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STIRRING SCIENCE-FICTION

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GOLDEN NEMESIS

by
David A. Kyle



He sought complete control of his brain and got it!

HIS face was a mask of fear. Like a drunkard, he stumbled across the room to lean against the dresser, knocking over test tubes and bottles. The noise of their shattering and the tinkling of broken glass on the bare floor attracted none of his attention. He

stared with fascination at the hypodermic needle that lay before him.

Slowly his head rose. In the high, clear mirror before him was a terrifying image. Beneath that perspiring brow were two frightening eyes, dead black, peering at him from a drawn and haggard face. That wizen,

hollow-eyed face a foot away, so much like a withered plant dying of a vicious blight, was his own. The thought seemed too horrible to bear.

"Oh God, I'm dying! Why must I suffer so?" His hot, damp hands beat his forehead and pushed back his unkempt hair with quick and desperate motions.

Suddenly he straightened. His jaws tightened firmly together, and his mouth became a thin, bloodless slit. If he was to die, there were things to do first.

Stiffly, he walked to the large table near his bed. Briefly, he scanned the jumble of paraphernalia on it. Glass bottles and tubing of every description were heaped with bewildering scientific apparatus. Disregarding the disorder, he roughly pushed everything aside and uncovered a soiled book. Though almost worn away, the words on the cover were still faintly visible: "*The Human Brain.*"

For a moment he appeared to caress it, then abruptly, he opened it. A piece of paper fluttered from the open page to fall to the littered floor.

Recovering the paper, he read for the last time those words which he had copied. "All the functions of man are controlled by the brain, yet less than a fourth of the brain tissues are used. Size has no importance relative to brain capacity, which exists solely because of synapses among the neurons, more simply explained as connections among the different cells. Thus, the more of these connections, the more brain capacity and proportionately the more intelligence is produced."

Then a paralyzing shock seemed to grip the man. On the paper were words to which he had never paid much attention. They caught his eye as if written in red. How strangely prophetic they were. He had read of

his death many times and had never realized it! "*The control of the brain makes it possible for the body to function properly.*"

He was a fool! A blind, blundering fool! Mad with anger, he flung the book at the window; it smashed through the dusty pane, hitting three floors below with a smack that was heard clearly in the still night. The paper had crumpled in his fist.

BUT of the confusion on the table he pulled a bunsen burner. A sputtering match lit it. He smoothed out the paper and thrust a corner into the blue flame. The fire raced along its top edge, slowly eating downward. He watched it burn, enchanted by the way it erased those words: "The control of the brain—makes it possible for—the body—to function — pro—pe—r—l—y." The flickering flames seared his fingertips. The last bit became ash and the sparks floated to the stained table.

"Mother of God!" he suddenly screamed. His face contorted with agony and from his twisting lips came choking, gasping sounds. His fingers dug into his chest, and the veins in his neck pounded with blood. His heart was being consumed with a fire like that which had consumed the paper. He staggered against the table and collapsed. Abruptly the wooden legs gave way and with a roar all crashed against the wall. The plaster was ripped away as they slid to the floor.

In one corner the bunsen burner glowed. Next to it a small blaze began. Flames crept along the shattered wood and spilt chemicals.

The man dragged himself to his feet.

"I must get it back. I must destroy it. I must!"

He pulled open a drawer of the

dresser and searched through it. Finally he found what he wanted, a worn envelope. The letter, which he took out, was brief: "This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter. I am holding your papers until further notice."

His interest, however, was not in the message. It was the address of the lawyer, who had signed it, for which he had searched.

A wave of heat engulfed him. He whirled around. The side of the room was a mass of flames, little hungry tongues of red licking toward his feet. A shelf leaned crazily from the wall spilling boxes and glass into the fire. Flames of rainbow hues sprang at his face.

He drew back frightened, then raced for the door, jamming the envelope into his pocket.

Standing in the street, in the growing light of day, he studied the address again and hurried off.

The sun had risen high in the heavens by the time he had climbed the floors to the law office. Outside, the rumble of business and the noise of humanity penetrated into the small room with a far-away murmur. The sunlight, dimmed by the dirt-streaked window, streamed in upon the dusty floor and splashed about the scattered papers that were piled on a grimy, battered desk. The chair groaned at his shift in weight.

Behind the single table, the curious lawyer, his plump form rolling beneath his sooty, threadbare coat, leaned over the jumbled mass of paper to speak soothingly to the slight figure in the chair.

"Yes, I have papers such as you describe, but why should I give them to you? What proof do you have that they are yours?"

His frantic client could scarcely keep his voice from rising to a shout.

"Break the seal and read the title. You'll find it says: 'Chemical formula for artificially increasing cellular connections in the human brain.' Go ahead, read it! It says that, doesn't it? That's proof. You can't keep from giving it to me. You were to keep it for me until I wanted it. Well, I want it now, do you hear?"

"Yes, it does read that way, and you have that letter from me. But surely you must realize that that isn't sufficient proof. You must identify yourself. Have you . . ."

