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Author: Wallace West

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The End of Time

By Wallace West

"There is no doubt of it!" The little chemist pushed steel-bowed spectacles up on his high forehead and peered at his dinner guest with excited blue eyes. "Time will come to an end at six o'clock this morning."

Jack Baron, young radio engineer at the Rothafel Radio laboratories, and protégé of Dr. Manthis, his host, laughed heartily.

"What a yarn you spin, Doctor," he said. "Write it for the movies."

"But it's true," insisted the older man. "Something is paralyzing our time-sense. The final stroke will occur about daybreak."

"Bosh! You mean the earth will stop rotating, the stars blink out?"

"Not at all. Such things have nothing to do with time. You may know your short waves, but your general education has been sadly neglected." The scientist picked up a weighty volume. "Maybe this will explain what I mean. It's from Immanuel Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason.' Listen:

'Time is not something which subsists of itself, or which inheres in things as an objective determination, and therefore, remains, when abstraction is made of the subjective conditions of the intuition of things. For in the former case it would be something real, yet without presenting to any power of perception any real object. In the latter case, as an order of determination inherent in things themselves, it could not be antecedent to things, as their condition, nor discerned or intuited by means of synthetical propositions *a priori*. But all this is quite possible when we regard time as merely the subjective condition under which all our intuitions take place.'

"There. Does that make it clear?"

"Clear as mud," grinned Baron. "Kant is too deep for me."

By millions of millions
the creatures of earth
slow and drop when
their time-sense is
mysteriously paralyzed.

"I'll give you another proof," snapped Manthis. "Look at your watch."

The other drew out his timepiece. Slowly his face sobered.

"Why, I can't see the second hand," he exclaimed. "It's just a blur!"

"Exactly! Now look at the minute hand. Can you see it move?"

"Yes, quite clearly."

"What time is it?"



A few remained standing like statues

"Half past one. Great Scott! So that's why you spun that yarn." Baron hoisted his six feet one out of the easy chair. "It's way past your bedtime. Didn't mean to keep you up." He stared again at his watch as if it had betrayed him. "It seems we just finished dinner. I must have dozed off...."

"Nonsense," sniffed Manthis. "You arrived at eight o'clock—an hour late. You and I and my daughter had dinner. Then the two of us came in here. We smoked a cigarette or two. Now it's half-past one. Do you need more proof?"

"Your theory's all wet somewhere," the younger man protested with a shaky laugh. "If my watch isn't broken, time must be speeding up, not stopping."

"That comes from depending on your senses instead of your intelligence. Think a minute. If the watch seems running double speed that would indicate that your perception of its movements had slowed down fifty per cent."

Baron sank back into his chair, leaned forward and gripped his curly black hair with trembling fingers. He felt dizzy and befuddled.

"June," called the doctor. Then to the agitated youth he added: "Watch my daughter when she comes in if you still think I'm crazy."

As he spoke the door flew open and a slim, golden-haired girl shot into the room like a motion picture character in one of those comedies which is run double speed. Jack's eyes could hardly follow her movements.

She came behind her father and threw one slim arm about his shoulders. She spoke, but her usually throaty voice was only a high-pitched squeak.

"Can't understand you, dear," interrupted her father. "Write it down."

"June is using a drug which I prepared to keep her time sense normal," Manthis explained as the girl's pen raced over a pad. "That's why she disappeared after dinner. I wanted you to get the full effect. Now read this."

"The deadline is approaching," the girl's message read. "You'd better take your injection now. It is 2:30 A.M."

"All right, prepare the hypodermics," directed the chemist. He had to repeat this in a falsetto

voice before June understood. "Make one for Jack too."

June went out at express-train speed.

Baron glanced at his watch again. The minute hand was moving with the speed at which the second hand usually traveled. Three fifteen already!

When he looked up June was in the room again with two hypodermic needles. Quickly she removed her father's coat and made the injection.

"Let her fix you up too, boy, unless you want to become a graven image," commanded Manthis. His voice, which started at the ordinary pitch, went up like a siren at the end as the drug took effect. Dazedly Jack held out his arm.

The sting of the needle was followed by a roaring in his ears like a hundred Niagaras. The room seemed to pitch and quiver. Staring down at the watch he still clutched, Jack saw the hands slow down and at last resume their accustomed pace. Gradually the unpleasant sensations died away.

"That was a close shave," commented the doctor, drawing a long breath. "I wouldn't have waited so long, except that I wanted to experience the sensation of coming back from the edge of the infinite. Not very nice! Like being pulled out of a whirlpool. It's 4:30 now. Took us an hour to return to normal, although it seemed only minutes. We have an hour and a half before the end. June, have you noticed anything unusual on the streets?"

"Yes," whispered his daughter, her usually piquant face pinched and white. "I've been watching from the balcony. It's dreadful. The people creep about like things in a nightmare."

Manthis tried to reassure her. On his face was a great sadness which was, however, overshadowed by a greater scientific curiosity.

"There's nothing we can do for them now," he said. "But we must learn all we can. Let's go down and watch the city die."

They descended in an automatic elevator and hurried through the hotel lobby. The lights of Fifth Avenue gleamed as brightly as ever. The streets near the lower end of Central Park still were crowded. But such crowds! They moved with infinite languor. Each step required many seconds.

Yet the people apparently did not know that anything unusual was happening. Many perhaps were puzzled because their watches seemed to be misbehaving but this did not stop their conversation as they traveled home from theaters or night clubs. Two white-haired men passed by, engaged in a discussion of business affairs. Their voices were pitched so low that they were almost inaudible to the trio of watchers, while their gestures looked like the slow waving of the antennae of deep sea plants.

