He will pluck one thread, and the rest will unravel.”

Orville breathed out heavily.

“Imagine the war without Lincoln. Imagine what would have become of the Union.” Paris let his diagram fall to the desk and planted his hands on his hips.

“This all hinges upon one necessary point – that Harris can travel time.” Orville shook his head and walked the length of the small room, pausing before the fire. He stared into the burning light for a time before turning around to look rather helplessly at Paris. “It is not worth considering, Howard. It is a great scheme, but I cannot see how we can even think of pursuing it.”

Paris blew out a deep breath, feeling his energy ebb away. There had to be some way for it to work. How else to explain Harris’ clothing, his ties to the Department, his words and his sudden appearance?

There was a knock. Paris dropped, lost in thought, into the great wingback chair behind Orville’s desk while his superior answered the door. There were a few hushed, urgent words exchanged. The door clicked shut. “The results are back,” came Orville’s disembodied voice from behind him.

“And?”

Papers were dropped unceremoniously onto the desk. “Positive.”

Paris caught his superior’s eye. “Orville. We have to try.”

Orville closed his eyes.

“Whether or not the man travels time, he needs to be stopped. Whatever it is he is up to, it is nothing good for both the Department and the nation, Orville. We haven’t got a choice.”

Orville sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “I’m getting too old for this.”

“That’s the spirit, old man.” Paris jumped to his feet, clapped Orville on the back, and reached for his hat. “I will take care of everything. Expect a report back in a day or so.”

The thing to do was find Harris, and work from there. There seemed to be no clear answer, no justification, and yet Paris had no other options. What would Harris need that would require being in the year 1891 to get it, only to turn around and return to 1861 to use it?

He turned the question over and over in his mind as he waited outside the Willard Hotel for Monsieur Henri Poincaré. The man was the only mathematician Paris knew, and he was going to take advantage of the fact. It had been hours; he dragged his hand over his face. Wary of Harris’ presence in Washington, Paris had refrained from entering the hotel for fear of running into the man before he was ready for the confrontation. And now here came the mathematician himself, just as the heat became too strong. Paris jogged after him, calling his name. Poincaré halted and turned, squinting in the bright sunlight, holding a walking cane in his right hand.

“Sir, if I could just have a moment.” Paris caught up to him and extended his hand. “Paris Howard. I saw your lecture the other afternoon, Monsieur Poincaré. It was fascinating.”

“Indeed. I thank you, young man.” The Frenchman shook his hand quickly but firmly and dropped it. “Now, if you will excuse me, I have an appointment –”

Paris stepped in front of the mathematician on the sidewalk. “One moment, please, sir.” He met Poincaré’s eyes.

Poincaré sighed. “Quickly, if you must. What is it?”

Paris hesitated. “This is going to sound ridiculous, I know. But – is it possible, by whatever means, to travel time, monsieur? To exist in one time period and somehow transport oneself to a different period without experiencing any of the time in between?”

For an instant Paris regretted his words. Hearing his thoughts spoken made them sound childish, but he kept his gaze firmly upon Poincaré’s. The mathematician stared blankly at him for one extremely long moment, until Paris wasn’t sure he had made himself clear. Then that deep French voice: “Who have you been speaking to?”

Paris blinked. “I have spoken to no one on the subject.”

Poincaré eyed him doubtfully but only said, “Indeed.” He coughed, casting a suspicious glance about the busy city street full of Washingtonians going about their everyday business. “Time travel is a matter I do not concern myself with. It is a...a...” He gestured randomly, searching for words. “A very stupid, very complex search for an answer that would have untold effects upon the world and society as we know it.” He narrowed his eyes. “And why is it that you ask, sir?”

Paris pushed the question aside. “Is it possible, Monsieur Poincaré? That is all I want to know.”

The mathematician shrugged. “I have heard of time traveling experiments. I do not trust them, myself. But they say it is.” He shrugged again, stepping around Paris. “They say it is.” With a brief but meaningful glance, he strode off briskly in his original direction, cane clacking on the pavement. Paris stared after him, dumbfounded.

The case of George Gregory Harris was only just beginning to be understood.

He headed in the opposite direction of Monsieur Poincaré, feeling overwhelmed with the knowledge of what it was Harris hoped to achieve. He assembled the facts in his mind, always a simple way to arrive at a conclusion or find the next step in a case.

