



Detective June's MOST THRILLING CASE

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

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.

Miss Tuft, the Upper Fourth Form mistress, was secretly in league with the Grey Falcon, and she suspected that one of her girls was really Noel Raymond's niece in disguise.

The Upper Fourth Formers were invited to a party at the Manor. All of them eagerly looked forward to it, especially June, for her uncle arranged to meet her there, disguised as a Scotland Yard inspector. And in his letter Noel Raymond declared that at the party he hoped to solve the mystery and expose the Grey Falcon!

"GOLLY, am I looking forward to the party!" That was June's excited thought, as she threw herself wholeheartedly into the rehearsal. The note she had received from Noel Raymond had made her radiantly optimistic.

Not for much longer would her detective uncle have to remain a fugitive. If all went well by this time-to-morrow his innocence would have been proved and the real Grey Falcon placed under arrest.

"Won't nunky and I have a lot to talk about to-morrow afternoon!" June told herself, as her scene over, she watched five of her Form-mates rehearsing the next. "I'm just dying to learn all that he's discovered. But what a nerve he's got—to go to the Manor disguised as a Scotland Yard inspector!"

She thrilled as she thought of Uncle Noel's audacious plans, and then forced herself to forget her secret hopes as Julie Vermont called all the Upper Fourth Formers around her.

"Wizard—simply wizard!" she declared approvingly. "The rehearsal's gone without a

bitch, and if only you do as well at the Manor, Mr. Wyndham is bound to be impressed."

"And that'll mean he'll persuade Miss Stanton to lift the ban on our using the refectory theatre," added Lady Sue excitedly.

"So we'll be able to keep our original plans for Foundation Day," added Celia Treves; and she gave a whoop of delight which was echoed by all around her.

Still happily discussing their forthcoming trial performance at the Manor, June, Julie and all the rest packed away their costumes, locked up the gymnasium, and went to roll-call.

Miss Tuft, the fussy Upper Fourth Form mistress, was in charge of the register, and when she had finished marking it she raised a detaining hand.

"The members of my Form will kindly remain behind a few moments," she said. "I wish to discuss the arrangements for the party which Mr. Wyndham is so generously giving at the Manor to-morrow."

The rest of the school fled out, and excitedly the Upper Fourth waited. Miss Tuft regarded them with a frown.

"It is a great honour which the chairman of the college governors is bestowing upon you," she declared fustily. "So I hope you will all be on your very best behaviour to-morrow afternoon. Fortunately, I shall be present to see that your conduct is not too exuberant. Your costumes and other theatrical gear will be taken over to the Manor by car, but you yourselves will walk. You will all assemble in the quadrangle promptly at two o'clock and, after I have inspected you, we will proceed to the party in a dignified and orderly manner. That is all. You may go."

A little resentful of Miss Tuft's manner, yet still thrilled at the prospect of the party, the Upper Fourth Formers left the Assembly Hall.

June alone did not join in the eager discussion that arose. She was busy with her own excited thoughts. So Miss Tuft would accompany them to the party! June was not

In the least dismayed. She wanted her to be there, for June knew that the young woman's fussy, nervous manner was only a cloak to hide her real character. Actually, Miss Tuft was the Grey Falcon's secret accomplice.

"So it's only right that she should be present when the show-down comes," June murmured delightedly to herself, as they all went up to bed. "What a shock she's got coming to her to-morrow!"

But, as things turned out, it was June herself, and not Miss Tuft, who received a shock. The first inkling of it June had was when, after dinner, she and half a dozen other Upper Fourth Formers went along to the gymnasium to load their theatrical hampers aboard the car which Mr. Howard Wyndham had sent. As June helped Julie to stow away the last hamper she heard the swish of tyres on the carriage drive, and, looking round, saw the station taxi approaching the entrance to the mistress' quarters. As it pulled up, the door opened and a tall, rather forbidding-looking woman descended.

June took one look at her, and then nearly collapsed.

"Aunt—Aunt Janet!" she gulped. The aunt with whom she made her home in the holidays! The aunt who, having no knowledge of the secret role June was playing at Port Craig, fondly believed her still to be a student at her old school.

