

Book Review

The Organ Grinder's Monkey

Richard Fliegel

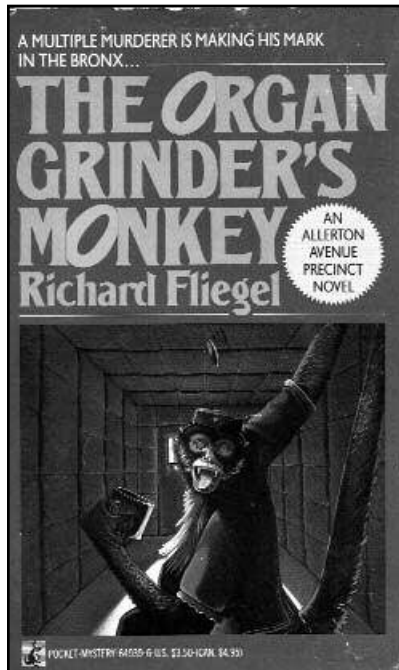
A recent acquisition on ebay provided me with a paperback novel for only \$1.00. I normally don't read such fictional material such as this but the title caught my eye (and some pocket change) and I just couldn't refuse. *The Organ Grinder's Monkey* is not a story about a monkey associated with an organ grinder (such as was reported in the article by Angelo Rulli in issue #13 of the *Carousel Organ* - "Where is the Monkey") but rather a murder mystery revolving around the fantasizing beliefs of an institutional inmate of the Hutchinson Avenue Psychiatric Institute in New York. Being a physician led me to have further interest in some of the descriptions used in assessing the murder victims.

Sergeant's Shelly Lowenkopf and Homer Greeley sifted through the evidence of three murders, each with grueling similarities. Each of the victims had become disemboweled following the stabbing. An internal organ had been removed from each and ground beneath a heel before being discarded somewhere near the crime scene. First a liver, then a heart and the third victim, Eliot Fingerhut, had his stomach removed. None of the victims were related in any way but a serial killer was appropriately suspected.

Undercover work was in order and Shelly Lowenkopf assumed the role of a janitor at the hospital in order to find more information. Of course a romantic fling was in order as he soon met one of the hospital's social workers, Betty. After that, however, and after one patient gave relevant information about another, a roommate discussed the man referred to as the "Monkey," Gustaf Carroll. Apparently Mr. Carroll was under lock and key, unable to leave the ward at any time—but, he talked violence, deaths and mutilation—so much that inmates as well as hospital personnel were afraid of him. One account noted that he "carves them up, like turkeys. He cuts out something and grinds it below his heel, squish-squash."

But, how can he be the murderer? He is in a padded room. Yet his accounting seems so accurate! When quizzed by Detective

Lowenkopf Mr. Carroll (who vaguely resembled a monkey) refers to his previous life when he was "a monkey in a velvet suit, collecting coins for an organ grinder, Signor." He went on to relate that they were on a ship, the Columbus, in 1912 and forced to stay away from passengers by living on the lower deck. One night they sneaked upstairs for more air when two couples came across them, engaged into a fight and eventually threw Carroll (the monkey at that time) overboard. The monkey not being able to swim sank into the ocean as Carroll continued:



"a racking pain shot through me—I will not forget how my long fingers seem to freeze in position, my short thumb to snap. My water-soaked fur tugged me under as the Columbus chugged off into the night." At this time Shelly Lowenkopf "couldn't help noticing, something ape-like about his (Carroll's) long hairy arms, bald head and stooped posture. As he watched Carroll pulled back his lips in a close-mouth grimace." Carroll then noted that he vowed to

avenge his former person's (well, monkey not person) death by killing those involved.

As a byline in this novelette a patient was noted to comment (after coming out of her therapists' office in a furor): "What a quack you are! Quaaaaack! I'm a very sick woman. I need help—therapy, medication, whatever you've got around here. Breathing I already know how to do. Who needs lessons in that? One-two, in-out-whaddya think I am, a pipe organ?"

Solving the murders of a blood vendetta carried out by a reincarnated monkey seemed to be the problem for the officers. A break came, however, when Carroll's therapist, Dr. Franck, was having his sessions with his patient videotaped for further use in a medical conference in Argentina. Suspects lined up in the Sergeant's heads but each was eliminated. That is until it became apparent that one more person could be suspect, the video-grapher, Issac Reuben. In a confrontation with the social worker, Betty, who was unsuspectingly led to the roof of the building where the first murder was committed, Isaac admitted that the first murder was inspired by: "something I'd heard just that morning, taping Dr. Franck with a chronic patient who'd been contemplating vengeance for the death of a monkey. I bent down and did what Carroll had described. I tore out his liver and ground it under my heel—'organs for the organ grinder'." He continued by saying "For all I know, those people I killed were the soles he was after, the ones who threw that monkey into the sea."

For the rest of the story—the good guys (Shelly and Homer) come to rescue Betty while Issac flees off to Argentina. Will this make good material for an upcoming film? I doubt it. But the very loose attachment to mechanical music makes for some interesting diversional reading. Now back to writing and editing for the *Carousel Organ*.

For those interested in adding this novelette to their collection of mechanical music the book was published by POCKET BOOKS, New York, NY 1989.

Ron Bopp

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