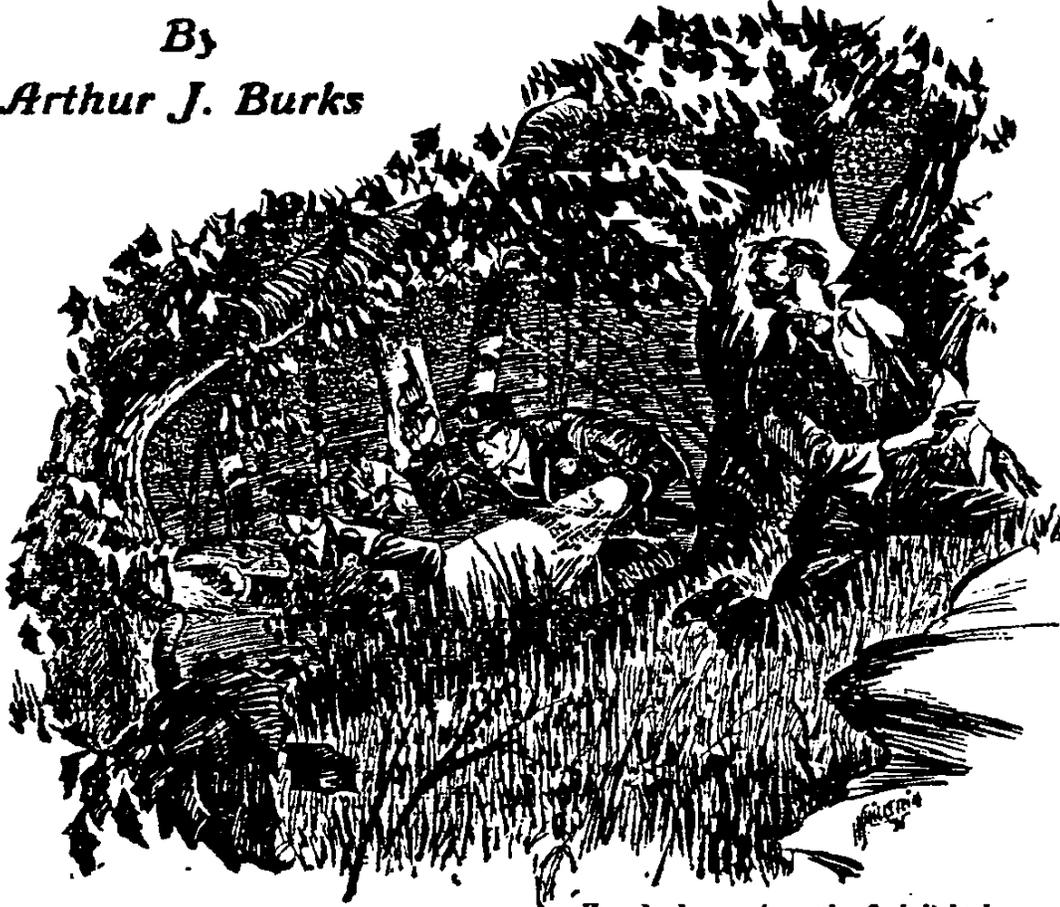


# Green-Eyed Vengeance

*Mystery Novelette*

By  
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*He edged away from the flash-light beam.*

*The green-eyed monster that was jealousy made Jed Raeme a gibbering madman, who rushed through a sinister, death-filled night to surprise his beautiful wife in a strange house of ghastly murder. And with remorse searing his heart, a grim fate was preparing to make his trembling fingers sign a confession to the hideous slayings committed by his unknown enemy.*

I CLICKED down the receiver and burned up the road, the two things seeming to run together in bewilderment. I never remembered going down in the elevator to my car at the curb, but I must have done it somehow, for I was in the car, traveling north, running ahead of motorcycle coppers whose keening sirens bade me stop. But no police officers living could have stopped me then. Driving at ninety miles an hour, the car seemed a part of me, so much so that I didn't give

thought to the driving. My whole brain was taken up with the words that had come to me over the telephone:

"That you, Jed Raeme? Good. Don't remember me, do you? Well, I remember you, always hated you, and now I've got even! I didn't try to get back at you because you ruined me in Wall Street. Money wouldn't hurt you, even if you lost it all. But to hit you in the heart, that was my idea, see— So I managed to meet her, socially.

Know who I mean, Jed Raeme? Wolf-of-Wall-Street Jed Raeme . . . ?”

I remembered thinking that the man must be mad to chant at me over the telephone like that. Same time, my conscience was clear. I'd never done anyone an injury in the Street that I knew of. At least I was no more ruthless than one had to be to survive. I hadn't done badly, either, after three years out of college. I supposed people had been ruined by my operations; but they'd have ruined me. Those who played dangerous games had to take the bad breaks with the good. I had. I didn't ask quarter, didn't give any. People who expected it were out of their element in the Street.

The chanting voice had gone on:

“Yes, I'm hitting you where it will hurt, through Dale!”

“Dale?” I repeated, in a kind of scream, cold terror gripping my heart. The man was mad, by his manner of speaking, and he spoke of Dale, my wife. If anything happened to her I would die. “Who are you? What the devil do you mean?”

“I am one of your better favored victims, Wolf-of-Wall-Street Jed Raeme, and I have deliberately won the love of your wife. She goes with me tonight, is leaving within five minutes, for your own country-place near Bedford! She told you she was spending the night with her sister, for she does not wish you to know; but I—I wish you to know!”

It couldn't be. There wasn't a human being on the face of the earth I trusted more than I trusted Dale. But she *had* told me she was going to her sister for the night and—but I didn't call my sister-in-law. I'd go to the country-place instead, and give the madman a beating for even daring to mention the name of my Dale.

The pursuing motorcycle coppers didn't have a chance to catch me. I crossed the Connecticut line miles ahead of them. After that the Connecticut officers chased me, but I didn't mind. If one had got in front of me he would have died. I wasn't being stopped. One thing I knew; if the madman dared to be there when I arrived, I'd kill him. I knew now how it was that men murdered other men—or women. Yes, women. I got to thinking of Dale, and how I would feel if she did betray me.

