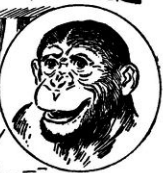
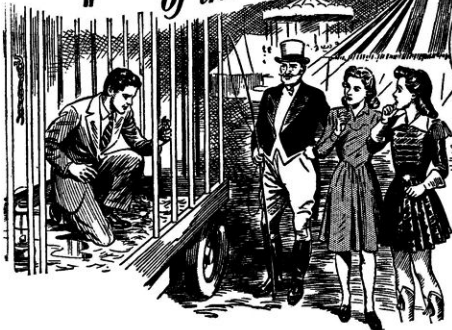


The MYSTERY of the CIRCUS APE



Those popular detectives, Noel Raymond and June Gaynor, are featured in this exciting story

By
**PETER
LANGLEY**

CHAPTER I

AN ASTOUNDING DISCOVERY

LOOK, nunky—over there! A circus!" cried June Gaynor.

Noel Raymond, the famous detective, smiled at his attractive young partner as he slowed his car in the country lane. Distantly, beyond the trees, rose the billowing canvas of a giant marquee, hemmed in by a dozen smaller tents and caravans. The glow of acetylene flares lit up the gathering dusk.

"Umph," commented Noel, "judging by the lack of crowds and excitement, it doesn't appear to be open to the public yet. A pity," he added, his eyes twinkling, "it would have made a good wind-up for your holiday, June—before getting back to solving mysteries!"

June laughed.

"Thought-reader!" she countered. "But I'm keen to get back to work, nunky. It's ages since a really exciting case came our way—"

She broke off with a gasp, and Noel swerved his car suddenly as a dishevelled

figure burst from the trees into the glare of the headlights.

A lanky youth in hiking shorts, carrying a pack on his back and with horn-rimmed spectacles askew, staggered towards the car.

"L-look out!" he panted. "It's coming this way! A great, hulking beast, as big as a man—"

"Here—steady on!" exclaimed Noel, braking his car to a stop, while June, rather pale, started to her feet. "What are you talking about?"

The young man gasped for breath, staring wildly over his shoulder.

"I—I dunno what you'd call it, but it looked like an ape of some kind. Huge, hairy brute, with long arms and gleaming fangs—sprang out at me from the bushes over there—gosh, what's that?" he gulped, starting back nervously as the bushes rustled.

"Pull yourself together," urged Noel, "and get into the car. We'll investigate."

With unconcealed relief the young man scrambled into the rear of the car, pointing out the spot where he declared he had seen the ape. Noel drove slowly along the lane,

directing the headlights on the tangle of dark bushes.

"Umph—nothing to be seen there," he remarked. "You say the animal attacked you?"

"Would have done—if I hadn't made a dash for it," declared the young man. "It had a chain dangling from its neck, as if it'd escaped from somewhere—"

"Nunky"—June's eyes flashed a startled question—"suppose it came from the circus!"

"I'd thought of that," put in Noel quietly. "We may as well make enquiries—just in case."

He turned the car and drove straight through a gateway, over a bumpy grass track that led to the circus field.

Here was a peaceful enough scene, with no suggestion of any alarms. Among the scattered caravans camp-fires had been lit, and performers and circus-hands stood round in little groups, or sat on the steps of their caravans, chatting and smoking.

As Noel and June stepped from their car, followed by the agitated youth, they were treated to curious glances.

Noel enquired for the proprietor, and they were directed to a large, ornate caravan where the circus-owner, burly and red-faced, greeted them affably.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked. "We don't open till to-morrow, officially, but if you care to look round—"

"As a matter of fact," put in Noel, "we're here on a rather unusual errand. My young friend here"—he indicated the bespectacled youth—"declares that he encountered a savage ape along the road not far away from the circus. You don't happen to possess such an animal?"

The circus-owner's rubicund face changed colour. He came hastily down the steps of the caravan.

"Judson," he shouted to a man standing by, "tell Miss Darnay I'd like to see her at once!" He turned to Noel. "We have an ape here," he admitted. "As a matter of fact it has only just arrived, with its young trainer. I have not had time to inspect it, but I understand that it is a docile and

harmless animal. It's quite incredible that it could have escaped."

At that moment a dark-haired, attractive girl hurried up. She wore a neat blue uniform, and was carrying an enamel bowl filled with an assortment of nuts and fruit.

The circus owner turned to her.

"Miss Darnay," he jerked, "is your ape safely locked in the van?"

