

Notorious Grey Falcon



Detective June's MOST THRILLING CASE

A SHOCK FOR JUNE

By PETER LANGLEY

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 startled to discover that the notes had been written by the Grey Falcon, a mysterious master-crook whom her uncle was trying to capture.

The Grey Falcon stole some valuable jewels from the near-by Manor, the tenant of which was Howard Wyndham, the chairman of the college governors. Mr. Wyndham declared that he had discovered Noel Raymond in the house, and said that the detective, far from trying to capture the Grey Falcon, was himself the master-crook.

June knew that her uncle was innocent, and when she found the stolen jewels she hid them in an Oriental vase, which later was removed to the headmistress' study.

June was worried at the lack of news from her uncle, but when she read the midday newspaper she learnt the startling truth.

IN consternation June surveyed the glaring newspaper headlines. They were so sensational, so utterly unexpected, that for a moment she could not believe her own eyes.

GRIM END TO SEARCH FOR NOEL RAYMOND.

Police Believe Once Famous Detective Fell From Cliff.

HAT AND COAT WASHED UP BY TIDE.

As the awful significance of those headlines crashed across June's brain a wave of faintness swept over her again, and she clutched at the banister-post more tightly to prevent herself from falling. For a minute or two she stood

there, swaying, white to the lips, striving desperately to conquer her emotion.

The uncle she adored—dead! Oh, it could not be true, she told herself wildly. The thought was too incredible to be true. There must be some other explanation to explain why the famous detective had failed to keep his appointment with her.

With an effort she choked back her tears and forced herself to read on. In crisp, blunt sentences the newspaper report told the startling story:

"The career of Noel Raymond, the once famous detective, who for months has been operating as the Grey Falcon, the notorious master-crook, is at an end. This seems clear as a result of discoveries made by the police this morning.

"Following the burglary at the Manor last night an intensive search was made for Noel Raymond. Footprints led to the cliff top near the old watch tower, and there came to an abrupt end. In examining the cliff face, the police found unmistakable evidence that someone had tumbled down the steep slope, and a torn scrap of clothing, caught on a bush, has been identified as belonging to the fugitive. Later, the detective's hat and coat were washed up by the tide, so it seems certain that in fleeing in the darkness Noel Raymond lost his way and fell from the cliff top.

"The current is very treacherous at this point, and even the strongest swimmer could hardly survive such a fall. No trace of the stolen jewels has yet been discovered, and search is now being made for the body of the detective, whose double life was a carefully preserved secret until—"

Hot, choking tears again blinded June. The paper slipped from her fingers, and suddenly something seemed to snap in her brain. She gave a low moan, and as a wave of blackness engulfed her, she crumpled up and collapsed in a limp heap on the floor.

When she recovered consciousness it was to find a crowd of Upper Fourth Formers gathered around her, and Julie Vermont was holding a glass of water to her lips. The girls exchanged looks of relief as they saw June's eyes blink open, and Julie put a plump arm around her shoulders and lifted her head.

"Take a sip at this," she urged. June drank some of the water and forced a smile to her pallid lips.

"Thank you," she whispered. "I—I feel much better now. It—it was silly of me to pass out like that."

"But what made you faint?" came in a puzzled, anxious chorus.

June put an unsteady hand to her brow, biting back the temptation to pour out the whole tragic story. She reminded herself that, no matter what had become of Uncle Noel, she still had her duty to perform. No matter how great her grief, she must continue to keep secret her relationship with the detective everyone now believed to have been the long-sought Grey Falcon.

Fortunately she was saved from having to satisfy the girls' curiosity, for Julie answered for her.

"Lack of food—that was the cause," the leader of the Upper Fourth declared decisively, and she shook a reproving finger at June. "You missed dinner, and I believe you skipped brekker, too. It won't do, you know. What you need is a good meal."

Eagerly June snatched at this way out. A little ruefully she nodded.

"It was silly of me," she agreed, "but—but I had so much to do. I'll make up at tea-time, though. Meanwhile, I think I'll just go and lie down. You won't mind if I skip rehearsal, will you?"