"My God, man!" cried Baron, at last awakening from his horror-stricken silence. "Why didn't you warn the world? This is criminal. If what you say is true, all these people will become rooted in their tracks at six o'clock like—like characters from 'The Sleeping Beauty.'"

"I only discovered the danger a week ago while working out a chemical formula." Manthis' eyes showed the strain he was enduring. "It was a very delicate piece of work having to do with experiments I am making on chlorophyl—quick adjustments, you know. I'd done the thing before many times, but last week I couldn't mix the ingredients fast enough to get the necessary reaction. Puzzled, I made further experiments. The result was that I discovered my perception of time was slowing down. I tested June and found the same thing. There was but one conclusion."

"But the drug we are using. How did you hit on that?"

"I recalled that such drugs as hashish greatly speed up the time sense. An addict is able to review his entire past life or plan an elaborate crime between two heartbeats. So I collected a small supply of the stuff."

"But hashish in large doses is deadly, and I've heard that users of it sooner or later develop homicidal mania—run amuck as they say in India."

"True enough," admitted the chemist, "but Andrej, the Russian, you know, recently worked out a formula to neutralize the deadly effects of the drug but retain its time-expanding effect for medical purposes. I've added that to the pure drug. There isn't enough of it in New York to keep all these people normal for five minutes. Why should I have frightened the poor things?"

He relapsed into silence and the others found no heart to ask further questions as they watched the coming of the end of a world. The procession of passers-by had thinned somewhat by now. The street lights had grown dim. There was a look of increasing puzzlement on the faces of the people who remained. Something was wrong. They knew not what.

Floating along the sidewalk like a figure in a slow motion picture came a tiny tot of three. She was sobbing. Great tears formed with painful slowness and slid down her flushed cheeks.

"She's lost," exclaimed June. "Here, darling, I'll find your mama."

She picked up the child and looked up and down the street. The mother was not in sight. Automatically she turned to a policeman who stood nearby.

"Officer," she said quickly, "this girl is lost. Will you...?"

She stiffened in dismay. The policeman was staring through her as if his eyes had not registered her approach. Slowly his gaze came into focus. A puzzled look came over his Irish face. He spoke. It was only a blurred rumble.

"What can I do for her, Father?" June cried, turning away from the officer in despair. "She's dying. See? Couldn't we give her some of the drug?"

"There's only enough for us," her father replied firmly.

"But she'll be quite dead in an hour!"

"I'm not so sure of that. Perhaps only in a state resembling catalepsy. We must wait. Jack, take her into the lobby. Put her on a sofa there."

Dawn was paling the blue-black sky as the radio engineer returned. The street lights fluttered fitfully and at last died. The streets had become deserted although groups still eddied slowly about the subway kiosks.

"Five forty-five," whispered Manthis. "The end should come any moment."

As he spoke a white-garbed street sweeper, who had been leaning on his broom at the curb ever since the onlookers had reached the sidewalk, decided to move on at last. With infinite slowness his foot came up. He poised, swung forward, then, the universal paralysis overcoming him, remained in a strangely ludicrous position for a moment before crashing downward on his face.

As far as they could see in the semidarkness, others were falling. A few, balanced with feet wide apart, remained standing like statues. Those who collapsed writhed slowly a time or two and were still.

After the thudding of the bodies had ended the silence became ghastly. Not an awakening bird twittered in the trees of Central Park. Not a sheep bleated in the inclosure. Except for their own breathing and the sighing of the wind, not a sound! Then a faraway clock boomed six notes. The noise made them start and turn pale faces toward each other.

"Come," said the doctor heavily. "It's all over. We might as well go up. We'll have to walk. All power will be off. Twenty stories!"

The lobby of the Hotel Atchison, on the roof of which the penthouse apartment was located, was empty now except for a few clerks and bellboys. These sat with bowed heads before their grills or on their benches as if they had merely succumbed to the unpardonable sin of sleeping on duty. But they did not breathe.

June clung to her father's arm as they crossed noiselessly over the heavy carpet.

"The city will be a charnel house when these bodies start to decompose." Baron hesitated. "Shouldn't we get out of town while there is a chance?"

Manthis shook his head. "No. I'm convinced these people aren't dead. They're simply outside of time. Change cannot affect them. If I'm not mistaken they will remain just the same indefinitely."

"But there will be fires throughout the city."

"Not many. The electricity is off. The day is warm so no furnaces are going. Not even a rat is left to nibble matches, for the animals must be affected in the same way that humans are. The world is asleep."

After mounting interminable stairs they regained the apartment and went out on the balcony. It was full daylight now but not a smoke-plume trailed from tall chimneys. Not a bird was on the wing. Elevated trains stood on their tracks, passengers and guards asleep inside.

"I still don't understand," muttered Baron. "The sun comes up. The wind blows. How can that be if there is no time? Might this not be some plague?"

"In a way you are right, boy. It is a plague which has paralyzed man's sense of time. You have become involved by not remembering Kant's axiom that time is purely subjective. It exists in the mind only. It and space are the only ideas inherently in our brains. They allow us to conduct ourselves among a vast collection of things-in-themselves which time does not affect."

"But—"

"Wait a moment. Granting that time is in the mind rather than in the outside world, what will happen if the time-sense is paralyzed? Won't the effect be similar to hypnosis whereby a man is reduced to a cataleptic state? The thought chain which usually passes ceaselessly through the brain is halted."