"Why—why, of course, Mr. Sanders!" rejoined the girl. "You said particularly that you wanted to inspect Chang before he was taken into the menagerie tent. I've just been preparing his meal. The poor thing will be famished after his journey."

She smiled, meeting June's interested glance.

"You've not had any trouble with your ape, Miss Darnay?" asked Noel pleasantly. "He's not the kind of animal to break out of his van and attack a passer-by?"

A startled, indignant expression flashed into the girl's dark eyes.

"Goodness—no!" she exclaimed. "What ever makes you ask such a thing?"

Noel glanced at the bespectacled youth, who eagerly repeated his story with even more vivid detail.

The girl's attractive face turned pale.

"It—it couldn't have been Chang!" she exclaimed. "The van hasn't been opened since he arrived—"

"You travelled with the vehicle?" put in the detective keenly.

The girl shook her head.

"I had to come by train, with my luggage. But I saw Chang safely fastened in the van, with his food and water, and watched it set off. We arrived practically at the same time—"

"The question is easily settled!" put in the circus owner, reaching for a lantern. "Would you come this way, please?" He beckoned Noel and his companions. "Miss Darnay will open the van in your presence."

They all followed the girl trainer as she led the way to a large, windowless motor-van. Noel surveyed it with interest.

"That seems pretty safe," he agreed. "How far has your animal travelled, Miss Darnay?"

"From Sherville—about forty miles from

here," explained the girl, as she removed the bars that secured the door. "My uncle"—her voice shook slightly—"had hoped to open a little circus there, when he returned from abroad. But his ship, the Neptune, was wrecked off the coast, and uncle lost his life's savings while trying to rescue Chang from the ship's hold. Perhaps you read about it at the time?"

Noel nodded, and June looked at the girl with quick sympathy.

Mr. Sanders, the circus owner, was impatiently tapping his leggings with the whip he carried.

"Well, I hope I wasn't mistaken in giving your ape a chance, Miss Darnay," he cut in. "I would never hire any animal if I thought it dangerous to the public. Let me have a look at it!"

Confidently the girl took down the shutters which enclosed the cage, then threw open the door.

Eva Darnay took the lamp from Mr. Sanders and stepped fearlessly into the van. "Come, Chang—" she began gaily, and broke off, a startled cry escaping her lips, her face paling. "Chang!" she gasped. "He—he's gone!"

"Gone?" thundered the circus owner, his genial face darkening.

June caught in her breath sharply, her hand tightening on Noel's arm. The detective stepped forward quickly. Through the open doorway, lit by the flickering gleam of the girl's lantern, they could see the bare iron-barred interior of the van, with its sawdust-covered floor.

In one corner was a pile of straw: a few links of chain dangled from a staple above it. In the roof a large ventilator gaped open.

But there was no sign of Chang, the circus ape.

"That must have been the way the animal broke out!" exclaimed Mr. Sanders, pointing to the ventilator. "It was gross carelessness on your part, Miss Darnay, not to have taken sufficient precautions. You must have known that your ape was dangerous, and liable to slip its chain—"

"But—but he isn't dangerous!" burst out the girl, in a tone of sharp distress that went

to June's heart. "I—I don't understand—Chang has never done a thing like this before. I've never known him deliberately to escape, or attack anyone—"

"G-gosh—he went for me all right!" cut in the bespectacled youth. "And goodness knows who he'll start on next."

There was silence as the little group surrounding the van peered anxiously into the shadows.

"The young man's right!" said the circus owner sternly. "It's quite clear, Miss Darnay, that your ape must have forced its way out of the van when it arrived—and it's prowling at liberty, a threat to passers-by—"

He was interrupted by a sharp exclamation from Noel. June glanced at her uncle quickly. The detective had taken the lantern and was scrutinising the barred walls and floor of the van, a gleam in his eyes.

"One minute, Sanders!" he said. "I fancy we've all been on the wrong track. It's impossible that Miss Darnay's ape could have been responsible for these scares—for the animal has never arrived here!"

CHAPTER II

FOOTPRINTS ON THE SAND

A BLANK silence greeted Noel's amazing statement. Even June stared at her uncle in perplexity, accustomed though she was to his surprising deductions.

The circus owner was the first to recover from the shock.

