

The Thing That Should Not Be

By BURTON PETER THOM

IT IS hardly necessary to recall the "laboratory murders" of two years ago. In the annals of crime they have remained unique, not only because of the absolute absence of motive, but also because of the utter inability of the police and the most expert private investigators to offer even the slightest suggestion in the way of their solution.

While I am well aware that there have been many unsolved crimes in the past that perhaps have equaled these in mystery, I am quite certain that there has been none which approached them in the lack of incriminating facts pointing to any particular person. For that reason these murders have afforded a fascinating study to students of criminology and to all others interested in the detection of crime.

Although no official explanation of these murders has ever been forthcoming, I can state here that within six weeks of their occurrence their solution was accomplished and the murderer was punished. For reasons which cannot be entered upon here, this was not made public, but the time has now come when a full account of the mystery can be given.

I am a physician, and for a number of years I have been Director of Pathology in the Stoneman Institute for Medical Research, which explains my acquaintance with the late Dr. Dalton and the late Dr. Bray and my connection with this particular case.

The events which preceded the first murder, that of Dr. Bray, can be briefly described as follows:

All of the laboratories of the Institute close at five o'clock. Dr. Bray, however, had left at noon, and after luncheon had gone directly to the Academy of Medicine, where he stayed until nearly six o'clock, reading some French journals which had just arrived. The last to leave the laboratory was Wilson, the orderly, who left shortly after six.

At nine-thirty in the evening, Dr. Bray returned. He spoke to the night watchman at the door and was taken to the fourth floor in the elevator by one of the assistant watchmen. There was nothing unusual in this, for Dr. Bray

frequently worked alone in the laboratory at night. This man saw him enter and close the door. He was the last to see him alive. These movements were all rigidly established at the subsequent investigation of the crime.

Wilson, the orderly, came on duty at eight o'clock the next morning. When he punched the time clock the doorman remarked that Dr. Bray was still in the laboratory, as the night watchman had told him that he had come in during the night and had not seen him go out. Wilson found the door of the laboratory unlocked and the electric lights lit. He passed around the long table, which occupied two thirds of the middle length of the room, and at the farther end saw Dr. Bray's dead body.

He immediately ran out into the corridor and called for help. When Dr. Dalton and I arrived we found the place in an uproar and the police in charge.

The body of Dr. Bray was lying on its back. His throat had been cut from ear to ear. Nearby, as it dropped by the murderer in his haste to get away, was a blood-stained microtome blade, which Wilson remembered having left on the table the afternoon before for the purpose of sharpening it. The body was completely exsanguinated, although the amount of blood on the floor, while considerable, would hardly show this. The discrepancy was accounted for by seepage into the porous material of the floor.

There were some smudges on the shirt front, and the three upper buttons of the vest were out of their button holes. The head had evidently been pulled back with considerable force, so as to allow the blood to flow more freely from the severed vessels. *Rigor mortis* had set in, which showed that death had occurred at least four or five hours before, probably longer. That the attack had been unexpected was evident by the upturned microscope on the table, with the slide still held in place by the mechanical stage. I might also add that the position of the body and the nature of the wound absolutely excluded the possibility of suicide.

The investigation at the scene of the crime was conducted by Inspector Gro-

gan and Medical Examiner Malloy. It was most efficient and painstaking and left nothing to be desired in the way of an intelligent scrutiny of the facts. Several hours elapsed before the investigation was finished, but no arrests were made either then or later. There were no grounds for such action. Although they did not admit it, the police were baffled. It was a nine-days' wonder in the newspapers, which only served to give the Institute much undesirable publicity, then it was forgotten by the public.

SATURDAY is a half holiday, and the laboratory is deserted after one o'clock. On the second Saturday following the murder Dr. Dalton did not leave with the rest of us, but remained to complete some dissections which he had begun earlier in the day.

