

Serial



Detective June's MOST THRILLING CASE

THE MISSING NECKLACE

JUNE GAYNOR, niece of Noel Raymond, the famous young detective, went to Port Craig College disguised as a new girl, Dorothy Whitman. Her object was to help her uncle to 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 a necklace 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 believed that one of the girls was secretly helping Noel Raymond.

While Howard Wyndham and Miss Stanton, the headmistress, were visiting the Upper Fourth Form Room Miss Tuft accidentally knocked over an Oriental vase which was to serve as a model in that morning's drawing lesson. The vase was smashed, and from Howard Wyndham came a gasp, for there among the fragments was the stolen jewel-case.

JUNE stared in consternation.

The discovery of that ebony box threatened all her plans. It might even bring to an end the daring role she was playing here at Port Craig College!

Once the contents of the box were known, the question would arise as to who had hidden the stolen jewels in the Chinese vase. Naturally enough, Miss Stanton and Howard Wyndham would believe that person to be a confederate of the Grey Falcon, and thus would be strengthened the suspicion that the master-crook had a secret helper in the college.

"And as everyone believes that Uncle Noel is the Grey Falcon, they will start looking for a girl who might be his niece in disguise," June told herself in alarm. "And as I'm a new girl—"

She broke off, her whole body tensing in anxious expectancy. Watched by the amazed Miss Stanton and Miss Tuft, the chairman of the governors had picked up the box and was fumbling with the fastening. Then a

gasp went up, as he lifted the lid and the glittering necklace was revealed.

"Great Scott! The rajah's necklace!" It was Mr. Wyndham who made the exclamation, and grimly he regarded the headmistress. "Then this settles it," he declared. "Someone in the school is in league with the Grey Falcon!"

Miss Stanton went white, and she waved a horrified, incredulous hand.

"Impossible!" she gasped. "There must be some other explanation."

"But what other explanation can there be?" demanded Mr. Wyndham. "No one but a confederate of that scoundrel would want to hide these jewels, and the fact that we've found them here proves that that confederate must belong to the college."

A startled murmur ran around the Form-room, and Julie, Lady Sue and all the other girls exchanged excited glances. Miss Stanton continued to gaze at Mr. Wyndham in shocked horror, but a flush dyed the cheeks of Miss Tuft and she gave an indignant sniff.

"I trust that it is not suggested that any member of the staff might be the culprit," she cried.

Miss Stanton made another agitated gesture. "No—no! The idea is too absurd. Mr. Wyndham—she whirled on the chairman of the governors—"I can personally vouch for all the staff. Most of them have been with me for years."

Mr. Wyndham smiled grimly. "I do not think we shall need to investigate the credentials of the mistresses or of the servants," he said. "This discovery confirms a suspicion I have long held—that the Grey Falcon's helper is his niece, a schoolgirl named June Gaynor. After all, it would be possible for a new girl to come here in disguise—masquerading under a false name."

Reluctantly Miss Stanton nodded. "I—I suppose it could be done," she admitted, "but there were only four new girls this term, so—" She broke off, frowned thoughtfully, then, to June's dismay, swung round and looked across at the girl she believed to be Dorothy Whitman. "Dorothy,"

she said, "I suppose you know nothing about this?" And she indicated first the ebony jewel box and then the smashed vase with a stern hand.

Instantly the disguised June became the cynosure of all eyes. As she felt the startled gaze of Julie and the others riveted on her, June strove desperately to mask her alarm. As if genuinely bewildered, she returned the headmistress' penetrating gaze.

"Miss Stanton!" she gasped. "What—what do you mean? How could I? How should I know anything about those—those jewels?"

The headmistress frowned.

"I have just remembered that some time ago I caught you in my study," she said slowly. "You were trying to open my china cupboard, and I remember that you seemed to be strangely interested in that Chinese vase."

With an effort June suppressed the horrified gasp that rose to her lips. The situation was developing even more dangerously than she had feared. By means of a supreme effort she forced herself to meet that sharp, suspicious look.

"But I explained at the time why I went to your study, Miss Stanton," she protested. "I have always been interested in curios."