"Never—never arrived!" he echoed. "What do you mean? I saw the van arrive myself—and Miss Darnay told us that she personally shut the ape in it before it left. There's the straw it was lying on—and there's its food and water-bowl, and the chain it must have snapped. And this young man here was attacked by a savage ape not a hundred yards from the circus field—"

"I still say," interrupted Noel coolly, "that neither Miss Darnay's ape—nor any other animal—ever arrived here in this van!"

Mr. Sanders drew a deep breath.

"How—how do you make that out?" he spluttered.

The detective smiled dryly.

"The answer is—food and water!" he replied. "Miss Darnay mentioned that her ape would be famished after its journey. How is it, then, that the food in the bowl on the floor has not been touched?"

"Oh!" breathed the girl, starting forward. "That—that's strange! I fed Chang before he set out—but he's always ready for another meal on the way—"

"He drank his water," put in June, glancing at the half-empty bowl.

Noel shook his head.

"You mean the water was spilt—possibly by the jolting of the van. And that brings me to my other point!" He stepped forward, holding the lantern low to the floor. "You see where the water has spread out over the sawdust, making an excellent surface for footprints. Here are Miss Darnay's own footprints when she entered the van—and here are mine. But where are Chang's?"

June caught in her breath as she followed her uncle's reasoning.

"You'd expect to find tracks of the ape's feet in that sawdust—possibly marks on the whitewashed bars," declared Noel. "There are no marks. How did he escape through the ventilator without leaving any traces? And, finally—how could he have made his way across the well-lit circus camp and out into the lane without being seen?"

For a moment or two silence fell again on the little group. They were all wondering what had become of Chang and, if he had not arrived, who was the creature that had attacked the scared hiker in the country lane?

That youth was staring round him apprehensively, as though expecting the missing ape to spring on him from the shadows.

"I—I still say that something ought to be done about it," he stammered.

"I agree!" rapped Mr. Sanders, frowning. "I'll send my men to rope in this ape, Miss Darnay—and if we have any trouble with the animal, you'll be answerable!"

The girl's face paled, and she looked anxiously at Noel and June. The detective smiled reassuringly.

"Don't worry, Miss Darnay," he mur-

mured. "I stand by my statement that your ape is innocent!"

"But—but where is Chang? What does it all mean?" she faltered.

"That," replied Noel quietly, "is what my young partner and I will endeavour to find out!"

June's heart leapt as she glanced at him quickly. She knew by her uncle's tone—by the glint in his eye—that he was already on the scent!

Eva Darnay departed to join the search party, and the scared hiker reluctantly agreed to lead them to the spot where he had seen the animal.

Noel had gone to speak to the driver of the van, and June darted over to him eagerly as he returned.

"Own up, nunky," she cried, "you're on to something! Are we joining in the search?"

To her surprise, Noel shook his head.

"The mystery isn't here at the circus, June," he rejoined. "It's many miles away—and we'll have to move quickly if we're to solve it before it's too late!"

June glanced at him, rather startled by his tone. But the detective refused to say any more till they had returned to their car and were speeding down the narrow country lane.

Noel pulled up at length about a mile from the circus camp, and after switching on the light in the car, took out his road map.

"To start with, June," he said quietly, "what do you make of this? I picked it up in the van."

He placed something in her hand—something that June at first thought was a piece of grass: but as she examined it more closely her eyes widened in amazement.

"Why—it's seaweed!" she exclaimed. "However did that come to be in the van?"

"That's exactly what I asked myself," replied Noel, with a smile. He jabbed a finger down on the map. "At this spot—about twenty miles away—the main road from Sherville touches the coastline. I had a word with the driver of the van. He admitted that a tyre burst about half an hour after he had set out, and he left

the van unattended for five minutes while he phoned a garage. He remembered noticing an old watch tower on the cliff; that would be Scaw Head, one of the most desolate parts of the coast—and that's where the mystery's centred, June!

June was in a whirl as Noel started his car, the headlights cutting a shimmering path in the dusk.

Scaw Head? The name intrigued her. But what had that desolate stretch of Cornish coast to do with the vanished circus ape?

June was still pondering the mystery when the lonely cliff road was reached, but suddenly her thoughts were startlingly interrupted. Something came crashing down the bank at the roadside, hurtling towards the car.

"Nunkyl—look out!" cried June.

Noel swerved in the nick of time, the car narrowly avoiding the edge of the cliff. The detective pulled up with a screech of brakes, his face rather pale.

"Phew—a narrow shave, June!" he exclaimed. "Wonder how that came to fall?"

