

The Day Time Stopped Moving

Ed Earl Repp

The background of the lower half of the page is a teal color. It features a complex, abstract pattern of thick purple lines and shapes. The pattern includes horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines, as well as triangles and curved segments. The lines vary in thickness and are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement, though the overall effect is somewhat chaotic and non-representational.

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Project Gutenberg's The Day Time Stopped Moving, by Bradner Buckner

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THE DAY
TIME
STOPPED
MOVING



By BRADNER BUCKNER

Dave Miller pushed with all his strength, but the girl was as unmovable as Gibraltar.

All Dave Miller wanted to do was commit suicide in peace. He tried, but the things that happened after he'd pulled the trigger were all wrong. Like everyone standing around like statues. No St. Peter, no pearly gate, no pitchforks or halos. He might just as well have saved the bullet!

DAVE MILLER would never have done it, had he been in his right mind. The Millers were not a melancholy stock, hardly the sort of people you expect to read about in the morning paper who have taken their lives the night before. But Dave Miller was drunk—abominably, roaringly so—and the barrel of the big revolver, as he stood against the sink, made a ring of coldness against his right temple.

Dawn was beginning to stain the frosty kitchen windows. In the faint light, the letter lay a gray square against the drain-board tiles. With the melodramatic gesture of the very drunk, Miller had scrawled across the envelope:

"This is why I did it!"

He had found Helen's letter in the envelope when he staggered into their bedroom fifteen minutes ago—at a quarter after five. As had frequently happened during the past year, he'd come home from the store a little late ... about twelve hours late, in fact. And this time Helen had done what she had long threatened to do. She had left him.

The letter was brief, containing a world of heartbreak and broken hopes.

"I don't mind having to scrimp, Dave. No woman minds that if she feels she is really helping her husband over a rough spot. When business went bad a year ago, I told you I was ready to help in any way I could. But you haven't let me. You quit fighting when things got difficult, and put in all your money and energy

on liquor and horses and cards. I could stand being married to a drunkard, Dave, but not to a coward ..."

So she was trying to show him. But Miller told himself he'd show her instead. Coward, eh? Maybe this would teach her a lesson! Hell of a lot of help she'd been! Nag at him every time he took a drink. Holler bloody murder when he put twenty-five bucks on a horse, with a chance to make five hundred. What man wouldn't do those things?

His drug store was on the skids. Could he be blamed for drinking a little too much, if alcohol dissolved the morbid vapors of his mind?

Miller stiffened angrily, and tightened his finger on the trigger. But he had one moment of frank insight just before the hammer dropped and brought the world tumbling about his ears. It brought with it a realization that the whole thing was his fault. Helen was right—he was a coward. There was a poignant ache in his heart. She'd been as loyal as they came, he knew that.

He could have spent his nights thinking up new business tricks, instead of swilling whiskey. Could have gone out of his way to be pleasant to customers, not snap at them when he had a terrific hangover. And even Miller knew nobody ever made any money on the horses—at least, not when he needed it. But horses and whiskey and business had become tragically confused in his mind; so here he was, full of liquor and madness, with a gun to his head.

Then again anger swept his mind clean of reason, and he threw his chin up and gripped the gun tight.

"Run out on me, will she!" he muttered thickly. "Well—this'll show her!"

In the next moment the hammer fell ... and Dave Miller had "shown her."

Miller opened his eyes with a start. As plain as black on white, he'd heard a bell ring—the most familiar sound in the world, too. It was the unmistakable tinkle of his cash register.

"Now, how in hell—" The thought began in his mind; and then he saw where he was.

The cash register was right in front of him! It was open, and on the marble slab lay a customer's five-spot. Miller's glance strayed up and around him.

He was behind the drug counter, all right. There were a man and a girl sipping cokes at the fountain, to his right; the magazine racks by the open door; the tobacco counter across from the fountain. And right before him was a customer.

Good Lord! he thought. Was all this a—a dream?

Sweat oozed out on his clammy forehead. That stuff of Herman's that he had drunk during the game—it had had a rank taste, but he wouldn't have thought anything short of marihuana could produce such hallucinations as he had just had. Wild conjectures came boiling up from the bottom of Miller's being.

