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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Shattered Timbrel

By WALLACE J. KNAPP

*A strange tale of a weird surgical operation  
and its ghastly results*

OVER all these ponderous volumes on the desk before me I have pored. Krestenivnikov's *Conditioned Reflexes of the Parietal Lobe*, Ebbingbaum's reprints from *Neurologie Centralblatt*, even the rare *Derangements cérébro-spinales* I have read over and over, seeking a clue. Hopeless. All hopeless. I, whom Schmerzholt, the world's greatest physio-biologist, called the most promising assistant he ever had, face a blank wall.

How I remember our excitement the first few times we performed the modern miracle. Even Schmerzholt's funny little beard danced up and down and his eyes behind their powerful lenses glinted, as the monkey that had actually been dead for two weeks raised its paw to claw at the life-restoring stream pouring into its arteries. If we had been publicity-seekers, the successful culmination of my chief's lifetime of experimenting would have put us on the front page of newspapers all over the world; but for some reason the little German held back.

"Nein, Wally, we are not ready yet."

But Nancy Follett, when I told her about it that night, could not understand the delay.

"Why, darling, bringing the dead back to life! It's wonderful. When people learn about it, someone will be sure to offer you a salary big enough so that we can get married."

"We'll be married without waiting for that, sweetheart," I told her. "and in less

than two months. Schmerzholt told me that after he gets back from the Experimental Biologists' Conference in Berlin, he'll give me a month's vacation."

"Marvelous! Let's drive somewhere and do something."

I begged off. The breakneck speed at which she drives that blue roadster of hers is breath-taking for a staid scientist like me. Besides, I wanted to stay there and plan what we'd do for the next two months.

Before Schmerzholt sailed, however, he outlined enough research to keep me busy for a year, not including the time necessary to look after our resurrected monkeys, a job that demanded almost the entire attention of one person; but Jim Briggs, Doctor Briggs with a string of letters after his name, even if he is younger than I, told him not to worry.

Still, my duties did cut into the time I had hoped to spend with Nancy. When you are trying to grow a cutaneous tissue synthetically, and need to add a drop of some solution or other every half-hour for ten days, there's little chance of covering much country, even with a speed demon like Nancy for a driver. She's unhappy unless she's hitting fifty miles or better; but that, I suppose, is what I should expect from the red-headed elf who was so soon to marry me.

We scientists are agnostics about telepathy, waiting the results of further investigation. But I know how uneasy I felt around the laboratory that afternoon.

Nothing went right. One of the monkeys ended the state of coma in which it had existed ever since before Schmerzholt's departure, by dying. The howling of the dogs we use for experimental purposes got more on my nerves than usual. And the shrill telephone ring so startled me that I dropped the pan of analine I was carrying across the operating-room.

Briggs was nearest the phone, but he just stood there looking at me and at the spreading red pool on the spotless tile.

I reached the phone first. The voice was breathless and choked as it asked for Doctor Knapp. I licked my dry lips and answered.

"Oh, Doctor, there's been an accident, a terrible accident. Miss Follett is——"

"Dead?" I rasped. "Where? When?"

WE BEAT the ambulance to the scene of the auto wreck. Nancy's blue car still remained rammed against a tree, but the farmer in the neighboring house and the two occupants of the truck that had been hugging the wrong side of the turn had pulled her out of the wreck and laid her on a blanket.

It seemed impossible to believe she was dead, but though she had not a cut or a visible bruise, her heart had stopped beating. I was bent over her when the ambulance clanged up. I pushed back the doctor. No hands but mine should touch her. If anything remained to be done for her—that gave me the idea. My choking cry brought Briggs to his knees beside me.

"What is it, Wally?" he demanded.

"We've got to get her to the laboratory."

At first the ambulance driver refused. It was his duty to take her to the hospital, but I insisted. Afterward he testified in court that I threatened to kill him. I don't know, but it ended with his driv-

ing and with me in the rear, my arms about Nancy and my voice screaming for more speed.

By myself I took her to our operating-room, immaculate except for the angry red spot on the tile, like a little lake of blood.

Briggs, arriving afterward, said he pounded for ten minutes on the locked door before he made me hear and let him in. Then he gasped. On the operating-table, covered by a surgical sheet, lay the dead body of the girl I had expected to marry.

"What are you going to do, Wally?" he cried.

"We've brought animals back to life," I told him. "I'm going to revive Nancy."

"You're out of your head."

"Maybe, but science saved monkeys. Science is going to save my sweetheart or I'm through with it for ever. And you're going to help me."

I caught him as he was sidling out of the room. Vainly he protested. I demanded his help. Mine would be the responsibility, but alone I could not do what I planned. Finally he sterilized me and buttoned me into my operating-gown, though still protesting.

"But look here," I thundered. "Every doctor in the land would pronounce her dead, wouldn't they?"

He tried Nancy's pupillary reflex.

"She's dead," he admitted.

"And unless we do something, she'll remain dead. So if we can do anything at all for her, she'll be better off than now."

As we rigged up the teeter board, I could see that though he said nothing, he was set against what I proposed to do, but I went ahead. I bound the girl I loved to a sort of seesaw; then, biting my lips, I made my incisions. As I had watched Schmerzholt, so now I pumped in the

epinephrin reagent to stimulate her heart action, the heparin for its effect on her liver, the leucholchyle for nervous system tone, all in a blood and saline solution from which the coagulating matter had been filtered. And from time to time I glanced up at Briggs, whose eyes, all I could see above his mask, remained fixed on the pulmonamic machine with which he was trying to start her breathing. With his gloved right hand he gently teetered the board back and forth, eight times a minute.

