



Detective June's MOST THRILLING CASE

STARTLING NEWS FOR JUNE

JUNE GAYNOR, niece of Noel Raymond, the famous young detective, went to Port Craig College disguised as a new girl, Dorothy Whiteman. Her object was to solve the mystery which surrounded an old play which the Upper Fourth Form, led by Julie Vermont, intended producing in the ancient refectory, which was used as the school theatre.

Julie & Co. received threatening messages, warning them to give up their theatrical plans, and June was started to discover that the notes had been written by the Grey Falcon, a mysterious master-crook whom her uncle was trying to capture.

Noel Raymond planned to keep watch in the that the Grey Falcon was out to bring off another of his audacious coups, and the young detective arranged to meet June in an old watch tower on the cliffs the following morning. When June went there, however, there was no sign of her uncle. On returning to the college, she was told that the refectory had been put out of bounds by Miss Stanton, the headmistress, and Cora Jarrold, a spiteful Fifth Former, declared that Howard Wyndham, the chairman of the school governors who lived at the Manor, had been responsible.

"There was a burglary at the Manor last night," Cora added, "and when you learn the full news of what took place you'll get the shock of your life!"

WHAT had happened at the Manor?

June did not know, but Cora Jarrold's cryptic words brought back all the vague fears she had felt when inexplicably Noel Raymond had failed to turn up for his appointment with her.

Had something gone wrong with Uncle Noel's plans to capture the Grey Falcon? Even more alarming—had something happened to Uncle Noel himself?

June told herself it was silly to worry. It was quite likely that Cora had simply been out to torment the bewildered Upper Fourth Formers. A malicious sense of amusement had probably caused her to exaggerate and dramatise whatever gossip she had overheard.

By PETER LANGLEY

As June stood there, staring after the departing Cora and striving desperately to shake off her feeling of uneasiness, there came an exasperated chorus of exclamations from the other girls. Julie, Lady Sue, and the others were not interested in Cora's dark hints about what had taken place at the rambling old house on the edge of the cliff. All that concerned them was the fact that the refectory had been put out of bounds.

"What's going to happen to our play?" demanded Lady Sue.

"Yes, where are we going to produce it now?" asked Celia Treves, almost in tears.

A tall, freckle-faced girl named Ivy Redditch made a wry grimace.

"Looks as if we'll have to give it up," she commented. "There's no other place except the refectory suitable as a theatre."

"Give it up?" It was Julie Vermont who spoke, and her usually cheery face was grim and angry. "No jolly fear! We're not going to abandon our plans—Grey Falcon or no Grey Falcon! We'll see the Head about this notice. When she learns how fed up we are—"

She broke off and they all stiffened, for two figures had just emerged from the headmistress' house on the far side of the quadrangle. One was Mr. Howard Wyndham, the chairman of the college governors and the tenant of the Manor; the other was Miss Stanton herself.

Julie squared her shoulders determinedly. "Come on, let's get this settled right away," she urged, and led the way forward.

Eagerly the rest of the Upper Fourth Formers followed, and none more eagerly than June. Perhaps, she thought, they might learn what had really transpired at the Manor from Mr. Wyndham's own lips.

A two-seater car stood on the drive, and Mr. Wyndham, having taken leave of the headmistress, was just about to clamber behind the steering-wheel. At sight of the crowd of schoolgirls, with Julie at their head, however, he paused, and he and Miss Stanton exchanged a quick, significant look. It was obvious that they both guessed what Julie

& Co. wanted, and at sight of their agitated, gloomy faces the Head looked sympathetic.

"Good-morning, girls," she said in that crisp, businesslike way which was so characteristic of her. "I see you have read my notice. I am sorry I had to issue it, but I had no choice in the matter. In view of those threatening notes, I cannot afford to let you take any risks."

Julie stared at her incredulously. "But surely you don't take them seriously, Miss Stanton?" she gasped. "They're only part of a stupid practical joke!"

The headmistress shook her head. "That is what I thought at first. Last night, however, convinced me otherwise. Incredible though it seems, that scoundrel who calls himself the Grey Falcon has some ulterior motive for prowling about the refectory. Therefore, until he is caught I cannot permit any of you to go there!"

