



THE MESSAGE IN CODE

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 help her uncle track down a mysterious master-crook known as the Grey Falcon.

As a result of the Grey Falcon's scheming Noel was accused of himself being the Grey Falcon, and of stealing jewels from the near-by Manor, tenanted by Howard Wyndham, chairman of the college governors.

Thanks to Miss Tuft, whom June knew to be the Grey Falcon's accomplice, it was suspected that one of the girls was really Noel Raymond's niece in disguise.

June was frightened lest her secret should be discovered, but she was helped by a bearded man whom everyone believed to be Inspector Brown from Scotland Yard. Actually, he was Noel Raymond in disguise, and secretly he and June met in a summer-house in the grounds. There they examined an old book from the school library. One of the faded illustrations contained a message in code, and June was thrilled when her uncle declared she believed that message held the key to the whole mystery.

EXCITEDLY June craned over her uncle's shoulder as he began to decipher the code message in the old book.

"Can you really read it?" she inquired. He looked up with a smile.

"I think so. I can manage to make out a word or two, anyway," he declared. "And there's no doubt about you being right, June. This is the vital clue. Once we've solved it, we'll be able to bowl out the Grey Falcon." "Whoopee!"

June gave a cheer and her eyes sparkled as Noel Raymond again bent over the faded illustration. It was wonderful to know that at long last they were on the track of the truth; thrilling to know that before long they would be able to unmask the mysterious master-crook whose cunning had resulted in Noel Raymond becoming a fugitive.

Eagerly, almost impatiently she watched and waited, but to her dismay the young detec-

tive's smile faded, and he began to frown as he examined the hieroglyphics through his magnifying-glass.

"I'm afraid this isn't going to be as easy as I thought," he said suddenly, regarding her with a wry grimace. "To decode the whole message will require a lot of hard study, but don't worry, my dear." Seeing the look of disappointment on her face, he gave her arm a reassuring squeeze. "It's only a question of time. Once I've had a chance to browse over it quietly, I'll manage to unravel the puzzle." As he spoke he closed the book and replaced it in his attache-case. "The best thing is for me to take it away and study it carefully," he declared.

"But you'll let me know the moment you've solved it, uncle, won't you?" asked June.

"Of course, my dear. It won't take more than a day or two at the most, and I'll find some way of getting in touch with you. But—remember, no more running into danger while I'm away. Promise me you'll be careful!"

June nodded, and her uncle looked relieved. "Good! Then I'd better be getting back," he said. "I'm supposed to be—"

He broke off, and they both stiffened, for from outside the summer-house came the sound of voices. Darting across to the tiny side window, June peered through, to give a gasp of alarm as she saw three figures approaching along the garden path.

Mr. Howard Wyndham, Miss Stanton, and Miss Tuft.

Clearly the gruff voice of the chairman of the school governors could be heard.

"Well, we'll have a word with this Scotland Yard chap," he was saying. "You are sure he came along this way, Miss Tuft?"

The Upper Fourth Form mistress gave an emphatic nod.

"Positive. I saw him not ten minutes ago—heading for the summer-house."

June's face paled as she realised that the trio were talking about the man they believed to be Inspector Brown, and agitatedly she whirled on the disguised Noel Raymond.

"They are looking for you," she whispered. "But if they find me here with you—"

There was no need for her to finish, for in the event of such a discovery, explanations would be decidedly difficult.

"Leave this to me," Noel whispered back. "I'll deal with them. The moment the coast is clear, slip away. Good-bye, my dear, and don't worry. Between us we will clip the Grey Falcon's wings."

As he spoke he opened the glass doors and calmly walked out of the summer-house, to be instantly hailed by Mr. Wyndham.

"Ah, there you are, inspector! Just the man we were looking for. We want to have a word with you about this girl, June Gaynor. Despite what you say, neither Miss Tuft nor myself is completely satisfied. We still have an uneasy feeling that Noel Raymond's niece may be operating from within the college, in the guise of a new girl."

"Yes—and the idea gives me the shivers!" cut in Miss Tuft. "Let us go into the summer-house and discuss it, inspector."