How did he get behind the counter? Who was the woman he was waiting on? What—

The woman's curious stare was what jarred him completely into the present. Get rid of her! was his one thought. Then sit down behind the scenes and try to figure it all out.

His hand poised over the cash drawer. Then he remembered he didn't know how much he was to take out of the five. Avoiding the woman's glance, he muttered:

"Let's see, now, that was—uh—how much did I say?"

The woman made no answer. Miller cleared his throat, said uncertainly:

"I beg your pardon, ma'am—did I say—seventy-five cents?"

It was just a feeler, but the woman didn't even answer to that. And it was right then that Dave Miller noticed the deep silence that brooded in the store.

Slowly his head came up and he looked straight into the woman's eyes. She returned him a cool, half-smiling glance. But her eyes neither blinked nor moved. Her features were frozen. Lips parted, teeth showing a little, the tip of her tongue was between her even white teeth as though she had started to say "this" and stopped with the syllable unspoken.

Muscles began to rise behind Miller's ears. He could feel his hair stiffen like filings drawn to a magnet. His glance struggled to the soda fountain. What he saw there shook him to the core of his being.

The girl who was drinking a coke had the glass to her lips, but apparently she wasn't sipping the liquid. Her boy friend's glass was on the counter. He had drawn on a cigarette and exhaled the gray smoke. That smoke hung in the air

like a large, elongated balloon with the small end disappearing between his lips. While Miller stared, the smoke did not stir in the slightest.

There was something unholy, something supernatural, about this scene!

With apprehension rippling down his spine, Dave Miller reached across the cash register and touched the woman on the cheek. The flesh was warm, but as hard as flint. Tentatively, the young druggist pushed harder; finally, shoved with all his might. For all the result, the woman might have been a two-ton bronze statue. She neither budged nor changed expression.

Panic seized Miller. His voice hit a high hysterical tenor as he called to his soda-jerker.

"Pete! *Pete!*" he shouted. "What in God's name is wrong here!"

The blond youngster, with a towel wadded in a glass, did not stir. Miller rushed from the back of the store, seized the boy by the shoulders, tried to shake him. But Pete was rooted to the spot.

Miller knew, now, that what was wrong was something greater than a hallucination or a hangover. He was in some kind of trap. His first thought was to rush home and see if Helen was there. There was a great sense of relief when he thought of her. Helen, with her grave blue eyes and understanding manner, would listen to him and know what was the matter.

He left the haunted drug store at a run, darted around the corner and up the street to his car. But, though he had not locked the car, the door resisted his twisting grasp. Shaking, pounding, swearing, Miller wrestled with each of the doors.

Abruptly he stiffened, as a horrible thought leaped into his being. His gaze left the car and wandered up the street. Past the intersection, past the one beyond that, on up the thoroughfare until the gray haze of the city dimmed everything. And as far as Dave Miller could see, there was no trace of motion.

Cars were poised in the street, some passing other machines, some turning corners. A street car stood at a safety zone; a man who had leaped from the bottom step hung in space a foot above the pavement. Pedestrians paused with one foot up. A bird hovered above a telephone pole, its wings glued to the blue vault of the sky.

With a choked sound, Miller began to run. He did not slacken his pace for fifteen minutes, until around him were the familiar, reassuring trees and shrub-bordered houses of his own street. But yet how strange to him!

The season was autumn, and the air filled with brown and golden leaves that tossed on a frozen wind. Miller ran by two boys lying on a lawn, petrified into a modern counterpart of the sculptor's "The Wrestlers." The sweetish tang of burning leaves brought a thrill of terror to him; for, looking down an alley from whence the smoke drifted, he saw a man tending a fire whose leaping flames were red tongues that did not move.

Sobbing with relief, the young druggist darted up his own walk. He tried the front door, found it locked, and jammed a thumb against the doorbell. But of course the little metal button was as immovable as a mountain. So in the end, after convincing himself that the key could not be inserted into the lock, he sprang toward the back.