"So it was just artistic interest which attracted you to the cupboard, was it?" It was Mr. Wyndham who spoke, and he stepped forward, regarding the supposed Dorothy Whitman from under bushy brows. "Let's see," he went on, giving June no chance to answer his first question, "you are a new girl, aren't you?"

Silently June nodded.

"Only arrived at Port Craig a few weeks ago, eh?"

Again June nodded. Despair was sweeping over her. Now that the finger of suspicion had been pointed at her, she had the awful feeling that she would be unable to escape it. Uneasily she waited for the next question, but before Mr. Wyndham could speak there came a knock and the door opened, to admit an apologetic maid.

"Please, madam," she said, looking across at Miss Stanton, "there's a gentleman who wants to see you urgently. A detective. A Detective-Inspector Brown, from Scotland Yard."

"A detective, eh?" Mr. Wyndham smiled. "The very man to help us. Show him in here, Mary. It will do these girls no harm to see Scotland Yard at work," he said, with a genial smile at the inhaled Upper Fourth Formers. "Besides, the inspector may wish to question one or more of them."

The maid retired, and in a fever of expectancy the girls waited, all but June excitedly eager to see what a Scotland Yard officer looked like. Presently the door opened again, and the maid announced:

"Detective-Inspector Brown."

Curiously everyone regarded the visitor. He was a tall, black-bearded man wearing gold-rimmed pince-nez and carrying a small attache case. There was something queer, bird-like about his expression, and he blinked frequently as Mr. Wyndham related all that had happened, polishing his pince-nez with a silk handkerchief.

"So you think the Grey Falcon's helper is one of your young ladies," the detective observed, and re-donning his spectacles, he beamed around at the girls as if amused by the idea that one of them might be the culprit. "A very interesting theory, sir, but it would be a mistake for us to jump to conclusions. Now let's see—" Taking off his pince-nez again, he repolished them, as if this helped him to concentrate. "This encounter Miss Tuft had last night—" He blinked across at the Upper Fourth Form mistress. "You say that the girl you caught in the library escaped with a valuable volume belonging to the college?"

Miss Tuft nodded.

"Yes. I actually caught her in the act of

breaking open the bookcase!" she cried, in that fussy, agitated manner which the girls knew so well, but which June knew was but a cunning pose to hide her real character. "Really, it was a dreadful experience! And it confirms what Mr. Wyndham has just said. The girl must belong to the school."

"The man from Scotland Yard beamed. "In that case, the stolen book will still be hidden on the premises, and I suggest that our mystery friend will have had no time to smuggle it out of the school. Therefore, I suggest we make the recovery of the volume our first task."

He replaced his pince-nez and, a new briskness in his voice, turned to the headmistress.

"Madam, with your permission," he said, "I will search the school. If that book is hidden here, then a thorough search is bound to reveal it. And the discovery of the book will, I need hardly point out, unerringly lead us to the identity of this girl whom you say is helping the Grey Falcon."

Mr. Wyndham nodded approval.

"Good idea. Let us begin at once," he said, and led the way to the door.

June sat as if petrified. The respite she had gained by the arrival of the detective promised to be short-lived, for once Inspector Brown searched her study her fate would be sealed!

THE RESULT OF THE SEARCH



"I MUST find a new hiding-place for the book—move it before they get to my study."

That was June's first desperate thought, and she blessed the fact that already it was time for the usual mid-morning break. In another minute or two she would be free.

But she reckoned without Miss Stanton. As the headmistress made to follow Mr. Wyndham and Inspector Brown out of the Form-room, she turned and looked across at Miss Tuft.

"The inspector will no doubt like to conduct his search without any fear of being disturbed," she said, "so I think it will be wise if we depart from our usual routine. Your girls will carry straight on with their lessons. Miss Tuft, I am sorry to deprive them of their break, but extra time off can be given this afternoon instead."

"Very well, Miss Stanton," Miss Tuft nodded, and as the Head departed, she rapped on her desk. "Attention, girls, please," she ordered. "Get out your geography books."