June, crouching down at the back of the glass-doored hut, gave an apprehensive gasp. It looked as if she was doomed to discovery, after all. But her uncle was equal to the situation. Standing so that he barred the way, he shook his head.

"There is no need for discussion," he declared. "I can quickly set all your doubts at rest. A discovery I have just made has confirmed my theory."

"New discovery?" ejaculated Mr. Wyndham. The black-bearded figure they believed to be Inspector Brown smiled with satisfaction.

"Yes—as you know, my examination of the library convinced me that the burglary was an outside job. I, therefore, searched for footprints outside the window, and that is what brought me here. Look!"

He pointed, and June, daintily peeping from the summer-house, gave a startled gasp, for her uncle was actually pointing to the footprints in the gravel which she herself had made.

"Those were made by the person who removed that book," declared the supposed Scotland Yard detective. "They lead, as you will observe, to the summer-house, but—" He paused, and gazed towards the shrubbery nearby. "Follow me, please."

Authoritatively he led the way forward, pointing out further details as he proceeded.

"You see those broken twigs—that was where someone in great haste brushed against that bush," he observed. "And on the wall are signs—only visible to an expert eye. I am afraid nevertheless, unmistakable—showing that it has recently been climbed."

While Miss Stanton and the others watched, impressed by his confident manner, Noel Raymond climbed on to the lower branch of one of the trees, and pretended to examine the top of the wall through his magnifying-glass.

"Ah, yes, as I thought!" he declared, clambering down again and nodding gravely. "It is quite clear, Miss Stanton, that the Grey Falcon's helper is not one of your girls."

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed the headmistress, overwhelmingly relieved that the dreadful suspicion which had haunted her during the past hour or two had been disproved.

Mr. Wyndham, however, continued to look a little dubious.

"I hope you're right," he said a little dubiously. "After all, these signs may only mean that one of the pupils has been breaking bounds, and be nothing to do with the thief at all."

"A very good point, sir." Through his pince-nez, Noel Raymond pretended to nod approval. "But I can also assure you that a very close eye is being kept on Noel Raymond's niece, and more is known about her movements than you might think." He turned to the headmistress. "You need have no anxiety about any of your girls, madam," he declared.

"You are sure of it?"

Again it was Mr. Wyndham who spoke, and the disguised detective nodded.

"Positive, sir. In fact, I could lay my hands on June Gaynor at this very moment. But you realise that it does not do to be too impulsive. We are more anxious to lay the Grey Falcon by the heels than to arrest a mere accomplice."

Mr. Wyndham gave an excited cry. "You mean, you are keeping her under surveillance—are hoping that if you lie low she will lead you direct to the Grey Falcon? Jove, that's a splendid idea! I can see, inspector, that we shall have no need to worry now that you are in charge of the case."

"That is very kind of you, sir. Now I am afraid I must go. I have a train to catch."

"Then come with me," urged the chairman of the governors, putting a friendly hand on the supposed Inspector Brown's shoulders. "I will give you a lift in my car."

Together with the two mistresses, the men retraced their steps back down the winding path, while in the summer-house June chuckled in mingled relief and delight.

"Good old Uncle Noel!" she exclaimed. "He's got them away. He sounded so convincing, too."

She chuckled as she thought of Noel's daring; then, feeling happier than she had done for days, she slipped out of the summer-house and made her way back to the school.

Thanks to her uncle, suspicion had been turned away from her. Now there was no need to fear the secret of her real identity being discovered.

But that was not all. Uncle Noel was taking away with him the book that contained the vital key to the mystery. Once that was solved, then the whole truth would be laid bare and the notorious master-crook who had troubled them for so long would be tracked down and put under arrest.

A WAITING GAME



"I SAY, girls, have you heard the news? All that absurd talk about the Grey Falcon having a secret helper in the coll, has been proved to be a myth."

It was after lessons that afternoon, and the Upper Fourth Formers, gathered in the Common Room awaiting

the tea bell, turned excitedly as the door opened and Julie Vermont came rushing in, her plump cheeks flushed with delight.