First: George Gregory Harris had been involved in the plot to assassinate the president in 1861 before Lincoln could be inaugurated. Something had gone wrong – something that forced Harris to find a way to the year 1891.

Second: Harris knew how to travel time.

Third: He was also clearly implementing Poincaré’s mathematical ideas – or bending them to suit his purposes, as it were.

Fourth: Lincoln had survived until 1865, but if he had not, there was no telling what would have happened between the bloodthirsty North and South.

Fifth: According to the theories of Poincaré, all Harris had to do was tinker with one aspect of the alleged assassination attempt in order to achieve success.

The questions: firstly, what was the missing piece to Harris' plot? Secondly, what did the madman have to change for his plan to succeed? And lastly – how were Poincaré's equations essential to what Harris hoped to achieve? Were the mathematics the key, or was it simply the idea of them? Harris' interest in the chaotic possibilities of this Three-Body Problem was disturbing.

Paris walked faster, the questions swirling around his mind and confounding him. Clearly Harris wanted the destruction of the Union. As a southern sympathizer, his goal had been to rid the North of its strongest asset: Abraham Lincoln and the threat of his administration. He had failed. Against all odds, it appeared the man was capable of traveling time – and he had come specifically to 1891 for the missing piece to his plan so he could return to his own time and do the job right the second time around. The gaping hole in all of this loomed even larger in Paris' mind than before, a constant problem that needed addressing – and yet he could not. Not without the aid of Harris himself.

It had not long been dark, but the night was deep enough for Paris to feel assured that his position would not be given away. The Virginia countryside was silent, disturbed only by an occasional strong gust of wind in the trees or the soft chirping of crickets. Paris waited.

And it was not a long wait.

An intimidating shadow was cast into the straw that lay scattered across the floor of the barn, and there was no doubt it belonged to one George Gregory Harris. The broad shoulders were recognizable anywhere, despite the fact that Paris had only seen them once. From his position in the loft, he watched Harris approach the middle of the barn floor, squat, and open a door in the solid wooden planks. Paris stiffened. Was the man working alone?

For several moments Paris held his breath, but Harris only reached in and pulled out a few dark items, wrapped in cloth, before shutting the door once again. Despite the fact that Paris was hardly new at this, his blood pounded in his ears as he waited for the right moment to reveal himself.

He did not move until he was certain that Harris was at ease, believing himself to be alone in the Virginia wilderness. Paris wondered briefly how many times this barn had been used as a rendezvous for Harris and his accomplices back in 1861.

And then, he dropped.

He was on top of the man and held him in an immobilizing position before Harris had time to realize what had happened. All weapons were subsequently removed. A stream of oaths came from the man's mouth while Paris sat atop him, perfectly willing to remain in that position all night if need be. He was in no hurry. He had his man.

"I know who you are," spat Harris, his words muffled due to his mouth's proximity to the straw-covered floor.

"Indeed," Paris answered dryly.

"I have been watching you just as you have been watching me, Howard," Harris growled.

This Paris had already deduced. "Of course you were. You wanted me to see you, that much was obvious. You did such a glorious job of making your purpose clear, what with Poincaré's lecture, that lovely visit of yours to my apartment, and I believe there is the matter of this dreadful suit you are wearing." He clicked his tongue. "Not at all inconspicuous, I am afraid."

In one neat movement, he whipped the revolver from its holster, trained it at the back of Harris' head, and stood. "Up." Harris rose slowly and turned to face him. Paris cocked his head to the side and looked the man up and down. "Really, you've been around for a week. I don't see why you couldn't purchase at least a new vest."

The look on Harris' face was murderous.

Paris shrugged. "I would appreciate it now if you would explain to me why it is you so wanted my attention, and now that I'm here, you don't want me." Harris opened his mouth. Paris interrupted him. "I would also like an explanation on your time-traveling tendencies and the reason behind your journeying so far from your own decade, if you don't mind."

Harris glared mutinously. "I want that gun out of my face."

"Oh, the gun stays where it is," Paris said politely.

There was a long pause as the two men stared at one another, the noise of crickets and wind rising to a roar in Paris' ears. He was ready for a fight, if need be; he was young and able-bodied. Harris would not be an easy man to fight, but Paris had seen worse.

Harris visibly backed down, his shoulders losing some of their height as he heaved a deep breath. "You are not going to stop me, Howard. Despite anything I say to you, I will have my way."

Paris smiled.

