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*Doctor Keller was sure he'd found a serum that would restore life. Only one trouble: The serum seemed to be as invisible as life itself.*

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# DARK MIRACLE

By IVAR JORGENSEN

**D**R. KELLER?"

The short, plump man continued down the hospital corridor, completely oblivious of the smart, white-clad nurse hurrying to catch up with him.

"Dr. Keller?" She caught up with him and tugged gently at his sleeve.

He stopped short and looked into her face, not comprehending.

"You are Doctor Nikita Keller, aren't you?" the nurse said.

"Yes. Yes, of course," the little man answered. "What do you want?" He had been in deep thought and was irritated at having his concentration broken.

The nurse smiled professionally. "Dr. Welles would like to see you, Dr. Keller;

would you mind stepping into his office? It's right this way."

She started down the hall and led the way to a mahogany door on which, in neat gold letters, the words "Doctor V. Welles" were followed on the line below by "Chief Psychiatrist." She knocked lightly on the door and, without waiting for an answer, opened it and announced, "This is Dr. Keller, Dr. Welles." Before either of the men could say anything, she swept out of the door, closing it behind her.

The little man stood in the center of the room, bewildered by the quick pace that had snatched him from the shelter of his meditations and deposited him in this office for no reason that he could grasp.

Dr. Welles got to his feet and came round the desk to shake hands. "Ah, Dr. Keller," he said heartily. "Please sit down. This is nothing serious. I just want to have a little chat with you."

Dr. Keller sat down as bidden. "About my wife, I suppose," he muttered.

"Only indirectly," Dr. Welles answered, resuming his seat behind the desk. He rested his elbows on the table and placed his fingertips together. "Specifically, I want to talk about you."

"About me?" The little man's eyebrows shot up, surprised.

"Yes, Doctor. Now to begin with, do I understand correctly that you are not a doctor of medicine?"

"Yes, that's right," Dr. Keller said. "I'm a bio-chemist."

"Quite," the chief psychiatrist nodded. "And you've naturally been terribly upset by your wife's accident."

"It was as much my accident as hers," Dr. Keller said, clenching his fists. "True, it happened to her, but if I hadn't let her drive the car . . . if I had been driving, she would be a whole woman today. She would still have both her arms, instead of be-

ing crippled, and . . ." he buried his face in his hands and shook his head helplessly.

"That's one of the points I want to discuss with you, Keller," Dr. Welles said evenly. "Blaming yourself for an accident which occurred through no fault of your own won't help either your wife or you. At the moment, Mrs. Keller's basic attitude is the greatest hindrance to her recovery. She just simply does not want to live. She regards herself as a cripple, of no use to anyone, and she doesn't want to go on."

Dr. Keller's head snapped up, his eyes blazing. "Well, would you?" he shouted. "What would your basic attitude be? How would you like to be the original even-tempered one-armed psychiatrist?" He buried his face again and sobbed briefly. Gradually he regained control and looked up, "I'm sorry, Doctor," he said, "but I've been under a strain. I hope you'll forgive me."

"I understand completely," Dr. Welles sympathized. "But you see, your frame of mind naturally affects your wife's. Now there are stories going about that the ordeal of this tragedy has, well, shall we say, caused you to lose sight



He exploded into a frenzy, venting his rage on the unoffending laboratory.

of reality. Set you off on a course which is unrealistic."

"These stories, Doctor," Keller looked unwaveringly into Dr. Welles' eyes, "they add up to the fact that maybe I'm crazy, is that it?"

"No, no. Not crazy at all." The chief psychiatrist smiled placatingly. "Let us just say that momentarily . . ."

"Momentarily I'm out of my mind," Keller broke in calmly. "You can come right out and say it, Doctor. I won't be offended. I know what I'm doing."

"Well, let me ask you directly, Dr. Keller—you are conducting some experiments, aren't you?"

"Oh, so that's it," Keller said. He took a deep breath. "Yes, I'm conducting some experiments. Now surely, Doctor, it can hardly seem unusual to you for a biochemist, and an organic chemist, too, I might add, to conduct experiments."