"But, Miss Stanton——" came in a dismayed chorus.

The military-looking figure by the car raised a firm hand.

"It's no use arguing, young ladies," Howard Wyndham said. "Orders are orders. But cheer up. It may not be long before the Grey Falcon is caught. Now that we know his real identity and name——"

"Real name?" It was June who echoed the words. Her heart thumping, she regarded the chairman of the governors in breathless excitement. "You actually know who the Grey Falcon is?" she gasped.

He nodded. "Yes. The scoundrel tried to be too clever last night. When he planned to steal the rajah's jewels he didn't know that we had received private warning of his intentions. The result was, when he broke into my library we were ready for him!"

"And—and you caught him?" asked June, wondering what part Noel Raymond had played in this ambush.

Mr. Wyndham shook his head. "No. He got away, and worse luck!—with the jewels as well. But don't worry, young lady. He won't get far. The whole countryside is being scoured for the rascal, and all the newspapers are carrying photographs of Noel Raymond!"

"Of—of Noel Raymond?" June's head seemed to spin round. As if thunderstruck, she stood there, hardly able to believe her own ears. "Of—of Noel Raymond?" she gasped again. "But surely you're not suggesting——"

"I am suggesting nothing, young lady," the chairman of the governors interrupted. "I am just stating facts. The Grey Falcon is none other than Noel Raymond."

There came a startled, astounded gasp from Julie & Co. They had all read about the famous young detective's spectacular career. Many a time they had been thrilled by the story of his latest capture. To them the news that he was in reality the elusive master-crook whom he had been pretending to track down came as a staggering surprise.

As for June, she for a moment was rendered speechless by this amazing accusation against her own Uncle Noel. The blood drained from her cheeks, and then just as swiftly rushed back again, and, quivering with anger, she stormily faced Howard Wyndham.

"You must be crazy!" she burst out. "How dare you suggest such a thing! How dare you——"

"Dorothy Whitman, kindly restrain yourself. Remember to whom you are talking!"

The scolding rebuke came from Miss Stanton, and with an effort June sought to control her agitated feelings. No one must know that her real name was not Dorothy Whitman; no one must guess the secret mission which had brought her here to Port Craig. Yet the thought of remaining silent

while the uncle she admired and adored was spoken of like this was intolerable to her. Struggling with her indignation, she turned to the headmistress.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Miss Stanton," she gulped. "I—I didn't mean to be rude. But it's so absurd. As if Noel Raymond could be a crook! As if——"

She broke off in confusion, as she realised that everyone was regarding her curiously; realised that Mr. Wyndham's steely eyes were fixed sharply on her.

"You seem strangely sure of yourself, young lady," he observed. "What do you know about the fellow Raymond?"

The temptation to blurt out all she knew was almost irresistible, but frantically June reminded herself of the need for secrecy. It would be fatal to all her plans—all her hopes—if her relationship with Uncle Noel were even suspected.

"I—I've read a lot about him," she stammered, "and I've been frightfully interested in his cases. Why until a few weeks ago everyone was singing his praises. That's what makes it so horrid that anyone should believe the cruel gossip that's flying about!"

Mr. Wyndham gave a dry laugh.

"I have something more tangible than idle gossip to go on, young lady. I have the evidence of my own eyes. I caught him red-handed last night, with the rajah's jewel-case in his hand, and when I accused him, instead of attempting an explanation, he turned and fled like the rogue he is. I am afraid, young lady——" he smiled sardonically——"your hero has feet of clay. He and the Grey Falcon are undoubtedly one, and the same person!"

June made no comment. She did not know what to say; what to think. Her brain was in a whirl. Only one grim realisation stood out stark and clear. The Grey Falcon's cunning plan to disgrace his redoubtable young adversary had succeeded. Somehow he had managed to turn the tables last night—had himself escaped while leaving his would-be captor to bear the brunt of his crime.

But where was Uncle Noel now? Had he managed to return to the old watch tower on the cliffs? Was he there now, waiting for a chance to see her? Oh, if only she could go to him! If only she could hear the full story of last night's sensational happenings from his own lips! If only——

Boom! The metallic clang of the clock on the college tower, hammering out nine o'clock, awoke the echoes. Miss Stanton turned to the excitedly whispering Upper Fourth Formers.