"What on earth can have brought her here?" June asked herself, and gave a sudden gasp of dismay. "Goodness, I mustn't let her see me or, disguise or no disguise, my game will be up!"

For although Aunt Janet's rather forbidding exterior hid a heart of gold, nevertheless she strongly disapproved of her niece's detective ambitions. Indeed, on several occasions in the past she had had stormy words with Noel Raymond, for she believed that he willfully encouraged June. What Aunt Janet thought about the sensational charge which had been brought against the young detective June did not know. But she did know that her aunt would be horrified if she thought that her niece was in any way mixed up in the matter.

But, despite the danger which would follow recognition, June felt that she must try to discover the reason for Miss Janet, Gaynor's visit to the school.

June and the rest, their work finished, were preparing to depart, but hastily June made an excuse to linger.

"You go on," she urged. "I'll follow in a jiffy. I just want to look around and see that I've packed all my things."

Unsuspecting, the other girls nodded and strolled off, leaving June to dart back into the gymnasium. A door at the far side faced the mistress' entrance, and, opening it an inch or two, June unasily peered through.

She was just in time to see the door opposite open and a slender figure hurry out to greet the visitor.

"Miss Gaynor, isn't it?" the all-too-familiar voice of Miss Tuft asked. "Oh, please come in! I am greatly obliged to you for responding so quickly to my letter. I hope you did not mind me writing, but I felt it was only right that you should know of my suspicions about your niece."

June's heart stood still as, apprehensively, she peered through the half-open door. She heard her aunt give an agitated cry.

"But surely my niece cannot be mixed up in this terrible business concerning Noel Raymond!" she exclaimed. "Even if what everyone is saying about him is true—and I cannot believe it—she would never allow June to become involved. There must be some mistake."

Miss Tuft, a hypocritical expression of sympathy on her face, shook her head.

"I am sorry. My heart goes out to you, for I know how you must feel," she said. "But I'm

afraid there is no mistake. I am certain that one of the girls in my Form is your niece."

"You mean that she's come here in disguise—under a false name?" Aunt Janet raised her gloved hands in horror. "I always knew those crazy notions she had about becoming a detective would lead to trouble," she declared, with a groan. "But what can be her object in embarking upon such a—such a mad masquerade?"

Miss Tuft frowned. "Possibly with some foolish idea of attempting to help her uncle," she suggested. "That is why I sent for you. I thought that, if you could identify her, you could take her away with you. I am sure that the headmistress, when she realises the situation, would agree to the whole unfortunate affair being hushed up."

Aunt Janet nodded agitatedly. "Yes, yes. There must be no public scandal," she agreed. "But what exactly do you wish me to do, Miss Tuft?"

June caught in her breath, and anxiously she waited Miss Tuft's reply.

"Well," said the Form-mistress, "my girls are going out to a party this afternoon. In a few minutes they will be lining up in the quadrangle. If you would come along with me and inspect them I am sure you would be able to pick out your niece, despite any disguise."

Aunt Janet nodded. "A very good idea," she said. "And if I do find June, then I shall insist on her packing her things at once and returning home with me."

AUNT JANET PLAYS HER PART



BEHIND the door of the gymnasium June stood as if petrified. She remembered what Uncle Noel had written. He had declared that her help was essential if his plan to identify and expose the Grey Falcon was to be carried out successfully.

But if Aunt Janet attended the Upper Fourth Form parade June would be marched off home instead of attending the party.

Desperately she racked her brains.

"What can I possibly do?" she muttered. As she strove to think of some way of frustrating Miss Tuft's cunning scheme to get rid of Noel Raymond's secret helper, the Form-mistress held open the door beside her.

"Perhaps you would care to come in and rest," she suggested. "You must be tired after your journey. I am afraid I will have to ask you to excuse me—I have one or two school matters to attend to—but I shan't be away more than a minute or two."

Together the two women entered the house, and through the window opposite June saw Miss Tuft usher her visitor into the mistress' private sitting-room, then withdraw.

June's lips set desperately. "There's only one thing for it," she told herself. "I must have a word with aunt—plead with her not to give me away."