Feeling this, with the night all around me, and the fever of hell burning me, I stopped at the edge of my property, which I had bought for a place of

relaxation, liking it best of all because no cars could reach it; and people who perpetually bothered me wouldn't have walked a mile through the woods to reach me. Now I was sorry, for it would take time to walk that mile.

I shunted the car into the woods, crawled out. I started walking.

I panted like a spent runner before I even got started, not from fatigue, but because of the fires that burned me. The woods spun. The stars danced crazily in their courses. I had a knife in my hand. I didn't remember picking it up, but knew whence it came—from the wall of my study. I collected trophies as a sort of relaxation from my arduous gambling in the Street. One day I had planned to take them all to my country-place, to keep my friends from pestering me about them.

**P**ICTURES kept coming and going in my brain. Dale, gorgeous, beautiful Dale, there in the country-place with a stranger. Not knowing I was coming, either. Not expecting me; infatuated with a man, giving herself to him. If it were true—Well, even just to think of it caused a red veil to drop in front of my eyes.

I'd kill her, too! but of course it wasn't true. Fool! I was a fool. Hadn't other men loved their wives as dearly, believed in them just as completely, and wakened from the red haze of madness to find that they had murdered the wife with her paramour? How was I any different than others? If other gorgeous wives could be weak, why not Dale?

Then I began hating myself for even thinking of Dale in such a situation. She'd kill me if I ever let her know . . .

But it didn't help. The feeling kept growing on me, the further I stumbled into the woods, that it was true—and that my enemy, whoever he was, wished me to visit the country-place, and find out the truth. He wanted to hurt me. And he was mad, for he must have known what the depths of my hurt would be, and that I would slay in payment; yet he would stay to be slain to watch my hurt as he died. Such hatred didn't seem possible, even in a man who was mad . . .

That ghastly journey through the woods, the horrible woods, which seemed equipped with a million arms to hold me back. Hard arms that slapped me across the face until my cheeks were numb . . .

I staggered from side to side, feeling my way in the deep path with my feet. I smashed against trees. They struck at me. The skin came off the trees, and I scarcely felt it I struck out at the trees as though they had been enemies, and lacerated one of my hands. I fancied the trees I fought were men—who wanted my Dale. I tried to see their faces—and they became, one after the other, the faces of all the men I knew. Of course they must all envy me my possession of Dale, and therefore must desire her themselves. Which of them was with her here in the country-place? Some “friend,” I gathered, who would play golf with me, and laugh over missed putts, and slap me on the back as though we were brothers. I myself knew some of the small deceits of betrayal—from the day before Dale, when fooled husbands had been a joke.

But not now. I was a little crazy. A little? I was utterly insane. I had never believed myself a coward in anything. Yet I was filled with terror beyond my comprehension, and the deeper I stumbled and staggered into the woods, the greater my terror became. I thought, time after time, terror had reached its summit, only to find it capable of redoubling itself, as I tortured myself with mental pictures.

How long since the madman had telephoned me? Hours, ages, eons, it seemed. So much could happen, in that time. What sort was he? The man who gloried in anticipation, who preceded dalliance with liquor and conversation? I hoped so. But even if she had gone with him, I told myself there had been one reason, and one only, and that a matter of purely technical detail mattered not at all.

I had lost her, after that fact, as surely as though she had become as one with the stranger. It would be all the same. If the man had been lying, and I found him, I would slay him for the lie alone. And for being with Dale. . . .

Even then, long before I came to the house, with my clothing in tatters from the savage charge through the woods, I knew that murder awaited at the end of the road.

My fingernails had been torn to the quick. My hat was gone. My clothing was rent in a thousand places. There were welts on my face. I panted. My breath tasted like fresh blood on my lips. I stopped at the edge of the clearing, staring at the house. Had it been light—but it wasn't. It was utterly

dark. In fancy I saw a white face there, baleful eyes looking out, watching for me, timing my approach, so that when I reached the spot I would find that which would hurt me more than anything else on this earth could have done.

But the house was dark, still, brooding—and its darkness was worse than a glare of lights could have been. In that house, surely and certainly—I now knew—were two guilty ones, Dale, and one other.

I started across the clearing, and the house seemed to laugh. I lifted my hot face to the evening sky, and saw the stars a-dancing. I remember that well, how they stood up there, looking down at me, and then went into a twinkling dance, as though enjoying a jest at my expense—because, perhaps, they could see into that house yonder, and I could not, save with the eyes of jealous imagination.

I charged across the clearing, right up to the door; and there, with my hand on the knob, I paused. Fear, overwhelming, terrible, gripped me, from the tips of my toes to the top of my head. I was afraid to enter the place, afraid to find all my suspicions, for which I truly hated myself.

Yet I couldn't turn, and walk away, and not know for sure. If I did that, and found out tomorrow that Dale had never visited her sister, and she dared to smile at me in supposed ignorance, or to pretend that her love for me had not in one whit abated, I would strike her dead.

No, I had to know.

I TURNED the knob. The door opened instantly. I seemed to hear the laughter of the stranger, hear him chant my name: “*Are you there, Jed Raeme? Wolf-of-Wall-Street Jed Raeme?*” Though nothing but silence came out of the black room ahead—silence, and the odor of perfume. There was just one person in my knowledge who used that perfume. The name of the perfume was Dale, because it had been made for her alone. And the odor was new. I couldn't feel that it lingered here from our visit two weeks ago. It wouldn't last like that.

Besides, the door had been open, and we had always locked it.

I knew where the light was. I thought of a poem I had once read, in which this line occurred. . . . “*the whispers of dalliance, the low laugh of sin,*” and I heard them, coming from the second

darkened room.

I lost my sanity then, what little was left to me. I switched on the light. In that other room they must have heard me; but the sounds kept coming forth to me, though there was a curious tone of dying-away in them.

I charged the second dark door, went in, switched on the light.

Yes, she was there! Dale was there! She was sprawled across the bed, on her back. She was in negligee, which had tumbled all awry, to show the body which would have stolen the senses of any man.

Beside her was a man. He was on his face. He too....

But forget the details. I didn't, just then, see his face. But one dreadful thing I did see: the body of my beloved, stained a ghastly crimson, blood still running onto the sheets from a great red mouth in her throat. The sound, I knew, came from Dale—the gurgling, red laughter of the dying....

