

Brennan Frank

Brains

SHORT

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The small monkey carefully completed the last piece of the one-hundred-piece puzzle. When all the pieces of the puzzle were put together, they made a copy of Sunflowers, a picture by the famous painter, Van Gogh.

'Well done, Max!' said a young woman in a white coat. 'It only took you twenty minutes this time - that's much better than the last time you tried it. Have a bite of lovely banana.'

The woman reached for the fruit from a bowl close by and gave it to the monkey. Max ate it happily. The woman's name was Gina Capaldi and she was twenty-six years old. She was studying for a Ph.D. at a university in Rome. She was hoping to become a Doctor of Science. Her ideas had already caused much excitement. Now her work was almost finished. Great things were expected of her.

As Gina prepared the monkey's next drug, Max played with his Rubik cube. The Rubik cube was one of Max's favourite puzzles. He enjoyed turning around the sides of the cube in his hands so that each of the six sides was a different colour. Gina looked over at him and was pleased. He was getting better every day.

Max completed the Rubik cube in five minutes.

Mr Dimitri sat behind a big desk in a large office in a huge building in New York. On the front of his desk was a sign in gold letters which read: Mr Theodore Dimitri. On his door there was a much bigger sign which read: President of the Centre for Science and Business Development (CSBD).

Mr Dimitri was middle-aged and wore a large dark-grey suit. He smoked a thick expensive cigar. The smoke from his cigar filled the room.

Today he was going to see his most promising new scientists. They were all studying for Ph.D.s so that they could become Doctors of Science.

They had to give him their new ideas if they wanted money from the CSBD. Mr Dimitri did this every year. If he liked their work, CSBD would give them lots of money to develop it. That was the way to make money in the future.

And Mr Dimitri was good at making money. But if he didn't like the work of these scientists, or if he didn't like them, he didn't have to give them a cent. 'After all,' Mr Dimitri thought, 'Business is business.'

Miss Epstein, his secretary, came into his office.

'Miss Capaldi to see you, Mr Dimitri, sir,' she said.

'Send her in, Miss Epstein,' said Mr Dimitri in a voice which was cold and business-like.

Gina Capaldi stood in her best suit and shoes in front of the big desk. She wanted to look her best before Mr Dimitri. In her bag was all the information needed about her work. She felt ready.

'Do sit down, Miss Capaldi. I've heard so many good things about you,' said Mr Dimitri in a voice that now sounded friendly and welcoming.

'Thank you, Mr Dimitri,' said Gina. She sat down in front of the big desk. Then Miss Epstein seemed to appear out of nowhere with coffee and biscuits. She put them on the desk and was gone again.

'Allow me,' said Mr Dimitri, as he put his cigar down for a moment and poured the coffee.

Gina took her coffee and left the biscuits. She didn't feel like eating. She was nervous. Mr Dimitri smiled at her with teeth that were large and white. Perfect teeth. His cigar found its way back to his mouth. The smoke rose up.

'Tell me, Gina... may I call you Gina?' he asked.

'Of course, Mr Dimitri,' she answered.

Mr Dimitri continued. 'Tell me about your latest work; I've heard very interesting things about it, but I would like you to explain it clearly to a simple man such as myself.'

Gina knew that Theodore Dimitri was far from being simple. You don't get to be the head of CSBD, the biggest organisation of its kind, if you aren't very clever. She knew his decision could change her life.

Gina began: 'I've discovered a drug which raises intelligence.'

'Hold on, Gina!' said Mr Dimitri. 'You mean to say you've found a way of making people smarter?'

'Yes,' Gina answered. 'And without any harmful side effects as far as I can tell .

'As far as you can tell?' Mr Dimitri said, his eyebrows raised.

'I mean,' said Gina, 'the work has not been used on people - I've only worked on animals. Especially Max.'

'Max?' asked Mr Dimitri.

'Sorry - Max is a monkey,' Gina explained.

'A monkey...' said Mr Dimitri but his voice sounded less friendly than it had before.

Gina knew she had to persuade him somehow. 'Max has done really well - it's quite amazing. He now has the intelligence of an eight-year-old human child. He can do many things...'

'You want money for a performing monkey?' said Mr Dimitri. He sounded a little annoyed. 'I can go to any cheap show to see smart monkeys doing tricks. And I don't have to pay a lot of money for it, either.'

'Mr Dimitri,' Gina said as she reached for her bag, 'I have a video of Max. I think you should see it before you make any decisions.'

'Oh, you do?' His voice was lower - not a good sign.

'Yes,' said Gina. 'If you would allow me. I'm sure you'll be as excited as I am once you've seen it.' Gina did not want to give up without a fight. Her future depended on Mr Dimitri's decision.

'Let's see what you've got,' he said in his low voice.

The video showed Max three years earlier, before Gina had begun to work on him when he was still a normal monkey. Then, three months after her work had begun, Max was seen drawing simple pictures with a pencil. After a year he was spelling out simple words. After two years he could add and take away simple numbers. After three years he could read, write and do basic mathematics. He also understood everything Gina said to him. Max had come to see Gina as his mother and he loved her. The video finished with Max putting his arms around Gina while Gina laughed.

'That's one smart monkey. Can you make him any smarter?' Mr Dimitri asked.

Gina knew he was interested. She was pleased.

'Max can be as intelligent as we want to make him, Mr Dimitri,' she said, trying not to show her pleasure in what she had achieved.

'Yes,' he said. 'But could that monkey be made to be as smart as a man?' (Or a woman, thought Gina)

'As I said, Mr Dimitri,' said Gina, 'we can make him as intelligent as we want to.'