"Of course not," declared Julie, and, as June struggled to her feet she gave her a helping hand. "But are you sure you're all right? Hadn't we better get Matron to see you?"

Vigorously June shook her head. The last thing she wanted was for her fainting attack to become known throughout the college. All she desired was to be left alone with her thoughts.

"No, no, I'm quite all right—honestly I am," she protested.

To her relief, Julie & Co. seemed satisfied, though they insisted on accompanying her to her study. There Julie helped her into an armchair, put June's legs up on another chair and wrapped a warm coat around them. Then a little doubtfully she regarded her.

"Sure there's nothing else we can do?" she asked.

June shook her head again. "Nothing—and thank you for being so sweet," she replied. "I'll see you all at tea, and mind you get in a good rehearsal!"

She forced herself to look calm and cheerful, but once the door had closed behind Julie & Co. she let her tensed muscles relax and a choking sob convulsed her.

To think that she would never see Uncle Noel again! To think—

She broke off and abandoned herself to her tears, but gradually a feeling of burning indignation mingled with her grief.

The Grey Falcon was responsible for this tragedy. It had been his treachery which had brought about Uncle Noel's death. It had been his cunning which had started the cruel rumours which had eventually led everyone to think that Noel Raymond was himself the master-crook.

"Oh, it's cruel!" June gulped, an angry flush dyeing her pallid cheeks. "For months uncle has been working himself too hard—for months he has been trying to track down the Grey Falcon—and yet his only reward was to be branded as a crook himself! And now—"

Again the tears gathered in her grey eyes, then she gazed as a new thought struck her. Now that the real Grey Falcon had got rid of

the only enemy he feared, he would be able to resume his villainous career unchecked. Under a new name he would be able to plan more of his audacious coups. There was no one left now to hinder him. No one left to—

Again June's thoughts broke off, and fiercely she sat bolt upright in her chair.

"Yes, there is," she snapped. "There's me. I know the truth, and I know something that may lead to him being exposed yet."

She thrilled as she thought of the locked dressing-room in the old refectory in the college grounds. Hidden there was some secret which the Grey Falcon was frightened might be discovered. That was why he had plotted against the Upper Fourth Dramatic Society; why he had caused the ancient building to be placed out of bounds.

"But suppose I can find out what that secret is," June whispered to herself. "Suppose, too, I can discover who is his accomplice in the college!"

For a moment she forgot her grief. The thought that she, a mere schoolgirl, might be able to track down the real Grey Falcon made her heart thump. And not only might she be able to bring his villainous career to an end, but be able to reveal the truth about Noel Raymond as well. As her thoughts turned again to the uncle she loved her lips quivered and another wave of emotion swept over her. It was a long time before she could conquer it, but at last that fierce, determined gleam again crept into her grey eyes.

"I've got to carry on uncle's work for him," she told herself grimly. "I've got to clear his good name. That means I've got to stay on here at Port Craig; have got to keep our relationship a secret."

She gave a heavy sigh. It would be a terrific, almost unbearable, task to mask her grief. To continue to pose as Dorothy Whiteman would require all her strength and courage now, but somehow she would do it.

Her mind made up, she set to work to prepare her plans. Her first task must be to learn the identity of the girl in the college who was the Grey Falcon's secret helper. But before she could proceed with that, she must try to regain possession of the jewel-case which now reposed in the big Chinese vase in the headmistress' study.

It was satisfying to know that at least the Grey Falcon had been robbed of his booty, but if the stolen necklace were found in the school awkward questions would be asked—questions which would inevitably lead to the discovery of June's real identity.

"Then bang would go all hope of me staying on here," she told herself. "And all hope, too, of solving the mystery. I must get back those jewels—hide them until I can find a way of restoring them to the rajah."

At that moment the clock in the college tower began to chime. Half-past four! Instantly June jumped to her feet. The headmistress would be at tea. That meant her study would be deserted.

"Now's my chance," June told herself.