Seeing that the engineer still looked puzzled, June interposed:

"It's something like enchantment," she explained. "The old legends are full of it—the Sleeping Beauty, Brunhilde, Rip Van Winkle. I am convinced that in ancient times a few persons knew how to draw a fairy ring about those they wished to injure or protect, placing them thus outside the reach of time and change. This has now happened the world over, perhaps through some drift in the ether or germ in the brain. That is what we must find out so we can solve the mystery and take steps to reawaken the world—"

"Perhaps this will help," interrupted Manthis in his turn. "As you know, all the great scientists—Einstein, Jeans, Pavlov—are convinced that everything in the universe is a form of vibration. Even thought, they believe, operates somewhat like a very short radio wave. What if some agency, either inside or outside the universe, began interfering on the thought-wave channel?"

"Granting your supposition,"—Jack was on his own ground now—"transmission would be impossible on that channel."

"Exactly! Well, that's what I am convinced is taking place. I'm a chemist, not an engineer. I've given you the lead. You'll have to do the rest. Do you think you might locate such interference?"

"Possibly. I'll do my best."

"Fine! Of course, if it is coming from outside the stratosphere as the cosmic rays do, there is no hope. But if someone is broadcasting such a devilish wave from an earthly station we may have a chance to stop it.

"Now, Baron, my boy," he continued, dropping into a more jovial tone and leading his friend into the laboratory, "you'll have to get busy if you intend to keep us ticking. This equipment is at your disposal." He waved toward a newly installed short wave radio transmitter. "Here are storage batteries, all charged." He opened another door. "I have a five kilowatt generator installed here. It is operated by a gasoline engine. If you need other equipment you can raid the Rothafel plant."

Returning to the main laboratory he indicated the work table set close to a great double window overlooking Central Park.

"Couldn't ask for anything better, could you?" he smiled. "Plenty of light and air and a view of the city. Look, you can even see those poor devils lying around the subway kiosk." His face became bleak. Then he shrugged and tried to throw off his depression. "June and I will help you as much as we can. We can raid stores for provisions and hashish. Now let's have breakfast."

The next few days were filled with unending labor for the temporal castaways. From daybreak until far into the night, with radio receivers clamped over their ears, the three twisted dials, adjusted rheostats and listened in on long and short wave bands. But the ether, which once had pulsated with music and friendly voices, now was silent, except for static.

"Makes me think of Sunday mornings when I was a boy," Manthis once commented. "Only this is more quiet. It gives me the jitters." There was a note of hysteria in his voice.

When the doctor's nerves began to quiver in that manner, Baron always insisted that they all rest. During such recesses they ate, played cards and helped June with the housework. The younger man was continually amazed by the calmness with which the girl faced their desperate situation. Clad in a blue smock which brought out the color of her eyes, she flitted about the apartment, manufacturing delicious meals out of canned goods and always having a cheery word when the others became discouraged. Yet she never would look out the window.

"I can't bear to see those poor souls lying about like rag dolls," she explained. "The only thing that keeps me sane is the hope that we may reawaken them."

It was on the evening of the third day that Baron lifted the headset from his burning ears and admitted failure.

"We've explored everything but the super-short waves," he sighed. "I'll have to get equipment from the laboratories before we start on those."

June nodded from where she perched on a high stool across the table. But Manthis did not hear. He was making delicate adjustments on his receiving set and listening with rapt attention.

"I've got something," he cried. "Jack. June. Plug in on my panel. Someone is talking. It's very loud. Must be close."

Instantly the others did as he ordered, but were able to catch only the last inflections of a ringing voice. Then silence settled once more.

"What did he say," the youngsters cried in one breath.

"Couldn't understand. Some foreign language." The chemist was furious with disappointment. "But I'd recognize that voice among a thousand. We must get in touch with him. Perhaps he can help us. God knows we need assistance. Quick, Jack. You're an expert. See if you can pick up a reply."

Baron leaned over his instruments, heart thumping. The dreadful loneliness against which he had been fighting was broken. Others were alive!

Minutes passed and the evening light died away. They were too excited to strike a light. Shadows crept out of the corners and surrounded them. At last a faint voice grew in their ears. But again the words were unintelligible.

"Sounds a little like Greek," puzzled the girl, "but it isn't."

Baron adjusted the direction finder and made scribbled calculations.

"Coming from the southeast and far away," he breathed.

"I caught a word then," gasped the doctor. "'Ganja,' it was."

"What does that tell us?" snapped Jack, his nerves jumping.

"Ganja is the Hindu word for hashish, that's all. My Lord, man, don't you understand? The station is in India. Those who operate it are using Andrew's solution as we are. I—"

"Listen!" shouted Jack.

There was a grinding and clashing in the receivers. Then a new voice, harsh and strained with excitement, almost burst their eardrums.

"Beware! Beware!" it screamed. "Do not trust him. He is a devil and has put the world asleep. His mind is rotten with hashish. He is a demon from—" Then came a dull, crunching sound. The voice screamed and died away.

In the darkened laboratory the faces of the three listeners stood out like ovals of white cardboard.

"What do you make of that?" stammered Baron at last.

"It looks as if the only persons alive, in New York at least, are hashish addicts—the most debased and murderous of drug fiends." The doctor stopped, his eyes dilating with horror. June crept close to him and threw an arm around his shaking shoulders. "Can't you see? Their time-sense expanded too. Like us they were unaffected. But unlike us they use the pure drug. Hashish smokers are without exception homicidal maniacs, vicious criminals. God!"

"Are they responsible for the end of time?" queried Jack.

"I don't know. Perhaps some master mind among them is back of it—some engineering wizard who has succumbed to the drug so recently, or who has such a strong constitution that his intelligence has not been destroyed."

The little doctor dragged off his headset, disarranging his sparse gray hair. His face was tired and worn but his jaw thrust forward pugnaciously.