"I've just been in with the Head, and she told me all about it," she declared. "It seems that Inspector Brown definitely proved to Miss Stanton that the Grey Falcon's helper was not one of us."

A cheer went up, for many of the girls had resented the rumour that had been flying about all day—particularly the suggestion that the traitor was a member of the Upper Fourth.

Julie was as pleased as anyone to hear that the news was public property. Now, indeed, she had nothing to fear.

"But that's not all," went on Julie, gazing around with sparkling eyes. "We've been invited out to tea on Saturday."

"What, the whole Form?" came in an incredulous chorus.

Smilingly their captain nodded.

"But who by?" asked June curiously. "By Mr. Wyndham," was the unexpected reply. "Seems he sympathises with us for all the alarms we've had lately in the coll, and thinks we deserve a bit of a treat. So he's invited the whole coll, across to the Manor. Of course, not all at once, but Form by Form—one every Saturday until the whole school's been. And the Upper Fourth is first on the list. We're to go on Saturday, and—what do you think?" Julie paused tantalisingly; then, as they all gathered around wonderingly, she

gave a breathless laugh. "Mr. Wyndham is interested in our play, and he wants us to run through one or two of the scenes for him when we go over to his place."

This news evoked another cheer, and Lady Sue gave an extra loud whoop.

"That's simply wizard!" she declared. "Why, if Mr. Wyndham likes it, then he may allow Miss Stanton to lift the ban on using the refectory theatre."

Julie nodded, as thrilled as the aristocratic member of the Form.

"Just what I thought," she declared. "So we've got to pull up our socks. We've simply got to impress him. But that means plenty of hard work," she added, "so what about having a rehearsal after tea?"

The suggestion was enthusiastically endorsed, and when they went in to tea the Upper Fourth Formers were still excitedly discussing the forthcoming invitation. The generosity of the chairman of the governors had endeared him to them all, but it was their play about which they were especially thinking.

All of them had been looking forward to putting it on on Foundation Day, so the banning of the refectory had been a big blow to them. But now it seemed as if the ban might be lifted, after all.

June was as thrilled as any of her chums, but for a different reason. This unexpected invitation would give her a chance to continue her detective work, for she could not forget that the mysterious Grey Falcon had carried out his most daring operation up to date at the near-by Manor. He was either one of the servants or one of the guests—which, she had no idea, but she meant to find out.

"He's got a scarred finger—that'll help to identify him," she told herself, as, tea over, they all hurried across to the school gym for their rehearsal. "And I may find other clues which will help to identify him. Wouldn't I feel proud if next time I met Uncle Noel—"

She broke off, her lips pouting doubtfully, as she remembered the promise she had made to him. Did her proposed investigations come within the scope of that promise? Certainly there would be danger if the Grey Falcon came to suspect that one of Mr. Wyndham's young guests had come to the Manor for such a purpose, but—

Impulsively June shook her head. "But he can't possibly suspect," she told herself. "And if I'm careful I can't run into danger. Anyway, this is too good a chance to miss. I'm sure if nunky were here he'd agree with me."

Reassured, she threw herself heart and soul into the rehearsal. Spurred on by the thought of what was at stake on Saturday, the other girls acted as never before, and from Julie there came a nod of satisfaction.

"Grand—simply grand!" she declared. "If you do as well on Saturday Mr. Wyndham is bound to be impressed. Now take your places for the ghost scene."

The three girls featured in this episode, looking eerie and statuesque in their long, billowing gowns of silk, grouped themselves around the imitation inglenook fireplace which had been erected in one corner of the gymnasium. Julie, script in hand, was about to give the signal to begin when Celia Treves, who was taking the part of Lady Charmaine's mother, looked around with a frown.

"Where's my embroidery?" she asked. "Oh, blow, I've left it in my study!"

Julie waved an impatient hand. "Both your embroidery! You can pretend to be doing it, can't you? This is only a rehearsal."