The tragedy of a few weeks ago was still fresh in our minds, and I and the other members of the staff urged him not to stay, or, if he did, to have some one remain with him. He would not have it. He would be through before three o'clock, he said, and it was impossible to suppose that the horrible deed of a few weeks ago would be repeated. So he stayed.

When the doorman was relieved by the night watchman he told him that Dr. Dalton was still in the laboratory; remembering what had occurred, they both went to the fourth floor and knocked on the door. There was no response, and they entered the room.

Dr. Dalton was lying in front of the sink—dead. A hatchet was fastened in the back of his head and his throat was deeply gashed. A large knife, of the kind usually called a "butcher knife," was lying beside him. It was stained with blood.

The horror and excitement this second murder inspired can be well imagined. The hatchet and knife belonged in the laboratory, which proved that the murderer had not come prepared to kill with weapons of his own choosing, but had seized upon those nearest at hand.

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A peculiar feature, which was also noted with the microtome blade used to kill Dr. Bray, was that none of these instruments of death showed any marks of finger prints. Rubber gloves could have been used, but it was definitely established that they were not.

As before, the police could learn nothing, although I am sure they tried. No one now ever remained in the laboratory alone. When the orderly came in the morning, two guards always stayed with him until the staff arrived. All left together at five o'clock.

About two weeks after the death of Dr. Dalton, when the orderly and guards on duty, they were surprised to find that one of the four monkeys that had recently been acquired for experimental purposes in the study of certain phases of sleeping sickness, was dead on the floor with its throat cut. That the monkey had been killed in the same manner as the two physicians could not but give the impression that the same cause was responsible.

The killing of the poor monkey was to me more mysterious than the killing of the two men. When a human being is slain by another there is always a motive. That motive may be hate or greed or fear, but to take the life of a caged and harmless beast, and to take it cruelly by stealth, why—reason stops. This incident, trivial in its way, gripped my imagination and I realized, as I had not before, how malign and horrible and secret the significance of this bloody enigma must be.

All day I thought about it, and when I left the laboratory I had come to a decision. The problem could not be solved by the logical processes of deduction. Its solution could be reached only by the less obvious but more direct process of intuition—the reasoning of the subconscious, and that required imagination, and imagination to a superlative degree. The decision that I had come to was to call in Dr. Finley.

He is the most remarkable personality I know. A successful East Side practitioner, not on the teaching staff of any college and holding only an obscure hospital appointment, he is the ablest diagnostician in the country today. For he has the gift, the rare and precious one which the high gods bestow but to the favored few, and which makes them truly great—imagination.

I called him up after dinner. He would be glad to see me if I called after nine in the evening when his office hours were over. It had been my habit to spend an evening with him once or twice

a month for a number of years, because he is one of the few men whose conversation I always find stimulating. Unlike most one-book men—and his one book is Medicine—he is not dull or uninformed when he talks outside his subject. He knows other things as well. I have often wondered where and how he gets his information on so many varied and often abstruse topics. Perhaps it is because he uses to the full the creeping hours of time.

Finley's knowledge of the murders was that which he had obtained from reading the daily papers. The information I gave to him was first-hand. He listened intently with his chin sunk upon his chest. Suddenly he looked up and spoke:

"The killing of the two men and the monkey occurred at intervals of two weeks apart, and in each instance the great vessels—the carotids and the jugulars—were severed and death was caused by hemorrhage. Was the amount of blood on the floor sufficient to cause complete exsanguinity, or was it not? Answer this question very carefully, because I believe it is most important."

It was strange that he asked this; it had been in my mind also. The blood on the floor had never been enough to cause death by exsanguinity. It had puzzled me at the time, but the detectives had attached no significance to it. I finally attributed it to seepage into the floor.

The peculiar fingerprint impressions on the microtome blade, the handle of the knife and of the hatchet also interested him greatly. Later in the evening I told him of the wonderful work that Bray and Dalton had been doing and which had been interrupted by their untimely death. He listened with rapt attention as I told him how they were able to keep tissue elements alive indefinitely and the bizarre results they had achieved in "building up" forms with diverse animal parts. He asked many questions pertaining to these which displayed a knowledge of anatomy and physiology that surprised me. Before I left he promised to visit the laboratory as soon as he had the opportunity to do so.

