



Detective June's MOST THRILLING CASE

JUNE'S MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

By PETER LANGLEY

JUNE GAYNOR, schoolgirl niece of Noel Raymond, was furious when she heard the fantastic rumours which were being circulated about her uncle. Some of these suggested that Noel was in league with the Grey Falcon, a mysterious master-crook; others hinted that Noel was actually the Grey Falcon himself!

June wanted to help her uncle track down the master-crook, but Noel would not hear of it. Instead, he gave her a case of her own to tackle. This concerned an old play which the girls of the Upper Fourth at Port Craig College intended to revive. According to an ancient legend, disaster would overtake all who attempted to produce the play, and Julie Vermont, the leader of the Upper Fourth, had received a message ordering her to give up the project.

Disguised as Dorothy Whiteman, a new girl, June went to Port Craig, and there she discovered that her case and Uncle Noel's were connected. It was the Grey Falcon who was plotting against the Upper Fourth Form's play!

Believing that a valuable clue to the mystery was hidden in the main dressing-room of the old refectory, June broke bounds one night and visited the supposedly haunted building, which had been converted into the school theatre. There she encountered a spectral figure dressed in the attire of a medieval knight, and realised that the girl who was playing ghost was not only in league with the Grey Falcon, but also belonged to the college.

In the refectory June also met her uncle, and, having recovered the keys of the locked dressing-room, she suggested that they should explore.

"COME on, uncle! Let's investigate! I'm simply dying to discover the secret of the locked dressing-room!"

And, tugging excitedly at Noel Raymond's sleeve, June Gaynor led the way up the steep stairs, leading to the stage trapdoor.

His niece's breathless eagerness made the young detective smile, but there was a gleam in his eyes that showed he was also labouring under a great excitement.

Tremendous issues were at stake.

What they found in the dressing-room might have a decisive effect not only on the career of the Grey Falcon, but on the career of Noel Raymond himself. For unless he could quickly track down the elusive master-crook, the cruel slanders which were being circulated about the young detective might bring about his ruin.

Emerging through the spring trapdoor, June and Noel made their way across the pitch-black stage, their torches cutting white beams of light through the gloom. Presently before them loomed an arched doorway, with an iron-studded, ancient door. June's heart leapt as she saw the cumbersome iron lock, and urgently she held out her hand.

"The keys, uncle!" she gasped. "Let me unlock it—please!"

Noel handed over the two keys which the girl in the luminous cloak had dropped, and, almost trembling with excitement, June fitted one of them into the lock and turned it. There was a metallic click, then creakingly the door swung open.

Hardly daring to breathe, June swivelled round her torch. Its bright rays played about the big dressing-room and a gasp escaped the schoolgirl detective's lips.

What she had expected to see she didn't quite know, but certainly not what now encountered her.

An empty room!

Nothing except four stone walls; a flagged floor and a smoky, raftered ceiling.

In disappointment and bewilderment she gazed around the cold, dusty apartment.

"There's nothing here!" she breathed. "Nothing at all! Even our theatrical baskets have gone! But surely—"

She broke off, for as she stepped into the dressing-room she saw that to the right of the doorway was a deep alcove, and stacked up here were three hamper-baskets belonging to the Upper Fourth Dramatic Society. And above them, carved in the stone wall, was the figure of Justice, blindfolded and holding the traditional scales. A narrow shelf had been carved below the model, and on it stood three small, ancient brass images. Picking them up, June regarded them wonderingly.

"Faith—Hope—and Charity," she whispered,

reading the names engraved on each of the tiny, but heavy figures. "The three Virtues in the play Julie & Co. are rehearsing," she added, then with a shrug replaced the images on the shelf. "But they can't have anything to do with the Grey Falcon," she went on, and turned desperately to Noel Raymond. "Uncle, don't say we've come too late!" she exclaimed. "Surely the Grey Falcon hasn't removed whatever secret he had hidden here!"

The detective shook his head. "No—it's still here. I'm certain of that—and we've got to find it!"

As he spoke, he took a curiously shaped little hammer from his pocket, and, dropping to one knee, commenced to hammer on the flagstones, listening carefully. June, watching him, gave an excited shout.

"A secret trapdoor, that's what you're looking for, isn't it?" she asked.

