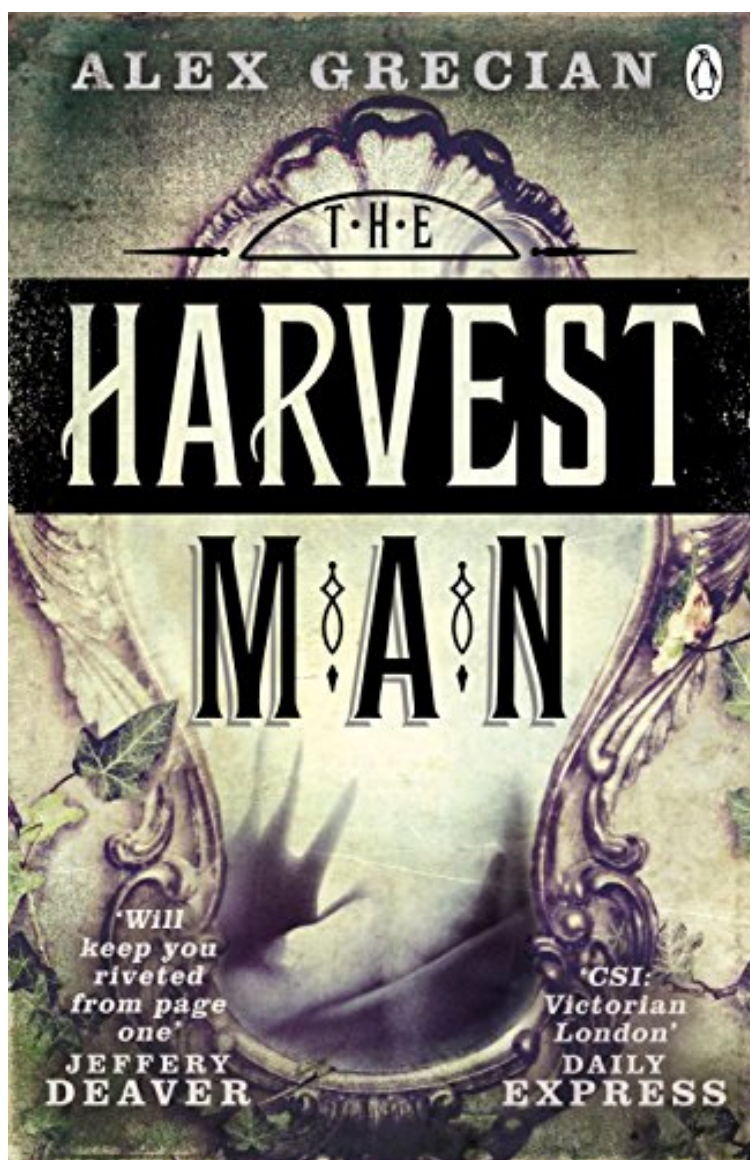


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The Harvest Man: Scotland Yard Murder Squad Book 4



Par Alex Grecian

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurMurder Squad 4: Alongside Jack the Ripper there is another brutal serial killer roaming the streets of Victorian London.Spring 1890. The spectre of Jack the Ripper still haunts Inspector Walter Day, his injured leg a daily reminder of his violent brush with London's most feared killer. He alone is convinced that the Ripper remains at large. But, worse is to come for Scotland Yard's Murder Squad. A new killer is terrorizing the citizens of London. They call him the Harvest Man; he hides away in the attics of the unsuspecting, emerging at night to terrorize his victims. This macabre new threat requires Inspector

Day to confront his demons, but he soon discovers that the Ripper himself continues to toy with Scotland Yard's finest. The game has only just begun . . .Praise for Alex Grecian's Scotland Yard Murder Squad Series:'Will keep you riveted from page one' Jeffery Deaver'CSI: Victorian London' Daily Express'Throw in deranged prostitutes, poisonings and throat slittings galore, amidst lashings of London fog. Gory, lurid and tons of guilty fun' Guardian'Lusciously rich' Jeffery Deaver 'Shiver-inducingly creepy. A racy read' Daily Express