The screen door was not latched, but it might as well have been the steel door of a bank vault. Miller began to pound on it, shouting:

"Helen! Helen, are you in there? My God, dear, there's something wrong! You've got to—"

The silence that flowed in again when his voice choked off was the dead stillness of the tomb. He could hear his voice rustling through the empty rooms, and at last it came back to him like a taunt: "*Helen! Helen!*"

CHAPTER II

Time Stands Still

FOR Dave Miller, the world was now a planet of death on which he alone lived and moved and spoke. Staggered, utterly beaten, he made no attempt to break into his home. But he did stumble around to the kitchen window and try to peer in, anxious to see if there was a body on the floor. The room was in semi-darkness, however, and his straining eyes made out nothing.

He returned to the front of the house, shambling like a somnambulist. Seated on the porch steps, head in hands, he slipped into a hell of regrets. He knew now that his suicide had been no hallucination. He was dead, all right; and this must be hell or purgatory.

Bitterly he cursed his drinking, that had led him to such a mad thing as suicide. Suicide! He—Dave Miller—a coward who had taken his own life! Miller's whole being crawled with revulsion. If he just had the last year to live over again, he thought fervently.

And yet, through it all, some inner strain kept trying to tell him he was not dead. This was his own world, all right, and essentially unchanged. What had happened to it was beyond the pale of mere guesswork. But this one thing began to be clear: This was a world in which change or motion of any kind was a foreigner.

Fire would not burn and smoke did not rise. Doors would not open, liquids were solid. Miller's stubbing toe could not move a pebble, and a blade of grass easily supported his weight without bending. In other words, Miller began to understand, change had been stopped as surely as if a master hand had put a finger on the world's balance wheel.

Miller's ramblings were terminated by the consciousness that he had an acute headache. His mouth tasted, as Herman used to say after a big night, as if an army had camped in it. Coffee and a bromo were what he needed.

But it was a great awakening to him when he found a restaurant and learned that he could neither drink the coffee nor get the lid off the bromo bottle. Fragrant coffee-steam hung over the glass percolator, but even this steam was as a brick wall to his probing touch. Miller started gloomily to thread his way through the waiters in back of the counter again.

Moments later he stood in the street and there were tears swimming in his eyes.

"Helen!" His voice was a pleading whisper. "Helen, honey, where are you?"

There was no answer but the pitiful palpitation of utter silence. And then, there was movement at Dave Miller's right!

Something shot from between the parked cars and crashed against him; something brown and hairy and soft. It knocked him down. Before he could get

his breath, a red, wet tongue was licking his face and hands, and he was looking up into the face of a police dog!

Frantic with joy at seeing another in this city of death, the dog would scarcely let Miller rise. It stood up to plant big paws on his shoulders and try to lick his face. Miller laughed out loud, a laugh with a throaty catch in it.

"Where'd you come from, boy?" he asked. "Won't they talk to you, either? What's your name, boy?"

There was a heavy, brass-studded collar about the animal's neck, and Dave Miller read on its little nameplate: "Major."

"Well, Major, at least we've got company now," was Miller's sigh of relief.

For a long time he was too busy with the dog to bother about the sobbing noises. Apparently the dog failed to hear them, for he gave no sign. Miller scratched him behind the ear.

"What shall we do now, Major? Walk? Maybe your nose can smell out another friend for us."

They had gone hardly two blocks when it came to him that there was a more useful way of spending their time. The library! Half convinced that the whole trouble stemmed from his suicide shot in the head—which was conspicuously absent now—he decided that a perusal of the surgery books in the public library might yield something he could use.

That way they bent their steps, and were soon mounting the broad cement stairs of the building. As they went beneath the brass turnstile, the librarian caught Miller's attention with a smiling glance. He smiled back.

"I'm trying to find something on brain surgery," he explained. "I—"

With a shock, then, he realized he had been talking to himself.

In the next instant, Dave Miller whirled. A voice from the bookcases chuckled:

"If you find anything, I wish you'd let me know. I'm stumped myself!"

From a corner of the room came an elderly, half-bald man with tangled gray

brows and a rueful smile. A pencil was balanced over his ear, and a note-book was clutched in his hand.