The prospect of doing detective work made her forget the emotional ordeal through which she had passed. It was briskly that she made her way along to Miss Stanton's study. Outside the door she paused, and then a little nervously knocked. There came no response. She knocked more loudly. Still no response, so boldly she seized the handle and opened the door. To her relief the study was unoccupied.

"Good," she breathed, and eagerly looked around for the vital Oriental vase.

Her sharp eyes quickly found it. It stood, along with a number of other curios, in the big, glass-doored cupboard to the right of the fireplace. Darting forward, June's fingers closed over the fastening. To her delight the cupboard was unlocked. She made to pull open the double doors, and then stopped, her

heart leaping to her throat. For from behind her came a surprised, scandalised voice:

"What does this mean? What are you doing in my study? Kindly explain yourself, Dorothy Whitman!"

June swung round in alarm, to see standing in the doorway the stern, business-like figure of the headmistress.

ADVENTURE IN THE NIGHT



IF the fastening of the cupboard had suddenly become red-hot June could not have let go of it more quickly. In dismay she returned Miss Stanton's look of suspicion, seeking desperately for some plausible explanation to account for her presence here.

"Well, I'm waiting, Dorothy," the headmistress observed, taking a step forward. "Why were you prying in that cupboard?"

June bit her lip. She realised that the secret of her identity hung by the merest thread. Only if she acted quickly could she prevent the whole truth from being discovered.

"I—I wasn't really prying, Miss Stanton," she stammered. "I know it was wrong of me, but I was fascinated by your curios—especially that big Chinese vase. It's—it's so lovely. I wanted to have a closer look at it."

Miss Stanton continued to look annoyed, but, to June's relief, she seemed to accept the explanation.

"Your interest in such matters is very commendable," she commented crisply, "but you had no right to open the cupboard without permission. Kindly refrain from doing such a thing again." She nodded warningly, then took another step forward. "But what brought you here in the first place?" she asked. "Did you wish to see me?"

June thrust her hand into her blazer pocket. "I really brought these," she said quickly, and pulled out the refectory keys which Julie had given her.

The headmistress regarded them in astonishment.

"What are you doing with them?" she demanded. "Don't you know that I have forbidden anyone to visit the refectory?"

"Yes, Miss Stanton—but we only went to get our costumes and stage props," June explained hurriedly. "You see, we intend carrying on with our rehearsals."

"Is that so?" The frown returned to the Head's face. "I am not certain that Mr. Wyndham will approve," she declared. "In view of what has happened he is against that ill-fated play being produced."

June stared in dismay. She knew how disappointed Julie & Co. would be if they were forced to give up their plans completely. At all costs she must try to win round Miss Stanton.

"But—of course there's no harm in carrying on rehearsals," she protested. "After all, none of us believe the legend about the play. It's only the Grey Falcon who's to be feared, and, according to the midday paper"—she paused and, despite herself, tears gathered in her eyes—"the report says that the—Grey Falcon's been drowned," she whispered.

Miss Stanton nodded.

"I know. I have read the newspaper account myself, but it is too early to remove the ban from the refectory. As for allowing you girls to continue your rehearsals—" She frowned and pursed her lips undecidedly. "I personally don't see any harm in it," she admitted, "but Mr. Wyndham may have other views." She paused again, then, to June's relief, smiled. "Very well, you can carry on until further orders," she said. "But—remember, I strictly forbid any of you to set foot inside the refectory. You understand?"

June nodded, although inwardly she felt a

pang of dismay. How was she going to carry out her resolve to discover the Grey Falcon's mysterious secret in face of this stern ban?

"Then return the keys to their proper place in the Assembly Hall," went on the Head. "There was no need to bring them here. I don't want them."

She made a gesture of dismissal, and only too gladly June went. She had got out of a serious situation more easily than she had dared hope. Nevertheless, she knew she must return. She dared not allow that tall-tale jewel case to remain in the Chinese vase a moment longer than she could help.

"I must slip down and get it to-night—when everyone is asleep," she told herself.