"No, of course not. But there is something unusual about the experiments themselves, isn't there, Doctor? Or is my information incorrect?"

"I should assume your information is accurate," Keller returned.

"Would you care to tell me about them?"

"Since you already seem to know as much about my work as I do, I might just as well. But first let me point out that if an experiment, any experiment, were not headed in an entirely new direction, there would be no point to it in the first place."

Dr. Welles nodded his agreement.

Keller hesitated a moment, then continued, "The fact of the matter is that I am attempting to find a method of growing new parts, at will, within a living body."

"Specifically, the regeneration of an arm. A woman's arm on a human body." Dr. Welles came right to the point.

"Not regeneration, Doctor. A completely new growth is what I seek," Keller corrected him.

Dr. Welles leaned back. "Before we go any further, Dr. Keller," he said, "I'd like to point out that I have a very high regard for your work. If memory serves me correctly, your father, Vladimir Keller, worked with Pavlov in Russia. He participated in the tests with the dog's head, where it was kept alive although completely severed from the body. Much valuable information on conditioned

reflex came from that work. In your own field, you enjoy an enviable reputation, and I have the utmost respect for your integrity and ability. I want you to understand that it is against this background that I speak to you now."

"Thank you for the bouquets." Keller half-smiled uncomfortably. "But I don't see what all that has to do with this interview."

"Simply this, old man," Dr. Welles said pleasantly, "I think you're barking up the wrong tree. Instead of trying to fight an unhappy situation with weapons that just aren't available, why not try to accept the thing and learn to live with it? Don't you see, your love for your wife isn't diminished by her loss of the arm; try to show her that, and she will come to accept life under slightly changed conditions. The big thing to her is your love. And that she still has."

Keller's face hardened. He sat for a moment in silence, and when he spoke his words were low and earnest. "Vera wants her arm," he said, "and I am going to give it to her."

"But my dear fellow," Dr. Welles protested. "How?"

"Sometimes I lose patience with you professional men,"

Keller said, without malice. "The very quarter where my work should receive its greatest encouragement produces the greatest resistance. Now look here, would you be startled if I told you that eye-cells grafted onto the abdomens of embryonic fruitflies produced full-fledged eyes on the adult fly's stomach?"

"Why, no, of course not," Dr. Welles said, "but that's all been done. It's pretty well established."

"In heaven's name, it had to start *somewhere!*" Keller almost lost his patience. "An arm cell, taken from an embryo, planted in the correct position, could be made to grow into an arm. It would take time, but I say it can be done."

"This sort of thing is not in my field at all," Dr. Welles said, feeling that he was being outmaneuvered, "but I just don't see how it could be done. What would nourish the cell, for instance? It couldn't expect to draw on the host body for the tremendous growth that would be required."

"Aha!" Keller jumped to his feet, his eyes sparkling. "It is precisely in this area that I am concentrating my study. I am developing a chemical aggregate that I

shall call the life-serum. It will itself be a life force and thus capable of nourishing the cell I shall have transplanted."

Dr. Welles sagged in his chair. The interview had gotten completely out of hand. "Do you mean to suggest," he asked, "that this serum which you create will be alive?"

"Exactly," Keller said triumphantly, spreading his hands. "So you see, it is not so crazy after all."

Dr. Welles floundered. "But Great Scott, man," he finally said, "how can you hope to create, in a serum, a life which doesn't already exist?"

"How?" Keller returned the question. "Like this, Doctor:" then, ticking them off on his fingers as he went, he said, "You take water, salts, minerals, carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, of course, and nitrogen, phosphorus, sulphur and nucleic acids. Porphyrin derivatives . . ."

"Enough, enough," Dr. Welles cried, holding up his hands. "I can't argue with you in your own field, Dr. Keller. But don't you see that the thing's impossible? Believe me, the best thing for you and Mrs. Keller, is to accept the unavoidable and adjust to it. Think it over, old man."