"We're making headway," he cried. "We know the probable author of the catastrophe is a drug addict and that he is located nearby. We know he has no scruples, for the man who warned us undoubtedly was killed. And I'm convinced those extremely short wave bands hold the secret. Let's knock off for the day. We look like ghosts. To-morrow morning you and June get what equipment you need from across the river. I'll stay here on guard. You'd better raid a drug-store and get some more of our life-saver, too. It's listed under Cannabis Indica."

The next morning dawned clear and cold. It was early October and there was a chill in the

apartment. Baron swung his legs over the edge of the davenport in the living room and stared out at the frost-covered trees of Central Park. The leaves were falling before the brisk wind and forming little eddying mounds over the forms of those lying about the streets. Jack shivered at the thought of the millions and millions of victims of the disaster who littered the Earth. They seemed to accuse him of still being alive. Well, if Manthis was right, perhaps all could be revived before winter set in.

June was singing as he and the doctor came to breakfast. Apparently she wished to forget the events of the previous night, so they laughed and joked as though they intended to go on a picnic rather than across a dead city.

The hotel lobby was as they last had seen it when they descended. The bellboys still nodded on their benches. A travelling salesman was hunched over a week-old Times as if he would awake in a few minutes, glance about guiltily and resume his reading. The child they had rescued still lay on the divan. Her golden hair framed her cheeks like a halo. One arm was thrown above her head. She seemed ready to awake, though she had not breathed for days.

"It all makes me feel so lonely," whispered June, clinging to the engineer's arm. "I want to cry—or whistle to keep up my courage."

"Don't worry," Jack replied softly, patting her hand and speaking with more assurance than he felt. "We'll find a way out."

She squeezed his arm and smiled at him with new courage. For months, in fact ever since his first visit to the Manthis apartment, Baron had admired the doctor's charming daughter. Although nothing had been said of love between them they often had gone to a dance or the theater together, while a firm friendship had been cemented. Now their closer association and the unflinching bravery which she showed was ripening this into a stronger bond.

They went out into the crisp morning, stepped across the body of a street sweeper who lay in the gutter, and entered the doctor's automobile. Through the silent city they drove, Baron watching carefully to avoid striking stalled cars or grotesquely sprawling bodies.

There was a tangle of wrecked automobiles in the center of the Queensboro Bridge and they were forced to push them apart to get through. While they were engaged in this arduous work, a drifting ferry bumped into a pier, shaking the dreaming captain into a semblance of life at the wheel.

"I used to like fairy tales," moaned June. "They're dreadful, really."

She clung to him like a frightened child. He drew her close and kissed her.

"I love you, June," he whispered, as though fearful that the sleeping drivers of the tangled cars might overhear. "Don't be afraid."

"I'm not—now," she smiled through eyes filled with tears. "I've loved you for months, Jack. Whatever happens, we have each other."

He helped her back into the car and drove on in silence. At last the Rothafel plant gloomed before them, forbidding as an Egyptian tomb. With a feeling that he was entering some forbidden precinct, Jack led the way to his office. Somehow, without its usual bustle and bright lights, it seemed alien.

Once inside he forgot his hesitation and set about collecting equipment—queerly shaped neon tubes, reflectors, coils, electrodes. Soon there was a pile of material glinting on top of his desk.

They were exploring a deep cabinet with the aid of a flashlight when a strange clicking sound made them whirl simultaneously. In a corner of the room a deeper blot of shadow caught their eyes. Jack snapped on the flash. In the small circle of light a long, cadaverous face appeared. Thin lips were drawn back over wide-spaced yellow teeth. Black eyes stared unwinkingly into the light. The flash wavered as the engineer tried to get his nerves under control.

"It's nothing," he assured the trembling girl. "A night watchman caught as he was making his rounds, probably. Don't get excited." He wet his lips.

"He's alive!" screamed June. "The eyelids! They moved!"

"Yes, I'm alive," boomed a hoarse voice. "I thought I was the only man God had spared. Pardon me for frightening you. I was so thunderstruck...."

The stranger stepped forward. He was dressed in a long black topcoat, high collar and string tie. The clicking noise was explained when he rubbed his long white hands together, making the knuckles pop like tiny firecrackers.

"Ivan Solinski, at your service." He smiled with what evidently was intended to be warmth, again showing those rows of teeth like picket fences. "I suppose we're all here on the same mission: to find a solution for the mystery of the world's paralysis." The apparition lit a long and bloated cigarette and through the acrid smoke surveyed them quizzically.

"I'm Jack Baron, formerly on the staff here, and this is June Manthis, daughter of Dr. Frank Manthis, head of the chemical research department." The engineer winced as Solinski enfolded his hand in a clammy grip.

"Ah yes, I know the doctor by hearsay. A great scientist. He has a lovely daughter"—bowing deeply to June as he let his beady eyes wander over her face and figure. "Perhaps we can join forces, although I must admit I have abandoned hope. It is God's will." He rolled his eyes toward heaven, then riveted them once more upon June.

"Why, certainly." Jack was striving to overcome his growing dislike. "We'll be driving back in a few minutes. Would you care to come with us?"

"No." The pupilless eyes skittered toward Baron for a moment. "I know the doctor's address. I will come to visit you soon. Now I must be going." Solinski turned as if to depart, then strode to the desk and looked down at the mass of equipment. "Ah, super-short wave tubes, I see. Very clever." His dexterous fingers lingered over them a moment. Then he bowed and was gone.

The two remained staring at the empty doorway.

"I—I wish he'd been dead—sleeping," whispered June at last, twisting her handkerchief with trembling fingers. "He—I didn't like the way he kept looking at me."

"He seemed all right to me." Jack tried to forget his own prejudice. "He's willing to help us."