"You, too!" he said. "I had hoped I was the only one—"

Miller went forward hurriedly to grip his hand.

"I'm afraid I'm not so unselfish," he admitted. "I've been hoping for two hours that I'd run into some other poor soul."

"Quite understandable," the stranger murmured sympathetically. "But in my case it is different. You see—I am responsible for this whole tragic business!"

"You!" Dave Miller gulped the word. "I—I thought—"

The man wagged his head, staring at his note pad, which was littered with jumbled calculations. Miller had a chance to study him. He was tall, heavily built, with wide, sturdy shoulders despite his sixty years. Oddly, he wore a gray-green smock. His eyes, narrowed and intent, looked gimlet-sharp beneath those toothbrush brows of his, as he stared at the pad.

"There's the trouble, right there," he muttered. "I provided only three stages of amplification, whereas four would have been barely enough. No wonder the phase didn't carry through!"

"I guess I don't follow you," Miller faltered. "You mean—something you did—"

"I should think it was something I did!" The baldish stranger scratched his head with the tip of his pencil. "I'm John Erickson—you know, the Wanamaker Institute."

Miller said: "Oh!" in an understanding voice. Erickson was head of Wanamaker Institute, first laboratory of them all when it came to exploding atoms and blazing trails into the wildernesses of science.

Erickson's piercing eyes were suddenly boring into the younger man.

"You've been sick, haven't you?" he demanded.

"Well—no—not really sick." The druggist colored. "I'll have to admit to being drunk a few hours ago, though."

"Drunk—" Erickson stuck his tongue in his cheek, shook his head, scowled. "No, that would hardly do it. There must have been something else. The impulsor isn't *that* powerful. I can understand about the dog, poor fellow. He must have been run over, and I caught him just at the instant of passing from life to death."

"Oh!" Dave Miller lifted his head, knowing now what Erickson was driving at. "Well, I may as well be frank. I'm—I committed suicide. That's how drunk I was. There hasn't been a suicide in the Miller family in centuries. It took a skinful of liquor to set the precedent."

Erickson nodded wisely. "Perhaps we will find the precedent hasn't really been set! But no matter—" His lifted hand stopped Miller's eager, wondering exclamation. "The point is, young man, we three are in a tough spot, and it's up to us to get out of it. And not only we, but heaven knows how many others the world over!"

"Would you—maybe you can explain to my lay mind what's happened," Miller suggested.

"Of course. Forgive me. You see, Mr.—"

"Miller. Dave Miller."

"Dave it is. I have a feeling we're going to be pretty well acquainted before this is over. You see, Dave, I'm a nut on so-called 'time theories.' I've seen time compared to everything from an entity to a long, pink worm. But I disagree with them all, because they postulate the idea that time is constantly being manufactured. Such reasoning is fantastic!

"Time exists. Not as an ever-growing chain of links, because such a chain would have to have a tail end, if it has a front end; and who can imagine the period when time did not exist? So I think time is like a circular train-track. Unending. We who live and die merely travel around on it. The future exists simultaneously with the past, for one instant when they meet."

Miller's brain was humming. Erickson shot the words at him staccato-fashion, as if they were things known from Great Primer days. The young druggist scratched his head.

"You've got me licked," he admitted. "I'm a stranger here, myself."

"Naturally you can't be expected to understand things I've been all my life puzzling about. Simplest way I can explain it is that we are on a train following this immense circular railway.

"When the train reaches the point where it started, it is about to plunge into the past; but this is impossible, because the point where it started is simply the caboose of the train! And that point is always ahead—and behind—the time-train.

"Now, my idea was that with the proper stimulus a man could be thrust across the diameter of this circular railway to a point in his past. Because of the nature of time, he could neither go ahead of the train to meet the future nor could he stand still and let the caboose catch up with him. But—he could detour across the circle and land farther back on the train! And that, my dear Dave, is what you and I and Major have done—almost."

"Almost?" Miller said hoarsely.