Reluctantly the Upper Fourth Formers obeyed, disappointed at being deprived of the thrill of watching the search take place. As for June, she sat as if turned to stone. It was only a question of time before the incriminating book was discovered—and discovery would result in her being forced to leave Port Craig in disgrace!

As, with trembling fingers, she groped in her desk for her geography book, there came a petulant cry from the Form-mistress. Inadvertently she had stepped on the broken remains of the Chinese vase.

"Really, this will have to be cleared up," she declared.

Instantly June leapt to her feet, new hope driving the blood back to her pallid cheeks.

"Shall I do it, Miss Tuft," she cried, and, leaving her place, darted forward and began picking up the shattered pieces of porcelain.

Bundling them up in a sheet of paper, she made for the door with them. Here was a good excuse to leave the class-room! But even as her hand clutched the door handle, there came a surprised cry from the Form-mistress.

"Why, where are you going, Dorothy?"

"Only to put this"—the girl everyone be-

ieved to be named Dorothy Whiteman held up the packet of broken pottery—"in the dustbin."

"Oh, there's no need to do it now. Put it down on the desk. You can take it away at the end of lessons."

"But—"

"Please don't argue, Dorothy, and do as you are told."

Miss Tuft spoke with unusual sharpness, and was it June's imagination, or was there really a malicious glimmer in the woman's eyes? Feeling that the Form-mistress suspected what had been in her mind, June reluctantly placed the parcel down, and with leaden feet returned to her place. Again her hopes had been smashed, and there was despair in her heart as she re-seated herself at her desk.

The next hour and a half was sheer torture to June. Every minute she half-expected the door to open and to see a grimly accusing Inspector Brown march in. Every time she heard footsteps outside the class-room door her heart turned over, for she feared that her secret had been discovered and that someone was on the way to denounce her.

But uneventfully the morning dragged on, and at long last the school bell clanged out. Lessons were over. The moment Miss Tuft had dismissed the Form June hurried away, thinking that even at this last hour she might smuggle away the hidden book.

As she neared her study she found her way barred by a whole crowd of Third and Fifth Formers. All of them were excitedly discussing the latest sensational development, and at sight of June they surged around her, forcing her to halt.

"What exactly happened in your Form-room this morning?" demanded one girl.

"Is it true that one of your crowd is an accomplice of the Grey Falcon's?" asked another. "There's a rumour going around that one of the new girls is really Noel Raymond's niece in disguise."

"Yes—and you're a new girl, aren't you?" It was Cora Jarrod, who never missed her chance to get one in at the Upper Fourth, who spoke, and with a malicious grin she regarded June. "I suppose you aren't, by any chance, this secret helper?"

"Don't be absurd!" The angry reproof came from behind June, and, turning, June saw Julie Vermont standing there, her plump cheeks red with indignation.

There came a storm of approval as the rest of the Upper Fourth girls came hurrying forward. June, hoping to slip away unnoticed in the excitement, was in the act of edging her way through the crowd when, abruptly, there came a new interruption.

"Girls, please cease that noise at once—and pay attention to me!"

It was Miss Stanton's brisk voice, and, looking round, June saw the headmistress approaching, accompanied by Mr. Wyndham and Inspector Brown. It was obvious from the disappointed expressions on the two men's faces that, as yet, their search had not met with any success. As silence fell, the headmistress surveyed the Upper Fourth Formers.

"As you know, a search is being made for the book which was stolen from the library last night," she announced. "So far we have failed to find it, and only the Upper Fourth studies remain to be searched. I hope none of you girls object to your room being gone through." She waited expectantly, and then, as there came no response, she nodded with satisfaction. "Of course, I do not believe for a moment that any of you was responsible for purloining that volume," she went on,

"but, nevertheless, for all our sakes we must make sure. Will you kindly hand to Inspector Brown—the nodded to the benignly smiling, black-bearded man at her side—the keys of any cupboards or locked drawers."

Still clutching his small attache case, the man from Scotland Yard went from girl to girl, and soon he had a handful of keys. At last he drew alongside June.

"You got anything locked up, miss?" he asked.