"Might he not be one of the hashish addicts? Those eyes—the pupils were mere pinpoints—and those evil-smelling cigarettes."

"Then why should he have offered to help?" puzzled Jack. "He could have killed us."

"Nevertheless I hope we've seen the last of him. Are you about through? Let's get out of this awful place. He looked like a mummy!"

They drove back to the apartment so completely preoccupied that both forgot to obtain the drug which the doctor had requested.

"Yes, I've heard of him," Manthis said after he had been informed of the encounter. "A naturalized Russian. Used to do quite a bit of valuable work in various fields of physics. But he was some sort of radical—seems to me an old-fashioned anarchist—and not popular. He dropped out of sight several years ago. I presumed he was dead."

They soon had the new equipment installed and again began exploring the wave bands, beginning with the comparatively lengthy ones and working down into those only slightly longer than light. It was tedious work, but all were by now as adept as Jack in combing the ether and their task progressed rapidly. Despite the labor, however, nothing could be heard. There was only the universal, breathless silence. At times they moved to the commercial bands and tried to pick up the stations they had heard on the previous day, but even there they met with failure.

By the evening of the third day they had left the wave bands which could be measured in meters and were exploring those strange and almost wholly uncharted depths of the ether which must be calculated in centimeters. There at last luck favored them. It was Jack who caught a strange pulsating tone on the three-centimeter band. It rose and fell, rose and fell, then died away like the keening of a lost soul.

"Listen," he whispered. "Plug in here. I've found something."

June and the doctor followed his instructions. Delicately fingering the coils, Baron picked up the sound again, only to lose it. Then it came once more. This time he followed it as it changed to the five centimeter band. Back and forth it went as though weaving an intricate and devilish web.

"What do you make of it?" queried the doctor at last.

"Don't know." Jack bit his lips. "It's no natural phenomenon, I'll swear. Somebody is manipulating a broadcasting station of terrific power not far from here and playing with that wave as a helmsman brings a sailing ship into the wind and lets her pay off again."

"What do we do now?" The little chemist, finding his theory apparently confirmed, was at a loss. "Could we wreck that station?"

"Fat chance!" The engineer laughed bitterly as he reached for a cigarette. "Whoever has

conceived that bit of hellishness is well guarded. The three of us wouldn't have a ghost of a show. What I can't understand is—"

"No use talking about theories now." Manthis sat down, crushed. Dropping his head in his hands, he pulled his few hairs as though that might drag out an idea. "What's to be done? Do you realise that we hold more responsibility than ever man has held before? Caesar! Napoleon! They were pikers. We have to save a world."

Silence greeted his outburst. The scratching of a match as June lit a cigarette sounded like an explosion. Then the smoke eddied undisturbed while the three stared vacantly into space, trying to think.

"Couldn't we"—the girl swallowed hesitantly as she realized her ignorance of radio engineering—"couldn't we interfere with that wave? Interfere with the wave which already is breaking up the thought waves. Cancel its power. Oh, Jack, you must know what I mean."

"With this dinky, five-kilowatt station? We couldn't reach Yonkers against the power they've got. By Jove!" He leaped to his feet as a new thought struck him. "Maybe we could just wake up New York. Get help from the police then! Smash that other station afterwards!"

"But we don't know whether interference would break the spell," interposed the practical doctor. "And it will take a lot of practise to follow that wave. It jumps back and forth like a grasshopper."

"And if we don't do it right the first time, whoever is operating that station will be down on us like a ton of brick," admitted Jack.

"Let's get the child we saved," suggested June. "We can bring her up here. Then we'll need only a little power, just enough to be effective in this room, to bring her to life if we can. They wouldn't hear our wave."

"Great!" Jack bent over and kissed her. "You're a real help. I'll be back in a minute." He dashed out. Soon they heard his step on the stairs and he reappeared, tenderly bearing his golden-haired burden.

"Now, June," he commanded briskly, "place her in a comfortable position on the work table while I get ready." He began arranging equipment and connecting it with the bank of storage batteries.

"Shall I adjust a headset for her?" asked the impatient doctor.

"Be yourself!" Jack placed a crooked vacuum tube near the child's head and clamped two flat electrodes on her temples. "This wave must act directly on the brain. The sense of hearing has nothing to do with it.

"All right, Sleeping Beauty." He stretched the kinks out of his aching back. "Let's see what we can do for you. Pardon me, Doctor, if I seemed rude. This is ticklish work. Pick up the outside wave for me. Thanks. Now I've got our dinky sending station set on the same wave length at a different frequency. It's adjusted so that as I keep in touch through this tuning coil, our wave will fluctuate over the same path as the other. It should take six or eight hours to overcome the effect on her, I judge. Here we go. June, you'd better get yourself and your dad some food. Doctor, you examine the kid from time to time. In an hour or so June can relieve me."

He pressed a switch. The tubes filled with a green glow.

Two hours passed, and the sun was sinking behind the trees of the park in a bloody haze when Jack at last signaled for June to handle the dials. For a time he guided her slim fingers. Then, as she caught the trick, he rose and stretched his cramped muscles.

"Don't lose the wave for a moment or we'll have to start all over again," he warned. "Now for dinner!"

She nodded and, frowning slightly, bent over the dials.

At that moment there came a heavy knock on the apartment door.

"Who's that?" gasped Manthis, his face turning grey.

"Probably Solinski," replied Jack, feeling his spine crawl as he remembered the moldy Russian. "Fine time he chose for a visit."

"Shall I let him in?"

"Don't see what else there is to do."