Erickson pursed his lips. "We are somewhere partway across the space between present and past. We are living in an instant that can move neither forward nor back. You and I, Dave, and Major—and the Lord knows how many others the world over—have been thrust by my time impulsor onto a timeless beach of eternity. We have been caught in time's backwash. Castaways, you might say."

An objection clamored for attention in Miller's mind.

"But if this is so, where are the rest of them? Where is my wife?"

"They are right here," Erickson explained. "No doubt you could see your wife if you could find her. But we see them as statues, because, for us, time no longer exists. But there was something I did not count on. I did not know that it would be possible to live in one small instant of time, as we are doing. And I did not know that only those who are hovering between life and death can deviate from the normal process of time!"

"You mean—we're dead!" Miller's voice was a bitter monotone.

"Obviously not. We're talking and moving, aren't we? But—we are on the fence. When I gave my impulsor the jolt of high power, it went wrong and I think something must have happened to me. At the same instant, you had shot yourself.

"Perhaps, Dave, you are dying. The only way for us to find out is to try to get the machine working and topple ourselves one way or the other. If we fall back, we will all live. If we fall into the present—we may die."

"Either way, it's better than this!" Miller said fervently.

"I came to the library here, hoping to find out the things I must know. My own books are locked in my study. And these—they might be cemented in their places, for all their use to me. I suppose we might as well go back to the lab."

Miller nodded, murmuring: "Maybe you'll get an idea when you look at the machine again."

"Let's hope so," said Erickson grimly. "God knows I've failed so far!"

CHAPTER III

Splendid Sacrifice

IT WAS a solid hour's walk out to West Wilshire, where the laboratory was. The immense bronze and glass doors of Wanamaker Institute were closed, and so barred to the two men. But Erickson led the way down the side.

"We can get in a service door. Then we climb through transoms and ventilators until we get to my lab."

Major frisked along beside them. He was enjoying the action and the companionship. It was less of an adventure to Miller, who knew death might be ahead for the three of them.

Two workmen were moving a heavy cabinet in the side service door. To get in, they climbed up the back of the rear workman, walked across the cabinet, and scaled down the front of the leading man. They went up the stairs to the fifteenth floor. Here they crawled through a transom into the wing marked:

"Experimental. Enter Only By Appointment."

Major was helped through it, then they were crawling along the dark metal tunnel of an air-conditioning ventilator. It was small, and took some wriggling.

In the next room, they were confronted by a stern receptionist on whose desk was a little brass sign, reading:

"Have you an appointment?"

Miller had had his share of experience with receptionists' ways, in his days as a pharmaceutical salesman. He took the greatest pleasure now in lighting his cigarette from a match struck on the girl's nose. Then he blew the smoke in her face and hastened to crawl through the final transom.

John Erickson's laboratory was well lighted by a glass-brick wall and a huge skylight. The sun's rays glinted on the time impulsor.^[1] The scientist explained the impulsor in concise terms. When he had finished, Dave Miller knew just as little as before, and the outfit still resembled three transformers in a line, of the type seen on power-poles, connected to a great bronze globe hanging from the ceiling.

"There's the monster that put us in this plight," Erickson grunted. "Too strong to be legal, too weak to do the job right. Take a good look!"

With his hands jammed in his pockets, he frowned at the complex machinery. Miller stared a few moments; then transferred his interests to other things in the room. He was immediately struck by the resemblance of a transformer in a far corner to the ones linked up with the impulsor.

"What's that?" he asked quickly. "Looks the same as the ones you used over there."

"It is."

"But— Didn't you say all you needed was another stage of power?"

"That's right."

"Maybe I'm crazy!" Miller stared from impulsor to transformer and back again. "Why don't you use it, then?"

"Using what for the connection?" Erickson's eyes gently mocked him.

"Wire, of course!"

The scientist jerked a thumb at a small bale of heavy copper wire.

"Bring it over and we'll try it."

Miller was halfway to it when he brought up short. Then a sheepish grin spread over his features.

"I get it," he chuckled. "That bale of wire might be the Empire State Building, as far as we're concerned. Forgive my stupidity."

Erickson suddenly became serious.