I hurled myself at the man, turned him over. He, too, was dead. But I had guessed it by the knife handle in his back. I stared at his face, then screamed. What awful horror was this? Dale's own brother! What was happening here? I cradled Dale's warm body, which would never be as warm again, in my arms. Her blood was on me, and I was crying her name in accents of stunned horror.... when the police, without pausing to bang on the door, came in and found me with my dead.

"So," said the sergeant grimly, "the tip was straight, then? I suppose you'll tell us the man's her brother, and that it's all a mistake? That you didn't mean to kill them?"

Rough hands tore me from Dale's body. A half-dozen pairs of eyes studied me, making mental note, obviously, of my torn clothing, my bleeding hands, the welts on my face.

"I didn't kill them," I mumbled. "Don't you understand? She's my wife; I loved her too much to kill her. She was my life, everything. I simply came here, and found her . . ."

"With another man, eh?"

"But the man is her brother!"

The sergeant laughed grimly. How dared he laugh when my Dale was there, newly dead? I struck out at him. But an officer was too quick for me. His right hand shot out. There was a blackjack in it. It struck me behind the ear. I went down, but I didn't lose consciousness. The blow made me

forget the officers. I sat there on the floor, close to the face of my beloved as her head hung down over the bed's edge, and babbled at my Dale.

"I came to kill you, Dale, to kill you and the man. But I didn't, you know that, don't you? I came to do it. I didn't believe it, ever. You know that, don't you, Dale?"

They yanked me to my feet, and as I went up past Dale's face I kept my eyes on her, telling her that there was a dreadful mistake somewhere.

The sergeant whirled me to face him.

"What's the idea of trying to slug me?"

"You laughed," I replied, remembering. "You shouldn't laugh, not here, with Dale like that."

"Why not?" he retorted. "You laughed, didn't you? Laughed as you cut her throat and stabbed the man. No, you stabbed the man first, and cut her throat because she insisted on saying that she loved him, and you wanted to stop the flow of words that told you such stuff. An old story, Raeme, and rather funny, if you have a sense of humor. Strange what trouble a man can get into, over a woman no better than she should—"

That got me again, and again, screaming like a wounded animal—though my voice didn't sound as though it were my own, and came from a far distance—I struck at the sergeant—. Again the blackjack struck me. This time I struck the bed as I fell.

QUEER things seem to happen to men who get like that. There are unexplained lapses of time. Now I straightened. I was in the living room, and the door to the death-chamber was closed. I didn't know how I had got there. The six officers were standing, looking at me. There was no mercy in the eyes of any one of them.

"Read it back to him, Drake," said the sergeant.

The man began to read from a paper.

"I came to Raeme Cottage, Bedford, to kill my wife and her paramour. I knew they would be together. I found them so. I stabbed the man in the back, when he knelt to beg for mercy. Dale told me she loved him, and her words drove me mad. I had to stop the flow of them, and a knife seemed the easiest way. I drew it across her throat. It was sharp, like a razor. I don't remember what happened after that, except that the police came. I make this confession of my own volition, and swear that no force of any kind was used by the

arresting officers.”

“What is that?” I asked.

“Don’t you understand? Your confession.”

“It isn’t true. I won’t sign it I couldn’t have slain Dale. And there is no wrong. A woman does not do wrong with her own brother ....”

“You’ve already signed it,” said the sergeant.

He held up the paper, just out of my reach, and I saw my own sprawling signature. Almost anybody would recognize it. Facsimiles of it had appeared in the newspapers of the land. Readers could get out their old copies, know that signature was mine. But I hadn’t put it there, I was sure of that—unless I had, like a prize fighter, been out on my feet, and signed in a sort of hypnotic trance.

I leaped for the paper. My brain was working again. I had tried to tell them of the telephone call, and they had laughed.

They’d had a phone call, too, from one of my neighbors here, who had seen lights in the house, come to investigate, watched through the window. He had seen the murders, both of them. I had been like a madman, smashing furniture....

Dully I had looked about me, at the signs of a struggle. Connected with my own appearance it was damning. That’s why I jumped, clutching for the paper which would send me to my death if read to a jury—that paper I hadn’t dictated, hadn’t known I had signed.

But when the sergeant pulled the paper away I went further, proving that I was—at least to them—as mad as they thought me. They had left my hands free, perhaps for the signing. What could I do, against six men, they must have thought.

The window was beyond the sergeant. I felt the officer with the blackjack reaching for me. But he missed, and I went head foremost through the window, to land on my head and shoulders, turning in the air as I went through, cutting myself on window glass....

Gats were banging, too. Bullets zinged out the window, into the night. But none had struck me. It had been a surprise. I rolled to my feet, made the woods. I knew it well. My own game preserve. They might find me here when morning came, but my wits were coming back, and I knew I had a job to do. Find the man who had telephoned me, the man who had telephoned the officers. He would know the truth. And I’d get the truth, and there would be another murder. Oh, I knew what the

coppers would do, when I had got clear away. They’d find my car, know I was afoot. They’d get dogs, and scour the country. They’d get me, certainly and surely.

“I’ll be damned if they will!” I told myself, racing through the woods. As before, I banged myself against the boles of trees. It didn’t seem to hurt, but reason told me it would sap my strength. I slowed down. No use being a blue-bottle fly against a window-pane, not when I knew the woods as I did.

Pursuit came on behind me. I angled off through the woods. I made little noise. Now and again there were sounds of shots, as the officers fired at shadows. I heard their cursing. But with them safely behind me, though capture was certain, I began to think back.

Who had telephoned? To me—? To the police? . . . . Nobody but the man who had telephoned me could have sent for them.

And he’d never seen anything through the window, such as he had said, for it hadn’t happened. But hadn’t it? My signature was on that confession, and only I could have put it there; yet I didn’t remember doing it. Maybe I had committed the murders, too, without knowing it. Maybe my jealous rampage through the woods had addled my brain, and I had killed them both, without noting that one was her brother Allan....

I could have sobbed for terror.

But my thoughts led me on to what I did remember—to the seeing of Dale, there on the bed. The blood gurgling from her throat, with a sound I had thought to be the “low voice of sin.”

