

The Dyke Grange Mystery By Sax Rohmer

Of Course You Are Acquainted With Paul Harley, the Great Detective; He Grapples With An Egyptian Mystery.

"YOUR complaint that there is a certain monotony about Norfolk's scenery," said Paul Harley, "is not justified by the facts."

At a spot selected by my friend we had anchored our boat, the anchors consisting of blocks of stone lowered over bow and stern.

"What do you mean?" I said sleepily. "Look!" Harley pointed down stream.

A man wearing a turban, that little red felt cap commonly called a fez in this country, was standing on the river bank a hundred yards below us.

He seemed to be looking in our direction.

"Salamat!" cried Harley gently. The brown face of the stranger lighted up at sound of the familiar tongue.

"Esh-halak, Effendim!" he replied. Harley scrambled forward and jumped ashore, entering into an animated conversation with the oriental in what was evidently the latter's native language.

I saw the man produce from his pocket a dangerous-looking dagger, its hilt thickly encrusted with gems, whether real or otherwise I could not determine.

Harley examined the thing critically, shook his head, and returned it to the man, speaking to him rapidly in Arabic. Finally a sum of money changed hands, and the oriental, with many expressions and gestures of profound gratitude, departed, whilst my friend rejoined me in the boat.

"What is he?" I asked. "An Arab?" "Possibly has Arab blood," returned Harley, "but he comes from Mithraia, in Egypt, that romantic village in the palm groves, which is all that remains of royal Memphis."

"What on earth is he doing wandering about Norfolk?" "He is some kind of performer; a member of a combination which came to grief in Cromer recently."

"Did he want to sell you that wonderful looking dagger?" "He did. He uses it in his performance apparently, and it's the only thing of value which he has left." He stared at me queerly.

"Is it genuine, then? Are the jewels real?" "Absolutely real, Knox. It's old Damascus work—apart from which I should say there are a hundred pounds' worth of gems in the hilt." He paused, fumbling for his tobacco pouch.

Dusk was not far off, and our beer jar had long ago run dry. The day had been an exceedingly hot one, and now the charms of the "Cardinal's Hat" called me urgently. But another encounter was to come; for, as we turned a bend, where a row of pollard willows broke the reedy flatness, there stood a short, thickest man in riding kit, staring intently toward us.

"Sir Joseph Peek," murmured Harley. "As pretty a scoundrel as anything outside Moscow. But I suppose we must be civil."

"Yes," murmured Harley, reading my glance aright. "It's very odd. First an Egyptian juggler and then an Egyptian cotton grower. Complain no more, Knox."

"Hullo!" called Sir Joseph from the bank as I pulled slowly by. "What luck today, gentlemen?"

"Fair," returned Harley, holding up the roach which he had last captured. "Sixteen inches of him. Did you ever see a bigger?"

"No," returned the other, a sardonic smile showing momentarily upon his dark, florid face. "But I don't like roach."

"Sorry," drawled Harley, dropping the fish back into the basket. "In that event I will keep it myself."

I pulled on in silence to the little landing stage of the "Cardinal's Hat," where we disembarked and walked up the gravel path to the inn.

"I cannot understand what has become of Wessex," said Harley.

Detective Inspector Wessex of New Scotland Yard, an old friend of Harley's, had been investigating a sordid but mysterious tragedy in Great Yarmouth. It was one of those beach murders which sometimes enliven the dullness of a summer season, and Wessex had traced the crime to a member of a highly respectable and religious family, a middle-aged man whose Sunday school activities had instantly aroused the suspicion of the trained investigator.

Wessex had conducted the inquiry very ably, and he was returning to London in the morning, but, knowing that Paul Harley was sojourning at the "Cardinal's Hat," he had arranged to dine and spend the night there with us and to outline to the celebrated private investigator the details of the case.

Now, as we sat there in the porch, drinking in the freshness of the evening breeze, the hum of a car upon the winding road reached our ears.

"Here comes Wessex," said Harley. "I wonder what has detained him. He is too late for dinner, but no doubt there is cold meat available, and the ale is excellent."

We stood up, crossed the little patch of lawn, and walked down to the gate. Inspector Wessex stepped out of the car.

"Mr. Harley!" he cried. "Thank heaven you are here. I have walked straight out of the great Yarmouth case into one that has simply stunned me."