June felt the key she was fiercely clutching in her blazer pocket go red-hot as, reluctantly, she nodded.

"One or two things in my bureau," she whispered. "But—but there are only private things in there."

He nodded.

"Quite. Nevertheless, you will appreciate that we must inspect them. Just a formality, of course. Can I have the key, please?"

Striving desperately to mask her emotion, June dragged out the fatal key and handed it over. The inspector took it, then turned to Miss Stanton and the chairman of the governors.

"It will save time if we take a study each," he said.

The trio split up, and watched by the excited, curious schoolgirls, the search was continued. Helplessly June stood there, icy shivers running down her spine as, slowly but surely, the searchers neared her study. At last Inspector Brown himself turned the knob of her door and disappeared into the room.

On pins and needles, June waited. The suspense made her go hot and cold. She could hear the girls around her whispering; sensed that Miss Stanton and Mr. Wyndham, their search ended, were standing near by. Four minutes passed—five—and then the study door opened. June braced herself. In a fever of fear she saw Inspector Brown emerge from the study, then she caught in her breath, blinking incredulously.

For the detective was frowning, and was shaking his head.

"Another blank," he announced, and regarded Miss Stanton and Mr. Wyndham inquiringly. "I suppose you haven't found it?"

As if in a dream, June saw them also shake their heads, then in bewilderment she heard the inspector say:

"Then it looks as if your theory, Mr. Wyndham, is incorrect. If that book isn't hidden in the school—and it doesn't appear to be—then the thief must have been someone who operated from outside. But I should like to examine the library before finally committing myself. Will you be good enough to conduct me there, please."

Miss Stanton and Mr. Wyndham led the way up the corridor, and as the trio vanished from sight there came a chorus of relieved cries from Julie & Co.

"There, that proves it! All this talk about one of us being a helper of the Grey Falcon's is a lot of rot!"

"Of course it is!"

"I never heard such nonsense!"

But June was oblivious of the excited chatter. She was still staring blankly across at her study. How was it that the man from Scotland Yard had failed to find the hidden volume? The bureau had been locked, so it was impossible for anyone to have removed it before his search.

"It's—it's incredible," June whispered to herself, and, her brain still in a whirl, she entered her room. Closing the door, she rushed across to her bureau and with frenzied fingers searched through it, but without result. "It really has gone," she muttered dazedly. "But who can have taken it?"

Utterly baffled, she stared around and then gave a startled gasp.

"What's that?"

Something had come whirling through the open window. It was a piece of paper wrapped around a stone. Wonderingly June picked it up as it clattered down at her feet, then

she gave another gasp as she saw that a message had been pencilled on the paper.

"It's a note—a note from Uncle Noel!" she exclaimed.

A MEETING IN SECRET



The last time June had seen her uncle he had been driving away in Howard Wyndham's car—making an audacious attempt to elude capture.

What had brought him back to the college she could not even imagine, and she did not stop to try to guess.

The sight of that familiar writing brought the blood rushing back to her cheeks, and with sparkling, eager eyes she read the few hurriedly scribbled lines.

"Don't worry—I've got the book. Meet me in the summer-house immediately after dinner."

That brief, cryptic announcement brought another gasp to the schoolgirl detective's lips.

"Uncle's got the book!" she ejaculated, and passed a dazed hand across her brow. "But how can he have possibly got hold of it? He didn't know it was stolen—let alone where I'd hidden it!"

She shook her head in bewilderment. Mystery seemed to be piling upon mystery. But, though baffled, she was delighted. For now there was no fear of the secret of her real identity being discovered; no fear either of the precious volume falling into the Grey Falcon's possession. And together, she told herself excitedly, she and Noel Raymond would be able to study the faded pages of that old book and unearth its secret.

And once that's done we'll soon bowl out the Grey Falcon," she murmured happily. At that moment the bell clanged out, and eagerly June rushed off to the dining hall. She hurried through her dinner, and as soon as she dared, excused herself and went racing out of school and across the grounds to the summer-house, which stood against the garden wall.