He sprang out of the car, examining a great piece of rock that had crashed from the steep bank above them. June watched him roll it with an effort to the side of the road, and flash his torch on to the bank.

June gave an excited gasp as she directed the torchlight on the half-buried wreckage. "Why—there's part of a name!" she exclaimed.



When he climbed back into the driving-seat, his blue eyes were grim.

"That rock, June," he said, "did not fall accidentally! It showed signs of having been wrenched from the bank and flung deliberately into the road."

"Nunkyl!" gasped June, her heart tightening. "You don't mean—"

Noel rammed his foot on the accelerator, steering the car round a treacherous bend and out on to a more open road. Only then did his tense expression relax.

"It's possible, June," he said quietly, "that someone—or something—is anxious to terminate our journey!"

He made no other comment then, but June's face was white as the car raced on its way. She was thinking of the strange story told by the nervous hiker—and of the empty circus van.

All that had happened miles away—but

they had not left the mystery behind. June had a feeling that they were running into the thick of it now.

It was plain that Noel had the same idea, for once or twice he stole a glance at her, clearly thinking of her safety.

"Feel like going through with this, June?" he asked lightly.

"Nunky—of course!" exclaimed June.

Noel slowed the car, peering ahead. June's heart beat more quickly as she saw the pale glimmer of moonlight on the sea through a sloping gap in the cliffs. To their right, perched on a headland, stood a crumbling red brick watch-tower.

"Scaw Head," said Noel quietly. "The circus van must have pulled up near here. I'm wondering if that burst tyre was an accident, June. After our experience with the falling rock I begin to mistrust all accidents!"

June glanced at him swiftly, but the question hovering on her lips remained unspoken as Noel brought the car to a stop on the sandy slope. He jerked open the door and stepped out, looking round him keenly.

June saw him stiffen, and the next moment she was at his side. Without a word, he pointed.

On the firm sand, among the shingle and seaweed washed up by the high tide, were blurred footprints—more than one pair.

But the mark on which June's startled gaze was fixed was no ordinary footprint. It was more like a hand, with four fingers and a protruding thumb.

June caught in her breath sharply, gripping Noel's arm.

"Chang?" she whispered.

The detective nodded.

"It seems clear," he said, "that Miss Darnay's ape came this way to-night!"

June's thoughts were racing as she stared at the unexpected footprints—strangely out of place in this desolate spot.

"But, nunky—if these footprints belong to Chang, then what was it that scared the hiker, and tried to wreck our car? Chang couldn't be in two places at once!"

"Precisely!" said Noel grimly. "There seem to be two mysteries, June, though

they are certainly linked in some way. The one I'm interested in at the moment is why Miss Darnay's trained ape was smuggled out of the van just here—and apparently taken down to the beach. This trail of footprints may provide the answer!"

He glanced at his young partner a shade uncertainly, but June surmised what was in his mind even before he spoke.

"Oh, no you don't, nunky!" she declared. "You're thinking of asking me to stay with the car while you explore. I'm coming with you!"

Noel grinned, but the next moment he was serious.

"All right, June," he said, "but I warn you there may be danger. Whoever planned this business must have had a pretty desperate purpose. Kidnapping a man-sized ape is no child's play."

He crossed to the car, and June saw him slip a revolver into the pocket of his light coat.

"Got your torch, June?" he asked.

The girl detective nodded. Together they set out across the sand, picking their way among the rocks. Suddenly Noel halted, to stare up at the cliff.

"Hallo," he said, "looks as though there's been a landslide recently!" He pointed to a great gap in the cliff, and a mass of fallen rocks. "I know there've been some pretty heavy storms, and——"

He broke off as there came a stifled cry from June. She had tripped over something, sprawling on her hands and knees. In a moment Noel was at her side, helping her to her feet.

"Hurt?" he asked anxiously. "These rocks are pretty dangerous——"

"It—it wasn't a rock, nunky," declared June. "Why—look——" She pointed in surprise. "It's an anchor!"

An anchor it was—a rusty anchor, protruding from a large patch of shingle.

Noel whistled softly as he bent to examine it.

"I should say it's been buried here for some weeks," he remarked, "and there's a chain still attached to it. It's curious that the ape's footprints should lead here—and no farther."

June's heart missed a beat as she flashed her torch on the sand and shingle. It was true. The strange footprints disappeared close to the buried anchor and the fallen rubble piled at the foot of the cliffs.

"Nunky," she breathed, struck by a sudden thought, "I wonder what's on the other end of that anchor chain? Do you think—"

Noel's eyes glinted.