"Good evening," cried their guest as Manthis opened the door. "Ah, Dr. Manthis, I believe. I have heard so much about your work." His hoarse yet ringing voice made the little man start violently

and caused June to shake her head in annoyance as the sound interfered with the humming of the vagrant wave. "Sorry I could not come earlier." Solinski advanced into the laboratory, giving the effect of driving the chemist before him. "Trying to revive one of the sufferers, I see. May God aid you in this noble work."

He spread the tails of his long coat and sat down. As he talked his eyes flashed about the room, taking in every detail and at last fastening on June's fresh beauty like those of a vampire. "Not," he boomed as he lighted a cigarette, "not that I believe it possible—"

Catching an agonized glance from Jane, Jack interrupted:

"You'll have to speak softly, sir. This is ticklish work."

"I beg your pardon." The Russian lowered his voice so that it squeaked piercingly like a rusty hinge. He wrung his hands audibly.

"Perhaps we'd better move into the living room," suggested the doctor, hovering in the background. "There we can talk without interrupting."

Their guest unfolded joint by joint like a collapsible rule.

"Of course, if you think I'm spying," he grated.

"Not at all," protested Jack, although he longed to strike the brute across the face. "It's just that voices of certain pitches interfere. Surely you have seen radio operators go all to pieces when spoken to."

Ungraciously Solinski allowed himself to be ushered into the outer room. Once there he disposed his lean form on another chair, unctuously refused a highball, and, forgetting his momentary anger, soon was deep in a scientific discussion of the problems involved in revivifying the world.

He mentioned the nearby radio station but declared that he had been unable to locate it despite a careful search. Dismissing this he turned to other topics, displaying a vast knowledge of all departments of scientific achievement and, despite his depressing personality, holding his bearer's attention so closely they forgot the passage of time until the clock struck ten.

"Time for daily injection," said the doctor. "Do you use Andrev's solution too, sir?"

"Naturally," replied the other, lighting one cigarette from the butt of another.

Manthis hurried into the laboratory. A few moments later he reappeared in the doorway and called to Jack in an agitated voice. As the younger man joined him he closed the door and turned a white face to him.

"The drug is almost gone," Manthis said. "Didn't you obtain a new supply?"

"We—I forgot it," admitted Jack, feeling his own face grow pale. "The shock of running across Solinski at the laboratory upset me."

"Well, that's all right, then. It gave me a turn, but we have plenty of time." The doctor laughed shakily. "Run down to the nearest drug store. There should be a supply there. Better take a flashlight."

He pushed open the door, then shrank back. Leaning against the jamb was the Russian. His manner had changed subtly. His thin lips spread from ear to ear in a wolfish grin. His fingers clicked like castanets.

"Ah," he purred. "So you have used up the last of your solution?"

"What's that to you?" The doctor was gripped by cold unreasoning fear.

"Only that you will be unable to obtain more. Since my first meeting with your daughter I have had my men collect all the Cannabis Indica in the city."

"Your men!" Manthis was thunderstruck.

"Certainly, you old fool. Do you think I'm a bungling theorist like yourself? Who do you think is operating that short-wave station? I am. Who do you think put the world to sleep? I did. Who do you think will wake it? I will."

Solinski's figure appeared to expand. He took deep drafts from his cigarette. The smoke seemed to impel some terrific force into his gaunt frame.

"So it was your voice I heard!" cried Manthis bitterly. "And those awful tales about you were true. A hashish smoker! A person whose mind is rotting, in control of the world!" He seemed about to leap at the other, and his chubby figure, in that attitude, would have seemed ludicrous if it had

not been tragic. "It shall not be!" he shouted.

"Now see here, Doctor"—Solinski assumed a friendly tone—"you're making a grave mistake. I have something to offer better than you ever dreamed of."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. How would you like to be assistant to the King of the World?"

"Crazy already," sneered the doctor, squinting up at his tormentor.

"Crazy or not, when the world awakes I will be its king."

"Why, damn you, I thought you were an anarchist and wanted to do away with kings and governments," sputtered the little man.

Solinski burst into a gale of fiendish laughter.

"An anarchist is merely a capitalist without money or power," he quoted.

"What do you want of us?" demanded Manthis, playing for time.

"Very simple. This: I intend soon to begin awakening those who will serve me, first in New York and then throughout the world. When I have a skeleton government built up, I will withdraw the wave and allow the people to revive. Clever, isn't it? Especially for such a madman as you think me." He snapped his fingers and leered cunningly at them.

The doctor choked but Jack's hand on his arm steadied him.

"You have a very beautiful daughter," resumed their diabolical visitant.

"Leave my daughter's name out of this," cried Manthis, recoiling.

"Not at all. Her charm and ability have greatly impressed me—so impressed me that I have decided to make her my queen."

"You scum of the gutter. You filthy beast. I'd die before I'd be a party to such a thing!" The doctor was beside himself.

"I consider myself justified," replied the other, taking great delight in baiting his foe. "The world was never able to govern itself. We anarchists have bided our time, although overshadowed by communists, Fascists and such ridiculous experimenters. Now comes our turn. I shall be the viceroy of God. Under my rule and that of Queen June the world shall become a second heaven."

He rolled his eyes upward at those words. As he did so, Jack, who had been awaiting just such an opportunity, struck him on the jaw.

The blow would have felled an ox but Solinski merely staggered back a step and snarled. Before Baron could renew the attack he jerked an automatic from beneath his coat and leaped to the hall door.

"You I shall kill," he grinned evilly. "But not now. First you must taste the horror of sinking into the long sleep. You have no more drug, nor can you obtain any. Those pitiful storage batteries will be exhausted by the time you have aroused the child. So you must sleep unless you have the courage to kill yourself. Doctor, I deeply regret that this has occurred, but you see that I must let you and June sleep too. When I have need of you I will recall you. That is all. Farewell. May God pity you, Baron. I will not."

