



Late at night, the light shone brightly through the dust grimed window of the office building facing new york times square. At his desk sat Cleve Backster, Americas foremost lie detector expert. Tapping his pen, thinking of nothing in particular, his eyes rested upon his favourite plant. He had felt his bare office needed a touch of green and so his constant companion was a house plant called *Dracaena Massangaena*, or commonly known as the dragon tree. On impulse he found himself attaching an electrode to one of its leaves. Pouring water on its roots, the pen attached to a galvanometer began to move. A galvanometer is the part of a polygraph lie detector, which, when attached to a human being, causes the needle to move in response to the slightest surge of human emotions. Backsters dragon tree, to his amazement, was producing reactions similar to those recorded on human beings. Surely, he thought, plants do not possess emotions.

The most effective way to trigger a human response is to threaten his or her wellbeing. Backster decided he would set fire to one of its leaves. As soon as he thought this, the patterns on the graph immediately changed. Instead of even little ridges, there was a prolonged upward sweep of the recording pen. Backster was stunned, as outrageous as it seemed, not only was the plant expressing emotions, it was reading his mind. During the next few months, chart after chart was obtained from different plants. The plants reacted not only to human threats, but threats from other sources, such as the sudden appearance of a dog in the room. On one occasion Backster

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provided an interview for the baltimore sun, hooking a galvanometer to his plant, he proceeded to interrogate the reporter about the date of his birth. The reporter was told to say no to each of the seven years between 1925 and 1931, even though one of these years was the correct year. By looking at the chart Backster could determine the correct year, somehow, the plant had responded when the correct year was mentioned.

Another experiment involved six students. Unknown to anyone else, one of the students walked into a room containing two plants. One of them was uprooted, stamped upon and thoroughly destroyed. By attaching the surviving plant to a polygraph and parading the students one by one before it, he was able to identify the killer. The plant gave no response when each of the other five had individually entered the room, however, when the killer appeared, the meter went wild.

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