"Lord, you are curious!" The weary face of the suffering man grew bitter. "You want to know, don't you? You're just itching to know all about me, aren't you? You're too damn curious! Maybe you'd enjoy hearing my little tale. Maybe you won't hold those papers in your hands so carelessly. Maybe you'll be glad to give them back!"

THE speaker halted, but the lawyer made no move. His curiosity had to be satisfied.

"So you want to know. Well, I'll tell you. I'll tell you something that your weak mind won't understand. All those long weeks of anguish I suffered. Only God knows how I suffered!

"Those papers in your hand are the result of my theory. I believed that the entire brain could be made usable, instead of the usual small amount. Such a discovery would mean a superman—a majestic intellect! And that paper held so carelessly by you can do it—has done it!

"I experimented for many months, using chemicals and electricity. Interesting work, but grueling. Then the time came when I was convinced that I had solved the problem. Tests seemed to uphold such a view. A

chemical compound would irritate the cells just so. . . . And then . . . ?

"Do you know what I did then, Mr. Lawyer? I decided to try it out on myself! Crazy by my convictions and by my nearness to fulfillment after so many months, I decided to finish it alone. Without anyone's help—actually to make an incision into my own brain!

"After a sleepless night intensely rechecking my calculations, the great moment came."

Slowly the narrator raised himself from his chair and placed his hands upon the desk. He bent toward the startled lawyer and deliberately continued his story.

"I stood before the mirror of my dresser. Before me lay the surgical instruments which I was to use. Carefully, with painful patience, I shaved the front of my head. A steady hand, which taxed my will power to its utmost, moved the razor up, down, back, across my moist forehead. My skull appeared with a dead-white color."

His voice sank to a whisper, those gleaming eyes of his boring into the widened ones of the listener. The blood in the lawyer's cheeks, like the fading of a delicate color in the sun, began to drain away at each word as the voice made the scene seem to happen again.

"I took the tiny silver drill and pressed it just above the left frontal lobe of the cerebrum." As he spoke, he appeared to forget where he was. In him steadily grew the vivid recollection of that fatal night. He was reliving it, as he had done many times before.

"The drill sank slowly into the bone; my nerves were tense from the strain of watching lest it go farther than I had marked. Line by line, it went down, until the minute

red marking was flush with the skin. Then, with trembling hands, I eased it up. It came free, and quickly I slipped a disinfectant cotton pad over the tiny hole. The moment had arrived . . . !

"In front of me on its clean white wrapping cloth lay the slender steel hypodermic. Rays from the unshielded electric light sparkled from its polished sides. Almost on their own volition my ice-cold fingers curved around it. With my other hand I reached for the thick glass bottle. The bottle that held all my dreams, all my fears.

"After working out the stopper with my teeth, I dropped the frail, needle-like point into it and gently drew the plunger back. Silently, that yellow golden liquid was sucked into the barrel. Mysterious and alien, that hellish stuff swirled as though angered by its capture, almost resentful of me, its creator."

The words flew more rapidly.

"Swiftly removing the protecting cloth, I inserted the point of the instrument into the microscopic hole, adjusting it to the best position. Gradually, I squeezed down the plunger. I could imagine that thick, golden fluid piercing down between the layers of tissue above the brain, instantly dissolving into the 'dura mater' and going on to thoroughly permeate the 'arachnoid' and 'pia mater'—into the brain serum itself—irritating.

"And thus it was done."

HIS breath was coming in shorter gasps and his face had become more strained. He wearily sank back into the wooden chair.

The lawyer sufficiently aroused himself to croak hoarsely, "And the results? What were the results?" He had begun to fear the peculiar

person who was telling this fantastic story.

"Ah, yes, the results. They were really very interesting. And very successful, too. In fact, they were much more than merely successful. You ought to find them startling.

"When I had finished that operation and a tiny silver sliver blocked the small hole at one side of my forehead, two weeks ago to be exact, my brain commenced to feel inexplicably light. I knew my brain had undergone a transformation. From the book shelf I took down a ponderous volume on mathematics. To test myself I began to solve a complicated problem in my head. It was done with no struggle at all!

"From then on I expected the impossible. I was not surprised when, after reading the evening paper, I found that I had memorized it entirely. My memory was astounding, and every little detail of every little experiment remained firmly etched in my brain. I did things that I could never have done without such a power as I had given myself.

"I took radios apart and put them back together successfully. I memorized whole pages of Shakespeare and the dictionary. I could add an infinite amount of numbers in my head with as much ease as two and two. I was the genius of all geniuses! I was the superman of which men dream!

"That day two weeks ago saw the greatest man in the world; yet five days later . . .

"My discovery had transformed me from a poor, struggling boy, unknown and friendless, to a talented man, equipped with a dozen times as much mentality as I originally had. A glorious success, borne aloft by a few drops of golden molecules! Yet a glory that was doomed . . . for

three days later I experienced something queer. My abilities were remarkable and more than I had hoped for, but strange things had begun to happen. In the early dawn of that morning, I threw myself out of bed and into the rays of the rising sun. I took a step toward the closet—and nearly fell! It was only by calm deliberation that I was able to walk safely about the room.