Harris ground his teeth. "I am the missing founder of the Department." Paris feigned shock. "I was part of the plot to assassinate Lincoln. I was caught." The effort it took the man to admit it was evident on his face. "Even if the entire plot had been known to exist, my part in it would have been kept a secret to protect the Department. I was sentenced to hang."

Paris was intrigued, but he kept his face a mask of indifference. "And you couldn't have that, could you?"

Harris glowered at him.

And Paris felt the corner of his mouth slide up against his will. "That was why you needed to leave 1861, wasn't it? You had to get out of town, and what better way than to leave the entire decade behind?" He shook his head in wonderment. Arriving in 1891, Harris had stumbled upon the Ku Klux Klan, had heard of Poincaré's lecture. "The lecture." Paris looked hard at his man. "It gave you the idea, didn't it?"

He hardly needed to have voiced the question; it was obvious.

"You didn't come to 1891 on purpose," Paris continued, watching Harris' eyes as he revealed piece by piece of the man's past. "You let the machine take you wherever, so long as it was away from your own death. And now you are going back to 'tinker' with the plot, as it were. You plan to change just one aspect of one of the necessary elements, and everything else will take care of itself."

The man snorted. "Do not be so cocky."

"Don't pretend with me. What are you going to change?" Paris let the revolver move closer. "What element?"

Harris did not blink. "Pinkerton."

Allan Pinkerton. The man who had protected Lincoln and saved him from assassination. Nobody else had believed so firmly in the plot's existence. Without him, Lincoln was as good as dead.

"Where is the machine you use, Harris?" Paris' voice was sharp. "Where is it?"

Harris looked back steadily. "I am going to go back, Howard. Poincaré is inadvertently brilliant. His ideas will not go to waste."

Paris cursed under his breath. "He did not mean for you to change the course of human history, you fool. Where is the machine?"

"Wonderful ideas." Harris' eyes were locked on the barrel of the gun. "I wonder if he knows how great the Confederacy would have been if I had been made aware earlier of these chaos theories."

Paris felt everything in him still. Madness. The man was mad.

"There are systems in the world, as Poincaré said," Harris continued, as if to himself. "Disrupt the system, change the future. Lincoln, Pinkerton, and myself – we are a system." An odd smile slipped onto his face. "We affect one another because our destinies are all linked together, yes? Tied to the Confederacy. Our system was perfectly balanced, but" – and now his head tilted to the side and he gazed with unblinking eyes at Paris – "like you yourself heard, a very small change in the input of our system will lead to a very different output. Balance will vanish. You like those mathematical terms, yes, Howard? They fit very well what I am trying to do, do they not?"

"You wanted me to see you so I would have to watch Lincoln's Union fall apart, isn't that right?" Paris stared in absolute anger at the man opposite him. "Isn't that right?" he shouted.

"Destroy the Union, destroy their way of life." Now Harris flicked his gaze up to meet Paris' eyes. "The Confederacy fell, after all I did for her. I did not know until a week ago how much my country stood to lose." His voice took on a smooth, frighteningly calm pitch. "I can change one event of that night, Howard, and save my people. Save my people and destroy yours, now that I know how to do it right. Yes. I will do it right. Pinkerton will go. Him and the railroad captains. You will watch."

Paris gripped the revolver. "Where is the machine, man?"

"Chaos. Imagine your precious Union in absolute chaos, Howard. The loss of your leader –"

"The machine!" Paris shouted.

Harris started. His eyes were eerily wide. He lunged.

The revolver went off.

Paris was aware of nothing but the sharp ringing in his ears and the lack of earth under his feet. Suddenly something broke beneath his back and he was falling backwards, pain searing his spine and the heavy weight of George Gregory Harris pushing him still downwards.

And there was a whirring sound, and he caught the bright whiteness of the moon through a hole in the roof of the barn, and the Virginia sky shining around it. He hit bottom and the whirring became even louder, drowning out the ringing in his ears. He felt himself shouting at the pain but heard nothing. Nothing but the whirring. There was an opening in the darkness above him, beyond which was the barn and the barn's roof and the hole in the roof with the moon above it. And there was the whirring and the ringing and the presence of another body beside him, that of George Gregory Harris.

The moon began to tilt, and then to spin crazily far beyond his reach.

Harris has done it darted across his mind.

Chaos, sir. A chain of unpredictable events spiraling towards chaos.

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