"You may have something there, June! Let's see if we can trail it."

He grasped the rusty chain and commenced to pull it out of the shingle link by link. June watched, her pulses quickening with excitement. Would the anchor chain provide a clue to the mystery?

CHAPTER III

PERIL BY MOONLIGHT

NOEL was tugging at the chain, and quite suddenly it came free, with a rattle of falling stones—revealing a piece of splintered timber caught in the rusted links.

"Part of the gunwale of a boat!" ejaculated the detective, as he bent to examine it. "There's been a wreck at some time. Bring your torch over here, June. This is interesting."

Excitedly June dropped to her knees beside him, directing the torch-light on the piece of wreckage.

"Why—there's part of a name!" she exclaimed.

Noel nodded, using his magnifying glass in an attempt to decipher the weather-beaten lettering.

"N—E—P—" he muttered. "The rest of it is missing. A pity—it might have given us a lead. Though even now I don't see what a wrecked boat has to do with the kidnapping of a circus ape—"

He broke off, glancing up at a ledge above them, his eyes narrowing.

"There's some more wreckage that has been thrown up there by the waves, June—ropes or tackle of some kind. I'll climb up and have a look."

He slipped off his coat and commenced to scale the seaweed-covered boulders, while June stood by anxiously with the

torch. She saw Noel drop to his knees on the ledge, examining the wreckage in the pale moonlight.

"It was a ship's lifeboat, June!" he called. "Here's a torn sail and some other gear—hallo! What were those letters on the gunwale?"

"N—E—P," repeated June eagerly. "Have you found—"

"The last letters," returned Noel, his voice betraying an unusual excitement, "were T—U—N—E. Neptune! We're getting warmer, June. That was the very ship in which Miss Darnay's uncle was wrecked—a month ago. I remember reading the report at the time. There's plainly some connection—"

At that instant, the rattle of a falling stone caused June to glance round. Her blood ran cold, and a look of horror flashed into her eyes.

Creeping on all fours along a ledge above that on which Noel was kneeling was a hairy, ape-like figure, its great teeth bared. Even as June stared, horror-stricken, the creature raised itself to its full height, grasping a jagged rock between its hands as it glared down at the detective.

For one nightmare moment June felt petrified. Then desperately she shouted:

"Nunky—look out!"

Noel acted in a flash, seeming to realise the direction of the peril. In a moment he had flattened himself against the cliff, as the jagged rock struck the ledge on which he was crouched and rebounded on to the beach.

June saw her uncle grope downwards—and with a cold shock of dismay she remembered that he had left his revolver in the pocket of his coat. The great hairy figure was climbing slowly towards him, and she saw Noel crouch to await its attack, his face pale and tense in the moonlight.

The girl detective thought desperately. If only she could distract the creature's attention—to give her uncle a chance to escape! Without a thought for her own safety she scrambled recklessly up the rocky cliff, flashing her powerful torch up into the creature's face—hoping to dazzle it.

It turned in a startled fashion, raising a

hairy arm almost as though to screen its face. At the same instant Noel leaped towards it.

June saw something whisk through the air, descending over the ape's head and shoulders. With an almost human howl of rage it stumbled from the ledge, rolling and slithering down the steep slope, entangled in the torn sail expertly flung by the detective!

June heard the sickening thud as it landed on the shingle, hidden from view by a great boulder. Not daring to look, she ran to meet Noel as he swung himself down from the ledge.

"Nunky—thank goodness you're safe!" she gasped.

"Thanks to you, my dear," said Noel rather huskily as his arm tightened round her shoulder. "It was your presence of mind in flashing that torch that saved me."

June shivered as they clambered back to the beach.

"But can that dreadful ape possibly be Chang?" she asked. "Eva Darnay said her ape would never attack—"

"That creature meant business!" cut in Noel grimly, as he quickly collected his revolver from the pocket of his coat. "Wait here, June. I want to have a closer look at the animal—"

"Nunky—be careful!" June urged anxiously.

The detective motioned her to stand back as he cautiously approached the great boulder behind which his hairy assailant had fallen.

June heard his startled ejaculation, and she ran instinctively to his side. A cry of amazement escaped her lips. The sail lay there, ripped in two—but of the ape-like captive there was no sign.

"Nunky, it's escaped!" she faltered. "It must have bitten its way through the canvas—"

Noel's hand tightened on her arm. He was staring incredulously at the torn sail, and the trampled shingle around it.