"What do you mean?" asked Harley. "What has happened?"

"Murder has happened!" "What! Another beach crime?"

"Nothing of the kind. Someone has been murdered at Dyke Grange, not a mile from here."

"But when?" "Tonight—less than an hour ago."



Peggy Gatten.

"What?" cried Harley. "How in heaven's name did you come to hear of it?"

"Simple enough," explained Wessex. "The Norfolk police knew I was here, and when the application came through to Yarmouth, the superintendent knowing where I was bound for, phoned to have me intercepted. So, instead of coming to the 'Cardinal's Hat' I went to Dyke Grange, and I only left there ten minutes ago."

"Do you want me to look into the matter?" asked Harley.

"I beg of you to do so, Mr. Harley. I don't know what to make of it."

"Come up to my room for a moment, and then we will accompany you."

Wessex agreed, and presently the three of us were seated in the little low-ceilinged room, the lattice windows wide open, so that from where we sat we could see the headlights of the car in the lane.

"It's this way," said Wessex, leaning his elbows upon the table and staring across at us. "Dyke Grange is an old Jacobean place, at one time surrounded by a moat. The moat is dry now, however. The property is supposed to be to let, and is actually in the hands of a Norwich estate agent. But from what I can gather the owner places impossible obstacles in the way of prospective lessees."

"Who is the owner?" "Sir Joseph Peek."

"What?" cried Harley. "And you don't think he really wants to let Dyke Grange? Why not?"

"I fancy Sir Joseph used these rooms at odd times."

"For?" prompted Harley.

"Well, he slept there when he was too drunk to go home, and also arranged interviews there which he did not want to take place at the hall, you understand?"

"I follow you. The man has an unpleasant reputation."

"He had," corrected Wessex.

"What?" "I say he had. He is lying in Dyke Grange, stabbed to the heart!"

Harley sprang to his feet excitedly, and I, scarcely knowing if I had heard aright, clutched the edge of the table, watching the speaker.

"Old Forder, the caretaker," Wessex continued, "came rushing down to the village constable at Dykemans at about half-past eight—that is to say, about the time that I was due here. In going round to look up he had found the dead man. As a result I was held up just as I came through Dykeham village."

"Good God!" muttered Harley. "Good God! And we were speaking to him only this evening. Go on, Wessex, go on."

"Well," continued the detective, "what do you say to coming and seeing for yourself? I have had everything left absolutely as I found it, and the local man is on duty there."

"You are right," said Harley shortly. "Let us start at once. Wessex, it's almost incredible!"

We descended the stairs just as Peggy Gatten, the landlord's daughter, crossed the passage below. She started and turned her head aside as if to avoid us, but:

"Good evening, Peggy," said Harley genially.

"Good evening, Mr. Harley," she returned, but hurried on without further speech.

I derived the impression that she had been crying, for her fine dark eyes looked unnaturally bright. She was a handsome brunette, her figure too full for classic beauty, indeed of an orientally voluptuous mold, so that I had more than once suspected a gypsy strain in Peggy, possibly inherited from her mother. She was no stranger to the arts of the toilette, but practiced them with so heavy a hand as to mar rather than to enhance her rustic good looks.

Dave Gatten, her father, came or a stock which had bred fennemen in the old days, a poaching, lawless lot, and I wondered if even his present prosperity had entirely quelled the family spirit within him; for he was an independent fellow, and at times there was a wild look in his eyes which, as Harley had laughingly remarked, lent him a remarkable resemblance to a Stevensonian pirate. His treatment of his daughter was sometimes harsh to the point of brutality; more than once I had overheard him taking her to task respecting her mode of dress. But tonight we had little leisure to consider the domestic life of the "Cardinal's Hat."

As we hurried out to the car which waited a mental picture arose before me of Sir Joseph Peek lying in his blood. I seemed to hear his rather coarse voice crying: "Cheerio, then. At seven-thirty tomorrow night."

As the car moved off:

"What was the weapon used?" asked Harley.

"Well," replied Wessex, "that's the point about which I am so hopelessly puzzled."

"Why?"

"He was stabbed to the heart—so much is evident. And in the next room—not the room in which he was killed—I found a jeweled dagger on the floor."

"A jeweled dagger!" I exclaimed in a hushed voice.