"I have thought it over," Keller replied with a faint smile, "and you believe me—Vera will have her arm." He moved to the door and, pausing with his hand on the knob, he half-turned toward the desk. "And, Doctor," he added lightly, "if I may give you a piece of advice, although you may find it difficult, try to accept the unavoidable and adjust to it." With a friendly wink at the completely staggered psychiatrist, Keller left the room.

The first two alarm clocks failed to rouse him, but as the third was nearing the end of its ring, Keller groaned, stirred and rolled over. He fumbled for the clock and reached it just as it had rung itself out.

Sleepily, he sat up and surveyed the room. The door between his bedroom and his laboratory was ajar, and it was hard to tell where one room ended and the other started. Half-empty flasks and test-tubes were scattered on any available space in both rooms; some were delicately balanced on great teetering mounds of formula paper, others were on the floor. Between his long daily visits to the hospital and his continuous figuring, formulating and

testing, Keller had no time for housekeeping — barely enough for sleep. Hence the three alarms.

Disregarding the complaints of his still-weary body, he lurched to his feet and stumbled across the room. He put a blackened coffeepot on a Bunsen burner and then drew a little soap and water across his face at the sink. Gulping down the stale, acid coffee as he dressed, Keller was ready to face the day.

Slowly, almost reverently, he entered the laboratory and looked around. One corner of the large bench at the far wall stood out. An area of two square feet had been cleared of the debris which cluttered every other inch of table and shelf space. A clean piece of white paper covered the cleared surface, and in the center a large wired glass dome enclosed a dish. Keller never glanced in its direction. Instead, deliberately, he wandered through the room, adjusting the position of a flask, picking up a test-tube and glancing at its contents against the light. Anything to keep away from the glass dome until he had built up his courage. Morning after morning had started this way, and every time the dome had

given him failure. Dead, inert serum greeted him every morning, making each day a bedlam of refiguring, reformulating and finally retesting. Time was draining away with each washing down of a dead serum. Vera was slipping closer to the level of non-existence. As Dr. Welles constantly reminded him, it was not so much that she would die as that she would cease to live.

And so, as he had come to dread each morning's findings, Keller had evolved a routine of ignoring the important corner, under the guise of tidying up. His actions were pathetic. He had to end up in the same place, and soon, having whipped himself almost to a frenzy of expectancy, he arrived in front of the dome.

Casually, he switched on the overhead lamp and peered through the glass.

He couldn't believe it! Squinting, he pressed his forehead against the dome, striving to understand. He tore the dome off and looked directly into the dish. It was empty! This morning yielded not just dead serum—but no trace of serum at all. The dish was dry and empty.

Keller reeled to a stool and sat heavily, clutching at the



tabletop for support. Several flasks crashed to the floor and splintered, but he ignored them. Could Dr. Welles be right? Was he losing his mind? He took hold of his spinning thoughts and approached the problem as a scientist. There was one of two possibilities; it was up to him to determine which was the probability. He had either suffered a complete mental blackout and had completed no experiment last night—or he had gone through with it and, during his sleep, he had destroyed every evidence of it.

Was it possible, he asked himself, that the power at the center of his importance really did not wish Vera to survive? Was his subconscious taking over and directing the ruination of his experiments? Or was it nothing so sinister; a simple case of overwork? Distraught, perplexed, he rushed into the street and inquired of two startled passers-by as to the date and time of day. Reassured that he had not blacked out for an extended period, he proceeded to go over the previous day and evening in his mind. Nothing seemed out of order. As far as he could tell, everything fell into place as part

of his normal overworked schedule.

All right, then, he decided, since he could not find the flaw, he would dismiss it. After all, a few hours of confusion could be absorbed into the general scheme of things without upsetting the basic plan.

That afternoon he did not visit Vera. Instead, he was busy in his laboratory reworking the experiment of yesterday. With infinite precision he went through the steps, writing everything carefully on fresh paper. He scrupulously made notes on even the elementary steps he knew by heart. When he was finished, he put the dish containing the serum under the glass dome and connected the wires. It was past midnight and the exacting work and lack of nourishment had taken their toll. He was haggard; tired beyond feeling. But he had a sense of accomplishment. He had, he knew, made up for the lapse of mind he had suffered the previous day. He was tired but satisfied. Without undressing, without food or drink, he stumbled to his bed and slept.