Noel nodded and went on tapping. Every flagstone he tested, then he turned his attention to the stone walls, but all gave out the same solid sound.

"No good, I'm afraid," he announced at last. "There doesn't seem to be any—"

Breaking off, he crossed to the alcove and began pulling aside the theatrical baskets. June, realising that he was anxious to test the flagstones on which they rested, gave him a hand.

Tap, tap, tap!
Again Noel operated his hammer. Still no result. If the Grey Falcon had a secret, it was well hidden. And then, as disappointedly the detective helped June to replace the baskets, he gave a sudden gasp, and snatched something which had become caught in the rope fastenings.

"Hallo! What's this?" he asked. Eagerly June looked at what lay in the centre of his outstretched palm. It was a crumpled up piece of paper. Examining it, she saw that it was part of a sheet of notepaper. A crest was embossed at the top, and underneath had been written a few words:

"This Friday—Library—one a.m."

But it was not this cryptic message which held June's attention. It was the faint fingerprint which her sharp eyes detected—a fingerprint with a scar running across it.

"The Grey Falcon's!" she gasped. Noel gave a grim nod.

"Yes—it must have been he who dropped that note. For some reason we've yet to discover, he had occasion to move these baskets. But this is an amazing bit of luck, June! The excitement in his voice made June's pulses quicken. "See that crest?" he went on. "It's the crest of the Manor House."

"The Manor!" June gave a startled gasp. "But that's quite near here. It's owned by Howard Wyndham, the chairman of the college governors."

"Exactly." Noel gave another nod, and there was a satisfied gleam in his eyes. "And Mr. Wyndham has a number of important guests staying with him, including the Rajah of Napree. That's what brought me down here in the first place, my dear. I had an idea the Grey Falcon was out to steal the rajah's jewels—and this note clinches it. The robbery is going to take place to-night."

"To-night, uncle?" echoed June, her heart thumping.

"Yes—and this piece of paper confirms another suspicion I had—that the Grey Falcon isn't going to operate from the outside, but from the inside."

"You mean that he's one of the guests?" asked June with a gasp.

Noel nodded.

"Yes—but this time he's over-reached himself. Now I know what his plans are, it should be easy to catch him red-handed." He looked at his wrist-watch. "Fraid I must be going, my dear," he said. "If I'm to capture the Grey

Falcon I've got to make careful plans. Besides, you ought to be tucked up in bed, you know."

"I—suppose so," agreed June, and sighed. "But don't forget I'm meeting you early to-morrow morning, uncle, in the old watch-tower."

"Yes, at a quarter to eight," Noel nodded.

"By then I hope to have big news for you—news that the Grey Falcon's been caged."

June forgot her own disappointment as she thought of what this case meant to her uncle, and with sparkling eyes she faced him.

"Oh, won't that be grand!" she exclaimed.

"Won't—"
And then abruptly her voice trailed away, and they both stiffened in alarm, for from outside had come a startled shout, followed by the squeal of hurriedly applied brakes.

"Out with the light—quick!" whispered Noel.

They both switched off their torches, then tiptoed across to the mullioned window and peered out. In the bright moonlight they saw that a two-seater car had pulled up at the top of the path leading to the old refectory, and emerging from it were two figures—a man and a woman. June recognised one of them, and her eyes widened with surprise.

"Miss Stanton—the headmistress! But what on earth's she doing here?" she ejaculated. "And who's that with her?"

Wonderingly she stared from the headmistress to her companion—a broad-shouldered, grey-haired man, with a bristling grey moustache and a ramrod figure which suggested a military man.

"Why, it's Howard Wyndham," said Noel. "I expect Miss Stanton has been to the dance at the Manor and that he's driven her back, but—"

He broke off, and they both darted away from the window as the couple outside turned and stared at it. Plainly came Mr. Wyndham's deep voice:

"I am certain I saw a light, Miss Stanton! Surely no intruder is prowling about in there?"

Judging from her comment, the headmistress was sceptical.

"But who—and why?" she asked. "Nothing of value is kept in the refectory—only theatrical costumes for the play the Upper Fourth is producing."

Her companion shook his head uneasily.