"I'd like to be optimistic, Dave," he muttered, "but in all fairness to you I must tell you I see no way out of this. The machine is, of course, still working, and with that extra stage of power, the uncertainty would be over. But where, in this world of immovable things, will we find a piece of wire twenty-five feet long?"

There was a warm, moist sensation against Miller's hand, and when he looked down Major stared up at him commiseratingly. Miller scratched him behind the ear, and the dog closed his eyes, reassured and happy. The young druggist sighed, wishing there were some giant hand to scratch him behind the ear and smooth *his* troubles over.

"And if we don't get out," he said soberly, "we'll starve, I suppose."

"No, I don't think it will be that quick. I haven't felt any hunger. I don't expect to. After all, our bodies are still living in one instant of time, and a man can't work up a healthy appetite in one second. Of course, this elastic-second business precludes the possibility of disease.

"Our bodies must go on unchanged. The only hope I see is—when we are on the verge of madness, suicide. That means jumping off a bridge, I suppose. Poison, guns, knives—all the usual wherewithal—are denied to us."

Black despair closed down on Dave Miller. He thrust it back, forcing a crooked grin.

"Let's make a bargain," he offered. "When we finish fooling around with this apparatus, we split up. We'll only be at each other's throat if we stick together. I'll be blaming you for my plight, and I don't want to. It's my fault as much as yours."

How about it?"

John Erickson gripped his hand. "You're all right, Dave. Let me give you some advice. If ever you do get back to the present ... keep away from liquor. Liquor and the Irish never did mix. You'll have that store on its feet again in no time."

"Thanks!" Miller said fervently. "And I think I can promise that nothing less than a whiskey antidote for snake bite will ever make me bend an elbow again!"

For the next couple of hours, despondency reigned in the laboratory. But it was soon to be deposed again by hope.

Despite all of Erickson's scientific training, it was Dave Miller himself who grasped the down-to-earth idea that started them hoping again. He was walking about the lab, jingling keys in his pocket, when suddenly he stopped short. He jerked the ring of keys into his hand.

"Erickson!" he gasped. "We've been blind. Look at this!"

The scientist looked; but he remained puzzled.

"Well—?" he asked skeptically.

"There's our wire!" Dave Miller exclaimed. "You've got keys; I've got keys. We've got coins, knives, wristwatches. Why can't we lay them all end to end—"

Erickson's features looked as if he had been electrically shocked.

"You've hit it!" he cried. "If we've got enough!"

With one accord, they began emptying their pockets, tearing off wristwatches, searching for pencils. The finds made a little heap in the middle of the floor. Erickson let his long fingers claw through thinning hair.

"God give us enough! We'll only need the one wire. The thing is plugged in already and only the positive pole has to be connected to the globe. Come on!"

Scooping up the assortment of metal articles, they rushed across the room. With his pocket-knife, Dave Miller began breaking up the metal wrist-watch straps, opening the links out so that they could be laid end-to-end for the greatest possible length. They patiently broke the watches to pieces, and of the junk they garnered made a ragged foot and a half of "wire." Their coins stretched the line

still further.

They had ten feet covered before the stuff was half used up. Their metal pencils, taken apart, gave them a good two feet. Key chains helped generously. With eighteen feet covered, their progress began to slow down.

Perspiration poured down Miller's face. Desperately, he tore off his lodge ring and cut it in two to pound it flat. From garters and suspenders they won a few inches more. And then—they stopped—feet from their goal.

Miller groaned. He tossed his pocket-knife in his hand.

"We can get a foot out of this," he estimated. "But that still leaves us way short."

Abruptly, Erickson snapped his fingers.

"Shoes!" he gasped. "They're full of nails. Get to work with that knife, Dave. We'll cut out every one of 'em!"

In ten minutes, the shoes were reduced to ragged piles of tattered leather. Erickson's deft fingers painstakingly placed the nails, one by one, in the line. The distance left to cover was less than six inches!

He lined up the last few nails. Then both men were sinking back on their heels, as they saw there was a gap of three inches to cover!

"Beaten!" Erickson ground out. "By three inches! Three inches from the present ... and yet it might as well be a million miles!"

