

The Murderer Within

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A writhing ghostly shape hovered above Blackwood

Back From the Lair of the Cadavers Comes a Wraith-Like Apparition to Make Dr. Acroyd Obey His Fiendish Commands!

DOCTOR STEWART ACROYD, thirty-seven years old, single and very successful, sat behind his desk and slowly wagged his well-combed head from side to side.

"No," he said firmly. "William Mordaunt did not come to see me—either as a friend or a patient. Above all, not as a friend. I detested him—and he knew it."

Inspector Hardy of the Homicide Bureau drew a long, slow breath. "You are my last hope, Doc. Mordaunt is dying at Memorial Hospital. He's in a coma of sorts, yet keeps talking all the time. Only he talks of everything but the man who shot him. I've got to track down his killer."

Dr. Acroyd smiled acidly. "Then look

for his lady friends; his victims at cards or dice; his drinking companions. Mordaunt means nothing to me and I want nothing to do with him.”

Inspector Hardy arose. “Don’t blame you, Doc. But you knew him. You’re the greatest brain specialist in this section of the country and I just had a hunch that maybe something worried Mordaunt until he had to see a doctor and came to you.”

Hardy walked toward the door, paused and turned around. He was a big man, florid of face and his mind was as keen as the edge of a razor blade.

“Say, Doc,” he said hesitatingly. “This Mordaunt now—he hasn’t got a chance, understand? The bullet is lodged in his brain and they’re just waiting for a hemorrhage to finish him off. But could you drag him out of it? Just long enough to name his murderer? You know all about brains and how they work. Or—is this just another poor hunch gone west?”

Dr. Acroyd tapped his well manicured nails together. “He’s in a coma, you say? And he keeps mumbling nonsense? Inspector—it would be an experiment worth trying. Mordaunt will die anyway, so we can’t harm him, can we? Perhaps I could reach his subnormal mind and make him talk even while he’s in a coma. It’s been done” —Acroyd caressed his chin fondly with an index finger—“only a couple of times of course. Yet . . . I wonder!”

“Doc,” Inspector Hardy said sincerely, “if you can make this bird tell me who plugged him, it’ll save my skin. I hate to ask you to do this. I know how overworked you are and right now you don’t look so chipper to me. But will you have a try at it?”

Acroyd quickly got up and donned his hat and a light coat. Meticulously he drew on fresh, light colored gloves. Everything about Acroyd was meticulous, even the

tiny wisp of a mustache that he had trimmed almost daily. . . .

THIRTY minutes later both men walked through the silent corridors of Memorial Hospital. Dr. Acroyd carried a compact leather case in his hand and his face was beaming with the idea of the experiment at hand. They turned into a room that was guarded by a burly patrolman who saluted Hardy listlessly. A feeling of death hung over the room, augmented by the perfectly bloodless face that matched the whiteness of the pillow case upon which it lay.

William Mordaunt wasn’t exactly a handsome man, yet he had a certain appeal. His eyes, staring wide open and seeing nothing, were coal black and he had rather thick, heavy lips and a jutting chin. His hands were long and his tapering fingers could pull an extra ace of spades out of thin air so fast that no human eye could detect it. He breathed stertorously now and Dr. Acroyd, after feeling the pulse, realized that the end was not far off.

Acroyd closed the door silently, motioned Inspector Hardy into a chair that stood in one corner of the room. Then he quickly set up apparatus, plugged it into a wall socket, and many discs, of kaleidoscopic colors, began spinning wildly. The brilliant galaxy of light and color made even Inspector Hardy wide-eyed. Then he tore his gaze away from the machine.

Acroyd held a hypodermic syringe in his hand. He deftly inserted it just above Mordaunt’s heart, shoved the needle along one rib and plunged it deep into the cardiac sac itself. He slowly pushed the colorless fluid it contained out of the magazine and into the heart of a dying man.