"So you're still letting them produce that play, eh?" he said. "Don't like it, Miss Stanton. I agree with Miss Tuft. Nothing good will come of that venture."

The Head regarded him in surprise.

"But surely you don't believe in that absurd legend!" she protested.

Howard Wyndham frowned.

"Now—but I believe in the Grey Falcon," was his unexpected reply. "And I understand that he has been issuing threatening notices. By gad!" He glared across at the refectory. "Perhaps it's that scoundrel who showed the light just now. Pray stay here, ma'am, while I investigate."

But the brisk, businesslike headmistress was not the kind of woman to remain inactive. She shook her head.

"No—I will come with you," she said calmly, and next moment both of them came striding down the gravel path.

AN ADVENTUROUS NIGHT



STANDING in the dark, chilly dressing-room, June stared in dismay at her detective uncle.

Discovery here would mean the end of her secret mission at Port Craig, for in order to explain their presence, both she and Noel would have to reveal their true identity.

The detective gave her arm a reassuring squeeze.

"Leave this to me," he whispered. "I'll decoy them away. It doesn't matter if they do see me. Thanks to this disguise, they'll probably think I'm the Grey Falcon." As he spoke, he tiptoed to the door. There he turned. "Slip away the moment the coast is clear," he ordered. "and—don't forget our appointment to-morrow. I hope to have big news for you."

Silently he disappeared, and her heart thumping, June waited and listened. She heard Miss Stanton and Howard Wyndham talking as they neared the refectory, then she heard the great double doors creak open. Instantly there was a startled shout:

"There he is! Come back, you rascal! What have you been up to? Come and give an account of yourself, sir!"

There came a mocking laugh and the sound of running footsteps. June, peering through the window, saw the disguised Noel go plunging away through the trees; saw first Mr. Wyndham, then the headmistress go racing in pursuit. A few moments more and all three had vanished from sight. Now was her chance to escape.

"Good old uncle!" she breathed, and like a shadow darted from the refectory and went racing back through the college grounds.

Her heart was thumping as she ascended the fire-escape which gave access to the window at the end of the Upper Fourth corridor, for she was thinking of the robbery which in little over an hour was to take place at the Manor. Would Uncle Noel be able to ambush the Grey Falcon? Would he at long last be able to capture the mysterious master-crook, and thus put an end to the slanders which were blackening his professional reputation?

June smiled confidently.

"Of course he will," she told herself. "Uncle's more than a match for the Grey Falcon."

And then, as she reached the top of the iron staircase and made to clamber up over the window-sill, she broke off. The window she had left open was now closed. She tried to lever up the bottom sash, but it would not budge. It was securely fastened.

"Oh, golly! Now what am I going to do?" she breathed in dismay. "And who can have locked it?"

Instantly her mind went to the girl who had been posing as the ghost of Sir Richard de Coreville; to the unknown member of the college who was a confederate of the notorious master-crook.

"She must have shut the window," the schoolgirl detective told herself. "I don't know whether she acted out of caution or out of spite, but whatever the reason, it leaves me in a nasty fix. Unless I can get back into the dormitory—"

Again she broke off, and, running back down the fire-escape, she made a tour of the building, testing every door and every window. But all of them were securely fastened.

And then came a new, dismaying development.

From the direction of the old refectory came the sound of voices. Miss Stanton and Howard Wyndham, having failed to capture the fugitive figure, were bidding each other good-night. In a minute or two the headmistress would be crossing the quadrangle on her way to her own private quarters, and if she saw the girl who called herself Dorothy Whiteman standing there—

Desperately June scanned the ivy-covered walls, and suddenly her heart leapt. One of the windows on the second floor was open at the top.

Dare she risk climbing up the ivy to it? No sooner did the question present itself than June answered it. Resolutely she stepped forward, grasped the ivy with both hands, and groped for a foothold.

Up and up she clambered. The ivy creaked and snapped beneath her weight. More than once she only saved herself from a headlong

fall by grabbing frantically at a new branch. Perspiration beading her brow, she battled her way upwards. She dared not turn her head. To look down would be fatal.

Gasping, almost exhausted, she reached the sill; hung there for a moment to rest, then with an effort managed to climb up on to the narrow stone ledge. Thankfully she reached up for the open upper sash and pulled it right down. She didn't know what room it was why lay before her; didn't much care. Her one anxiety was to get indoors before she could be seen.