But before bed-time came she found herself faced by another ordeal. First of all she had to listen to Julie & Co.'s enthusiastic account of their first rehearsal; had to feign delight when Julie announced that they had decided to allot to her the important rôle of Lady Charmaine, the heroine of the legendary play.

At any other time June would have been thrilled by the prospect, but, worried as she was, she found it difficult to share the high spirits of her fellow Upper Fourth Formers. All her thoughts were with Uncle Noel; try as she would, she could not forget the awful tragedy which had taken place.

When she finally went to bed and lay down without undressing she felt more miserable than ever she had felt in her life.

Half-past ten had struck before she moved; then, getting up, she crossed to the wash-stand, poured out some cold water, and splashed her hot, tear-stained face. The cold douche made her feel better, and it was more calmly that she dried herself, then donned her hooded mac, for it would not be wise to risk being recognised while venturing out of the dormitory.

On slipped feet she descended the stairs, and groped her way through the darkness to Miss Stanton's study. All was quiet, so stealthily she opened the door. The room was also in blackness.

"Good," she breathed in relief. "Now for the jewels."

Switching on the torch she had brought with her, she crossed to the cupboard. Eagerly she grasped the bronze fastening; gave it a turn, then pulled.

But nothing happened. The glass doors refused to budge. In blank dismay she stared. "Locked!" she exclaimed. "The Head's taking no more risks! She's locked up her curios!"

It was a bitter blow. Through the glass the big Chinese vase seemed to mock her. So near and yet so far! But she was helpless to do anything.

For a moment or two June stood there, then she let the bright torchlight rove around the study. Perhaps the Head had left the keys behind her, but though she hunted everywhere, she failed to find them.

"It's no good," she told herself at last. "I'd better get back to bed."

Ruefully she snapped off her torch and groped her way to the door. Opening it, she stepped out into the corridor, and then, abruptly, she pulled up dead.

What was that?

Footsteps! Someone was descending the near-by stairs!

Hastily she shrank back, fearing discovery. The footsteps came to an end. Whoever it was at the foot of the stairs had halted.

But who could it be?

All the girls were supposed to be in bed, and surely no member of the staff would walk around without a light.

June's heart began to pound. A wild suspicion had occurred to her. Hardly daring to breathe, she stole forward. From the staircase there came a hesitant shuffle, as if the person there was trying to get her—or his—bearings.

And then June pulled up, her heart thumping more wildly than ever. For suddenly she had become aware of an eerie greenish glow ahead—a glow which faintly illumined the unknown figure, revealing a girlish shape clad in the picturesque costume of a medieval knight.

"Sir Richard de Coreville," June whispered to herself. "The ghost I saw in the refectory the other night."

But she knew it was no spectre that stood in the dark hall. It was the mysterious girl traitor in the college. The Grey Falcon's secret helper!

With unerring instinct the unknown made straight for the Assembly Hall, and there came a click as she opened the door. A second click followed, and the darkness was broken by a bright light, telling that the night prowler had snapped on an electric torch.

What was she up to?

Quivering with excitement, June crept to the doorway, and peered through.

What she saw brought a gasp to her lips. The "knight" had halted before the glass-fronted case which contained the college keys. She had rested her torch on the edge of a table, and seemed to be busy with two of the keys.

"She's taking an impression of those keys," June told herself. "That's a bar of soap she's got, and she's pressing the keys into it. And I bet they're the refectory keys! She means to have false ones made."

Her heart gave another wild leap. This was positive proof that the clue to the whole mystery lay in the ancient building which had been converted into the college theatre. But what secret lay concealed there? June did not know; at the moment did not even try to guess. An overpowering longing to learn the "knight's" identity seized her.

Without stopping to realise that her own identity was in peril, without stopping to calculate the consequences, she plunged into the Assembly Hall.

"I've caught you!" she cried. "Now I'll soon know who you are!"

And excitedly she rushed forward.

THE CLUE OF THE SHOES



THERE came a startled gasp from the far wall, and instantly the light was extinguished.