“Dale—Dale,” I whispered. “Forgive me! God never will, but you will. You know I didn’t mean it, don’t you?”

I paused, there in the woods, listening for her answer. We had hunted these woods, Dale and I, and had often shouted to one another. Only now I whispered—and waited for an answer.

It came, on the wings of the night-wind, and the whisper said:

*“You believed me false, and came to slay me. How, then, can I forgive? Even now you wonder why I was here, with my own brother!”*

**I**T was her whisper. Impossible, but I believed it then. Maybe it was an echo of my own self-loathing, but then I believed the impression came from Dale, the newly dead. I had already

thought of destroying myself. I didn't fear death, not with Dale gone. I wanted to be with her. But now—not now! Not when she felt this way about me. I wasn't afraid of the officers, or of the law and what it might do to me, save in my relation to Dale.

How could I face her, Beyond the Curtain, and see the accusation, the cold contempt in her eyes, when she had never doubted me in anything, and her pride in my honor had been the spur which had made me great in my career?

"I can't die," I whispered to myself. "Not until I have made atonement. I can't die by bullets, by the noose—whatever it is in Connecticut—until I have squared accounts. Maybe, if I find the man who did it, and give him up to justice—"

I choked, speaking of giving the man up to justice, when my whole soul cried out to me that if I found him I would myself find justice with knife or gun or fists—choked, yet went on.

But there was cold comfort in it, comfort as cold as the night wind, as cold as the twinkling, frosty faces of the distant stars, which were paling a little with the coming of dawn.

The pursuit was close. Officers had spread out, seeking me. Their whistles had brought other officers. They would have me soon, unless....

But I knew these woods. I crawled into a tree, hiding myself in the mantling foliage, and listened to the movement of the pursuit. I heard the sergeant, stopping under the tree, talking to one of his men.

"He has to be here somewhere. The whole place is surrounded. He's hiding. We'd better bring the dogs. We can't search every tree in the place, and the hounds will find him. A strange thing, eh?"

"Yeah, don't it beat hell what love for a cheating woman can do to a man?"

I almost dropped from the tree, then, onto the head of the officer who dared to speak of my Dale like that. I don't know how I contained myself. I know, though, that I did it strangely. I stared, from my coign of vantage, up into the graying vault of the heavens, where the stars were dimming into invisibility, and tried to count them. It made me think—and almost laugh, until I realized that only madness could make me laugh—of how my mother, long ago, had always told me to count to a hundred before I vented my anger in any direction.

The sergeant and the officer walked on.

I gave them five minutes, ten perhaps, at a guess. Then I came down the tree, and started back for the house. There, I was sure, I would find the answer. And I must see Dale again. I must tell her, over her dead face, how sorry I was that I was afraid to go to her, with her knowledge of my black suspicions to accuse me from the eyes which had always told me of her love for me.

Foolish, of course, but maybe something guided me.

The answer would be there, at the house. I was sure of it. I reached the house. I looked through a window. An officer was on guard. He was standing, nervous and afraid, as any man might be alone in a house of the dreadful dead. I tapped the wall with my knuckles. I don't know why I did it. The officer whirled, pistol jumping into his hand from somewhere, and looked at the closed door, as though expecting the dead to come forth and challenge him.

His face was white as death.

I looked at that door myself. What did the fool expect could possibly come from there? Superstitious stuff and nonsense!

But the door did come open.

A white hand and arm shot forth. A gleaming streak sped between the hand and the officer. The streak became a spot of silver at the officer's throat. He dropped his gat, staggering back, clutching with both hands at the knife handle.

A woman's hand, I would have sworn.

The officer fell, kicked once or twice, was still. There had been no sound—and now the door to the chamber of death, behind which the naked hand and arm had vanished, closed softly, without sound.

There was just one way a person could have entered that room without passing the officer—no, two; by way of the window just to my right, or through a door leading down to my liquor cellar by a black, circular stairway.

The outer entrance to that was on the opposite side of the house.

I ran in that direction.

From somewhere to the north, suddenly as a thunderclap, sounded the eager baying of a single hound.

I wonder now, looking back, how I was able to do things I did that ghastly night. Dale, lying there in the black room, dead—with her brother Allan. The policemen seeking me. The baying of a single

hound. That knife, hurled from the closed door, killing one of the officers.

And the knife, I knew, was my knife. The officers must have taken it away from me, left it in the room of death.

The bare arm, out of the door.... And a memory, flooding back. Dale, my wife, had been my closest pal for years, deeply interested in everything I did. If I was interested in knives, so was she. If I was interested in the use of knives, so was she. And I had been. Result: we had both practiced for hours, out under the trees of our country-place, at throwing knives! Dale, good at anything and everything she tried, could impale a playing card against a tree at twenty feet.

To bury the blade of a knife in the throat of an officer was the easiest thing imaginable for her. What was happening here?

I circled the house. I realized that when some officer came back he would find the dead man, and know that I had returned to the house. Then, perhaps, he would go into the room of death, and try to find out just what had happened. A thrown knife, buried in flesh, could scarcely be told from a knife that had not left the hand of the killer until he had released it, after a stabbing. He might not think of the death-chamber at all.

I found the outer door, opened it, went down into the cellar.

Dale's perfume was down here, too. She had been here for some reason, though Dale—and it was one of the reasons I loved her so deeply—never imbibed of my liquors or of any other, and that was all that this cellar contained.

I felt my way along the floor with my feet, afraid to strike a light. I listened at intervals for the sound of breathing. The hair on the back of my neck shifted, giving me an odd chill. I had the feeling that there were unseen things all around me in the cellar, crouching to spring. Right over my head were the dead, whose death had not been explained. Whence had death struck at them? From down here, surely; at least retreat had been had by this way, for Allan and Dale had not been dead when, that night, I had first opened the door—else I wouldn't have heard that "low voice of sin."

The killer had waited for me to open the door, then had struck—and from some place, maybe even from my own bedroom telephone, had called the police.

No, he couldn't have done that, for I'd have heard him. Maybe he had called when I had first shown myself in the moonlight at the edge of the clearing. But what had Allan and Dale been doing all that time?

The whole thing was a ghastly, horrible muddle. A nightmare from which I might one day waken, with the numbness gone, and in its place a great gnawing emptiness where Dale had been.