"It was like that the entire day. Every little act that I heretofore had done unconsciously was now dependent upon my continuous attention. At every movement, I had to think. A reversal had taken place; my mind had become the slave of my body.

"It did not take me long to realize the reason. The realization numbed my befuddled brain; my serum had not only built up my mental capacity, but it also had linked habit-formed actions with the voluntary and thinking control. I could do nothing without special consideration of it!

"Imagine my surprise, then terror. Dreadful thoughts surged and heaved in my brain until I was driven almost mad." The speaker paused, and the bitterness in his words sent a twinge of pity through the lawyer. It seemed the truth, and the strange man was convincing. The lawyer let the papers, which he had been holding, drop from his sticky hands to the surface of the blue, splotched desk blotter and relaxed against the chair back. The head of the speaker was bowed. It straightened suddenly as a shiver passed through the man, and, with a nervous lick of his lips, he continued.

"My emotions were finally conquered and my true status took form; I was unable to have any more common everyday habits. I must always be forced to think. It was consoling to know that it was a small

price to pay for the greatest brain in the world. It would certainly be worth the handicap. A little practice until I had adapted myself to my new condition and I could start to reap its benefits.

"For two days I exercised my growing knowledge. The discomforts were comparatively easily overcome. That evening, however, I had new and greater cause to worry.

"As I was sitting in my single room, prior to going to bed and dreaming of what I might do with my power, I began to grow dizzy. My head whirled and my lungs burned. I was suffocating! I was not breathing! Hastily I gulped in some air. The hideous fact was apparent—I had to will myself to breathe! No longer did my brain take care of my respiration without conscious help. My breathing, too, must be controlled by me!

"I DID not sleep that night. Nor the night following. My fears were increasing with every hour. That now devilish liquid had penetrated through the cerebrum and through the cerebellum, to touch the medulla oblongata! Everything that had absorbed it had been made dependent upon my conscious behavior. Oh God!—if that fluid should keep penetrating. Do you see? Do you understand? That evil drug would—Oh, Lord, how foolish I had been!

"The crisis came that morning: My heart fluttered and stopped! My doom was sealed.

"I made it beat, as steadily and energetically as before. But it bound me to it with something worse than steel chains. Even my great brain was powerless. Every atom of concentration that I had was needed to keep me alive. No longer could I sleep, for to do so was to die. Noth-

ing could interest me too intensely or I would lose control.

"Many times I had to start my heart into action—the minutes ticked by and became hours—my brain grew fogged—my eyeballs stung and burned—my body quivered with fatigue. I arose and walked out into the rays of the mellow moon and the cool air fanned my cheeks . . . Crack! My thoughts whipped back to my condition. My heart had stopped. A searing pain racked it as I knotted the muscles to make it beat again.

"The night fled on lingering hours of torture. My body cried aloud for sleep, but my will cried louder for survival.

"The next night was worse. Stimulants forced me awake—awake so that I might suffer another day.

"My only hope was that my mental Frankenstein would be dissolved and carried away by the blood. A hope of which even my blinded brain knew the impossibility. And though the days dragged themselves through, like thirsty men on a desert of sand, I bore up. To slip into the portals of sleep, to relax into dreams—the temptation was maddening. Every second I had to be thinking. Every second since I came into this office I have been concentrating: Beat, beat, beat; a deep breath; beat, beat, beat. . . .

"Desperation has driven me to courage. I have one hope, a friend of mine; I am going there as soon as I leave you. Now give me those papers!"

Awkwardly, the tired man pushed himself erect. The lawyer sat paralyzed by the weird story of unimaginable suffering; he could neither think nor talk. Seconds of silence passed by. With a cry of rage at the unbearable suspense, the man

snatched up the papers from the desk. Before the surprised lawyer could intervene, he had begun to strip the paper into many tiny pieces. His fury lent him strength and he yelled joyously, "I'll scatter this spawn of Satan to the winds. None shall know its secret."

Suddenly his expression changed. Every muscle of his body seemed to jump and twist. The scream that seemed to tear itself from his very soul frightened the lawyer to his feet.

"My God! My nerves are on fire! I cannot think! I cannot think! . . . It's death!"

THE lawyer's ponderous form knocked over the squeaking chair in his haste to reach the limp figure. He bent over the body which was covered with countless tiny white

pieces of paper and gazed at the upturned face, that registered peace and calm, which a few seconds ago had been convulsed with agony from some inner struggle. The black, puffy eyelids were gently closed and the drawn, haggard skin was smoothed over the sharp bones of the face. The hair was pushed back, and a little speck of silver glittered on the skull in the half-smothered light of the sun.

Sliding his hand from the slumped man's chest, the bulky one picked up the telephone.

"Hello? Police Station. Is that you, Sarge? Yeah, it's me. Something just happened in my office. A client dropped dead. Wasn't so ordinary. The guy was insane, a regular maniac—worked himself into a frenzy. . . . That's right, just a common case of heart failure."