Lifting a leg, she thrust it over the open window; got a precarious foothold on the narrow, inside sill; lifted over the other, then—

Crash!

Losing her balance in the darkness, she toppled and fell—to find herself sprawling across a bed. And from beneath the sheets and blankets came a wild, startled yell. The bed was occupied!

"Oh, g-golly!" gulped June, and completely losing her head, she scrambled to the floor and plunged blindly across the room.

From the bed came another shrill shout:

"Help! B-burglars! Help!"

There could be no mistaking that tremulous treble. It had been Cora Jarrod, the Fifth Former who was jealous of the Upper Fourth's play activities, whom June had so violently awakened.

To June it seemed that those agitated yells must arouse the whole school. For a moment despair gripped her, then she gave a gasp of relief as her groping hand closed over the door-knob.

Frantically she flung open the door and plunged out into the corridor. As there came another wild shout from Cora, followed by answering shouts from adjoining cubicles, June dashed into her own dormitory. Racing on tiptoe to her own cubicle, she tore off her clothes, donned a dressing-gown, then went to the door and peered out. It was to see a crowd of Upper Fourth Formers and Fifth Formers gathered in the doorway of Cora's cubicle.

Forcing herself to appear composed, June hurried along the corridor to the noisy, agitated scene.

"Whatever's happening?" she asked.

It was Julie Vermont, the Upper Fourth captain, who answered.

"Cora's had a nightmare. She dreamt she was at grips with the Grey Falcon," she said.

Cora Jarrod glared.

"It wasn't a dream!" she gasped. "It was true, I tell you!"

There came an incredulous chorus from the Upper Fourth Formers.

"More likely you ate too much supper!" declared Lady Sue. "And you even dream about trying to spoil our play!"

Cora ran furious fingers through her black hair and stamped her foot. She was torn between tears and anger.

"I haven't tried to spoil your silly play!" she burst out. "It was the Grey Falcon who wrote that threatening message, not me! And it was he who—"

She broke off, for there had come a sudden gasp from Julie Vermont.

"And I suppose it wasn't you who stole the dressing-room keys, either?" put in the Upper Fourth Form captain. Stepping forward, she snatched something that lay on the floor near the bed. "Perhaps you'll explain what these are doing here!"

And scornfully she held up two big, rusty keys.

June with difficulty suppressed the gasp that rose to her lips. When escaping from the refectory she had thrust the keys into her blazer pocket. Now she realised they must have dropped out when she had fallen headlong across Cora's bed.

"Oh, golly, that's complicated things!" she told herself.

Happlessly June stood there, listening to the quarrel, for she dared not intervene. To do so would be to reveal her secret. And then, as the row developed, she found her attention attracted to the locker beside Cora's bed. The door stood ajar, and through the opening June glimpsed a pair of high-heeled white shoes. Instantly she stiffened and her heart missed a beat.

Those shoes were very like the ones worn by the unknown traitor who had played ghost in the refectory earlier on that evening.

Was it possible that the bad-tempered Cora was the Grey Falcon's secret helper?

It was an electrifying thought, but June was given no chance to ponder on it, for from one of the girls out in the corridor came an agitated whisper:

"Come! Look out, the Head's just come in!"

Instantly the rival Formers forgot their quarrel. Whatever the truth about the night's sensational happenings, none of the girls wanted to be caught out of bed. So, with a final glare at the angry Fifth Formers, Julie & Co. sped for their own cubicles.

Quietness soon descended, but tired though she was after the day's exciting happenings, June could not get to sleep. Her thoughts were now of her uncle, wondering what he was doing as the fatal hour of one o'clock—the hour fixed for the daring robbery at the Manor—drew near.

There was nothing for it, however, but to wait till morning.

THE EMPTY WATCH-TOWER



JUNE was up early next morning, eager to keep her appointment with Uncle Noel; to learn whether he had managed to capture the Grey Falcon re-handed.

Slipping out of the school, she made her way through the grounds and hurried along the cliff path to the old watch-tower.

The door was ajar, and her heart was pounding as she pushed it wide open.