She knew it would be difficult. Aunt Janet was very strong-willed, and once she made up her mind on a certain course of action she seldom changed it. But it was June's only hope, so, with her heart in her mouth, she darted out of the gymnasium.

It would be too risky actually to enter the mistress' apartments—if Miss Tuft caught her there there would be trouble—so it was the open doorway that she approached.

"Aunt!" she called softly.

Aunt Janet looked round for a moment gazed in bewilderment at the girl whose head and shoulders were framed by the window.

"J-June!" she gasped. "Can it really be you? But what have you done to your hair? Goodness gracious, you have had it dyed!"

Her voice rose in scandalised surprise, and agitatedly she crossed the room. "Then it is true what I've been told!" she exclaimed, and sternly she regarded June. "You foolish, reckless girl, to get yourself involved in all this terrible business! Well"—her voice took on a grim note—"this masquerade must end at once!"

White-faced and pleadingly, June faced her. "But that's just what it can't do, aunty," she protested. "I simply can't leave here until the Grey Falcon's been captured."

"The—The Grey Falcon?" Aunt Janet echoed the name distastefully. "That is the scoundrel whom your uncle is accused of being, isn't it?"

Vigorously June nodded.

"Yes—but it's all a horrible mistake. Aunty, surely you don't believe uncle is guilty of all those awful things, do you?"

For a moment Aunt Janet's stern face softened, and she made a sad, helpless gesture. "Of course not," she said rigorously. "I'm very fond of Noel, but I had only one thing against him—that was the reprehensible way in which he pandered to your foolish ambitions to become a detective. I always feared it would cause trouble, and now it has. You must come home with me at once."

"But I can't, aunty. Oh, don't you realise what is at stake? Uncle's whole future! The family's good name! You must let me stay on here. It won't be for long. Uncle's on the track of the real Grey Falcon. He's certain he will be able to arrest him and prove his own innocence this afternoon. But if his plan is to succeed he and I must have a talk. And I must go to the party." Desperately June regarded her aunt. "Surely another day or two won't make any difference?" she pleaded.

"But—"

June, however, did not give Aunt Janet a chance to speak.

"You want uncle's good name to be established, don't you?" she rushed on. "You want the real truth to be discovered?"

"Of course."

"Then let me stay on here—just a little longer. Pretend not to identify me when we all line up in the quad. Please, aunty! Honestly, it's the only way—"

She broke off in dismay, for she heard footsteps approaching down the corridor, and next moment the door-handle turned.

"Oh, golly, I mustn't be found here!" she gasped, and shot her aunt another appealing look. "Don't say a word—and please remember what I've said," she whispered. Then, not daring to linger another second, she darted away from the window and dived back into the gymnasium.

And only just in time, for even as she disappeared the sitting-room door opened and Miss Tuft entered.

What passed between her aunt and the rascally Form-mistress June did not know—hardly dared think. It was in an agony of suspense that she joined the rest of the Form in the dormitory and changed into her best frock. Had her appeal had any effect? Would Aunt Janet forget her strong principles and for once in her life agree to enact a scene of deception?

During the next quarter of an hour June was on pins and needles, and it was apprehensively that eventually she followed Julie, Lady Sue, and all the rest downstairs and lined up with them out in the quadrangle.

They were all silent as the door of the mistress's quarters opened and Miss Tuft emerged, accompanied by Aunt Janet.

The Form-mistress seemed in the best of moods—and June alone knew why.

"All ready for the party, girls?" she said brightly. "You certainly look very nice; but you won't mind if I just inspect you individually, will you?"

And, without attempting to introduce her companion, she went slowly down the double row of girls, adjusting a dress here, inspecting

a girl's hand there. The Upper Fourth Formers glowered in red-faced indignation. They would have found this inspection humiliating at any time, but the fact that there was a stranger present made it ten times worse.

But Miss Tuft seemed to be oblivious of the girls' frowns and rebellious glares. On she went down the line, every now and again to stop and look inquiringly at Aunt Janet who walked at her side, but always Aunt Janet shook her head. Then they drew opposite June. An icy shiver running down her spine, yet striving desperately to appear calm and normal, June forced herself to meet their gaze.