Mordaunt didn’t move. Pain meant nothing to him any more. His lips twitched

nervously and he mumbled something incoherent. But the muttering brought Inspector Hardy to his feet, as if he believed Acroyd's injection had brought results this swiftly. But Acroyd shook his head and motioned Hardy for silence. He bent over Mordaunt and pushed up his eyelids.

They remained far up, too, as though the muscles were paralyzed. Acroyd steadily kept feeling the pulse for any sign of reaction. It was thready, weak and irregular. Mordaunt didn't have much longer in this world. Acroyd turned on his machine once more, carefully focused the flashing colored lights directly into Mordaunt's eyes. Then he put his lips close to the dying man's ear and spoke very softly.

"Mordaunt . . . Mordaunt . . . wake up. Do you hear me? Wake up, I say! Your eyes are wide open, staring. They're looking directly into that ray of colored light. You can't close them, do you hear? You can't close them. Now you're feeling stronger, Mordaunt. Much stronger! Keep watching the lights. Keep your mind on the colors and don't be afraid. Don't be afraid, do you understand? Mordaunt—answer me! You can talk! There is no pain for you. Answer me! There is no pain. Is there?"

And the lips of a man who was already well down the Valley of the Shadow, stirred sluggishly.

"No . . . no pain," he gasped out. "No pain. . . ."

Acroyd's eyes flashed. "Mordaunt—you've been hurt. Someone hurt you. There was a gun—an explosion. Then you fell. Remember? You fell! You were shot. Who did it, Mordaunt? Who wanted to kill you?"

Mordaunt's lips parted in a ghastly grin. They were a livid blue color and his bulging, staring eyes were glassy. He

looked much like an embalmed corpse. The bed linen, tucked closely around his body looked like a winding sheet—the vestment of the dead.

MORDAUNT'S tongue moved, though his lips were quiet. "Shot me . . . got to live . . . to kill him. Got to live! Show me . . . must have . . . revenge. Can't . . . die. Don't let me. . . ."

Mordaunt's right hand came up as if to shield his eyes from the burning light. For a split-second it created a shadow across his face. Then his lower jaw sagged and his arm dropped limply down again. The muscles controlling his eyelids relaxed and they closed halfway.

Dr. Acroyd kept on whispering, pleading. Mordaunt was dead, truly dead. But there are many things a scientific mind does not know and Acroyd's experiment went further than the gates of death. It went beyond—far beyond. Acroyd was trying to make a dead man speak. Trying to force a dead brain to unloosen the nerves controlling the tongue.

"Mordaunt," he whispered hoarsely. "Mordaunt. You can't leave now. You haven't finished here yet. There is work for you to do. You've got to kill the man who murdered you. You've got to kill him, Mordaunt. Listen to me! Hear me! You've got to live to kill him. You must!"

Inspector Hardy was almost as white as the corpse. He was slowly wringing his hands. Hardy had seen death in all its most violent and hideous forms, but this was something far more ghastly than mere death. Here was a man trying to force the soul of a dead man back into its body. Trying to make a dead man speak.

"Doc," he cried out, despite himself. "For God's sake, stop it. Can't you see he's gone? A dead man can't speak. Good God—I'll hear that voice as long as I live. I'll never forget it. Come on. Let's get out

of here. To hell with Mordaunt's dying statement."

Acroyd slowly drew himself erect. His lean face was pale, too, his breath coming in gasps. He shoved a hand across his forehead and closed his eyes tightly.

"Doc," Hardy cried shrilly. "Doc, snap out of it. We're finished. We don't know who killed Mordaunt."

"Got . . . to . . . kill . . . him," Acroyd droned on, his lips moving thickly. "Got . . . to . . . kill him. . . ."

Hardy, who had already turned toward the door, spun around again. His pores overflowed with perspiration, his eyes were staring.

"Doc," he shouted. "Doc." Hardy ran up to Acroyd and shook him vigorously. "Doc—snap out of it. Did you hear that voice? It was Mordaunt! Mordaunt, I tell you! He spoke. Or—*or was that you?*"

Acroyd opened his eyes. "Me, Inspector? No! No, I didn't say anything. Didn't hear anything either. I—I guess we're both a little mad. It was a horrible experiment. Horrible! He was dying before I began it. At that I think I prolonged his life a few moments. I—I don't feel very well. I think I'll sit down."

