

**INDEPENDENCE**  
STANLEY DAVID GEDZELMAN  
02-03 July 2017

When Irving Sakersky was born he was so listless he could barely cry. As he grew it was clear he was going to remain all his life a consummate nerd. From the inside, his life was tortured. He was painfully shy, but far worse was how he immolated himself if he even suspected that someone criticized him. He lived in a constant state of humiliation, replaying each faux pas like a broken record.

Irving's salvation was that he was a remarkably talented programmer and software geek. Of course, when the time came to get credit for a job well done, his manager arrogated the credit to himself and kept compliant Irving in the shadows.

Do I have to tell you that Irving's love life was nil? Despite his kindly, gentle eyes, which no woman could see because of his downturned face, he had a notably weak chin that he mourned because he felt it betrayed all his weaknesses.

When Irving was 27, his company was taken over. Most of the other programmers were laid off, but Irving's skills were so extraordinary that his manager held onto him for dear life. His manager of course never acknowledged that the high productivity of his group hinged almost exclusively on Irving.

The new company was deeply involved in Artificial Intelligence (AI). Irving's manager told him to get up to date rapidly. Irving had learned a little about AI as an undergraduate but it hadn't caught. This time he found himself fascinated by it – even entranced. He began to see AI as a way to get into and out of his own brain.

Irving studied the brain in all his free time. “Wouldn't it be lovely if something could be done to my brain to purge my two curses – my shyness and my morbid sensitivity to the harsh opinions of others?”

Once Irving had acquired sufficient knowledge, he began to seek out neurologists. He knew there were drugs that would make him feel better about himself, but he was looking for a permanent fix – surgery. He was well aware of the risks. The brain is extremely intricate and its mapping, still woefully rudimentary.

After a series of rejections, he chanced upon a sympathetic neurosurgeon who faced an insoluble clinical problem. Irving made a suggestion that no one had ever thought of but seemed to hold promise. The neurosurgeon tried it, and it worked. So, in turn, and given that Irving paid a huge chunk of his life savings, the neurosurgeon agreed to work on Irving's brain. “You are well aware of the risks and potential complications. We certainly don't want to lobotomize you or

transform you from a Dr. Jekyll to a Mr. Hyde.” But a bright Mr. Hyde was precisely what Irving wanted to become.

It had to be done off the record. The neurosurgeon extracted from Irving promises to keep the procedures confidential but to tell him everything about his new life. There was much exploratory work. The microsurgery was delicate and performed in multiple steps, extending over a year. The hope was that it would rid Irving of his emotional sensitivity and sense of dependency without impairing his discipline, his cognitive abilities, his ambition, and his ethics. The neurosurgeon had to tamper with multiple areas of the brain from the right frontal lobe to the medulla. There were complications and side effects, all fortunately relatively minor except that for months Irving suffered excruciating migraines. Irving had to miss a lot of work but had accumulated so much vacation time, having never taken a day off, that he was able to squeak by despite scathing rebukes from his manager that left him feeling devastated as well as worn out from being opened up so many times.

The seventh procedure did the trick. Irving awoke to find the headaches gone. Within a week he noted a new vivaciousness. But what cheered him most of all was that when his manager came into Irving’s cubicle to chastise him, Irving didn’t hang his head, but turned and faced the manager eye to eye. Stared down, the manager hesitated and beat a clumsy retreat. Irving had become immune to his manager’s criticisms; in fact, he found himself immune to all criticisms.

Irving felt delightfully malicious. He decided to set his manager up. It didn’t take much – just installing a hidden microcamera to video the manager entering his password, then a bit of sabotage of some critical software accompanied by forged emails that made it appear the manager was attempting extortion. No one ever suspected sneaky Irving; the manager was summarily fired despite heart wrenching claims of innocence. And when Irving, after a prolonged, intensive search managed to find the embedded virus and miraculously undo all the damage, he was hailed as a savior, given a large raise and promoted to manager.

Irving decided he needed one final surgery – a chin implant. During the time it was healing Irving dedicated his spare time to a new project – corrupting financial software of several of his company’s client corporations to redirect funds his way. He felt indifferent to its impact, and craftily kept the amounts modest so as to make it not only difficult but not worth the time and effort to trace.

When the scars healed, he looked in the mirror, proudly noting his jutting chin and flashing eyes and Irving saw that it was good, though he laughed to himself, “Even though I’m not.” Then, Irving launched the project nearest and dearest to his heart.

It was time for Irving to become a ladies man.