"Yes, a wonderful looking Moorish thing."

"Good God!" whispered Harley. "Do you hear that, Knox?"

"I do."

"But," continued Harley, "where is the mystery—if you say you found a dagger lying on the floor?"

"Here's the mystery," returned Wessex. "There is absolutely no trace of blood upon the blade!"

The car pulled up in a narrow lane beside a low stone wall in which a gate was set.

The path which we were following was a mere grass track, at one point passing through a clump of trees; then, as we came out from their shadows, Dyke Grange lay before us.

"This was the way I came tonight," explained Wessex, as we crossed a narrow piece of neglected lawn and approached a curious Gothic window, tall, narrow and pointed at the top.

The room within was dimly lighted by the moon, and the churchlike quality of the illumination was enhanced by the presence of stained glass in a smaller Gothic window upon its farther side. The floor level was three feet beneath us where we stood, and I could see that there were oaken steps leading down from the

window. As the three of us stood looking in:

"This," said Wessex in a rather husky voice, "was Sir Joseph's private entrance, and the furnished rooms are immediately above."

Neither Harley nor I answered him, for we were both staring at something which lay upon the polished oaken floor some ten or twelve feet from where we stood. It was a jeweled dagger, its blade gleaming coldly in the moonlight and the stones of the hilt glittering like eyes of venomous serpents.

I looked silently at Harley, and he read my glance, nodding his head slowly.

"The same, Knox," he said, "beyond a shadow of doubt! All Mahmoud's knife!"

He turned to Wessex. "Where are the man Forder and his wife?" he asked.

"They are in their own quarters at the other end of the house. Relations of the dead man, and others, are there as well; and a local officer is on duty in the next room—the room through that doorway yonder. But"—he spoke eagerly—"do I understand that you have seen this dagger before?"

"I have, Wessex! But be patient. Let us go in. This was the way you approached tonight?"

"Yes," replied the inspector shortly, piqued, I thought, by Harley's reticence.

He pushed the leaves of the window and they opened noiselessly.

We walked down the steps on to the polished floor. There was a curious musty smell in the room, not unlike that of a cheap cigar. Harley dropped on one knee, and, bending, stared intently at the dagger.

"Not a stain," he muttered. "Not a stain. It fell a yard from where it lies. The notch is just discernible. It hasn't been touched, Wessex?"

"No; it lies exactly where I found it."

The sound of an interrogatory cough reached us from the room beyond, and:

"It's all right, constable," cried Wessex. "We're coming in."

The constable was standing over by the window, watching the doorway through which we had come, and some distance from him, beside a second closed door, lay the huddled figure of a man wearing a riding kit. He lay half upon his face, one clenched fist shot straightly out before him, the other arm doubled under him naturally. A great quantity of blood had stained the oak beneath his body.

We stood for a moment silent, then:

"Anything to report?" asked Wessex.

"No, sir," replied the constable, evidently awed by the intrusion of a great tragedy into his humdrum routine.

"Did you move him?" asked Harley, turning to Wessex.

"Only enough to examine his wound," was the reply.

"Who sent for the doctor?"

"The man Forder, after he had communicated with the police."

"And he arrived while you were here?"

"He had arrived a few minutes before."

"I see. Was he smoking?"

"Smoking? No. Why do you ask?"

"Sniff, Wessex, sniff!" He turned suddenly to the constable. "You have not been smoking, officer?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Sure?"

"Quite, sir."

Harley stooped and gingerly turned the body on its back.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed at sight of the blood-stained breast. "A strong blow, Wessex."

Harley made a brief examination of the hands, clothing and hair of the dead man and stared critically at the soles of his boots. Then:

"Here's a burned match on the floor," he said abruptly. "Upstairs."

Opening the door, we found ourselves at the foot of a carpeted stair and, mounting this, we entered an elegantly furnished and well-lighted room in which the pictures, statuettes and decorations spoke eloquently of the tastes of its departed owner. There was a vague smell of tobacco in the stale air of the room, and Harley, staring about him, said slowly:

"What sort of cigarettes were in Sir Joseph's case?"

"Algerian," replied Wessex. "Similar to French Caporals."

Harley turned to me.

"That is the smell in the room below," he said.

One of the drawers of a large writing desk was open. In an absent fashion Harley began to examine the contents. He came upon a number of photographs. Turning his head, he glanced over his shoulder at me quizzically.