'You mean,' asked Mr Dimitri, 'that that monkey could get to be smarter than I am?'

'I suppose it is possible - there's no reason why not, as far as I can tell. Although, of course, Max is a long way from that just now,' Gina said.

'But you're working on it, right?' Mr Dimitri asked.

'Well, er... yes.' Gina was less confident now.

'And what if you worked on a human being - could you make them smarter?' he asked.

Gina answered: 'I think so, Mr Dimitri.'

Mr Dimitri narrowed his eyes. 'You only think so?'

'Well,' said Gina, 'the brains of a monkey and a man are built in much the same way, so I'm almost certain.'

'Almost certain. Hmm...' Mr Dimitri looked out of the window, down at the streets of the busy city far below them. His cigar smoke rose lazily to the ceiling.

Gina's hopes of money and success - and her Ph.D. - depended largely on the decision Mr Dimitri would make.

'Tell me, Miss Capaldi...' said Mr Dimitri.

Gina noticed he had stopped using her first name. This looked bad.

'... have you ever taken this stuff yourself to increase your own intelligence?' Widi that, he turned to look out of the window again.

'Of course not, Mr Dimitri,' Gina said to the back of his head. 'But if you think I should...'

'NO!'

Mr Dimitri had turned suddenly from the window as he said this. The speed of his action surprised her because he was such a large man. His eyes were wide and looked angry. Gina was scared.

'Miss Capaldi,' Mr Dimitri said, lowering his voice, 'your work has been very good. In fact, it has been excellent and you have my congratulations. Unfortunately, I must ask you to stop what you are doing. At "once.'

Gina's mouth suddenly felt very dry and she felt the hairs on her head rise up.

'But Mr Dimitri,' she said, 'I've done so much... all my work, my Ph.D!'

'Who is going to believe you if they wonder for one moment if you took some of this stuff yourself?' Mr Dimitri's voice softened. 'They would say that anybody could get a Ph.D. with your wonder drug to help them. And they'd be right.'

'But I never... I mean... I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing!' said Gina. She tried not to show the disappointment she felt.

'Wouldn't you?' said Mr Dimitri. 'There are many people that would take this stuff. And many that would think that you had, too.'

Gina looked alarmed, but said nothing.

'Yes,' he continued, 'it's a sad fact but a true one. Many people would think that you had taken your own drug to make yourself smarter. They would see you as being no different to those athletes who take stuff they're not supposed to take. It might make them do better but it's not honest, is it, Miss Capaldi? And it's no different for CSBD - we do not want people to think that we are anything other than a completely honest organisation. If they ever thought we had anything to do with such behaviour they would never trust us again!'

'But I promise you... my work has all been done honestly,' said Gina. 'I never took anything!'

'But,' said Mr Dimitri as he looked straight at Gina's eyes, 'you would if I asked you to, wouldn't you?'

Gina knew it was true, so she said nothing and looked at the floor.

Mr Dimitri turned his great weight towards her and put his hand on her shoulder.

'I understand how much you want to succeed, Miss Capaldi. Don't worry... I'm going to talk to the people at your university - I think you should have a Ph.D. for the work you've done so far...'

Gina raised her eyes.

'Yes, Miss Capaldi, I believe in your honesty and believe you are a brilliant young scientist. I would very much like you to continue to work for us...'

Gina shut her eyes. She was tod happy to speak.

'... but in a different area,' Mr Dimitri added.

Gina opened her eyes. She could hardly believe what she had heard.

'But what about my work?' she asked.

'You may carry on if you wish,' said Mr Dimitri, 'but you will have no money from us if you do. And I think I can say that nobody else will help you if I have anything to say about it - and I will.'

Gina felt bad about losing her work. But she had been offered a job - and her Ph.D.

'If you leave all your work with us, Miss Capaldi, we'll make sure that it is properly taken care of. After all, y^u have made a discovery which could change the world someday. And you can be sure that we will recognise you as the person behind it all when the time comes. But it could take a long time.

'But right now we would like to use your clever brain to the full in doing important work for us. And, of course, you will be safe in the knowledge that you have the CSBD behind you. You will never be short of money again. So why not join us, Gina? What do you say?'

Gina felt surprisingly good about the offer.

And I'll get recognition for my work?' Gina asked.

'Definitely' said Mr Dimitri.

'Mr Dimitri, I accept!'

There were smiles and goodbyes and, soon after, a happy Gina Capaldi left the room.

Mr Dimitri sat down, lit another cigar and watched the smoke rise up to the ceiling before it finally disappeared. He knew that business was not good when people asked too many questions. If people were made to be too smart they would do just that. And once they didn't get the answers they wanted, they might not buy things. And if they didn't buy things there would be no money to be made.

No-one would like that. No-one at all.

Miss Capaldi's work would be put away somewhere nice and safe. Somewhere secret. Along with all the other dangerous ideas. Like the car that ran on water, or the shoes that never wore out, or the battery that never stopped.

But he was glad to have Miss Capaldi. She was bright. He ought to give her something to do. Something that would make a lot of money. He picked up his telephone.

'Miss Epstein... See that Miss Capaldi is sent to the biological science centre. I want her to be a part of that three-legged chicken plan. She can do it, if anybody can. She's one smart lady. Oh, and Miss Epstein...'

'Yes, Mr Dimitri?' said Miss Epstein.

'I want you to see that a dangerous animal from one of our centres is killed. It's a monkey. His name is Max.'

- THE END -

Hope you have enjoyed the reading!