Acroyd all but fell into the chair Hardy had occupied. When the inspector reached for a carafe on the table beside the bed, his eyes passed over Mordaunt's grinning dead face. Hardy shivered and roughly drew the sheet over the leering features. Then he poured a glass of water and forced some of it down Acroyd's throat.

"Come on, Doc, snap out of it. We're both a couple of imaginative sissies, I guess. Me thinking I heard Mordaunt's voice. You, feeling so rotten all of a sudden. Anyone would think a dead man was a novelty to us. You—a doctor, and me—a Homicide cop. That's a hot one."

Acroyd managed a weak grin. "You are right, Inspector. We are a couple of

weak sisters. I—I think I'll go back to my office now. Mind driving me?"

HARDY not only drove him back, but he helped Acroyd into his office and dismissed the two nurses at Acroyd's request. Then he departed, shaking his head like a man who refused to believe in ghosts—yet had seen one.

"Damn funny," Hardy muttered to himself. "Mordaunt was dead, stone dead. Yet how could he speak? And I'd have sworn that voice came from Doc. Only it was Mordaunt's voice, not Doc's."

In the security of his office Doctor Acroyd sat limply behind his desk. Horrible, evil thoughts were spinning through his brain. Thoughts that concerned themselves with death—*and after death*. Thoughts of Mordaunt who had died while under his hypnotic influence. Acroyd had literally torn Mordaunt's mind from his dying body.

"Sometimes," Acroyd muttered, "I feel that his mind remained here, within me. Odd, this feeling. Can't account for it. And I lied to Inspector Hardy. The first lie I've ever told in my life. I wonder why I did that? It was my voice he heard. My voice or . . . in Heaven's name—*could it have been Mordaunt's?*"

At eight o'clock Dr. Acroyd saw his last patient leave and he was glad of it. He arose abruptly, walked to a cabinet and extracted a bottle of whiskey. He dumped a good portion of it into a large glass, raised it to his lips and tossed off the rye as though he'd been a heavy drinker all his life.

Then his eyes widened as a sudden pounding smote his temples. He felt perspiration rise up on his forehead and finally cover his whole face. He stood, woodenly, staring at the empty glass. This was one of the few times he had taken a drink like that.

Acroyd was no prude, but since childhood his mission in life had been to cure the sick and whiskey had little part in his scheme of things. Not that it would seriously damage anything—other doctors drank moderately. But Acroyd had been exceptionally moderate in his use of all intoxicants.

Now here, unconsciously, he had taken a healthy portion of rye and downed it without batting an eye. Its mellow, soothing aroma filled his nostrils and made his taste buds swell. After he downed a second drink, the world took on a new lustre.

But he stopped there. It wouldn't do to attend one of Mrs. Burgoyne's bridge parties with the odor of whiskey on his breath. So Acroyd bought a package of chewing gum.

He played excellent bridge, scoring point after point. But he had never played like this before. The cards seemed to do tricks for him. He shuffled skillfully something he could never do before. He kept up a running fire of witty conversation, entirely free of all mention of psychiatry.

Then the most respectable Dr. Acroyd found himself cheating. Cheating at a game of bridge with small stakes. Somehow, he found that slipping cards off the bottom of the deck was easy. A riffle deal could be made to do tricks under his nimble fingers. His score went up and up and up, until, despite the small stakes, he had a tidy little sum coming.

At midnight he took his leave. Once more sweat poured down his face. Even though he drove like a fiend from hell, the sharp breeze couldn't dry the sweat. Not the kind Acroyd found running down his face. After he put the car in the garage, he went home and Simmons, his combination valet and butler, let him in.

“MRS. WHITE phoned, Doctor,” he said. “Her husband seems worse. She'd like to have you over—at once.”