"Uncle Noel!" she called. "Uncle—"
And then she broke off in disappointment and surprise, for the solitary room which the tower boasted was empty. There was no sign of the famous detective.

"He must have gone out for something," she told herself. "I'd better wait."

She seated herself on a broken-down chair, which, together with a camp-bed and a deal table, was all the furniture in the room. The minutes ticked by, and as her gaze wandered around the gloomy apartment, with its grimy window overlooking the sea, gradually a feeling of uneasiness crept over her.

The bed had obviously not been slept in. A simple breakfast had been laid on the table, but it remained untouched.

Could anything have gone wrong with Noel Raymond's plans? It was so unlike him to be late.

Boom!
Suddenly the church clock in the near-by fishing port began to strike the hour. Eight o'clock!

Could anything have happened to him? June stirred uneasily as she thought of the lone watch he had planned to make in the library at the Manor. Supposing the Grey Falcon had somehow got wise to Noel's plans! Supposing—

With an effort she smothered the alarming thoughts that rose to her mind. Jumping to her feet, she went outside and looked, first one way, then another. There was not a soul visible anywhere.

"What can have become of him?" she murmured anxiously.

Time went on, and in increasing agitation she paced up and down. Half-past eight came and went, and still there was no sign of him.

A quarter to nine, and she knew she could wait no longer. At nine o'clock lessons started. One last look around, and then reluctantly she made her way back to the college, feeling more worried than she even dared admit.

To reach the quadrangle she had to pass by the ancient refectory, and as she came within sight of it she saw an indignant crowd of schoolgirls crowded around the doorway, staring at a typewritten notice pinned to one of the oaken panels. They were Julie & Co.

"Hallo! What's the excitement?" she asked, momentarily forgetting her own troubles.

Julie, her usually cheery face looking pale and distressed, indicated the notice with a quivering hand.

"We came along to make sure our costumes were all right," she explained. "After what happened last night, we thought the Fifth Form might have been up to some more of their horrid tricks."

"But the door's locked!" added Lady Sue indignantly.

"And the refectory's been put out of bounds!" put in Celia Cleves, also pointing tearfully to the notice.

In amazement June surveyed the notice. Curtly it stated that until further orders the refectory had been placed out of bounds, and it bore the signature of Miss Stanton.

"But whatever's the reason for this ban?" she gasped.

Glumly the Upper Fourth Formers shook their heads.

"That's what we want to know," they chorused. "We haven't the slightest idea."

"Perhaps not—but I have!"

The shrill voice, tinged with a malicious satisfaction, came from the path, and, as they swung round, June and the others found themselves confronted by a grinning Cora Jarrold.

"Stormily they all regarded her.

"If this is anything to do with you—"
began Lady Sue

A glare replaced Cora's smirk.

"It's nothing to do with me, or with anyone in the Fifth!" she snapped. "You've got to thank the Grey Falcon for the ban. It was true what I told you. The Grey Falcon was on the prowl last night! Miss Stanton and Mr. Wyndham saw him themselves, and later on he actually broke into the Manor."

"Into the Manor?"

It was June who echoed the words, and her heart began to thump as she remembered the inexplicable failure of Noel Raymond to keep his appointment with her. Again those vague fears crowded back into her brain.

"What happened there?" she asked, her voice little more than a whisper.

Cora sniggered.

"You'd better ask Mr. Wyndham," she replied tantalisingly. "He's in with Miss Stanton now, and it was he who insisted that you kids should be prevented from carrying on with your tomfool plans." She gave another provoking grin. "Just wait until you hear the full news!" she cried.

Was it imagination, or was her malicious gaze really concentrated on June? For one alarming second June had the feeling that the Fifth Former knew her secret, was in some strange way mocking her.

Striving desperately to conceal the apprehension in her eyes, she faced the older girl.

"What is the full news?" she asked.

But Cora was obviously enjoying herself and did not intend to give anything away.

"You'll know before long," she said. "And when you do learn exactly what happened at the Manor last night—you'll certainly get the shock of your life!"

And with another provoking laugh she turned away, leaving June feeling more alarmed than ever.

Can this news have anything to do with Noel's failure to keep his appointment with June? There are lots of exciting developments in next Friday's chapters of this serial in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.