I stopped in the cellar. It was a strange sound which made me stop. The same gurgling sound that I had heard before I had entered the bedroom and found the dead. It came from my right, and my heart jumped into my mouth. It had that same dying-away sound. Horrible . . . .

But I was too numbed with agony to be very much afraid. I struck a match, looking toward the spot. The sound still came from there, and it was very strange.

A bottle of liquor lay on its side, spilling its contents onto the floor! The contents came forth with a gurgling' sound! I looked at the red liquor, and it was like the blood which had spilled from the throat of my Dale.

But the bottle must have been placed there at exactly this moment. It wouldn't have lain on its side, to begin spilling its liquor at exactly this instant. Perhaps I was mad. I stooped, touched the bottle, and it was real enough.

The match went out, and the darkness seemed to jump at me, filled with bodiless, glacial entities which were eager to destroy me. Again, outside, muted by the cellar and the closed outer door, sounded the baying of that single hound.

Again I struck matches. There was a mirror in the cellar, and I saw myself in it, almost screamed. Little wonder, I told myself, when I realized it was my own reflection instead of the shape of my terror.

I looked a mess. Clothing in shreds, Blood on my welted face—and two egg-sized lumps on my head where the blackjack had struck me.

**E**XCEPT for myself, the cellar seemed to be empty. Still, it was a big place, in which several people might have hidden. There were many liquor shelves and bins.

I dared not wait down here. No telling whether the skulkers were friend or enemy. And yet, if they were police, they would have shown themselves, attacked me.

Therefore they were something else. But I had to make time. I scurried in and out among the bins, and with me went the feeling that whomever I pursued fled ahead of me, just out of sight, or pursued me on my crazy journey. I panted again, but locked my lips on the sound, lest it betray me to some one upstairs.

Somehow it seemed to me that Dale—the living Dale, not the dead—was very close to me, and that was the craziest thing of all. I had seen her too recently, felt her cooling wrists.

Cooling wrists....

That made me think of something. What did I remember about those wrists? There had been something strange about them. My subconsciousness had retained a vague, fleeting memory of the strangeness; but what? I had been too wild with grief and terror to recognize what the strangeness had been. It eluded me now, like a dream one tries to recall and cannot. I'd have to find out.

I couldn't accomplish anything in the cellar. I went to the door. The door was a simple matter. The mirror was the door, and nobody, as far as I knew, save myself and Dale, knew of it. It was a whim of hers. She came down for liquor, she said, and liked to make sure that she looked presentable—after walking among the cobwebs—before going back up to her guests. The mirror had been a jest between us—a small jest—but we had always enjoyed even the smallest jests.

I turned back the mirror, and the black stairwell led upward. I had the feeling that the steps were packed with enemies, poised here, ready to leap upon me. It was a horrible feeling, and as I went up I fully expected, from time to time, that my groping hands would come in contact with the legs of unseen people.

The stairs gave off no sound. They were of stone. I had set them in place myself, taking pride in the masonry.

I reached the top, knowing I had been alone on the stairs. None could have flattened himself enough for me to have passed him in the dark.

I found the door leading into the bedroom. I held my breath. What would I find in the room of death? The moonlight shining from the window onto the dead; that, of course. I knew that window, for often Dale and I had lain there, side by side, talking far into the night, while the moonlight seemed to bestow a blessing.

I knew what I would see, and was afraid of it—but my fear was like an anesthetic. Having plumbed so much of despair and terror, what greater could I know?

I pushed open the door. I looked in.

The two bodies were lying there, not exactly as I had last seen them, but there. Side by side on the bed—Allan and Dale.

And Dale had become a stranger to me. The senseless clay was not my Dale. The Dale I loved had gone away somewhere, and this was merely the empty house.

I strode into the room. I walked to that other door, which gave onto the living room. I pushed it slightly open. Just so must the person of the bare hand and arm have done before hurling the knife to the throat of the officer. She—I was sure it had been a woman—had willed the officer to turn, and present a target. The sound I had made outside, rapping against the wall, had created the diversion—almost as though I had been willed by the slayer to make the officer turn—and the knife, my knife, had sped.

The officer, utterly still, lay where he had fallen. None had as yet returned from the search to find him. I must hurry, though, for the baying of the hound was loud out there in the woods. Neighbors, I knew, would never come to investigate. To them I was “the eccentric city feller”, who did crazy things at all hours of the day and night. I had dogs of my own, and it had been a delight, at times, for Dale and me to set them tracking tasks at flight, training them for the hunt....

The neighbors, then, would merely think we were at it again.

I went back to the bed, staring down at the two who were dead. Dale's face in the moonlight was pale, snowy white. Her hands were crossed on her breast. Some one of the officers had done that, perhaps automatically.

I fumbled for her wrists. They were icy cold now. But there were ridges on them, and I knew exactly why. When, a moment later, I felt of the wrists of Allan, they too were ridged, the skin broken in one or two places.

My heart hammered with excitement.

Both of the victims had been tightly bound before they had been slain! If only they could now talk, tell who had bound them, what words had been spoken over the wire just prior to my

coming; could tell by what means they had partially disrobed, could describe the methodical disrupting of the house to indicate a struggle, which really had never taken place.

But they would never speak again, never....

The telephone stood in a corner. I couldn't take a chance on using it, not with the hound so close. But—well, I went to the telephone, took up the receiver without sound. I put my ear to it, listened. The line seemed to be dead. The operator did not answer. Of course, the killer would have fixed the telephone.

And then, next instant, I almost choked on my heart, which leaped into my throat, for this is what came over the wire:

*“Jed Raeme? Wolf-of-Wall-Street Jed Raeme? How do you like it, Jed Raeme?”*

There sounded, I was sure, the voice of the murderer. But whence was he calling? How did he keep the wire open? How did he know I would take down the receiver?

Well, the least I could do was puzzle him. I did not answer. A chuckle came over the wire. The voice again, in a husky whisper:

“I know it's you, Jed Raeme. Jed Raeme, Jed Raeme, nobody else but you! No use in keeping mum, Jed Raeme!”

Before I could make up my mind what to do about this uncanny circumstance, the hound bayed outside, right where I had paused to look in—and see the policeman die—and I knew I had only seconds left.