ExtraitNightMother and Father were sharing a bed. The Harvest Man hesitated in the open bedroom door, staring down at his bare feet, his face flushing scarlet beneath the plague mask. Mother and Father had always slept in separate rooms. He was certain of it. But perhaps their habits had changed over time. That made perfect sense. If they had remained the same, he felt sure he would have found them long ago.Mother stirred in her sleep and the Harvest Man finally moved. He wasn't ready for her to wake up. He uncorked a bottle of ether and placed a folded face cloth over the rim, tipped the bottle up and held it until cold liquid soaked through to his fingers. He set the open bottle on the floor next to the doorjamb, where he knew the liquid would silently turn to gas.Everything always changing. Things disappearing without a trace.He moved forward in slow motion, keeping his head and shoulders straight up and down, only bending at the knees. He made no sound. Mother stirred again, rolled onto her back, and the Harvest Man moved around the foot of the bed to her side. He preferred to deal with Father first. Father was bigger and stronger and, if he woke early, he always caused trouble. But Father was snoring and Mother was moving, on the verge of waking. Better to tend to her.He knelt by the bed and gazed at Mother's sleeping face. The room was dark, but the window was open and the moon shone bright. He could see well enough even through his thick lenses. Mother was pretty. He thought she had always been pretty, but she didn't look like he remembered. It took him a moment to categorize the differences. Fortunately, he had a very good memory for faces. Mother's nose was slightly larger now, and was turned up at the tip. Her eyes were spaced closer together and her lips were thinner. She had lost a little weight, and her forehead was wider, her hair a different color, her neck longer, her cheekbones more prominent. He shook his head and the heavy beak at the front of his mask moved back and forth. Why did they always make so much work for him? They shouldn't change so very much. It always made him cross.Mother opened her eyes and they were not the same color as he remembered. He hesitated, confused, but when she opened her mouth he clapped the ether-soaked cloth over it, held it tight to her face. She struggled for a moment, then relaxed and her arm fell limp over the side of the bed. He picked up her hand and placed it on her chest.Around on the other side of the bed, Father shifted his position and so the Harvest Man leaned far across Mother's limp body, stretched out his arm, the moist cloth pinched between the ends of his two longest fingers, and shared the ether fumes with Father. When both parents were insensible, he left that room and explored the house. He had been in a hurry earlier and had bolted for the attic without taking his customary tour.There were two children, both boys, sleeping in a small bed tucked under the staircase. He pushed the plague mask up to the top of his head so he could see them better, enjoying the feel of fresh air on his cheeks and chin. He rubbed his ear. Sometimes it still itched where the top of it had been pulled away. The mask's goggles rested against the back of his head and the long pointed beak stood straight up like a baby bird straining for food. The Harvest Man stood and watched the children's chests move gently up and down. He gazed without affection at the nearest boy's chapped lips, which were parted, the upper lip deeply grooved and dark pink. The boy's eyelids fluttered. The Harvest Man placed his drying face cloth between the children, trusting that the remaining essence of ether would keep them from waking.He climbed up the stairs above the sleeping boys and retrieved his boots and knife and a coiled length of stout rope from the attic. He sat on the top step and pulled the boots on. He tugged the plague mask back down into place and adjusted it so that it wouldn't slip from his face while he worked.He decided to ignore the boys. He didn't know them. They might be his brothers, but he couldn't remember their faces and so it would do no good to remove their masks. He would ask Mother and Father about the other children when they woke later. Then they could determine together what was to be done. As a family.But first things first. Before they could be a family again, he would have to remove Mother and Father's masks to reveal their true faces. He smiled, excited, and stood, picked up the curved knife and the rope and trotted down the stairs, no longer concerned about making noise. He couldn't wait to see his parents' faces again.How happy they would be that he had finally found them.

Day OneChapter 1In the late spring of 1890,

Number 184 Regents Park Road was a flurry of activity. Upon receiving news of the arrival of twin grandchildren, Mr and Mrs Leland Carlyle ordered their luggage to be packed for an immediate holiday in London and took up residence across the park from their daughters home in Primrose Hill. Mrs Carlyle visited Claire Day early each morning and stayed on past tea most evenings. She found the household in a