“The devil with Mrs. White—and her husband too,” Acroyd snapped. “Call Morgan. He knows the case. I'm tired.”

Acroyd slammed the study door behind him, walked deliberately over to a sideboard and poured himself a drink. Then he sat down in the most convenient chair and it happened to be directly across the room from a full length mirror whose base was close to the floor. Acroyd could see himself clearly. Too clearly, he thought. He seemed tired and there were furrows across his usually smooth forehead. He sat there, for perhaps ten minutes, looking at the image in the mirror.

“What's come over me?” he asked himself. “What in the name of heaven am I doing? Drinking—gambling—and cheating. Refusing to visit a patient. I've changed, horribly—must find out what in the world is wrong. Can't go on like this.”

“Why impossible?” a voice asked. “I like it.”

Acroyd leaped to his feet. There, in the mirror across the room, hovering above his reflection like a cloud—*was Mordaunt*. Mordaunt, who was already cold on a slab. Who had died under Acroyd's very eyes. Yet, he was here, leering at him from out of a mirror that should have reflected only Acroyd's own image.

“You—you—” Acroyd cried shrilly.

“Sit down, Doctor,” Mordaunt's voice came gayly. “Sit down. I'm tired and I can't relax unless you do.”

Acroyd sat down slowly and that grisly image in the glass seemed to become more distinct.

“How about another drink?” Mordaunt's voice asked. But Acroyd saw that the fleshy lips didn't move. “One more—a nightcap. Makes you sleep well,

or don't you think sleep will come to you tonight, Doctor Acroyd?"

Acroyd arose and as he moved out of the mirror's range, the image also vanished. When he returned to his chair, the ghostly image did likewise. Acroyd wiped his perspiring face with a handkerchief. Then he swallowed his drink in a single gulp.

"That," Mordaunt's voice said, "is better. Much better. We'll have a little nightcap each night, shall we? And, oh yes. Stop that foolish gambling for half a cent a point. You can take suckers for real money. Shall we do that, Doctor?"

"No," Acroyd shrieked, and jumped up. "Get back where you belong, back to hell's fires or to whatever purgatory your sins committed you. Go back and let me alone!"

Acroyd rushed to the sideboard and tipped the whiskey bottle to his lips. He wasn't drinking because the ghost within him demanded it; he drank because he needed the stimulating effects of alcohol.

"You've come back," Acroyd said, facing the ghost image in the mirror again. "You've returned from the dead to live within my body."

"Be reasonable," the image said. "How could I return when I never went away? Not completely at least. You, my very beneficent doctor, controlled my mind when my body passed away. Therefore you became my host. Within *your* mind I shall live."

Acroyd forced his nerves to some pretense at calmness. He was still sane, at any rate. He was suffering from no delusions. This image was real enough—not a figment of an overwrought, overworked imagination.

"Tell me," Acroyd said slowly, bitterly, "who really shot you. I'd like to shake his hand."

THE aura in the mirror seemed to loom larger and the ghostly features became bestial.

"You'll do more than shake his hand, Doctor. You'll kill him for me. That's why I've remained with you after death. Nobody ever got the best of me, and the fool who sent that bullet into me won't get away with it. You're going to find him, Doctor. Find him and—kill him! Give him what he handed me, do you understand?"

ACROYD nodded slowly. "I understand, but suppose I refuse to do this? Suppose I won't consent to committing murder?"

"Then," Mordaunt's voice was as deadly as his spectral image, "I'll be with you for as long as you live. You'll become me, Doctor. You'll find your practice ruined, your reputation shot to pieces. I can control part of you. I can force you to lie and cheat and drink because it will really be me enjoying all these things. But find the rat who murdered me, kill him slowly and painfully while I watch and I'll leave you. Once I remove myself from your mind I cannot return, for that hypnotic thread will be broken."

Acroyd patted his face with a handkerchief and slumped a little lower in the chair. He kept eyeing the ghostly image in the mirror. Acroyd wasn't exactly afraid of Mordaunt, but the shocking idea of living with a ghostly figment of his imagination for the rest of his life became unbearable.