Outside it grew dark. Inside the operating-room, dripping in the air heated to lessen shock, we watched, blinking in the glare of overhead lights. I was dimly conscious of people knocking at the door, but we did not open it. When the telephone bell annoyed me, I hurled a pair of hæmostats at it and sent the apparatus crashing to silence on the tile. And still we watched, feeding the life-giving fluids into the body and waiting for them to take effect.

Yes, waiting, because, somehow, I had no thought of failure. The reason Schmerzholt went to the added expense of buying monkeys for his experiments was because their reactions parallel human reactions. If they had been restored after two weeks of death, Nancy must come back to me.

Briggs called my attention to the blood on my gown, dripping from the lip I had been worrying with my teeth as I worked. But I did not stop to change. Just then, I thought I saw a slight movement of her mouth, but when it was not repeated, I called it a product of my tensed imagination.

It was Briggs who first detected the trembling of Nancy's eyelids. That gave new vigor to our exhausted bodies and we kept on until finally she gave a little moan

and slightly moved the hand that wore the engagement ring I had given her.

And then Briggs slumped to the floor.

I could not stop to help him. Even though Nancy had begun to breathe again, slowly, I could not leave her, even for an instant. Not until the black of the windows turned to gray and I knew she was safe did I open the laboratory door. Outside, Mrs. Follett, dry-eyed and gray, sat folding and refolding her handkerchief. I gave her instructions and stumbled to a cot in our smoking-room. I slumped onto it.

When I awoke, I discovered they had moved her to the hospital, since our laboratory had no facilities to care for her. Quickly I drove over, still haggard. The doctor began questioning me, but all I said was that I had given her a blood transfusion to replace what she had lost in the accident. For a moment he looked at me queerly.

"She's still unconscious," was his answer to my question. "From the shock, of course."

The next day I was given the same report. She was, however, as I saw her, resting easier, breathing quicker and with a better color. But it was four days before she opened her eyes, and then those hazel eyes that used to sparkle at me were glazed. When I saw she did not recognize me yet, I soon left.

Mornings and evenings I made my pilgrimage to Nancy's bedside, but when a week passed and still she had not spoken or recognized anyone, the family began to worry. Hour after hour the girl lay unmoving, her lusterless eyes fixed vacantly on the ceiling, saying nothing, apparently hearing nothing. Finally they decided to call in a specialist. I tried to have them put it off until Schmerzholt's arrival, for we were expecting him in ten days, but they were frantic.

**T**HEY made a good choice. I don't suppose there is a neuropathologist of greater skill than Doctor Parker in the Midwest. He made a thorough examination, but I could see how puzzled he was, and while he talked in hopeful generalities to Mr. and Mrs. Follett, to me he acknowledged that he was at sea.

"It looks like pressure on the brain somewhere, but although I've used this new X-ray technique, there isn't the slightest evidence of lesion. Even an injury to the spinal column would partly account for her condition, if we could find any. You found no trace immediately after the accident?"

I assured him that I had no explanation. I still do not know what—except shock—could have stopped her heartbeats without leaving a wound. And so, after promises to keep her under observation, Doctor Parker left and I waited for Schmerzholt.

Finally he arrived, tanned and vivacious, but he sobered instantly when he saw me, and by the time I had told him the whole story, he was so furious that he choked. I had thought that when a scientist like Schmerzholt had devoted a quarter-century to the problem of methods of restoring human life, the acme of delight would be the report of its successful use, but instead he became more enraged than I have ever seen him. He bombarded me with German oaths.

"You fool!" he ended. "*Aber* tell me instantly, how is she?"

"Getting better all the time. She is still dazed, but Doctor Parker thinks——"

"Dazed?" snapped Schmerzholt. "Dazed? Have you from the observation of our monkeys learned nothing, block-head? Don't you know what to that lovely girl you have done?"

I tried to stammer a question.

"Don't you know," he shrieked, "that

the instant blood stops flowing through the brain a chemical change takes place? You revive her body, perhaps, but her brain, what of her brain? Dead! Dead!"

Briggs tried to divert his anger by quoting what I had said to him.

"We thought anything at all that we could do for her would be better than to leave her dead."

The little German whirled on him.

"So? Eh, so you made her—what do they call those Haitian imbeciles?—a zombie? And he—he loves her, so he wants her to live an idiot? A lifetime of torture for everyone? And perhaps you will think you must marry her, *dummkopf*. Look what happens when I go away. If I had been here, I would have broken all the instruments, and chloroformed you, first. If it had not been impossible, do you think I would not have experimented with people? Well, now where are you going?"

After all, what could I say to him? I went out slowly, stopped at the store-room, and then on to the hospital. There I saw the girl I loved better than anything in the world, as beautiful as ever, but with the dull eyes of an idiot. To my kisses on her fiery hair, her lips, her fingers, she made no response. Then from my pocket I drew a tiny bottle and emptied its few flakes of powder into a glass. In my arms I clasped her as I held it to her lips. The nurse, coming in, found me kissing a corpse.

They kept the name of the poison I used out of the papers, for, after all, if people knew how painlessly death may be summoned, more of them might seek it. But everything else made front page headlines.

**T**HE story I told at my trial was so fantastic that none of the jury believed it. When Briggs testified that Nancy had

been dead in the first place, they thought his words an attempt to shield a friend. From the beginning, I knew there could be only one possible sentence.

But now, as I wait for the death guard, I have only one ambition. Somewhere in one of these ponderous volumes on the desk before me may hide the secret of a

way to awaken the brain as it is possible to start heart and lungs functioning. My time on earth is short now, but if I keep looking . . .

What? They are waiting for me in the death chamber? Then I must go. Nancy, you understand. You'll be waiting for me. Nancy! Nancy!