state of disarray (or, as she put it to her son-in-law, a state of near vacancy) and determined that her first order of business was to hire a staff. Fiona Kingsley, the young lady who had stayed at Number 184 to look after Claire during the pregnancy, was sent back to her fathers home. Within three days, a new governess had been acquired, along with a cook, a scullery maid and a head of housekeeping by the name of Miss Harris. Mrs Carlyle also arranged for three boys from the local reformatory to help clean the house once a week between seven-thirty and nine in the morning. Overnight the household became too large to be sustained on the salary of a policeman and Detective Inspector Walter Day began to feel vaguely anxious. The two babies woke at odd hours and Day, who was a light sleeper, rose with them and tried to stay out of the way as the governess tended to them. He did not remember the governesss name, nor did he know the names of the cook and scullery maid. Nobody had bothered to introduce him to Claires staff and he felt certain he was going to have to let them all go once his in-laws departed. He made no effort to get to know them. Violence had recently been visited upon the Day home in the form of a double murder, and reasonable precautions had been taken against future ugliness of the sort. A retired inspector by the name of McKraken had volunteered to stand guard on the house. He kept to himself, but his presence added to the general quality of congestion at Number 184. Some sensation had returned to Days right leg and he got around with a degree of confidence using a cane. The commissioner of police, Sir Edward Bradford, had assigned Day a number of tasks designed to supplement the efforts of the rest of the Murder Squad and, clearly, to keep him sitting at a desk for the bulk of his shifts. Day had petitioned Sir Edward for a meeting on several occasions, hoping to convince the commissioner to give him more challenging work, but he had been ignored. Everyone at the Yard was bustling about, working to catch a murderer known only as the Harvest Man, and boxing up all nonessential items for transport to the new headquarters that were being built for them had, in fact, been nearly finished on the Victorian embankment. Nobody was sitting still except for Day, change was everywhere. The flow of life, he felt, had plucked him off his feet and deposited him on some deserted beach. Feeling useless both at home and at the Yard, Day began to spend much of his time at the Chalk Farm Tavern above the canal. That is where Nevil Hammersmith found him at teatime on the first Tuesday of May. Day was at a table in the back, talking with a trio of young solicitors. He had lost track of the amount of ale theyd had and he doubted the other men would make it back to their office in Camden Town. When he saw Hammersmith at the tavern door, he stood and moved stiffly around the table. Hammersmith saw him and made his way across the room, through a maze of mismatched tables and chairs. They greeted each other warmly and Day introduced him to Haun, Moore and Peck, the solicitors. After shaking hands all round, those three men politely gathered their glasses and retired to the counter near the front of the pub, surrendering the table to the inspector and his friend. Im headed to Bridewell right now, Hammersmith said. I assume youve heard the news? Im sure I havent. Nobody tells me anything anymore. Hammersmith blinked and pulled out a chair. You look rough, he said. Do I? And how have you been, Nevil? Breathing well enough? Ive been careful, Hammersmith said. He had been promoted from constable to sergeant after helping Day catch a child murderer, but then almost immediately dismissed from the Yard. In the course of his duties he had been poisoned on two occasions, bludgeoned, nearly frozen to death, and stabbed in the chest with a pair of scissors. It had all been too much for the commissioner of police to bear. I dont move as quickly as I once did. Nor do I, Day said. Hows the leg? Better than it was. Will you have a pint? Tea for me. Good. And then you must tell me your news. Day called over the proprietor and ordered a pot of Imperial and brown bread. The man nodded and hurried away. Hammersmith watched him go, then leaned forward across the table. Never mind the news. That can wait. I want to know, are you with me? With you? Now Im sufficiently mobile, Hammersmith said. Im going to find him. He didnt have to explain. Day knew who he was talking about and he unconsciously rubbed his leg. The scars there were ugly and they ached, and he had been told he would never walk properly again. The most dangerous man in London had held Day captive in a devils workshop deep beneath the city, had tortured and taunted him. Day had barely escaped with his life. Hammersmith had come even closer to an early death. His chest was a battleground of dried black stitchwork. Both men knew that Jack the Ripper was still at large, still roamed the streets, and had not finished his deadly work. Come with me now, Hammersmith said. Together we can catch him. He leaned back as the taverns proprietor reappeared with a wooden tray. The jittery little man set a teapot in the center of the table and ringed it with two cups and saucers, a plate of brown and white bread, lemons, a jug of milk, and tiny pots filled with sugar, jam, and thick white butter. Thank you, Day said. And a shot of whiskey? The man nodded and took the now empty tray back to his counter, out of earshot. Day and Hammersmith busied themselves with the tea for a moment. Day poured in a spot of milk and swirled the dark tea in after it. He

spooned in sugar and stirred slowly back and forth, watching the murky liquid fold over on itself, ripple outward and lap gently against the side of the cup. He set the spoon down and sipped, his eyes averted from Hammersmiths face. When he lowered the cup at last, he wiped his lips and sighed. Its my leg, Day said. Id be useless to you. Hardly useless. Youre the brains of our little outfit, you know. We can catch him, you and I. You figure his game and Ill ferret him out. Sir Edwards been giving me busy work. Yet here you are. I cant help you. You know Ill do it without you. But Id rather have you with me. I have two babies,