Her heart was pounding as she reached out for the latch, and softly she called his name as she pressed open the glass door.

"Uncle Noel—" she cried, and then stopped, staring in dismay.

For it was not the lithe athletic figure of the young detective which confronted her in the summer-house, but a bespectacled, black-bearded man.

Detective-Inspector Brown!

"Oh!"

Involuntarily June recoiled, the blood draining from her face. Had the man from Scotland Yard caught the name she had breathed? Had she involuntarily given herself away?

But to her relief the inspector continued to smile, and pleasantly he beckoned.

"Come in, my dear," he said, and June's heart did another crazy somersault, for it was not the high-pitched, rather squeaky voice of Inspector Brown which addressed her, but the firm, steady voice of Noel Raymond!

Stupefied, June could only blink, and the figure confronting her chuckled.

"Still can't believe it, eh?" he said. "My disguise must be really good, if it's taken you in, June."

"Uncle—Uncle Noel!" gulped June incredulously. "Oh, can it really be you?"

And she hurled herself into his arms. He chuckled again as he returned her delicious embrace.

"Yes, it really is me, my dear," he said. "Sorry I had to keep you in the dark so long, but I didn't dare give you any idea. It was

too risky. All I could do was to throw you that note."

"And—and you really have that book, nunky?" gasped June, still half-convinced that in a moment she would wake up and find that it was all a dream.

Noel Raymond grinned.

"Rather! I whipped it into my attache case when I was searching your study. That's why I suggested the search party should split up. I didn't want anyone else in the room when I was looking around, for, of course, I guessed the missing volume would be hidden amongst your things."

"Oh, you wizard!" In fond admiration June surveyed him. "No wonder the Grey Falcon is scared of you!" she exclaimed. "But it was a grand idea!" She paused breathlessly. "Actually to pose as a Scotland Yard man! It was a brainwave!"

The young detective laughed.

"It seemed to me the only way to help my plucky young niece," he said more seriously. "You see, when I met my man Parker, he told me that there was a rumour going about that one of the girls at the college was really my niece in disguise, so I decided that something must be done to squash it."

"And that's why you decided to come here disguised as a Scotland Yard man?" put in June.

Noel Raymond nodded.

"Yes, Parker, who, incidentally, has found a comfortable hide-out for me, provided me with the disguise, and all morning I've been trying to convince Miss Stanton and the others that this rumour about you is false."

"And have you done so yet?" asked June.

"Not completely. But so far Miss Stanton accepts my theory that the robbery was the work of someone operating outside the school. Mr. Wyndham, however, still has to be convinced, while Miss Tuft, I'm sorry to say, is frankly incredulous."

"She would be!" commented June, and she wrinkled her nose in disgust.

The hypocrisy of the Upper Fourth Form mistress made her blood boil. To think that she had the impudence to pretend to believe that the Grey Falcon's secret helper was a schoolgirl while all the time she herself was the person treacherously aiding him!

Noel Raymond laughed at June's vehemence, and then abruptly he became serious.

"Let's get busy," he urged. "You say this book contains the key to the whole mystery?" As he spoke he unid his attache case and took out the leather-bound book.

Excitedly June nodded.

"I'm positive it does," she declared.

The young detective began to turn over the faded yellow pages. When he came to the wood-cut of the old refectory, June pointed with a quivering finger to the queer-looking hieroglyphics on the ornamental scroll which surrounded the picture.

"I believe those are the clue to the secret," she said.

Her uncle frowned down at the strange-looking signs, then, taking a magnifying glass from his pocket, he examined them through it. Anxiously June watched and waited. To her delight Noel Raymond's frown suddenly vanished and he looked up, an unusual gleam of excitement in his eyes.

"These hieroglyphics form a message in code!" he exclaimed. "And I'm pretty certain I can read them. It's an old Norman code, and—"

Breaking off, he studied the faded page again, and June's heart began to pound, for it seemed that she and her uncle were on the verge of another momentous discovery.

Has Noel really found something that may end in the clearing up of this amazing and bewildering mystery? Be sure not to miss next Friday's splendid chapters of this serial in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.