"How," Acroyd asked, in a voice he had to force into calmness, "can I find the killer if the police have failed?"

Mordaunt's ethereal features turned into a smug smile. "You forget I was there, Doctor. No—I don't know who killed me. Any number of people hated me enough to do it. The man who did fire the shot turned and ran before I caught sight

of his face. All I saw was his back. He was young, dressed in dark clothing. I struggled to sit up and while he was running away I saw him throw the gun into the cellar window of an old house a block away. It must be there now. Find it, check the numbers and trace it to the killer! That won't be hard to do. Even if it was difficult, you'd handle it. Wouldn't you, Doctor?"

Acroyd nodded curtly. He arose, stepped beyond the mirror and found that his nerves grew calmer as the wraithlike image left his range of vision. But that was all it left. Mordaunt's mind would remain within Acroyd so long as he lived unless he obeyed the dead man's orders. Even then Mordaunt might decide to stay, but Acroyd had to take that chance.

He almost ran past the mirror, scooped up his hat and coat and hurried to the street where his car was parked. He drove like a madman to the spot where Mordaunt had been killed, looked around keenly and soon located the deserted house. He made certain that no one saw him slip toward the house and examine the cellar windows.

One was broken. He reached inside, turned the latch slowly and then hooked the window up. He slipped through the narrow aperture quietly, landed on a cold, damp cellar floor and then struck a match. There halfway across the floor, he saw the gun. It was a cheap, nickel-plated job. Acroyd picked it up, broke open the breech and saw that three bullets were still intact. He found the serial numbers, too.

A wave of relief swarmed over him as he made his way out of that cellar. But he knew that the relief was not his own. It was Mordaunt's mind, functioning within his skull. Mordaunt was the one who felt relieved.

NOW, Acroyd was more worried than ever. He could track down the killer,

but what then? Could he murder a man in cold blood even if that person had himself committed murder? Could he do this ghastly thing in order to save himself from a life of torture at the hands of a dead man?

Acroyd returned to his car, drove to police headquarters and found Inspector Hardy in his office, Acroyd placed the gun on Hardy's desk.

"I need your help, Inspector. About an hour ago a man came to my office—a psychopathic case. He wants to kill himself, but he's afraid. I know how to handle him, but he got away from me. I managed to sneak this gun from his pocket before he ran away. If I could trace him—treat him before he kills himself. . . ."

Hardy studied the gun carefully. "Sure, Doc. Of course I'll help you. Poor guy. I hope we'll be in time."

Acroyd shook his head knowingly. "Not we, Inspector. Just me. This patient must be handled very carefully and all of what I've told you is strictly off the record, until there is a complete cure. I must have that co-operation."

Hardy shrugged and copied the serial numbers on the gun. He used the phone, put through a long distance call and when it came through he had the name of a dealer. Another phone call and Hardy slid a piece of paper before Acroyd's gaze.

"Young Blackwood," he said sadly, "You certainly diagnosed him right, Doc. Blackwood's sister committed suicide a month ago. She married some heel who managed to get all her money—young Blackwood's, too—and then ran out on her. I understand Blackwood has almost gone crazy since. You'll find him at that address, but don't you think I ought to tag along? He might get violent."

Acroyd arose, picked up the gun and stuffed it into his pocket. "No, Inspector. I can handle him. Especially after what

you've told me. Thanks and good night."

Acroyd left Police Headquarters hurriedly, slid behind the wheel of his car. He glanced up in the rear view mirror before he pulled away from the curb and caught a fleeting glimpse of what seemed to be a tiny cloud. His hand shot up and turned the mirror away.

Finding Blackwood's apartment was a simple matter. Acroyd used a self-service elevator to reach the ninth floor. As he stepped out of the car he stood in front of a full length mirror. Before he could turn away Mordaunt's features surged from the depths of that looking glass. He was grinning like a well pleased ape.