Nevil. Hammersmith said nothing. And if I do go with you? If he catches me again Day shivered, remembering long hours underground, a scalpel, a laughing madman. If he kills me this time, Claire and the babies will have nothing. Theyll be put out in the street. Do you really believe that? Day filled his cup again and sipped. Claires parents would jump at the chance to have her back home with them. Her father no doubt already had a proper match in mind for her. Shed be remarried within a year and the twins would be raised by some other man. They would take that strangers name and call him father. Day set his cup down and opened his mouth to respond, but there were no words. The pubs proprietor arrived just in time with the whiskey. Day took the shot, swallowed it and handed back the empty glass. Another, would you? Right away.

The proprietor walked back across the room, wiping the glass with a dirty cloth. Day looked again at Hammersmith who held up a hand and nodded. I apologize, Hammersmith said. You have a family. Of course you have a family. And so many other considerations I do not. My God, the Ripper even knows where you live. You must be constantly on edge. Its only Im frustrated. I know you are. I am too. Yes, youre the only one who knows my frustration. Thats why Its not just fear, Nevil. I know. Its really not. Theyre hunting this other monster now. The Harvest Man. Yes. He killed another family last week. The things he did Youll catch him. And I want to help you. But our fellow, Jack, hes all but disappeared. Doesnt that frighten you? Whats he up to, do you think? Hes killing them. Somehow. He must be. Or planning to at any rate. Jack the Ripper was embroiled in a personal war with a secret society of vigilantes who called

themselves Karstphanomen. The notion that the Karstphanomen might have won, that Jack might be dead or captured, did not cross Day or Hammersmiths minds. Jack was far too dangerous to go quietly. He hates them, Day said. And I honestly cant muster much sympathy for them. Its the Karstphanomens fault hes at large right now. Their own damn fault hes killing them off. Hell make a mistake and Ill be on him before he can hide again. I know you will. At least, youll catch him if he really does make a mistake, but I dont share your faith that he will. Hammersmith opened his mouth to respond, but Day held a hand up, quieting him, as the proprietor appeared once again with a shot glass on his tray. Day took the drink and closed his eyes, held the whiskey in his mouth as it warmed, then finally swallowed it. He opened his eyes again and took a deep breath. I must do my job. And only my job. Sir Edward wont acknowledge that Jacks even still alive. I cant make him see the truth and I cant risk my job. Then Im on my own. Get one of the others. Constable Bentley might help. Im not a policeman anymore, remember? Nobodys going to help me. Not officially. Then give it up. For your own sake. Its too much for you. Hell leave you alone if you let him be, but if you dont hell get to you before you can find him. I know him. Hes almost What? Never mind. No, what were you going to say? I dont think he is a man. I think hes something else. A woman? Hes not a woman. I heard his voice. No, Day

sighed. Thats not what I meant. Forget I said anything. Just let it be. For Gods sake, Nevil, you had your chest split open. Youre lucky to be alive. Heal yourself and, when youre better, petition Sir Edward for your old job back. Hes fond of you. Hell consider it. Ill put in a word for you, you know I will. So will some of the others. Kett, Blacker, maybe even Tiffany. What you said. Im lucky to be alive. Theres a reason I am. I think its to catch that monster. Someone has to. He cant be left to roam. If Im alive, then I must make myself matter. Hammersmith pushed his chair back and stood, fished sixpence from his pocket and tossed it on the table. For the tea, he said. He walked away without another word, out the door and into the sudden blinding sunlight. Disappointment shimmered like heat from his shoulders. The door closed behind him and the tavern was once more plunged into brown silence. Day motioned for another shot of whiskey, stared glumly at Hammersmiths untouched cup of tea and waited for the man to bring his drink. It occurred to him too late that Hammersmith had come to deliver news. He wondered what it might have been. Revue de presse Will keep you riveted from page one (Jeffery Deaver) CSI: Victorian London (Daily Express) Throw in deranged prostitutes, poisonings and throat slittings galore, amidst lashings of London fog. Gory, lurid and tons of guilty fun (Guardian) Lusciously rich (Jeffery Deaver) Shiver-inducingly creepy. A racy read (Daily Express)