"Lend me your torch, June," he said tersely.

Without a word she passed it to him. The detective bent over the canvas. When

he straightened himself, there was a stern glitter in his eyes.

"June," he said quietly, "that sail was not ripped by an animal's teeth: it was cut—with this!" He opened his hand, revealing something that brought an amazed gasp to June's lips.

"A—a penknife!" she faltered. "But, nunky—an ape couldn't—"

"Precisely, June," put in Noel. "Even a trained circus ape would hardly be carrying a penknife; and neither was this scrap of fur, clinging to the canvas, part of the coat of any living animal."

"Nunky—what do you mean?" asked June, her face rather pale.

"I mean," said Noel, "that the creature we are dealing with, June, is not an ape. It is a man in disguise!"

CHAPTER IV

THE AMAZING RESCUER

JUNE'S mind felt momentarily numbed, as Noel led her away from the sinister shadow of the cliff.

"A man?" she echoed incredulously. "But—I don't understand! You mean to say there never was an ape—but that's impossible! We actually trailed Miss Darnay's ape down here—found its foot-prints—"

"Exactly, my dear," said Noel. "I mentioned that there were two mysteries, and now I'm beginning to see clearly how they link up. The whole thing was an amazingly clever plot. Someone wished to use Miss Darnay's ape, Chang, for a purpose I've not yet fathomed. It was decided to smuggle it out of the van at this lonely spot, and allow the van to continue on its way to the circus, the driver supposing that Chang was still inside. But the scoundrels knew that there would be an immediate hue and cry when the van was opened. The driver would recollect being pulled up here, and the local police would be contacted. To avoid that, the tricksters planned to start a scare in the vicinity of the circus, twenty miles away—"

June gave a little cry, enlightenment dawning in her eyes.

"Nunky—of course! I see it all now! It

was a man in an ape's skin that sprang out at the hiker, causing a scare——"

"And who later got on our track," put in Noel, "and followed us down to the coast in a fast car, possibly taking a short cut and getting here ahead of us. He was waiting on the cliff road when we arrived, June—prepared to wreck our car. When he failed, he trailed us down to the beach and launched a second attack. It's clear that the scoundrels will stick at nothing to prevent their activities from being discovered!"

June nodded excitedly as Noel's clear reasoning put the entire mystery in a new light.

"And that brings us back to where we were, nunky," breathed June. "Why should anyone kidnap Chang and lead him down to the beach—and where is he now?"

Noel thoughtfully stared at the fallen rocks.

"I think, June," he said, "that your stumbling over that anchor provided the vital link with the real mystery. It's quite clear from the wreckage that the boat that foundered here belonged to the steamship Neptune. The long-boat was reported missing, with the passenger—a circus-trainer on his way back to England—and three members of the crew. The Neptune itself managed to limp back to port."

"But—but Eva told us that her uncle and the ape were rescued!" pointed out June.

Noel nodded.

"That came out in the report at the time. John Darnay was found wandering, with his ape, on the cliff-top to which he had somehow managed to escape. His memory had gone. His three companions were assumed drowned. But supposing the crew managed to climb to safety, abandoning their wrecked boat? Supposing that, when they returned later, they found that the boat had been broken up by the sea, its contents missing——"

"But wouldn't they have reported to the coastguards?" asked June.

"That would depend," replied Noel, "on whether they had anything to hide. Listen, June. Under the back seat in my car is a portfolio of recent newspaper cuttings. I'm certain I filed one referring to the wreck of the Neptune. You might slip back and look up the report. It may contain the final clue to the mystery—and we've no time to lose!"

"Nunky"—June stared at him anxiously—"what do you mean? What are you going to do now?"



Grimly Noel held up the penknife. "This proves that we are not dealing with an escaped ape," he said, "but with a man in disguise."

She had seen her uncle checking the cartridges in his revolver. He grinned reassuringly, though his eyes were stern.

"I mean, June," he said, "that now the scoundrels know we're on their track, they'll hurry forward with their plans—and it's our job to put a stop to their game! I'm going to get on the track of this ape-man—he can't have gone far. And this time I'll be prepared for him!"

June knew her uncle too well to attempt to argue, though she felt a tightening at her heart as she stared towards the shadowy cliffs.

"And when I've looked up the report—what then, nunky?"

"Drive to the nearest phone-box, June—contact the police—and find out if any information about the wreck has come through since the report. Wait for me in the car. O.K.?"