Her heart leapt in alarm as she saw Miss Tuft again turn to the woman at her side. Then, to her relief and delight, she saw Aunt Janet shake her head once more.

"Oh, you darling!"

It was only with a supreme effort that June resisted the temptation to shout the words out aloud. It was wonderful to know that her urgent appeal had not been ignored.

Frowning a little, half with disappointment and half with bewilderment, Miss Tuft passed on to the next girl. Aunt Janet made to follow, but as she passed one gloved hand thrust something into the schoolgirl detective's fingers. It was a note, and swiftly June pocketed it. Then, without so much as a look in her direction, Aunt Janet passed on.

June could not suppress a giggle. Aunt Janet's acting was superb. Not a trace of her real feelings appeared on her handsome, rather stern face. Not by so much as a blink of an eyelid did she betray the fact that she had actually recognised her niece, and when the inspection was at an end she drew Miss Tuft to one side and shook her head.

"I am glad to say that I have had my journey for nothing," she announced.

Miss Tuft regarded her incredulously.

"You mean—"

Aunt Janet nodded.

"That you are mistaken," she said.

"But—"

Aunt Janet raised a gloved hand.

"I have inspected all the girls very closely," she declared firmly, "and none of them looks in the least like my niece"—which, thanks to June's skillful disguise, was true. "Now I must ask you to excuse me, as I have a train to catch."

And, leaving Miss Tuft looking angry and bewildered, Aunt Janet crossed to where her taxi waited.

June gazed in rapture at her aunt's stern back and almost danced with delight.

It was not until the taxi had driven off that Miss Tuft seemed to recover from the stupor into which she had fallen. Then, her face no longer pleasant and smiling, but red and angry, she glared at the waiting girls.

"Wake up, there!" she ordered sharply. "If we don't hurry we shall be late. And kindly walk in a dignified and seemly manner."

Still scowling, she placed herself at the head of the procession and led the way across the quadrangle and out through the gateway. On the way to the Manor June smoothed open Aunt Janet's note and covertly read it. It was short and to the point:

"Against my better judgment I have decided to accede to your request, but not even for your uncle's sake will I allow this masquerade to continue for longer than a few days. Unless this business is cleared up by Tuesday, and unless you voluntarily return home by then, I shall come to Port Craig to fetch you."

There followed Aunt Janet's signature, then underneath was a short P.S.:

"Give my love to your uncle."

"Good old aunty!" June breathed, and her eyes sparkled with happiness.

The fact that Aunt Janet had only promised to hold her hand for two days did not worry

her a bit. Long before Monday she was confident that the mystery would be cleared up. Indeed, if all went well, there might be no need for her to continue her masquerade after this evening.

At the entrance to the Manor Mr. Howard Wyndham and his guests awaited the Upper Fourth Formers. The chairman of the governors greeted Miss Tuft warmly, introduced her to the members of his house-party, then turned and smiled at the girls.

"Welcome to the Manor!" he said. "And I only hope you enjoy yourselves. You are welcome to go where you like and do what you like. There is a maze in the grounds. You will find boats on the river, and there are both grass and hard tennis courts. Please make yourselves thoroughly at home. Tea will be served on the terrace at half-past four, and afterwards we will ask you to be good enough to put on your play."

He beamed on them again, then proceeded to introduce the other guests to them. There were several young people amongst them, and it did not take the Upper Fourth Formers long to get over their first shyness.

Laughing and talking, they stood in little groups, sipping at the iced lemonade or ices which two stately footmen handed round and discussing plans for the afternoon. Some were eager to explore the lovely grounds; others decided to swim or play tennis.

June, outwardly as light-hearted as any there, but inwardly aglow with eager expectancy, covertly surveyed the older guests.

Had Uncle Noel arrived yet? Once or twice she had casually mentioned the name of the supposed Scotland Yard detective who was to call on Mr. Wyndham during the afternoon, but none of the house-party seemed even to have heard of Inspector Brown, let alone have any knowledge of his intended visit to the Manor.