"There are two points to be decided," he said.

"What are they?" I asked eagerly.

"First, where Sir Joseph dropped the cigarette which he lighted and partly smoked in the room below; and, second, which, if any, of these fair but frail ladies"—he tossed the bunch of photographs upon the desk—"was here tonight."

"Good God!" said Wessex. "What makes you think a woman was here?"

From a little coffee table standing beside a deep settee Harley took up a china ash tray and held it out toward Wessex. It contained the stumps of three tiny gold-tipped cigarettes.

"I don't follow you," Wessex declared, bluntly.

Between finger and thumb Harley took up one of the gold-tipped stumps and held it directly under a shaded lamp.

"Examine it closely," he invited.

"Do you see the faint red stains upon the gold?" asked Harley. "Lip salve, Wessex; lip salve!"

"Well," said Inspector Wessex, walking into our sitting room at the "Cardinal's Hat" on the following morning, "we've got the Arab; he was arrested an hour ago at Norwich."

"Good!"

"He will have to be more fully examined through an interpreter," replied Wessex.

"Did he explain how he had come to lose the jeweled dagger?"

"Yes," Wessex frowned thoughtfully. "He declared that he had sold it to Sir Joseph for five pounds."

"Ah!" Harley looked up suddenly. "When and where did the sale take place?"

"Apparently a few minutes after his interview with you on the river bank—or so he declares."

"Why?" asked Harley. "My two pounds and Sir Joseph's five, together with the few shillings already in Alf's possession, would account for the sum found upon him."

"Listen, Wessex: the Algerian cigarette was lighted in the room where the dagger was found. Evidence: the burned match and the smell. He smoked there for a few moments and then walked to the gate. He was almost certainly accompanied by the woman who had been to visit him. After she had gone the murderer came! Have you traced the original of any of the photographs?"

Inspector Wessex shook his head.

"But you are convinced that there was a woman with Sir Joseph last night?"

"I am."

"You think she came back and murdered him?"

"Oh, no, I don't. No woman's hand struck that dreadful blow."

Wessex sighed wearily.

"In other words, Mr. Harley," he said, "your theory leads us nowhere. Mine, shabby in places, at least points to a possible culprit."

We walked downstairs together and out into the porch. The "Cardinal's Hat" seemed to be deserted this morning; no one was about in any of the rooms. We lingered there for a while, in thoughtful silence, staring at the spectacle of great brown sails apparently jutting up from the middle of meadows, when something dropped lightly upon my hat brim and then fell at my feet. I looked down, and:

"Harley!" I whispered, glancing up at an open window over the porch. "Harley, look!"

It was the gold tip of a tiny Egyptian cigarette!

"Ah!" He snatched it from my hand and peered at it closely. Then: "Lip salve!" he muttered. "Lip salve!"

There were faint red stains upon the gold!

Harley grasped Wessex and myself each by an arm and drew us back into the inn. Stepping into the little bar parlor, he rang the bell. Presently Henry the ancient and melancholy waiter, appeared, and:

"Could I speak to Miss Peggy for a moment?" asked Harley.

"I'm afraid not, sir," was the reply. "She's been lying down all morning, suffering from a very bad headache."

"Is that so? The news of the tragedy in the neighborhood has upset her, doubtless?"

"It has upset us all, sir."

"There is something I want to ask Miss Gatten," said Harley after a moment's hesitation. "I should like you to take a little note to her. I will write it now, if you will bring me paper and envelope."

Five minutes later Peggy Gatten came into the sitting room where Harley, Wessex and I awaited her.

"Ah, Peggy," said Harley genially, "sit down, won't you? I am sorry to worry you when you are obviously far from well, but I must ask you to tell me where you got those little gold-tipped Egyptian cigarettes which you smoke."

Peggy leaped to her feet, wide eyed, clutching at the back of a chair.

"All right," said Harley gravely. "You need not answer. I know now. Tell me what happened at your interview with Sir Joseph Peek last night."

Unheard by us, so intent were we upon this strange scene, Dave Gatten, the landlord, had approached the door.

"I'll tell you!" he shouted. "I'll tell you!"

"You!" came in a whisper from Peggy. "You!"