The eager anticipation with which Keller looked forward to the inspection of the serum dish next morning

fought a battle with the utter weariness of his body and won a victory at ten o'clock. His eyes flashed open and he was awake in an instant. Out of bed, slippers and bathrobe ignored, he dashed into the lab room. No pretense at tidying this time . . . no delay. Straight to the glass dome he went and lifted it up.

He stared at the dish in silence and without motion, then he blinked his eyes and checked his vision. Once again it was completely empty. He stood there, stunned. Hastily he checked his notes, making sure that they were undisturbed, and verified his memory. Quickly pulling trousers and jacket on over his pajamas, he checked in the street to make sure that the date and time coincided with his belief. Having ascertained that there had been no loss of time involved in his failure, he set about making new plans.

The next few days passed in a blur of almost continuous activity. He called the hospital and learned that Vera had passed into a coma; he asked them to notify him at home of any developments and kept at work. He checked over the phone with Dr. Welles and asked, in guarded words, if it were possible for

a man to destroy, in his sleep, the product of his labors while awake. The answer confirmed his opinion, and he set about devising every sort of trap to catch himself.

From the depths of memory, he dredged up various methods of inhibiting sleep-walking. He tried them all, and none of them worked. The strain, the intolerable eating habits and the constant defeat wore his nerves to a transparency. In desperation, he surrounded his bed at night with carpet tacks. Starting at the outer perimeter, he worked his way carefully toward the bed, placing each tack in its position, point upward. From the wall, around the bed, to the other wall, a semi-circle of bristling points, three feet wide, formed an impassable barrier to bare feet. Sitting in bed, he surveyed the scene and nodded approvingly to himself. His awakening might be painful, but he would not leave his bed this night without knowing it.

In the morning, Keller's first act was to examine his protective screen; to his great relief, he found it intact. He put on his slippers and, using his pillow as a broom, swept a path clear. Shuffling with

amazing speed in his floppy slippers, he went directly to the all-important glass dome. Without bothering to look through, he lifted it off and stared. An oath ripped from his lips, as he flung the dome at the wall, splintering it. The infernal dish was empty. He rested a haunch on the stool and passed a shaking hand over his brow. He was completely, utterly defeated now, and he knew it. He would have to give himself over to Dr. Welles. And in the meantime, Vera, Vera who meant so much to him, the only one who made his own life worth living, would die because his mind had failed him. His inner consciousness had betrayed him.

The great blanket of despair which had settled on him was pierced by the shrill ringing of the phone. He heard it on the fourth ring and searched for the instrument. He found it beneath a large sheaf of papers. Mechanically, he lifted it to his ear.

"Hello," he said blankly.

"Doctor Keller?"

"Yes."

"Dr. Keller, this is Dr. Welles."

"Yes."

"Look here, this is Dr. Kel-

ler, isn't it?" The voice sounded puzzled.

"What? Oh, yes, yes, Dr. Welles, I understand. My mind was elsewhere when I answered. What is it, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid I have bad news for you," Dr. Welles said. His voice was coming over in the too calm, professional manner which presages tragedy.

"Vera," Keller moaned. "Is she worse?"

"She . . . slipped away from us during the night, Dr. Keller. The nurse thought she was asleep."

"Slipped away from you? I don't understand." Keller could hardly concentrate. "Where did she go?"

"What I'm trying to say, Doctor, is that she's dead. She went peacefully and without pain. The hospital would like to know what arrangements you wish . . ."

The conversation continued, but it was a monologue, the words pouring senselessly from the earpiece that dangled from Keller's limp hand. Then a terrible fury gripped the dazed, hurt mind, and he slammed the receiver back into place, and grabbing flasks, books and chunks of minerals, he hurled them about the room destroying,

breaking, wreaking damage wherever he could.