I clicked down the receiver, whirled to look out into the moonlight. As I looked a grisly head lifted, a queer face looked through the window. The bloodhound, with lolling tongue....

His next effort would take him around the house to the cellar door. I must reach it first, get away. Back into the cellar I went, feeling in spite of the enigma of it all, that I was closer to a solution.

**I**RACED back down the stairwell into the cellar. There was a telephone extension down there, which gave me an idea. I spared enough time to reach for it in the dark. The receiver was off the cradle! The receiver was warm, as though a hand had just held it. Then, I thought—not knowing too much about telephones—that I had the answer. The person who had just talked to me had cut the line leading to the operator in Bedford, and then

had waited for me to take down the receiver in the room of death.

No wonder he had known that I, and I only, could have answered the telephone. He, or she, had been in the cellar, had seen my face behind the lighted matches. I seemed to hear the chuckling of the killer. Mad, he was utterly mad—playing with me as a cat plays with a mouse.

Was he still in the cellar? I hadn't time to find out. Had it been his hand which had slain the officer? That meant that the telephoner was a woman, with the voice of a man. That wasn't too difficult, though; plenty of women could imitate men's voices.

I raced from the cellar, out into the clearing, making for the nearest woods, which I reached without trouble.

Even as I did so, I saw the moving shape of the hound, heading for the cellar.

Why, then, didn't he follow me into the woods, instead of sniffing around the cellar? I had the answer to that instantly. I had wetted my shoes with the liquor which had gurgled from that bottle, and the hound for a moment had been thrown off the scent until his handlers should make him sniff at the prints beside the empty bottle, and start him forth again.

Three men followed the hound. I saw them plainly in the moonlight. I began to run, circling the house but keeping to the clearing. I felt that I simply must see the other door of the house. The killer might, of course, have got out ahead of me, reached the woods. If he hadn't, he was somewhere in the house, which he must leave when the officers began an intensive search. There was one other mode of exit—by way of the door through which I had first entered the house.

I ran as I had never run before, finding at last a coign of vantage in the woods, whence I could watch the door. And I had reached it just in time. Muted, there came to me the eager baying of the hound, in the cellar, then in the stairwell—then in the room of death. The officers, checking on me closely, knew now that I had returned to the “scene of the crime.” Shortly they would find the other crime, if they hadn't already—the dead officer.

It was just here that a shadow detached itself from the outer door, racing away across the clearing to my right. There, I was sure, went the killer.

Now the hound was after me again, out of the cellar, racing for the woods. I moved again through the blackness toward the spot where the man I believed to be the killer would go into hiding. If I could reach him, capture him, I would *make* him tell the truth. As I raced I kept wondering why, standing over the dead body of Dale again, I had felt so little emotion. Even her dead clay should have stirred me, for it had been her image once.

But it hadn't, and Dale had been so very close to me—or had so seemed, there in the house of the dead.

The hound was coming closer.

I stepped out. I prided myself on the fact that I was moving so nearly without sound. It was an accomplishment, there in the black woods.

I saw the killer go into the woods. By the way he looked over his shoulder, and slowed his pace, I know he would stop as soon as he had taken cover.

I, too, began to slow down. I had to, or run directly into him. We were the stalked and the stalker. I was stalking him. He thought he was stalking me, setting and resetting the stage, drawing out my agony to the uttermost.

And then I stopped stockstill, staring in amazement. I had almost run directly into the arms of sure capture. The man I saw, a shadow among other shadows, was an officer! There was no mistaking his uniform, even in the shadows. Only by sheer luck had he not seen me racing into the woods.

How did it happen that he hadn't seen the killer, who must be here somewhere, very close? That added to the depths of the enigma to which I believed I would soon have the solution.

Whence had the killer gone? Had he been the man who had telephoned me from the cellar, or waited down there, knowing I had gone upstairs, on the chance that I might take down the receiver? If so, then he had waited again until I had come back into the cellar, fled from it; then he had gone upstairs, to avoid meeting the officers, and had fled from the house in his turn, into the woods. But if the house was being so closely watched why had not this officer seen him?

I almost walked up to him, to ask the question.

He was smoking a cigarette behind capped hands. Now he dropped it. It described a parabola, to the ground. He stepped forward, stamped it out. I heard him sigh as he settled back to some vigil.

I couldn't see his face, save as a vague white shadow, and that I could see no longer because he had thrown away the cigarette which had made it possible.

**S**ILENTLY as possible I cut away to the right. I eluded him with ease, which proved to me that the killer had been able to do the same. But how? The officer was watching the house. Unless, of course, he hadn't reached this spot until the killer had vanished into the woods. If I could avoid the officer in such a situation, so could the killer. Madmen were cunning.

I got deep into the woods, and behind me the hound was baying again, closing in on me swiftly. I quartered the woods, trying my best to pick up footprints, or any signs whatever which would lead me to the killer.

If I found him I'd hold fast to him, yelling for the police, until they came and I could force an explanation out of him, if I had to thrash him to do it.

But I found nothing, I came to one of the roads which bounded my place, but knew I could never cross it undetected. I could see the forms of men along it, knew that sharp eyes were watching for just such an attempt.

I couldn't therefore escape from my own property, whereon I must surely, sooner or later, be run to earth.

I could hear that blasted dog coming, swiftly. He would, I knew, outrun his handlers. They weren't using him on a leash. That was their one mistake.

The dog would reach me ahead of them. I knew bloodhounds. They weren't savage. They tracked men down, not in anger, but as a sort of game, and when they found their quarry they wagged their tails at him, as though expecting to be petted for their success. How far was the animal ahead of his pursuers?

I took a chance on that.

I waited, some hundred yards or so off the road, for the dog to come up with me, hating myself for what I felt I had to do for my own safety. I loved dogs of all kinds, with a kind of adoration. They were so friendly, so regal and loyal. I wouldn't kill this animal, but...

He gave a joyous yelp as he came through the trees, a streak in the moonlight. I drew back my right hand, to hurl the baseball-sized rock I had

picked up. But he was on me before I could throw it. His voice had stilled. I hated myself for what I next did.

I patted his head. I capped his jaws with my left hand, then struck him between the eyes with the rock. I held his jaws to still his yelp of pain. His legs went up. He fell. I put my hand over his heart. I whispered to him.