"It's time you girls went to lessons," she said. "Run along, please! And don't take this ban too hardily," she added with a sympathetic smile around. "Once that scoundrel has been safely put under lock and key, it may be possible for me to permit you to use the refectory again."

A little encouraged by the Head's kindly words, Julie & Co. went hurrying off towards the main college building. More slowly June followed. She felt sick and faint, and tears of dismay and anger gathered in her eyes.

To her the morning seemed endless. Never had Miss Tuft's fussy, nervous manner been so exasperating. But at long last the college bell clanged out, and the Form mistress, stepping down from the rostrum, gave the signal to dismiss.

June almost bolted out of the Form Room, and, rushing out of the school, she made her way along the cliff path to the grey stone tower. Her heart was pounding wildly when she reached it, and with fingers that trembled she pushed open the oaken door.

"Uncle Noel——" she called, and then stopped, the blood draining from her cheeks.

For the circular chamber with its solitary, barred window was deserted.

NO NEWS OF NOEL



BLANKLY June gazed through the doorway. What could have become of the famous detective? She could not believe that he had run away because he was frightened of being arrested. That was the last thing Noel would do.

"Yet it's funny he hasn't come back here—hasn't tried to get in touch with me," she murmured. "It's not like him!"

Utterly bewildered, she stepped into the tower and looked around. The breakfast, laid on the table, still remained untouched. The bed had not been slept in. Nothing had changed.

But wait!

Suddenly she gave a gasp, as she noticed Noel Raymond's suitcase. When she had visited the tower early that morning it had been open and pushed under the bed. Now it was shut and was precariously perched on a coiled-up rope in one corner.

"Then he has been here!" she exclaimed excitedly. "At least!"—quickly she corrected herself, as she remembered her uncle's warning never to jump to conclusions—"someone's been here!"

Her gaze went to the dusty floor. Footprints could be seen there. Her own and a larger set evidently left by a man. She frowned as she surveyed them.

"They look too big for uncle's," she told herself, "and yet— Who else is likely to have been here?"

Vaguely she felt a sense of uneasiness steal over her. Crossing to the open suitcase, she looked down at it. The neatly folded clothes seemed to have been disarranged. Frowning, she lifted them, one by one, and then a startled gasp escaped her lips.

At the bottom of the case was a long, ebony box, with a curious Eastern crest carved in the lid. Gingerly she picked it up and opened it, then she gave another gasp. For sparkling up at her was the most dazzling necklace she had ever seen. A glittering circlet of diamonds and emeralds—precious stones as big as her thumbnail.

"Golly!" she whispered, awe-stricken by the sight of that wondrous ornament; and then, as she stared at the jewels, stared at the Eastern crest on the lid, her face went pale. "These must belong to the rajah who's staying at the Manor!" she gulped. "They're the stolen jewels Mr. Wyndham was talking about this morning!"

But what were they doing here, hidden in Noel Raymond's suitcase? That Noel himself had placed them there it was impossible to believe.

Her pulses racing, June examined the ebony box carefully. Her own fingers had left-prints on its polished surface. There were other prints, too. Pulling a magnifying-glass from her pocket, she peered at them, and her cheeks went whiter than ever as she saw that a scar ran across them.

"The Grey Falcon's!" she breathed. "Then it was he who hid the jewels! It's a trap! Knowing uncle's suspected, he's out to make him appear to be a thief!"

For a moment a blazing anger smothered her agitation, then slowly, irresistibly that feeling of fear returned. Suppose someone else had examined Noel's suitcase? Suppose someone else had found the jewels?

An icy shiver ran down her spine.

"He'd never have been able to prove his innocence then!" she gulped. "Never have been able to prove that he wasn't the Grey Falcon!"

The thought made her choke. That anyone should think her uncle was a traitor to his profession was bad enough, but that they should believe that he was the scoundrelly

master-crook he was actually trying to track down—that made her blood boil.

But where was her uncle? Again the thought nagged at her brain. And what should she do with the jewels? She dared not leave them here. Nor dared she admit having found them.

"There's only one thing for it," she told herself. "I must—"

She broke off, stiffening in alarm. From somewhere outside came the murmur of voices; the tramp of approaching feet.