Miller's body felt as though it were in a vise. His muscles ached with strain. So taut were his nerves that he leaped as though stung when Major nuzzled a cool nose into his hand again. Automatically, he began to stroke the dog's neck.

"Well, that licks us," he muttered. "There isn't another piece of movable metal in the world."

Major kept whimpering and pushing against him. Annoyed, the druggist shoved him away.

"Go 'way," he muttered. "I don't feel like—"

Suddenly then his eyes widened, as his touch encountered warm metal. He

whirled.

"There it is!" he yelled. "The last link. *The nameplate on Major's collar!*"

In a flash, he had torn the little rectangular brass plate from the dog collar. Erickson took it from his grasp. Sweat stood shiny on his skin. He held the bit of metal over the gap between wire and pole.

"This is it!" he smiled brittlely. "We're on our way, Dave. Where, I don't know. To death, or back to life. But—we're going!"

The metal clinked into place. Live, writhing power leaped through the wire, snarling across partial breaks. The transformers began to hum. The humming grew louder. Singing softly, the bronze globe over their heads glowed green. Dave Miller felt a curious lightness. There was a snap in his brain, and Erickson, Major and the laboratory faded from his senses.

Then came an interval when the only sound was the soft sobbing he had been hearing as if in a dream. That, and blackness that enfolded him like soft velvet. Then Miller was opening his eyes, to see the familiar walls of his own kitchen around him!

Someone cried out.

"Dave! Oh, Dave, dear!"

It was Helen's voice, and it was Helen who cradled his head in her lap and bent her face close to his.

"Oh, thank God that you're alive—!"

"Helen!" Miller murmured. "What—are—you—doing here?"

"I couldn't go through with it. I—I just couldn't leave you. I came back and—and I heard the shot and ran in. The doctor should be here. I called him five minutes ago."

"*Five minutes* ... How long has it been since I shot myself?"

"Oh, just six or seven minutes. I called the doctor right away."

Miller took a deep breath. Then it *must* have been a dream. All that—to happen in a few minutes— It wasn't possible!

"How—how could I have botched the job?" he muttered. "I wasn't drunk enough to miss myself completely."

Helen looked at the huge revolver lying in the sink.

"Oh, that old forty-five of Grandfather's! It hasn't been loaded since the Civil War. I guess the powder got damp or something. It just sort of sputtered instead of exploding properly. Dave, promise me something! You won't ever do anything like this again, if I promise not to nag you?"

Dave Miller closed his eyes. "There won't be any need to nag, Helen. Some people take a lot of teaching, but I've had my lesson. I've got ideas about the store which I'd been too lazy to try out. You know, I feel more like fighting right now than I have for years! We'll lick 'em, won't we, honey?"

Helen buried her face in the hollow of his shoulder and cried softly. Her words were too muffled to be intelligible. But Dave Miller understood what she meant.

He had thought the whole thing a dream—John Erickson, the "time impulsor" and Major. But that night he read an item in the *Evening Courier* that was to keep him thinking for many days.

POLICE INVESTIGATE DEATH OF SCIENTIST HERE IN LABORATORY

John M. Erickson, director of the Wanamaker Institute, died at his work last night. Erickson was a beloved and valuable figure in the world of science, famous for his recently publicized "time lapse" theory.

Two strange circumstances surrounded his death. One was the presence of a German shepherd dog in the laboratory, its head crushed as if with a sledgehammer. The other was a chain of small metal objects stretching from one corner of the room to the other, as if intended to take the place of wire in a circuit.

Police, however, discount this idea, as there was a roll of wire only a few feet from the body.

THE END

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Obviously this electric time impulsor is a machine in the nature of an atomic integrator. It "broadcasts" great waves of electrons which align all atomic objects in rigid suspension.

That is to say, atomic structures are literally "frozen." Living bodies are similarly affected. It is a widely held belief on the part of many eminent scientists that all matter, broken down into its elementary atomic composition, is electrical in structure.

That being so, there is no reason to suppose why Professor Erickson may not have discovered a time impulsor which, broadcasting electronic impulses, "froze" everything within its range.—ED.

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