"O.K., nunky!" replied June. "And—take care of yourself!"

Noel stood watching her slim figure as she hurried back along the moonlit beach. With a smile of relief he began following a blurred trail of footprints that led from the torn sail towards a bend in the cliff.

For several hundred yards he followed the trail, till his way was barred by a groyne. The stonework was slippery with seaweed, but Noel commenced to scale it, his revolver held in readiness.

Ahead of him he could see the moonlit beach, and the tide rapidly creeping in. But there was something Noel could not see.

Crouched behind the groyne, an iron bar in its hand, was the furry shape that had attacked him on the cliff. And the ape-man's eyes glittered vengefully as he awaited the detective's approach.

"THIS must be the newspaper cutting that nunky meant!" breathed June, as from the medley of papers spread out on the seat of the car she selected a cutting bearing the photograph of a fishing-trawler.

"MYSTERY OF THE SEA UNSOLVED!" ran the headline.

June scanned it eagerly. It reported the

arrival in harbour of the trawler Neptune, badly damaged by a gale. The captain informed the authorities that three of his men were missing—supposedly drowned while attempting to reach the shore in the long-boat. And with them had disappeared a battered tin trunk, the property of the Neptune's sole passenger, who had since died from shock and exposure.

June's pulses were racing as she re-read the report. Link by link, the strange mystery was being unravelled. The secret of the empty circus van and the faked ape had already been disclosed: and this report explained the wreckage—confirmed Noel's shrewd theory.

It seemed possible that the three "missing" seamen were at the back of this strange plot to kidnap Chang, the circus ape—and that in some way their plot was connected with the wrecked boat and the mysterious tin trunk that had disappeared with them.

But exactly what was their purpose—and where was Chang?

Busy with her excited thoughts, June put away the cutting and turned to the wheel of the car, remembering Noel's instructions to contact the local police.

But even as she switched on the headlights, a startled scream was torn from her lips. A pair of eyes were glaring at her through the windscreen: and at the same instant she felt a gust of air as the car door was jerked open and a long arm reached in, seizing her by the shoulder.

With a broken cry for help, June started to her feet, but the next moment something dark and muffling was thrown over her head, and she was lifted bodily out of the car.

"Good work, Soames!" muttered a voice. "That's the girl, right enough—Noel Raymond's partner. They suspect too much!"

"What about the detective?" came the harsh reply of June's captor—a giant of a man, as he held her firmly despite her plucky struggles.

"Gaspard means to settle with him," came the retort, with a laugh that chilled June's heart. "He's got a score to settle for that fall he had from the ledge. If he hadn't

been an acrobat he might have been seriously hurt. He's keeping watch on the beach now—and this time he'll make no mistake!"

Unable to cry out, realising the futility of struggling, June felt herself carried for some distance over uneven ground, and then down a steep flight of steps.

"A bit of luck, Gaspard knowing something about the circus," went on the more talkative of the two. "We might have searched for months without finding where old John Darnay had hidden his precious trunk! But the ape was with him at the time—and it was Gaspard's idea that the creature might remember——"

The other man laughed harshly. June, her thoughts racing, almost forgot her own peril as she strained her ears to listen.

Now, at last, the explanation of the baffling mystery seemed to be within her grasp—now that it was too late!

Her captors secured her hands and feet with cords, and the stifling cloth was removed from her head.

Dazedly June stared round her. She was in a cave, dimly lit by a lantern that stood on a great boulder. The entrance of the cave had been almost blocked by the recent landslip, and the girl detective drew in her breath sharply as she saw the remains of a splintered hulk protruding from the fallen rubble.

She realised, now, how clever Noel's reasoning had been. The long-boat had been driven into the cave by the storm, and the passenger left for dead with his precious trunk. The rascally seamen, returning later to rob a dead man, had found both passenger and trunk missing!

Old John Darnay, with the aid of his ape, had hidden the tin trunk from the would-be thieves!

Just then the rattle of a chain caused June to look round—and her heart gave a violent jump. Chained to one of the rocks, its great shoulders bent dejectedly, a bewildered look in its eyes, was a man-sized ape—the real Chang!

One of the men—a bearded giant—stepped over to the ape and unfastened its chain.

"We'd better get busy," he muttered. "The tide'll be in again in half an hour—and every hour we waste makes the job more dangerous. Gaspard'll warn us if there's any alarm. Get moving, you!"