June, unprepared, blundered into a row of chairs. There was a crash as they went tumbling in all directions; another, as she tripped and fell headlong.

But she was up in a moment and frantically fumbled for her own torch.

"Don't try to escape!" she panted.

And then, as her torch clicked on, her voice trailed away. Except for herself the Assembly Hall was empty. With amazing speed the unknown had made her escape. Frantically June raced back to the door, played her torch up and down the hall. But no one was to be seen. She listened, but not a sound. Dazedly she stood there. It seemed incredible that anyone could have vanished so swiftly, so noiselessly. Surely she could not have dreamt it all!

But there was no mistake. As she turned her torch round and let it rove round the Assembly Hall she saw the open cupboard; saw too, the keys which the unknown had dropped in her fright. Saw something else also—a square block of soap, bearing the impressions of the two big keys. With a grim chuckle June pocketed it.

"I can make use of this," she murmured.

Then she caught her breath, for on the well-polished floor her keen eyes had detected footprints. She examined them one by one, and under the small, glass-fronted cupboard she found a perfect specimen. Excitedly she took from her mac pocket the compact detective outfit without which she never went far, and

got busy, measuring the footprint, examining it through a magnifying-glass, and finally making a careful tracing of it.

Returning to bed, June concentrated on her next plan of action. How could she discover whose shoe tallied with the tracing she had taken?

Suddenly she remembered that the boot-boy always collected all dirty boots and shoes in the early morning. They were cleaned in a small room beyond the class-rooms and re-distributed to their owners later in the morning.

"I'll get up early and take a look around," she murmured. "Perhaps that shoe will be there."

She was still thinking of this when she fell asleep, but she woke just before Rising Bell. It was just clanging out as she made her way downstairs, but sounds from the kitchens showed that the domestic staff had already started their Sunday's labours.

She hurried to the boot room at the end of the passage. The door stood wide open, showing the little room to be unoccupied. It showed, too, a big pile of footwear lying on the table.

Her eyes gleaming, June began to rummage through the shoes. Suddenly she caught a glimpse of white at the bottom of the pile. She plunged down her hand and drew out a pair of white, slender shoes tied together.

Hardly daring to breathe, she turned them upside down, compared the soles and rubber heels with the tracing she had brought with her. They were identical!

"These belong to the Grey Falcon's helper, right enough," she murmured in triumph. "But who owns them? Who—"

And then her voice trailed away and her heart seemed to leap to her throat. For there had come the sound of footsteps out in the passage.

"I mustn't be found here!" she breathed, and, still clutching the tell-tale shoes, she darted to the doorway and peered out.

It was a man's figure that could be seen out in the corridor. But it was not the boot-boy, or any member of the college staff. It was a perfect stranger who was approaching.

Dressed in stained, creased flannels, the man looked unwashed and unshaved. There was a wild look on his face, and he hobbled rather than walked with the aid of a crudely made stick.

But what could such a ruffian want in Port Craig College?

Bewildered and startled, June involuntarily took a step forward.

At sight of her the man pulled up dead and passed a trembling hand across his stubby chin, then a hoarse cry escaped his lips.

"June!" he whispered. "Then it was you I saw! Thank goodness!"

June stared incredulously. That hoarse voice had touched a chord of memory. Indeed, as she peered at the ill-clad figure which confronted her she found something strangely familiar about that also.

"June, don't you recognise me?" asked that gruff, strained voice, and the man took an unsteady step forward.

But June still stood as if petrified. Blankly she gazed at the man. Her heart was thudding wildly.

"June!" came in another hoarse whisper, and it was as if a curtain had suddenly been lifted in June's whirling brain.

"Uncle Noel! Oh, Uncle Noel!" she sobbed, and, letting the white shoes clatter to the floor, she hurled herself forward—hurled herself into the arms of the detective she had believed to be dead.

What a wonderful, though incredible, surprise this is for June! What can have happened to Noel Raymond, and what are his plans? You'll read in every word of next Friday's chapters of this serial in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.