Still clutching the heavy jewel case, she darted to the door and cautiously peered out. What she saw sent her heart pounding again. Half a dozen men were striding down the cliff path. Most of them were fishermen, but one, armed with a shotgun, was obviously a keeper, and June guessed that he had come from the Manor. There was a look of grim excitement on their faces that filled her with alarm, and, as she crouched there in the doorway, she heard the keeper give a husky laugh.

"Well, we'll soon see if rumour's right!" he exclaimed. "But watch your step, men. The Grey Falcon's a dangerous customer. He may be armed. Better let me go first. I'll see if Noel Raymond, or whatever the rascal calls himself, is at home."

And, holding his gun ready for instant action, he came marching on ahead of the others.

June stood as if petrified.

She could guess who had spread the rumour that the Grey Falcon's hide-out was located in the watch-tower—the Grey Falcon himself! And quite clear now was the reason why that jewel case had been hidden in Uncle Noel's suitcase—to incriminate the young detective to the very uttermost. The Grey Falcon meant to make absolutely certain of getting rid of the one man he feared.

Agitatedly June's fingers tightened around the ebony box. That must not be found here. At all costs she must frustrate the master-crook's crafty scheme.

But how?

It was hopeless to attempt to escape unseen from the watch-tower. The gamekeeper was less than twenty yards away.

Desperately she looked around the gloomy, stone-walled chamber, then, as her gaze fell on the coiled rope on which the suitcase rested, a daring plan occurred to her.

Softly she closed the door; softly she thrust home the one ancient, rusty bolt it possessed. Then she grabbed up the rope, and with frantic haste tied one end of it around the iron bar of the window which overlooked the sea. Throwing the rest of the rope over the sill, she peered anxiously through the window. The beach seemed a nerve-racking distance away, but the long rope almost reached to the foot of the black cliff on which the tower was built.

"I'll have to risk it," she whispered. "It's the only way. I daren't let them find—"

Her voice broke off and her heart leapt into her throat. For there had come a heavy thump on the bolted door, followed by a shout.

"Come on, you scoundrel—open up! You can't escape!" bellowed the gamekeeper; and there came a whole medley of bangs, as his companions joined him outside the door.

Quickly June clambered up on to the stone sill; frantically she squeezed herself through the narrow window. Her face was as pale as she clutched at the rope; wound one leg around it. Suddenly she realised how serious was her own plight. If she were caught here—what explanation could she possibly give? And if her real identity should be learned—if it was realised that she was actually Noel Raymond's niece—

"Everyone would think Uncle Noel and I were in league!" she told herself; and, careless of the risk, began to lower herself, hand over hand, down the swaying rope.

From outside the tower came a series of thunderous crashes. The crowd, convinced that they had the Grey Falcon cornered, were flinging themselves against the oaken panels. The door was strong enough, but the ancient bolt wasn't. Bit by bit it began to give, and suddenly it burst away from the woodwork, causing the door to fly open.

But by then June had reached the end of the dangling rope. She dropped safely down to the beach, then ran along the foot of the cliff until she reached the steps leading up to the college grounds, then she gave a gasp of relief.

"D-done it!" she gulped. "And I'm certain I wasn't seen. But what do I do next?"

She frowned down at the jewel case. There was only one thing for it, she decided. She must hide that until she could get in touch with Uncle Noel. Sooner or later he was bound to communicate with her.

Cautiously she made her way through the gardens. The jewel case was too bulky to conceal, so at all costs she must avoid anyone seeing her. To her relief the grounds seemed to be deserted. The rest of the school would be at dinner.

Unseen, she gained the college, and with a bit of relief stepped into the hall, and then she stopped dead, listening in alarm. Voices came from around the corridor. Dinner was over, and the girls were streaming out. Another moment and they would be in sight.

Frantically June looked around. She must not be seen with that incriminating box.

Near her was an oak chest, and on it stood a large Oriental vase with a wide neck. Impulsively June reached up and as quick as thought popped the jewel case into it. Even as it dropped down out of sight, there came a rush of feet and a chorus of surprised voices rang out:

"Dorothy!"
"Where on earth have you been?"
"We've been looking everywhere for you! Don't you know you've missed dinner?"