He prodded the dazed ape with the end of a boat-hook. The bewildered animal rose, its great arms dangling at its sides; it looked to June as though it had been drugged.

"You—you beasts!" she burst out, throwing all caution aside. "You won't get away with this."

In a bound the other scoundrel had reached her, whipping a gag round her mouth.

"You may as well save your voice, miss," he sneered, "to call for help later on—when the tide comes up. I reck'n Chang will have finished the job for us by then—and we'll leave him down here, to keep you company!"

June's blood ran cold. To her straining ears, the murmur of the sea sounded very close.

Where was Noel? Had he returned to the car in search of her? Or—her heart sank at the thought—had he been attacked and overcome by the ape-man?

Chang was now at work, prodded every now and then by the bearded seaman. The circus ape was dazedly removing stones and rubble from a corner of the cave, obviously prompted by memory. As he cleared a cavity, one of the men set to work there with a crowbar and spade.

The bearded leader was looking anxiously at his watch. June could hear the wash of the waves on the shingle outside the cave.

Chang, the ape, was struggling with a massive piece of rock. Grunting, he dragged it clear of the cavity—and there came a triumphant shout from the two men as a battered tin trunk was revealed, half buried by rubble.

The bearded man snatched up the lantern, and the pair of scoundrels bent eagerly over the trunk. The great ape, forgotten, lumbered away to the dark corner of the cave.

June, struggling with her bonds, stiffened suddenly, her eyes widening. From the

darkness of the cave she could see the ape's lumbering figure returning. It seemed less dazed, its movements almost purposeful as it crept along by the wall, keeping in the shadows.

One of the men glanced at it carelessly, and turned away again to examine the contents of the trunk. The shambling figure came closer, its furry arms trailing at its sides. It brushed close to June—and she caught in her breath sharply, incredulously, as she felt it fumbling with the cords that bound her wrists!

In another moment her wrists were free, and the great shaggy figure bent to release her ankles.

Just then the swarthy-faced man turned—and his eyes goggled. With a furious shout he leaped to his feet as June, her numbed wits suddenly clearing, made a wild dash for the steps leading out of the cave.

"Stop her, Soames!" shouted the leader. "She'll give the whole game away. I'll settle with this confounded performing ape!"

And he snatched out a revolver, levelling it at the ape. There was a deafening report and a yell from the scoundrel. The pistol was sent flying from his nerveless fingers by a shot fired a split second earlier by the smoking revolver grasped in the ape's unwavering hand!

"Stand where you are—both of you!" rapped the "ape" in a voice that caused June's heart to give an incredible bound. "The police are surrounding the cave—and the game is up!"

As he spoke, the figure in the ape-skin tore off his mask—revealing the grim, determined face of Noel Raymond!

"It was a narrow shave, June," explained Noel later, when the two scoundrels had been led away by the police to join their confederate whom Noel had already handed into custody. "The ape-man was waiting for me behind the groyne

—but I managed to kick the weapon out of his hand as I jumped. He was tremendously strong—a circus acrobat—but luckily he missed his footing on the slippery stones, and I was able to knock him out."

June's eyes were shining with mingled relief and excitement.

"What happened then, nunky? I thought—I was afraid——"

Noel grinned reassuringly.

"I tied the fellow up, after removing his disguise," he said, "then I hurried back to the car, expecting you'd be waiting for me. When I found it deserted, and signs of a struggle, I guessed what had happened. By a stroke of luck a fisher-lad came along just then, and I sent him for the police. Then, after donning the ape disguise, I followed the tracks as best I could——"

"And you turned up in the nick of time!" breathed June. "It was the biggest surprise of my life when I felt the ape untying the cords that bound me!"

The detective chuckled.

"It was the only way, June. I knew both scoundrels were armed and desperate—and I was single-handed. If I could get into the cave without them suspecting my presence, there'd be the element of surprise on my side. The ape-skin seemed the obvious way—and Chang made it easier by ambling into the dark end of the cave, where I was hidden. I simply changed places with him, and—well—you know the rest!"

June squeezed his arm, staring down at the open tin trunk and its contents—neat piles of bank-notes, jewellery and other personal valuables—old John Darnay's life savings with which he had intended to buy a circus: and which now legally belonged to his niece.

"I expect Eva will carry out her uncle's last wish," said June, "and open a circus near his old home. I know one thing, nunky"—her eyes twinkled suddenly—"we're going to be there on the opening night, to see Chang do his act!"