IT was not until five days later that Dr. Finley came, and I then had another strange incident to relate to him. When the monkey was found dead I ordered that the surviving animals be removed to an adjoining room, which was kept locked except when they were fed and their cages cleaned. There were six rabbits, however, which were allowed to remain. On the morning that Dr. Finley visited the laboratory all of them were

found dead with their throats torn either by teeth or claws, and, although they were completely drained of blood, there was very little blood on the floor.

His eyes glinted and narrowed when I told him this, and his face broke into a faint smile, but he made no comment. He examined the laboratory with care, but his interest was mostly centered in the specimens of living tissue and the examples of reconstructed vertebral types. These seemed to fascinate him; as indeed they would have fascinated most any one, showing, as they did, not only a knowledge of anatomy and physiology more profound than was hitherto thought possible, but a plastic surgical skill that was marvelous in technic and amazing in results.

When he left he told me that I would hear from him shortly. Two days later he called me on the telephone and asked me to come to see him that evening.

"Have you solved the problem?" I asked anxiously as we shook hands.

"I think I have," he answered quietly. "At least the conclusion I have reached is plausible, and whatever is plausible is always possible."

As soon as we were comfortably settled, with pipes alight, he asked me if I had a pistol. "I haven't, and I think we'll need one."

It so happened that I had one and the permit which made it lawful for me to carry it.

"Fine," he replied. "We'll take it with us when we go to the laboratory tomorrow night."

During the remainder of my stay he persistently evaded letting me know what his conclusion was. That there was a possibility of violence was evident by his request for a deadly weapon. That was as far as he would commit himself. He instructed me to put the monkeys back into the laboratory and to have a blanket or sheet hung across the alcove, where the thermostats stood, to conceal us while we watched. Our vigil was to commence as soon as the staff left.

Promptly at five-thirty Dr. Finley was announced over the telephone. He came in as the staff was leaving. I had not informed them of our plan, and when they saw that he and I intended to remain they knew that something was going on, but I shook my head to enjoin silence and they went without voicing the questions I knew they would like to ask.

At a sign from Finley I handed the pistol—a thirty-two calibre automatic—to him. Without speaking, we tiptoed behind the curtain in front of the alcove and sat down. I leaned over to whisper to him, but he put his finger to his lips.

Silently we watched and waited. Slowly the daylight changed to twilight and then the moon came out. I could see her pale beams above the curtain. Occasionally we could hear the monkeys moving in their cages and every now and then one of them would give a squeak.

Faint and far away the sounds of the street came to us; the piping voices of children at play; the whirl of automobiles and the clang of the surface cars. For a while a phonograph played in a nearby house. The music was popular songs and jazz, but it sounded eerie and weird. Finally it stopped and the noises gradually became fainter and fainter; the only sounds were those made by the passing of the surface cars and an occasional belated automobile as it rushed up the avenue.

The monkeys were asleep and still. As the night wore on it seemed to me that my senses were no longer attuned to sound and time, although I was wide awake.

Suddenly Finley clutched my hand. Instantly I was alert: I could have heard a pin drop, but what I heard was the slight creaking of a door moving on its hinges.

Then came a muffled thud as the door struck against the wall. Something seemed to drop, followed by a scratching patter on the floor.

The monkeys began to chatter excitedly. Something seemed to jump on the ledge in front of their cages. The chattering increased, and above it came the high, shrill scream of one of the little beasts in mortal pain or terror.

The scratching sound was heard again, then silence.

FINLEY stood up. He brushed aside the curtain and we strode into the room. At the far end, near where the monkey cages were, a dark form crouched. It was no larger than a child and its back was turned toward us, but in the moonlight we could see that it held a monkey in its arms and its teeth champed at its throat.