"Yes! Who else?" shouted the man, his eyes lighting up madly. "I'll do no good by trying to conceal what's bound to come out at the trial. I might as well tell the truth now and take my chance."

Harley was standing by the window, his face quite expressionless, but I saw the light of a sudden understanding dawn upon the countenance of Inspector Wessex. Rising from the chair in which he was seated, the inspector came forward, and:

"Dave Gatten," he said. "I arrest you for the murder of Sir Joseph Peek at Dyke Grange. Anything you say will be used as evidence against you."

"Let it be!" cried the man truculently. "Let it be!"

He folded his arms, glaring around from face to face.

"I've watched and I've wondered," he continued, addressing himself to the pale-faced girl who now crouched back against the wall of the room staring at him glassily. "Fine dresses and silk stockings, aye, and jewels, too! They never came out of your savings, Peggy. I was easy, but it was going too far. And last night I followed you. You talked so loud up in that room above that I heard almost every word, and I can answer the question you have just asked me, sir!"

"He told her he was through with it all, that it must finish before things were discovered. Then"—Gatten turned to Harley—"I saw the black-faced dog light a cigarette in the room below. I saw him come out, smoking it, and walk down to the gate with my girl. I lay flat behind a bush waiting for him to come back. When he did and walked in through the open window, I followed him! He heard my foot on the steps and turned."

"I don't know what he read in my face! I don't know what I had in my heart. But there's something in my blood, as there was in my father's blood before me, that just drives me mad at times."

"He knew he was outmatched, but he wrenched one arm free and got it into his pocket. I saw the glitter of a long blade, and I threw him off and fell back a step. He came for me, as mad now as I was, and then—" Gatten paused. "Well, then I remembered the big clasp knife which I always carry—always have carried. I can prove it. And the next thing I knew I had it in my hand with the blade open."

"He struck at me. I caught his wrist, twisted it and his dagger fell. He turned and ran, and I followed him. Half way across the inside room I caught him and threw one arm around his neck. He twisted about, squealing like a hare, and reached on to my throat. Then I struck at him with all my strength."

"I dropped the clasp knife, still open, into my pocket and stood listening for a moment, looking down at him where he lay at my feet. The red madness was gone for the moment, and I could think coolly. I had heard you"—he turned his glaring eyes upon Peggy. "You had said over and over again: 'Open that drawer; I want my letters.'"

"I found the drawer and I opened it, and I found your letters and some photographs. I forgot the dagger, or I might have brought that, too. But what I want to say is this—he attacked me, the black-hearted mongrel. And, except for that last blow, all I did was to defend myself."

Uttering a low moan, Peggy sank down, insensible, to the floor. Her father did not even glance aside.

"I've burned what I brought away," he concluded, "and I have cleaned my clasp knife. But the lining of my coat pocket is still stained with blood. I've spoken because I'd rather face the music now in my own time and in my own way than skulk like a rat in a hole waiting to be dragged out. It was sure to come sooner or later."

"It had to come," said Harley gravely. Inspector Wessex was raising the unconscious girl, and I saw my friend's glance fixed upon her face, its pallor throwing into ghastly prominence the unnatural scarlet of her painted lips.

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Drugging of Dixie Dixon.

(Continued From First Page.)

having to go to France with the American forces.

When he returned they had a second honeymoon and for a while she seemed nappy. But the old urge was soon lashing her onward. She and her husband were finally separated. She came to New York, lived expensively on money that he sent her, went on the stage, passed with kaleidoscopic rapidity through a hundred hectic experiences and finally, when the rest of life had degenerated into hopeless dullness—she took to drugs and the unreal world that they led her to. With it was not degeneracy. Her moral fiber was not any weaker. She plunged into this newest vice as one who is hot and perspiring confined will plunge into cold water.

A similar story might be told of Dorothy Wardell. She came from Kearsarge, a small town in New Hampshire. Her father, E. G. Wardell, owns the Kearsarge Mountain Inn, a well-known resort. Tales of big cities were poured into this little girl's ears. Her life had been one of repression. One day she couldn't stand it any longer. She fled to the cities. Not only did she involve herself, but her wild tales brought her half-sister, Dolly Baker, to live with her.

The latter is now living in Montreal as Mrs. Cassie Burke. Dr. Simon is trying to make Mrs. Burke rejoice her parents.