Celia, however, refused to be appeased. "But, I won't know what to do with my hands," she protested. "You know last time I forgot it you said I was too fidgety. It fits the part and helps me—"

"O.K., O.K.!" cut in Julie resignedly. "Suppose we'll have to pander to your artistic

temperament. Buzz off, someone, for goodness' sake and fetch her ladyship's embroidery!"

"I'll go," offered June. And, gathering up her satin skirts, she went racing out of the gym.

On going to Celia's study she found the missing fancywork lying on the table, and, snatching it up, was hurrying back down the corridor when abruptly she paused.

From the hall ahead had come a soft but clear voice:

"You shouldn't have rung up from the Manor. It's too dangerous. You know how I warned you."

June gave a startled gasp, and, stepping into a near-by alcove, she peered round the corner of the wall. What she saw confirmed her suspicions. Standing beside the telephone table in the hall, the receiver to her ear and looking very nervous and furtive, was Miss Tuft.

To whom was the rascally young Upper Fourth Form mistress speaking? Those agitatedly whispered words gave the clue, and June felt her heart leap.

"The Grey Falcon!" she told herself. "And he's phoning from the Manor!"

EXCITING PROSPECTS



CROUCHED in the alcove, June strained her ears. If it was indeed the Grey Falcon on the other end of the wire, then he must have something vitally important to say to risk telephoning from the Manor—and the schoolgirl detective did not intend to miss a single word that was said.

For a few moments Miss Tuft was silent, listening into the receiver; then she gave an impatient nod.

"Of course I didn't believe that Yard man!" she cried. "He's a fool! I'm positive June Gaynor is one of the girls here, and we've just got to find out which. I tell you, she's on my track—What?"

Again she pressed the receiver to her ear, and June frowned anxiously. It was disturbing to discover that Noel Raymond had not succeeded in allaying the Form-mistress's suspicions, although, apparently, she had no idea that the supposed Inspector Brown had in reality been the one man whom she and the Grey Falcon feared.

Impatiently June watched and waited. It was maddening not to know what that voice at the other end of the wire was saying. Something important, judging from Miss Tuft's expression. The woman was listening eagerly, and suddenly an excited smile wreathed her lips.

"A splendid idea!" she exclaimed. "Yes, that certainly ought to do the trick. And once we've bowled out June Gaynor, we'll soon get on the track of her uncle. What? Of course. I will write this evening. Don't worry. Your plan can't possibly misfire. That girl won't suspect a thing—until it's too late. Good-bye! See you on Saturday."

And, hanging up the receiver, the mistress looked furtively around, then went hurrying away.

In the alcove June stood as if turned to stone. What she had overheard had filled her with acute alarm.

"They've got some scheme on foot to discover who is masquerading here under false colours," she muttered. "If only I knew what their plan was! Oh, goodness, what can I do?"

She was still trying to answer that question as she walked back to the gymnasium with Celia Treves' embroidery. The strain of grappling with the problem spoilt the re-

hearsal for her, and she felt greatly relieved when at last it was over.

The rest of the evening she spent in the privacy of her study. Somehow she must discover the details of the plot which was being hatched against her. But how? Frantically that query was still hammering on her brain when she went to bed, but she found no answer to it.

Next morning she watched Miss Tuft whenever possible. Once she even managed to slip into the mistress's study, and there, hoping against hope to find something which would put her on the right track, searched through her desk, even examined the contents of her wastepaper-basket. But all in vain.

The next two days were lived through in an agony of suspense. To June it was like living on the top of a volcano. Every minute she expected it to blow up. But, to her relief, nothing happened. Miss Tuft was her usually fussy, fidgety self. Not by so much as a word or by a look did she betray the fact that she was secretly engaged in anything out of the ordinary. Indeed, towards the end of the week she seemed, if anything more fussy and bad-tempered than usual. June found new hope in the mistress's cross looks.

"Perhaps the Grey Falcon's plan—whatever it was—failed," she told herself. "Perhaps he's still got no suspicion who I really am."

And then, on the Friday morning, there came another small incident which made June feel still easier in the mind.