At the sound of our approach, it turned and looked. Its eyes glowed red, like living coals, its lips were dripping blood. Its face was that of a fiend from hell.

One look—and I knew. Dropping the limp monkey on the floor, it stood erect and advanced a step, then—a flash, a report, a smell of acrid smoke, and the thing crumpled into a heap and lay still.

With the automatic still in his hand, Finley turned to me and said, "Throw on the light and look at the thing that should not be."

DR. FINLEY will tell the rest:

"Shakespeare was right when he said that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. There certainly are, and the perpetrator of the 'laboratory murders' was one of these. I had read about them and heard about them at the time—some people talked of nothing else—but I had not given the slightest thought to their solution until I was asked to do so.

"The police, I knew, were up against a blank wall. That they were unable to fasten the remotest suspicion on any particular person was proved by the fact that they had not made a single arrest. This was unusual. It was unusual because there is nearly always a finger of suspicion that points somewhere, even if it points wrong. In this instance there was not even the trace of a suspicious finger to point. The general, I might say the invariable, rule was broken here, because there is hardly ever a crime committed even by the most astute and cunning criminal that does not leave some sign, however slight, that is indicative of the person, or type of person who committed it. This sign, in the minds of the police at least, was wanting.

"When a crime like murder has been committed, if the murderer is unknown, or if suspected but not proved guilty, it is essential to establish a motive. To know the motive is to know the reason, and if the reason for a crime is known the search for the criminal automatically narrows down to the search for one who would be impelled to act for such a reason.

"Although neither the police nor my friend attached any significance to it, there was one feature that to me was most significant, because to me it seemed to be the motive. That was, the victims were invariably bled to death, yet the amount of blood on the floor did not equal the amount they had lost. To my mind this discrepancy furnished a clue of supreme importance, and I was very much surprised that it was overlooked. For it offered absolute evidence that the blood of the victims was what the murderer desired. The killing of the monkey and the rabbits confirmed this beyond all doubt.

"Now it could be safely assumed that no normal human being would want the blood of another obtained in this manner. This suggested a maniac with cannibalistic tendencies. But the fingerprints impressed on the death-dealing weapons did not correspond with those of a human being. All students of criminology know that fingerprints are an infallible test. Their evidence can never be

denied. For that reason the human element could be eliminated.

"Yet the manner in which the crimes were committed showed intelligence. The attacks had occurred when the victims were alone and no one was about to come to their aid. Some of the higher apes, the orang, or the gorilla, might show such intelligence, and these animals have been known murderously to attack men, but they have never been known to exhibit any vampiric characteristics such as sucking the blood of their kill.

"No animals that would fit this description were confined in the Institute and none was known to be wandering at large. It had been demonstrated in a way that it was impossible to deny that no one had gained entrance into the laboratory with homicidal intent. It was natural, therefore, to infer that the assassin was to be found in the laboratory. But he was not—at least by the police. If he was in the laboratory, unable to escape, he would have to hide therein.

"If there had been only one murder I would have concluded that there was some flaw in the police theory that the murderer had not gained entrance into the laboratory. I would have reasoned that in some unexplained, or rather, undetected way, the murderer had done so and had long ago escaped; but the second murder and the seemingly meaningless slaying in an exactly identical manner of the harmless little beasts made it impossible not to believe that the murderer was still concealed in the laboratory.

"I thus satisfied myself as to the motive and the locality where the murderer must be concealed. It was now necessary to identify him.

"When I was formally asked to try to solve this dreadful mystery, my friend mentioned, quite incidentally, the intensely interesting and surprising results which had attended the researches of Bray and Dalton in constructive biology and plastic surgery. When I visited the laboratory I was permitted to see these truly wonderful accomplishments. That animal tissue, composed as it is of innumerable cells of most delicate and highly specialized structure, could be made to live, and not only live but also increase in volume if so permitted, outside of the body from which it was derived was a stupendous biological triumph. But that did not compare with the other marvels shown.