"I'm sorry, old fellow. I wouldn't do it for the world, but it's my life at stake, though you couldn't possibly know that."

His heart beat strongly. I had struck well. He would be out awhile, and by the time they could use him again it would be dawn, if, indeed, they could get the dog to follow the trail of a man who had smashed him with a rock—a task which had hurt me to my very soul.

I went on through the woods. When daylight came, I decided to make a break through the woods. I'd be able to see further, would be able, somehow, to elude coppers along the road. It was my only chance.

All I had to do then was bide until they wore themselves out, or until dawn broke over the land. The chance that they would search the tree I selected was one in a million.

I crawled into a tree, hid myself, and waited.

I heard some one shout: "The dog has found him! He's killed the dog!"

"Which way," came an answering shout, "did the animal go?"

There was some sort of answer, and I heard them beating the woods for the dog, and knew that they were close to him. They had been following his route with amazing accuracy.

I was tired and numbed with catastrophe, else I would not have slept. How could I have slept, after all I had gone through? I never expected to sleep again; yet sleep I did.

I snapped awake at sound of voices. I stirred and looked down. The dog was back, but now he was silent, sniffing at the base of the tree. I got the idea at once. He thought he had been punished for barking, and now he made no sound, save the sniffing.

I looked up, and the stars were gone. Day would break in a blaze of glory, any second now. The east was tinged with gold. The sky above was waking into day.

I looked down again.

The dog had stopped sniffing. Eagerly

whining, he was trying to jump as far up the bole of the tree as he could. He had me treed. I heard heavy footfalls as men came through, surrounding the tree. They didn't say anything, but I could hear their harsh breathing.

The dog kept whining.

I didn't move. If anybody came up for me, I'd throttle him, drop him back down. Then, came the voice—a strange voice in which, however, there was a hint of the familiar. The sergeant again, ruthless hunter of men.

"Come on down, Raeme! We're not risking a copper's life by sending anyone into the tree, but if you don't start down in five seconds by my count, there'll be more bullets slicing through those branches than you ever knew there were!"

They had me, no doubt about that.

Well, might as well get it over with. Now the whole story would come out. I'd telephone Dale's sister and break her heart by telling her the whole tragic thing.

Stiffly, I crawled down. I stood erect at the base of the tree. The dog came to me, hesitantly, and I patted his head.

"Sorry, old fellow," I said again.

The dog understood, anyhow, for he licked my hand.

**I** SAW a coil of rope in the hands of one of the officers. Two men, at his nod—he was the sergeant—jumped at me, grabbed me, hammered me to my knees.

Then they bound my wrists, tightly, so that ridges of flesh showed between the lengths of cord.

But they didn't use the coil of rope which the sergeant still carried. It was very strange, the whole thing. I studied the faces of the men as I got back, wearily, to my feet. They were vaguely familiar, but of course they would be. They'd put me through enough at the house last night.

"This is your last morning," said the sergeant grimly. "If you've any prayers, you'd better start saying them!"

His grim pronouncement made my hackles rise. What did he mean, my last morning? The course of the law was slow, long, and execution, even if the murders were proved against me, would be months in the future.

They circled me, began, to march, deeper into the woods, away from the road—stopping at last

under a bigger tree. The sergeant, shaking the rope suggestively, moved forward. He was uncoiling it, shaping a knot....

Horror immeasurable flowed over me when I realized what I was facing.

Who had ever heard of officers, sworn to uphold all the legal covenants, resorting to lynch law? Yet that, plainly, was what my captors intended doing. Why? Why?

"You are not coppers," I gasped.

The sergeant grinned.

"No, Jed Raeme? What makes you think so, Jed Raeme?"

There it was, the voice I had heard over the telephone, The "sergeant" of police was the man who had telephoned me, both before my arrival at the country place, and when I had taken down the receiver in the room of death.

I stared at the others, understanding now, a little, why their faces seemed even more familiar than they would have.

I had seen them all before, and it hadn't been here!

"Who are you?" I asked,

The sergeant grinned.

"You might as well know, Wolf-of-Wall-Street Jed Raeme!" he said. "That man there is Clark Davenport. He bought certain shares which you were dumping. You twisted the market to suit yourself. He lost everything he possessed—two millions of dollars."

I felt as though some one had struck me over the heart with a sledge hammer. My eyes went to the next in line. He bowed. Hatred flowed out of his eyes, seemed to engulf me, in waves.

"Clancy Dugan, at your service, Raeme," he said. "I wouldn't go so far as to get in on a lynching, though, if you hadn't knifed my brother, back there at the house. I felt we had done enough; now I don't believe that we can possibly punish you enough, and so, you will be hanged until almost dead, lowered, revived, hanged again, until I am satisfied."

I said: "Haven't you done enough? My wife—her brother—that confession which I believe would send me to the chair, so that I experienced all the fears of it—though you never intended using it. Haven't you done enough?"

They shook their heads. The others were named. The names meant nothing to me. I played the market, against chance, not against men. If

men happened to be caught in the cogs of the financial wheel, was I to blame? No. If they weren't ready to take a beating when their turn came—as I had always been, I prided myself—then they deserved losing.

The loop dropped over my head.

"How do you expect to get away with it?" I said desperately. I wasn't so much afraid of death as I was that these impostors would escape after they had done me and my family so dreadfully in the eye.

The sergeant, who said his name was MacKinnon, grinned.

"It's simple. Who will ever know that the man was her brother, if he was? We hang you. The neighbors, in time, find you. They find the man and the woman. They know you deserved hanging for the murders; if they believe in the unwritten law, then they'll think you hanged yourself. When the law steps in, what can it do? It finds your body. It asks your neighbors who took part in the lynching. Each neighbor vehemently denies knowing anything about it; but, being human, he will think that all his neighbors were in on it—and he will not voice his suspicion, believing that it was right if his neighbors did it. Suppose two or three get together and swear they had no part in it? Fine. They'll believe that others had. It's perfect, and all because you were a stranger here, see? And who could trace us?"

**I** FOUGHT for time as the hangman's noose was affixed, the loose end of the rope thrown over a limb. "How did you get my wife to come here?"

MacKinnon grinned again, a savage, ghastly grin.