He sprang through the door and, the tails of his black coat flapping like the wings of a gigantic bat, vanished down the stairs.

Manthis slammed the door and locked it, then leaned weakly against the panels and wiped his round face. His hands shook pitifully.

"This then is the end," he whispered hoarsely.

"Is there none of the drug left?" Jack shook him out of his lethargy.

"Enough for a half portion for all of us," sighed the doctor. "But what use of that? Better we poisoned ourselves now and escaped that demon."

"Nonsense. A half portion means twelve hours of life. In that time I can rig up the big transmitter. Perhaps there is still time to revive New York. Solinski won't know we have a generator until we turn on the power. Quick. Poor June must be nearly frightened to death at our shouting."

But they found the girl sitting tense and jubilant at the controls.

"Father! Jack!" she cried as the door opened. "It's working. I saw her move. That means we may be able to revive the world!" Her face was streaked with tears.

"Her heart's beating," whispered the doctor, feeling the child's pulse. "Slow but steady. She'll regain consciousness any moment now."

"No time to wait." Disregarding June's cry of protest Jack stripped off the electrodes. "We must get the big machine working."

"But the little thing will die again," cried June, throwing herself on her knees beside the tot. "I didn't think you could be so cruel."

"Solinski has cut off our drug supply," explained Manthis gently. "He's operating the other station. Don't blame Jack. We must work fast."

"You mean that Russian is responsible for all this?"

"Yes, child. But maybe we can defeat him yet. Don't lose courage. Now I must go and prepare what's left of the drug. We're overdue for it now."

Meanwhile Jack was busy running leads from the generator room, connecting banks of tubes, stringing an aerial on the terrace.

"Twelve hours! Twelve hours!" he muttered. "Just time to make it if the doctor's calculations are correct. June, hand me those pliers, but be careful of the wires. I haven't time to insulate them. When we start the dynamo they'll be carrying twelve thousand volts."

"But won't Solinski and his men come back and kill us?" For the first time the full weight of despair descended upon her brave spirit.

"Probably. Does your father have a revolver?"

"I—I think so."

"Find out." Jack connected a loading coil with deft fingers. "Then go down to a sporting goods store and get some ammunition. If there are any shotguns in the place bring two back with plenty of buckshot shells. I don't think we're being watched yet, but if you're attacked, run for it."

Noting she looked hurt at his abruptness, he kissed her quickly.

"Sorry, darling. Every second counts. Run along, like a good girl."

She smiled for the first time in a long while and patted his hand.

When she returned, two shotguns and several boxes of shells held like wood in her bent arms, the generator was sparkling merrily. The gasoline engine barked steadily and the vacuum tubes glowed green.

Manthis came in at that moment and injected all the remaining drug as Jack gave crisp orders. Automatically the engineer had taken command.

"I'll get things going and handle the dials until Solinski sends his rats down on us. June, you watch the street door. Run up at the first sign of an attack. After that you'll take my place and hold it, no matter what happens, until we succeed or are killed. The doctor and I will go downstairs when you come up, and hold them off or retreat slowly. Thank heaven we can command both the front and rear stairways from the halls. Now doctor, watch the circuit breaker. I'm going to throw on full power."

As he advanced the rheostat the tubes glowed brighter, bathing the room in unearthly light. Jack adjusted his headset, and smiled up at June. She kissed him bravely before hurrying to her dangerous post.

Once more he sat listening to that whining, fluctuating wave. The engineer's thoughts wavered between speculations on the future, fond memories of June and impatience with the dragging hours. Would nothing ever happen? Through the earphones now came a jangling, agonized whine, as if the two antagonistic waves were endowed with life and actually struggling in the ether.

From time to time his glance wandered to the child, who, having obtained a head start through her preliminary treatment, now was stirring fretfully.

Slowly the time plodded by. Jack smoked cigarette after cigarette in an effort to fight off the drowsiness which loaded his eyelids with lead.

It must have been three o'clock when a whimper from the divan apprised them that the child at last had awakened.

"Where's mama?" She blinked into the glare. "I've lost my mama."

"There, there, honey," soothed the doctor, stopping his pacing up and down the room and picking her up. "Your mama had to go away for awhile. She'll be back any minute. Let's go find a drink of water. And I've something for you to play with too." Gently he carried her into June's bedroom.

Soon he reappeared and patted Jack on the shoulder.

"Our first victory," he said in a broken voice. "She's in perfect condition and sleeping naturally now. I gave her one of June's old dolls to play with." He sighed and collapsed into the nearest chair. "I'm almost dead with the strain of it. Do you think there's a chance?"

"Three more hours should turn the trick. I don't understand why Solinski—"

The crash of a shotgun, coming faint but clear from the street below, brought him up short. The shot was answered by a volley of rifle fire.

Jack almost lost the wave in his excitement, but regained it with a desperate twist of the wrist. No time for nerves now. He must be calm!

"Go down and hold them until June can get back to relieve me," he ordered. "Hurry. They may rush her any moment."

The doctor seemed ten years younger as he thrust a revolver into his pocket, snatched a shotgun from behind the door and ran out.

The commotion had awakened the child, who started whimpering, adding further to Jack's distractions. Yet he managed, in spite of ghastly mental pictures of June being torn to pieces by her attackers, to keep his hands steady.

A few minutes later she slipped into the room and laid her cold cheek against his before taking her place at the instruments.

"It's all right," she added. "I don't think they'll attack in the dark. There are five of them. I'm sure I wounded or killed one. They weren't expecting a guard. I left the gun with father. He's behind the cashier's desk." Then, all her courage evaporating, she turned an appealing, little girl face toward her lover. "Don't let yourself be killed, Jack. I'd die too."