"These were nothing more or less than new forms of animals, composites of different types and widely separated genera in the zoologic scale, that had been welded together as it were into one. Grotesque and bizarre were these man-

created shapes. But they were purely vegetative, they existed and no more, the vital spark which we call life was lacking. Close as they had come they had not penetrated Nature's greatest secret—Life.

"One of these shapes in particular attracted my attention. It was the most horrible parody on brute creation that it was possible to conceive. It was like no living creature on earth or in the waters under the earth.

"The body was that of a large and powerful dog, probably a mastiff, as it was covered with a coat of coarse, tawny hair. The abdomen, however, was white and scaly like the belly of a reptile. The legs were those of a big monkey—a baboon I would say. The arms were disproportionately long and their knotted muscles were covered with thick, reddish hair. The hands were sinewy, black and ape-like. Both arms and hands were evidently those of a young orang. The face resembled nothing so much as a hideous

gargoyle, the nightmare dream of some mad mediaeval artist. The head of a leopard had been used, and by the plastic skill of the surgeon the features had been transformed into a revolting, feline caricature of a human face. The ensemble of horror was completed by a hairless, tapering, reptilian tail.

"While I gazed on this devilish insult to man and beast and their Creator a strange thing happened. Strange, in that it set in motion the train of thought that enabled me to supply the unknown quantity of the problem that I had attempted to solve. I had the motive, the location; it gave me the identity of the murderer. In its outward seeming it was most commonplace, but Fate, or, rather, Fate's Master, not infrequently acts so and we call it chance. A fly—a big, bluebottle fly, one of the survivors of last year's myriads, alighted on the eyelid of the thing. Instantly its eye opened, it winked and and a black and hairy

hand was raised to brush away the irritation. By that I knew it lived. It was not a mere vegetative automaton endowed only with the basic, reflexes of breathing and the action of the heart, it possessed instinct and reasoning, else it would not have brushed away the fly. Whence came its life?

"There are those who believe that there are other spirits or intelligences who do not inhabit the bodies of men. I am one of those who hold this ancient doctrine. These discarnate intelligences have never been clothed in flesh, yet to be so is ever their desire. Into this house of flesh without a tenant, this thing that should not be, an evil spirit crept. That which was lifeless thus became alive. Urged by the instinct of its carnivore brain, it was not satisfied by a diet of serum or citrated blood injected into the great vein of the neck every few days. Blood, blood fresh and warm only, could give strength and vigor; so it slew to get it."

Another Creepy Story by Burton Peter Thom Will Appear in an Early Issue of WEIRD TALES. It is Called "The Statement of Archibald Swayne," and It's an Eerie Yarn. Watch for It.

Table of Contents

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PLANET PARADISE	3
DICK FREESLEY TOOKER	
THE TAP	14
ARTHUR EDWARD CHAPMAN	
THE THING THAT SHOULD NOT BE	17
BURTON PETER THOM	
THE GUILTY MAN	21
MARION CARRERE	
THE TRANSPARENT GHOST	21
IRIS BELLE MANEE	
COILS OF DARKNESS	22
STELLA RAMUS	
CARVED IN THE FLESH	22
TOM RAWSON HILBURN	
THE HALL BEDROOM	22
W. ELWIN BACKUS	
THE DOOR OF DOOM	22
MARY SHARON	
THE ABYSSAL HORROR	22
B. WALLIS	
THE HOUND	24
H. P. LOVECRAFT	
DRACONIA	24
JOHN MARTIN LEAHY	
THE GHOST OF SILENT SMITH	24
C. FRANKLIN MILLER	
DOCTOR DEBRUCK	24
EARL LEASTON BELL	
THE HATER	25
E. W. WILSON	
WEIRD CRIMES	26
SEABURY QUINN	
THE EYRIE	28
THE EDITOR	
THE KILLER	28
HAROLD WARD	

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