"See how easy it was, Doc? Blackwood will be hiding in his apartment, scared stiff. What if I did take his sister and him for a neat little buggy ride? Sure I got her dough! That's all I was after. Was it my fault that she was in love with me? Was it my fault that she killed herself? Now, listen. The rest is up to you.

"Go in there and kill him! Kill him slowly so he'll suffer a thousand times more than I did. You're a doctor and know plenty of ways to do it. Remember—you go through with this or I'll stay with you until they close a casket lid on your face. I'll ruin you so people will run when they see you. I'll convert you into a cheating gambler, a drunk and more of a rat than I was. Nothing can make me leave you, understand? Nothing! Only when I see Blackwood's lifeless corpse will I go away. Now get busy!"

ACROYD forced himself to turn from the mirror, forced himself not to think. *He was going to murder a man!* A killer, yes, but a killer who possessed a good reason for his deed. If anyone deserved to be slain, that person was Mordaunt.

Acroyd's hand was very steady as he pushed the bell beside the apartment door. There was no answer to his ring. He looked around, listening intently for approaching footsteps. Then he leaned his shoulder against the door and pushed inward.

He felt the panels crack under his driving weight. Finally the lock gave way. Quickly, he stepped inside the apartment, found that he could close the door firmly again and after that was done he moved forward. The apartment seemed to be vacant, but a wisp of smoke spiraling ceiling ward from a cigarette tray jammed full of butts told him differently. Blackwood was still in the apartment, probably hiding somewhere.

There was a closed door to the left. Acroyd tried the knob and found it was locked from inside. He pressed an ear against the panels and could hear someone breathe with a wheezing similar to asthma. Then he heard a window being raised slowly. He recalled that there were no fire escapes on this building—which meant that Blackwood was getting set to end things by leaping out of the window!

Acroyd moistened his lips and found that although his mouth and throat were dry, his whole body was bathed in perspiration. He stepped back a pace and hurled himself at the door. It was flimsy and gave way under this savage assault. As he catapulted into the room, he saw Blackwood half in, half out of the window. Acroyd lunged across the room, seized the younger man by one arm, gave a violent wrench and yanked Blackwood back to "safety."

Blackwood cowered before him. He was wild-eyed, panic-stricken, half mad.

"Let me go!" he screamed. "Let me jump! Yes, I killed Mordaunt. I'm the murderer the whole city is looking for. But Mordaunt deserved to die. He had it

coming to him, I tell you. He killed my sister just as surely as if he pumped a bullet into her head like I did to him. I'd do it over again if I had the chance!"

Acroyd gripped Blackwood by both shoulders and forced him to a davenport. Slowly his hands moved from the shoulders up to Blackwood's throat. Acroyd felt his heart pumping violently and through his mind surged the wild desire to kill. That was Mordaunt's mind superseding his own. Acroyd's hand would do the slaying, his body would pay the penalty when he was caught; but behind it all was Mordaunt.

"I'm going to kill you," Acroyd said very slowly. "Blackwood—you're going to die. I'll strangle you, but I'll do it gradually so you'll suffer. You're to die. Do you hear that?"

And the vengeful voice that emanated from Acroyd's parched throat was Mordaunt's. The voice of a man whose body lay cold in death on a morgue slab. Blackwood seemed to recognize it, for his already wide eyes grew still wider until they bulged horribly. All desire to die left him. He was afraid to die now.

Blackwood gave a violent, upward lunge that carried Acroyd backwards until he stumbled and fell heavily. With the speed of lightning Blackwood spun, reached for a vase, stepped above Acroyd and hurled it. Acroyd saw the missile coming and whirled so that it smashed against his shoulder instead of his skull.

HE RUSHED at Blackwood, driving him back into a corner. He smashed two hard blows into the pit of the younger man's stomach and watched him double up in pain.