"June, you're wonderful," he whispered. "I didn't know there was a girl alive as brave as you. Good-bye. No matter what happens, keep the wave in tune." He kissed her tenderly, trying not to think he had done so for the last time, and hurried out.

The stairs were black as the inside of a tomb. Once he stumbled over the body of a charwoman and came near falling headlong.

"Nothing's happened since that first volley," whispered Manthis when Jack slipped into the cage. "They're holding off for dawn. Look!" his voice wavered. "Was that a face at the window?" He fired wildly. Glass tinkled.

"Easy," warned Baron. "Don't waste ammunition. Besides, if you get this place full of smoke they'll jump us."

Dawn was painting the windows gray when the assault began. Their first warning came when a small object was tossed into the lobby. It exploded in a cloud of white vapor.

"Tear gas," yelled Jack. "Back to the stairs." They ran for cover, weeping and choking.

Then began a slow retreat up the stairways, Jack guarding the front and Manthis the back passages. At first it was a simple matter for their enemies to toss tear bombs through the fire doors, then, protected by respirators, capture another floor. But as the light increased this became more and more hazardous. Twice a spray of buckshot laid a Solinski man low.

"He hasn't many men available," called Jack as the attack slackened. "But watch out. His time's about up. Hey, look at that woman!" A white-uniformed maid, whom he remembered having seen lying in the same spot every time he climbed the stairs, had stirred weakly, as though about to wake.

It was their glance at the sleeping form which undid them. When they looked up both fire doors were open and helmeted figures were emerging from them.

The shotguns roared. Two of their attackers collapsed, but the others came on. Before there was time for another shot they were at close quarters. Standing back to back, Manthis and Jack clubbed their guns and held their ground.

The fact that Solinski and his men wore respirators handicapped them immensely, so that the two

defenders kept a cleared circle about them.

One of the attackers, more daring than the rest, leaped forward to engage the engineer. He collapsed with a crushed skull.

Then, when victory seemed in their grasp, luck turned. At Jack's next blow the stock of his weapon parted from the barrel, leaving him almost defenseless. At the same time Manthis slipped and collapsed from a knife thrust.

Jack was left alone to face three enemies and would have been killed within the minute had not Solinski, recalling the little time he had left to stop the interfering wave, deserted his comrades and sprinted for the laboratory.

The seeming defection of their chief threw the other two attackers into momentary confusion. Before they could recover, Jack knocked one out with the gun barrel, then came a flying tackle at the other.

But he had caught a tartar. His remaining enemy was a gigantic Negro. Recovering from his surprise the latter lifted high a glittering knife to finish his disarmed foe. Jack snatched at the uplifted arm—missed!

A revolver cracked. The hooded Negro staggered, then crashed forward.

"Remembered my pistol just in time," gasped the doctor from the floor. "Don't bother about me. I'm all right. Stop Solinski, for God's sake."

Although his lungs seemed bursting Baron turned and flew up the stairs. Being familiar with every turn, he gained on the Russian and caught sight of the dreadful black coat-tails as his enemy burst through to the twentieth floor. The locked door of the apartment baffled him only a moment. Stepping back, Solinski hurled his giant frame against the panels. They splintered and crashed inward. But the delay allowed Jack to catch up.

He leaped on the Russian's back. Locked together they reeled into the living room. For a fleeting moment Jack saw June sitting rigidly at the instruments. Her eyes were starting from their sockets but her hands were steady.

"I warned you to kill yourself," Solinski's voice rose in a screaming whisper through the respirator. "Now I will do it." Displaying the strength of madness he hurled Jack from him. Losing all control of his limbs, the younger man flew across the room and demolished the divan in his fall. But the thought of what Solinski would do to June brought him back to the attack.

The fury of their struggle wrecked the living room. Both bled from numerous wounds. One of the Russian's bleak eyes closed under a well-directed blow, but otherwise he seemed unaffected. Jack grappled again and realized his mistake as he was caught in a bone-cracking grip and forced into the laboratory.

Baron felt a rib snap. A sweat of agony broke out over his body. Holding his enemy helpless the invader worked his way toward the work table. They bumped against it, making the equipment totter perilously. Solinski released his grip, snatched a bottle of distilled water and swung.

Jack felt his head explode. The room went dark. But in his semi-consciousness he remembered he must not let the Russian reach that switch. As he slid slowly to the floor, he grasped the other's legs.

The drug fiend tried to kick free, stumbled, struck the table with his hips. Throwing out his arms to regain his balance he plunged one hand among the naked cables which led from the generator to the transformers and tubes.

A blinding flash of light and the scream of a soul in torment followed. As a nauseating odor of burning flesh filled the room, the Russian was hurled backward like a rubber ball. He struck the window which overlooked the park, crashed through the large panel and fell!

June sat as though hypnotised, forcing herself to manipulate those dials.

Jack crawled to the window and watched the black body swoop downward like a wounded bird, the coat flapping like crippled wings. After what seemed an eon it struck the edge of the subway kiosk, bounced like a rag doll and sprawled across the pavement.

Still Jack did not move. Through a haze of his own blood he stared, the fate of his enemy forgotten. All about the kiosk bodies which had laid so still for the past week were moving. The little figures, not much larger than ants from that height, yawned, sat up and stretched as though it was the commonest thing in the world to take a nap in the midst of Fifth Avenue. It was as if the last swoop of that batlike figure had returned them to consciousness.

"The world is alive! The world is alive!" Baron croaked wildly as he felt his senses slipping from him. "We have won, June! We have won!"

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