The small cages which housed his guinea pigs were dashed to the floor, crushing and maiming the little animals. For an hour the rampage continued, the awful pent-up emotions of the past several weeks suddenly spilling the dam and flooding the area around the heartbroken scientist. And then the flood subsided, and a deep unnatural calm settled in the room, as Keller stood slackly before the fresh white paper and the dish which alone had escaped the raging force of his temper.

He stared at the dish, not seeing it. Not seeing anything. Not thinking anything. Unhurriedly, consciousness returned to him and pulled him gently back toward awareness. He looked around his littered laboratory. He knew what had happened and did not regret what he had done. There was nothing, at the moment, about which he cared.

At his feet, he noticed the soft, dead body of a guinea-pig that had fallen into sudden death. He picked it up idly and fondled it—not for what it was or what he had done to it, but because at the

moment he felt the need for gentleness. He stroked the smooth fur, fingering and petting it. Then he laid it tenderly in the dish on the fresh white paper.

He looked at it, lying so still in the dish. He did not see it as a guinea-pig, but as the thing which had accepted his gentleness. His eyes narrowed, then he blinked rapidly and squinted. He leaned forward, staring. The fore-foot of the little animal was twitching, almost imperceptibly. A terrible doubt crossed Keller's mind. Was this hallucination? The guinea pig answered this question decisively. With a sudden movement, it drew its legs up under it and, looking around it with jerky motions, it scampered out of the shallow dish and down the bench, clambering over the debris.

For a moment Keller stood there. Just for a moment. The impossible idea split open his mind, entered and took hold. The animal had been brought back to life. No, no, it had been *given* life. That was it! The serum was there. It had been there all the time. But of course, what a fool he had been! What had he been expecting? He had created a life force. It had evolved from the serum. But a life force in it-

self would be invisible. What is there to death that one can see? Only the result of life is visible. He had held life itself in his dish for the last few days.

Swiftly, he checked his theory. He looked around and found another dead guinea pig. He examined it carefully for signs of life; there were none. To be sure, he picked up a syringe which held a long, hollow needle. Using the skill of long practice, he deftly inserted the needle into the animal's breast and pierced the heart. This guinea pig was dead. There could be no doubt about it.

Carefully, with hands that were trembling, he placed the silky body in the dish and waited. Long minutes appeared, hovered over him and dissolved to make way for minutes still to come. Perspiration washed his forehead and his mouth was dry. As he watched in grinding concentration, within his whole world—which was Vera, his wife and companion—there existed only himself and this guinea pig.

At last, like the eruption of a gigantic volcano, a foot twitched. A tremor passed over the tiny body, and then the legs were drawn up under the animal as life coursed

through the animal and occupied it. Soon the greased pig became completely rejuvenated.

Dr. Keller acted without hesitation. He picked up the phone and dialed a number. After a mercifully short wait he said, "Hello, Dr. Welles?"

"Yes. Ah, this is Dr. Keller?" The voice was poised, confident.

"Yes, it is," he answered, fighting to control his own voice and filter out the tumbling excitement. "You wanted to know my wishes as to the arrangements?"

"If you're sure you feel up to it, old man," Dr. Welles said soothingly. "If not, I could . . ."

"I'm up to it all right," Keller said, almost jovially. "You can just bet the whole damn world I'm up to it. I want the body sent here immediately. By ambulance."

"To your place?" Dr. Welles sounded surprised. "Well, I don't know . . . look here, can I help at all? I mean, don't you think it would be better if . . ."

Keller interrupted him. "You do not question my competency to decide in this matter, do you, Doctor?" he asked, his tone achieving just the right degree of hardness.

"Not at all, old chap, not at

all," Dr. Welles reassured him. "It's just that . . ."

"Good," Keller leapt into the breach. "Then you have her sent over immediately by ambulance. I'll pay all charges. And, Doctor, come by tomorrow in the morning some time, and take a look at her."

"All right, Dr. Keller,"

Dr. Welles sighed resignedly. "I'll see that the body is sent directly over to you. I'll stop by tomorrow."

"Thank you very much," Keller said, and hung up abruptly. He took a deep breath and started clearing the place at once. He had a lot of work to do. And he had so little time. **THE END**



"Joan is a firm believer in realism."