Then Acroyd stepped back a few paces, whipped out the gun which Blackwood had used to murder Mordaunt, and leveled it. His finger gripped the

trigger tensely. The urge to kill became stronger than ever. Acroyd's senses were reeling. Then, with a shout of derision, he placed the gun on a small table.

"That way is too easy," he ground out. "A bullet is much too fast for you. I'll do it with my hands. My bare hands! Blackwood—I'm coming."

He moved forward, arms outstretched, fingers hooked like talons and shoulders hunched. He looked hideous. Blackwood gave a wild yell and spurred forward. He hit Acroyd hard, saw him sink to his knees and then Blackwood emitted a hysterical shout of joy. He drove a long, looping right to Acroyd's chin and sent him sprawling on his back. Then Blackwood leaped toward the gun resting on that small table.

Acroyd, watching this dazedly from the floor, saw Blackwood reach for the weapon. *But his hands closed on nothing but air.* The gun appeared to have been swept off the table to the floor. A writhing, ghostly shape seemed to be hovering above Blackwood, making the young man lose all control of his senses. He reeled back drunkenly a few steps, then he collapsed and fell like a bundle of old rags.

Acroyd was on his feet swiftly. He rushed forward and kicked the gun viciously into a corner. The ghostly presence screamed a shriek of hatred and frustration.

"Mordaunt," Acroyd called out. "Mordaunt, you're licked. You're out of my mind. I'm free of you! I let Blackwood seem to get the best of me so you'd take a hand. You left my brain to materialize and try to stop Blackwood from getting away. You can't come back to me now. My mind is stronger than yours. You are doomed! Go back—back to those fires of hell which you richly deserve. Go back and carry this thought with you: That Blackwood isn't going to pay for his crime. He'll not suffer

because he killed you.”

There was a weird, swishing sound and a cry of a lost soul in torment. Then the lights in the apartment actually seemed to grow brighter. The air smelled cleaner. Acroyd walked deliberately in front of a mirror and studied his own reflection. The image of a ghost was no longer there. Mordaunt, in his fiendish desire to see Blackwood punished, had left his earthly home in Acroyd’s mind. There was no way for him to return. Acroyd was free!

But there was still work to be done. Acroyd ran over to where Blackwood lay. He picked him up, laid him gently on a davenport and made a quick, but thorough examination. It took him about five minutes to rush back to his car, take out a kit of instruments and return to the apartment.

Acroyd set up his apparatus, turned it on and as Blackwood’s eyes opened they were focused on spinning, colored discs. His pupils grew wider and the haggard features relaxed. Acroyd hastily propped Blackwood’s shoulders up with a pillow.

Then he bent close to the younger man.

“**Y**OU’VE been very ill. You can’t remember things. Your sister died and for a while you wanted to kill the man who was responsible for her death. But someone else killed him. You know nothing about it. You will remember only that you felt very ill and that you went to see Dr. Acroyd.

“You had a gun. He took it away from you. You fled, returned to your apartment and he found you there. Now you are cured. Mordaunt is dead by another’s hand. You will carry on bravely—bravely, do you understand?”

“Bravely . . .” Blackwood mumbled. “Yes . . . yes. Mordaunt is dead. Somebody . . . beat me to it. I . . . I’m satisfied. It’s all over . . . now. . . .”

Acroyd shut off his gyrating discs and sank wearily into a chair. He saw Blackwood’s gun in a corner of the room. That could be taken care of. The river on his way home, or better, a beaker of corrosive acid. Blackwood was a murderer, but even he didn’t know that now. And justice had been served well enough.

Acroyd passed a shaky hand across his tired face. Doubts began to assail his mind. Wasn’t all this a lot of nonsense? Hadn’t young Blackwood really come to his office? Of course. The rest was imagination. He’d been working too hard.

He arose abruptly and packed his equipment. There were things to do. Jed White needed him. Dr. Morgan was a fool and couldn’t handle that case properly. Acroyd wanted to rush back to his work. There was no longer a desire to shirk it. He looked forward to it.

Acroyd began to hum a gay tune as Blackwood opened his eyes and stared up at him.