Coming down early for breakfast, she saw the Upper Fourth Form mistress pacing up and down the hall. "There was something so tense and anxious about her manner that June's curiosity was instantly aroused.

"Hallo, what's up?" she asked, and, acting on the impulse of the moment, stepped into a near-by alcove to watch.

Suddenly there came a rat-tat at the door, followed by a clatter, as the postman pushed the morning mail through the letter-box. Instantly Miss Tuft had seized it, and the watching June heard her give a disappointed gasp as she ran through the letters.

Opening the door, the mistress hailed the departing postman.

"Are you sure you haven't forgotten one of the letters?" she asked. "I'm particularly expecting one from London. Miss Tuft is my name."

The postman examined the bundle of letters in his hand, then shook his head. "Sorry miss, there's no more for the school," he said.

Miss Tuft bit her lip, then, turning, disappeared down the corridor to her study, a scowl on her face.

Watching her go, June remembered the letter the mistress had promised the Grey Falcon she would write. Was it the answer to this letter which she was so anxiously expecting? Was it because no reply had come that she had stalked off with such a furious look of disappointment on her face?

June did not know, but more and more her fears left her, for it really did look as if the Grey Falcon's scheme to discover which girl was Noel Raymond's niece—whatever that scheme might be—had failed.

And then, that evening there came a development which made the schoolgirl detective completely forget her fears.

Together with the rest of the Form, she was in the college gymnasium, awaiting the last dress rehearsal of their play, when suddenly she heard a faint tap on the window beside her.

She turned, and stared in bewilderment, for there was no sign of anyone outside the window. She was about to turn away again, thinking she had been mistaken, when there came another tap, and slowly the small window swung open and a hand appeared in view—a hand clutching a folded slip of paper.

"Catch—quick!" came in a whisper, and the folded note came whirling towards her.

Her heart pounding, June grabbed at it, for she had recognised that soft voice.

"Uncle Noel—it's a note from him!" she murmured excitedly, and her heart gave another wild leap.

Apprehensively she looked around, but she was unobserved. Under Julie's directions, the rest of the girls were busily engaged in arranging the stage for the first scene. So, drawing back behind a pile of theatrical hampers, June unfolded the slip of paper.

"Perhaps uncle's managed to decode those hieroglyphics in the book," she whispered to herself.

One glance at the note, and she found her dazzling hopes confirmed, and it was with sparkling eyes she read what was written there:

"Have deciphered the puzzle. The key to the whole mystery lies in the library at the Manor, and, if all goes well, we will bring the case to a successful conclusion to-morrow. But your help is essential if I'm to bowl out the Grey Falcon. Look out for Inspector Brown to-morrow afternoon. He will be at the Manor to report progress to Mr. Wyncham."

June's heart pounded with joy, for this news was far better than she had ever dared hope for. Not only had Uncle Noel discovered the secret of the old book, but he was actually planning to unmask the Grey Falcon!

But what did that mention of the library mean? And why was her help so essential?

Those were questions June could not answer, and she did not try to solve them. The one big thing was that, if all went well to-morrow afternoon, the case on which she and Uncle Noel had worked so hard would be brought to a triumphant end.

Noel Raymond's innocence would be proved! The identity of the real Grey Falcon would be discovered, and the whole scoundrelly gang brought to book!

"Hey, come on, June! Where have you got to? We're waiting to begin."

As she heard Julie calling, June hurriedly stuffed her uncle's message into her pocket and emerged from behind the hampers. As she did so she saw Julie staring at her curiously.

"Hallo! What's happened?" the plump captain asked. "You look as if you've come into a fortune or something!"

June, realising that her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes had betrayed her feelings, gave an excited laugh.

"Don't know about that," she said. "It's the thought of to-morrow's party that's making me look so happy. I expect it promises to be great fun—and am I looking forward to it! I'll say I am!"

And her fingers closed over the note in her pocket.

What a sensationally exciting party it was going to be!

You'll be on tenterhooks of excitement to know what happens at Mr. Wyncham's party, so be sure not to miss the exciting chapters of this serial in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

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