For one fleeting moment an uneasy premonition crossed June's mind. Suppose something had happened to prevent Noel Raymond from carrying out his daring impersonation? After all, he was a fugitive—in constant danger of arrest. Suppose—

But firmly she smothered her rising fears. "It's silly to worry," she told herself. "The afternoon's early yet. Nunky will turn up before long, then I'll learn full details of his plan to track down the Grey Falcon."

And, forcing herself to restrain her impatience, she went off with one of the light-hearted groups of guests to enjoy herself.

NO SIGN OF NOEL



"COME along, everybody! Take your seats. Tea is ready."

It was two hours later, and the Upper Fourth Formers lost no time in responding to their host's invitation. All of them had had a thoroughly good time, and now they were ready for tea.

And what a tea it was!

The white-clothed tables, which had been set out on the terrace overlooking the sea, almost groaned beneath the good things which weighed them down. There were four kinds of cake; delicious-looking sandwiches; trifle and jelly; even big bowls of fruit and cream.

Julie's plump cheeks flushed with delight as she looked around.

"My—oh, my, what a banquet!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Wyndham certainly has—"

And then she broke off as she saw June standing on the edge of the terrace. "Come and sit next to me," she smiled, patting a vacant chair.

Reluctantly June crossed to the tea-table and accepted her chum's invitation. There was a worried frown on her face, for still she had seen nothing of her uncle.

The captain of the Upper Fourth regarded June a little curiously, as the schoolgirl detective seated herself beside her.

"There's nothing wrong, is there?" she asked.

June tried to look innocently surprised. Much as she liked Julie, it would not do for that girl to suspect anything.

"Why do you ask that?" June said. "What makes you think there's anything wrong?"

"Oh, I don't know. You seem all on edge, and you look a bit washed out."

"Been overdoing it, I expect," June declared with a laugh. "That last game of tennis was pretty strenuous, you know. Anyway, this tea will soon put new life in me. Isn't it simply scrumptious?"

"Rather!" agreed Julie, and to June's relief the plump girl did not pursue her embarrassing questions, but got on with her tea.

June helped herself to a sandwich, but that troubled frown remained on her face. She was still worrying about the strange absence of Noel Raymond.

What could have happened to him? Whilst she did her best to respond to Julie's merry chatter, June tried to smother the feeling of uneasiness that was growing in her heart, and, as she saw a grey-haired, grave-faced butler handing round cakes, she came to an abrupt decision.

Beckoning to him, she pointed to a chocolate éclair.

"May I have one of those, please?" she asked. Then, as he served her, she smilingly indicated the empty chair opposite. "Is Mr. Wyndham keeping that for his special guest of honour?" she asked.

"Special guest of honour, miss?"

The butler seemed puzzled, and vaguely his husky voice struck a chord of memory in June's mind; but she was too intent on carrying out her plan to obtain information about Uncle Noel to pay any attention to the fact immediately.

"Yes, that man from Scotland Yard who visited the college the other day. Now, what was his name?" June pretended to think, then she smiled again. "Of course! Inspector Brown."

The butler's frown deepened, and for a fleeting second June thought she detected a queer gleam in his dark eyes. He shook his head.

"No inspector has arrived yet, miss. And I am certain he is not even expected."

Now there could be no mistaking the queer way in which he was regarding her, and that chord of memory which nagged inside her brain could not be ignored any longer.

Where had she heard that husky, vaguely insolent voice before? With an effort she suppressed the gasp which rose to her lips.

"In the Smugglers' Cave!" she told herself excitedly. "This man is either the Grey Falcon or one of his men!"

And then, as idly her gaze went to the hand which held the tray of cakes, she received another shock. For the thumb of that hand had a strip of plaster stuck across it—just the kind of strip which might be used to conceal a scar!

"Is there anything else you require, miss?"

The butler's voice broke into her whirling thoughts. June shook her head, and he turned away, and, her heart thumping, her eyes gleaming, the schoolgirl detective watched him go.

Was it possible that, at long last, she had discovered the identity of the Grey Falcon? Was that grave, portly figure now serving Lady Soe with a cake in reality the mystery master crook?

June has certainly got every reason to be anxious! But where can Noel be? Surely he will not fail his niece now. Be certain to read next Friday's CRISTAL chapters of this serial—in the GIRLS' CRISTAL.