"Same as we got you, Jed Raeme," he said. "It was simple. We telephoned her sister's house, knowing she was headed that way. We told her, simply, that if she were wise she'd check up on you; that you had gone to your country-place with another woman . . ."

"She'd never believe it," I muttered, my heart sinking.

"No? Well, she did believe it, and at once! She came—and you have some idea what happened to her. We saw everything that happened ourselves, except how you killed the 'copper', and we drew it out as far as we could. Merely dying wasn't enough . . ."

"God," I said, "if only I could get my hands on

you ....”

“You’ll never do that,” said MacKinnon. “But maybe, when, you’re weak from repeated hanging, when you can scarcely lift your hands, we’ll loosen them, and let you see what you can do. Your suffering when you find yourself as weak as a kitten will add to our sense of justice done.”

The rope tightened.

Slowly they were lifting me up. My toes barely touched. Spots of black danced in front of my starting eyes. My neck was twisted so that my head was back. Through the top of the trees I could just make out—or maybe it was fancy—a pale star or two. The dawn had broken, and I saw the stars as from the bottom of a well.

I strangled. I twisted, then tried to hold my body still, because the twisting only added to my agony. I felt myself spinning, so that the pale stars spun, too. And then I lost them. Night was settling over Connecticut.

I knew I was sinking into oblivion. Some of the pain was leaving me. Then I snapped awake. My throat was parched. I could scarcely move my tongue. I was leaning against the tree. The rope still reached from my neck to the stout limb. MacKinnon was slapping my face, chuckling.

“Ah,” he said, “there you are! Ready for another lynching in a minute or two.”

I tried to scream, but no words would come forth. I confess, in my agony and terror, that I had forgotten even Dale. I wanted only my life, that I might use it henceforth in tracking down these men, destroying them, one by one.

Another thought came: Dale had been so willing to believe that I could be unfaithful, that she had come to find out—and had died under the knife.

That bare arm, though, which had hurled the knife that had slain the “policeman,” whose hand had hurled it? I didn’t know. That was still a mystery.

But the killer no longer was. The officer I had seen in the trees where I had expected to find the killer, had been the killer, or one of them.

If only, then, I had suspected, he, too, would have been dead. I would have thus taken to hell with me at least one of my wife’s murderers.

“You tied her, abused her,” I said.

“She went crazy when we told her how we intended to punish you, Jed Raeme,” said MacKinnon. “We had to do something. Then, one

of us saw you coming—and did the job. Never mind which man did it; we’re all together in it. All right, fellows, up with him again!”

MacKinnon raised his hand to indicate that I was once more to be hoisted to the stout tree limb. No words can describe my feelings. I lived through a hell of anticipation. If they’d just hang me and let me die.... But I knew they wouldn’t. I’d be lowered again—and yet again....

Here there came a strange sound. MacKinnon’s hand was still lifted in the signal.

The sound was a whirring one, and a sharp thud, as of metal striking wood. MacKinnon tried to lower his arm—and *couldn’t do it!*

He couldn’t, for the simple reason that his coat sleeve was fastened to the tree, led there by the blade of a knife whose blade still quivered with the speed of the knife’s travel. Then came a cold voice.

“Move, any of you, and the next knife does what the last-but-one did!”

The “last-but-one” would be the knife which had slain the copper in the house. The voice was a woman’s voice.

“You’re not going to get away with it,” came the voice again, a voice so strange and terrible—yet with something richly familiar in it—that I held my breath for what might come next. “The officers with me are real ones, giving me the satisfaction of handling this in my own way. Drop your weapons! Drop them, I say, or you’ll all be shot down as ruthlessly as you destroyed the two in the house!”

The lynchers moved. Their weapons dropped.

“You, MacKinnon, untie Raeme!”

**M**ACKINNON, his face a white, writhing mask, stepped forward. His hands trembled as he obeyed. It had been all he could do to withdraw that knife with his left hand—the knife which had fastened him to the tree.

I staggered as I was free. The voice again.

“Take the knife from MacKinnon. Cut the rope into proper lengths, and bind the prisoners, Jed.”

It was the happiest thing I ever did. When it was finished I stopped, looked in the direction of the voice—and *Dale Raeme stepped into view.*

“Dale! Dale!” I said. “Then that woman in the house . . .”

“Eulalia, Jed, silly! My sister. She got the

message meant for me, and came to find out things for herself, wanting to spare me if there were any truth in the story. But, just in case, she took Allan with her, left brother-in-law in full possession of the facts, written down in a sealed envelope, to be given to me only if I insisted. Well, I insisted . . .”

“And the dead man, in the house?”

“Yes, I did that. I would have finished the rest of them, too, not only for killing Lalie and Allan, but for what they tried to do about you. But I remembered, finally, that there was a law—and that I was a civilized woman. Just the same, I don’t regret it for a moment.”

“But how could I mistake Eulalia for you?”

“What brought you here?” she countered. “Lalie happened to be wearing some of my clothing, hastily snatched up. You know we’re often mistaken for one another. In a moonlit room you might well mistake her for me, yourself. Didn’t you?”

I didn’t tell her that I had switched on the light, nor did I give her an inkling of how I had been mistaken, because I had been almost blind with jealousy on arrival, and hearing the “low voice of sin.” I told her though, that I had expected to find her, Dale, and nobody else—and that I was

so stunned with the shock of finding her that I never even noticed the difference.

Maybe, some day, when the shock of her sister’s loss has worn off a bit, she’ll begin asking questions. But by that time I shall have found an explanation that will suit her.

We herded our prisoners out to the road. There were, naturally, no other officers. But Dale could have handled them all, even if they had known there were no others. Most men fear knives in the hands of women who do not hesitate to use them . . .

As for myself, how peaceful is the presence of my beloved who never, this side of Paradise, will I mistrust again. I have paid enough for faith renewed. My faith, I know, is justified beyond all cavil; for how could a woman, save one who deeply loved, have played hare and hounds with those killers, through the early morning hours, any one of which might have been her last, for a man whom she did not almost worship? Egotism? Perhaps, but if so—make the most of it, and envy me as you must in my possessions.

The killers, one and all, went to the chair. And so richly did they deserve it, we have never even been troubled by them in our dreams.