And there, confronting her with wide curious eyes, were Julie, Lady Sue, and half a dozen other Upper Fourth Formers.

THE VANISHED VASE



INNOCENTLY, June returned their stares. There was not a trace of the agitation she felt on her face. Never had she acted so well.

"Oh, I didn't feel hungry," she said, and she forced herself to laugh. "Anyway, I had to go out. Being a new girl I find

I'm in need of heaps of things, you know!"
Julie gave an understanding nod.

"Been shopping, eh?" she said, then laughed herself. "But, I say, we've been making plans—"

June smiled.
"Yes?"

"We're going to carry on rehearsing our play," said Julie excitedly. "And if only the police will hurry up and arrest that beastly Noel Raymond, maybe the ban on the refectory will be withdrawn."

June winced at this contemptuous reference to her uncle, but she forced herself to appear interested only in the play.

"Goody! That's the idea," she approved. "And what about a part for me?" You remember, Julie, you promised me one."

The leader of the dramatic society smiled.

"Of course I did, and I've got just the part for you," she declared. "But we'll discuss that later. Let's go and get our prop baskets. Miss Stanton can hardly mind us visiting the refectory to move our stuff. Anyway, I've helped myself to the key, so let's go."

And in friendly fashion she linked her arm in June's. Although June's one anxiety was

to retrieve the stolen jewel case and find a safer hiding-place for it, she allowed herself to be escorted across to the refectory. Indeed, to have refused to accompany her Form chums would have been to invite awkward questions.

While they were carrying the heavy baskets out of the dressing-room Julie explained that, temporarily at least, they intended to store their gear in the college gym, and there they meant to hold their first real rehearsal right away. That gave June her chance to slip away.

"I'll join you in a minute or two," she said, as they emerged out in the open and Julie locked the refectory door. "But I want to pop across to my study first."

"O.K. Then you can put this back on its hook," replied Julie; and she handed over the key.

June slipped it into her blazer pocket, and, leaving the others to go to the school gym, which was housed in a building away from the main college premises, she sped across the quadrangle.

But when she entered the hall she received a nasty shock. There was no sign of the big Oriental vase.

In consternation she gazed about her, then seeing a maid walking along one of the corridors, she ran forward.

"Mary," she called, "just a moment!" The maid tucked the newspaper she was carrying under one arm and turned. Desperately June strove to hide her agitation. "I say, what's become of that vase that was out in the hall?" she asked.

"You mean that big ugly thing wi' blue serpents climbin' over it?" asked the maid.

"Yes, that's the one. Who's taken it away?"

"Why, Miss Stanton, miss!"
"M-m-miss Stanton?"

In blank dismay June stared. Curiously the maid regarded her.

"Yes, miss. It belongs to her, you know. She only lent it to the Sixth to paint, although why anyone should want to paint a great ugly thing like that beats me. Anyway, Miss Stanton was annoyed when she saw it had been left out in the hall, and she grabbed it quick an' carried it off to her study."

June felt her cheeks going white.
"Oh, golly!" she whispered to herself.

But that shock was nothing to the one she was about to receive. The maid, pulling the newspaper from under her arm, held it out.

"Have you seen this, miss?" she asked.
June shook her head.

"Well, perhaps you'd like to have a look at it, miss," went on the maid. "It's got all the latest about the Noel Raymond case. Coo, but it's a real knock-out! Accordin' to the paper—" She broke off, as from one of the mistress' rooms there came an impatient summons. "But I mustn't stop gossipin', miss. You read it for yourself."

And, thrusting the newspaper into June's hand, she turned and hurried away. Idly June opened the paper and glanced at the front page. Great black headlines ran right across the columns, and as her startled eyes saw them, she reeled, so sensational, so utterly unexpected was the news which they shrieked.

For those headlines made it clear why Noel Raymond had not kept his appointment with her; made it clear why he had not returned to the old watch-tower.

But so staggering was the information which seemed to leap out from the paper and hit her, so blood-chilling, that she swayed, and if she had not clutched blindly at the banister post at the foot of the stairs she would have fallen to the ground.

What news is it that the paper contains which can upset June in this manner? Be sure you don't miss next Friday's splendid chapters of this exciting story in the GIRLS' CRYSTAL.