

"DULCIE AND THE HOODED PIRATES"

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Stories For Schoolgirls.

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# GIRLS' CRYSTAL <sup>3¢</sup>

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



"THE MYSTERY DOG  
FROM THE WILDS"



# The VANISHING STATUES

By PETER LANGLEY

## A STRANGE LEGEND

"THAT'S a storm-looking sunset, June! This night, we get across to the island for a while!"

June Gaynor gave a quick breath as she halted on the cliff-path beside her famous detective uncle. The sky was a deep, angry crimson, streaked with clouds, and a strong wind blowing from the land whipped the sea into curling breakers.

Barely half a mile from the shore the water broke on a small, rocky island fringed with trees, through which could be seen a grey, barred tower.

"Is that's Restful Island?" June murmured. "When a chance place for anyone to choose for a home!"

Noel Raymond smiled faintly.

"Oh, John Strickland's a bit of a recluse," he explained. "He bought the island and the old mansion as a retreat for his last years. The place is a veritable stronghold—enough to deter any would-be thief!"

June's grey eyes sparkled with interest as she followed her uncle along the steep bank that skirted an old lighthouse overlooking the headland. Below, in the shelter of the bay, nestled the village of whitewashed houses.

"I'm quite thrilled at the thought of spending the night on the island, nunky! Ah, do hurry!" But why did Professor Strickland insist on it?

"His wife didn't say—'t was terrible abrupt," replied Noel. "But it's possible he wants to consult me about some of his recent finds. He's been excavating on the site of the ancient monastery that once stood on the mainland. And the detective nodded towards the crumbling lighthouse tower they were passing. As a matter of fact, that used to be part of it."

He broke off, and June caught at his sleeve, a startled expression in her eyes.

"Nunky—listen!" she gasped. Noel had already come to an abrupt halt as he, too, heard that eerie, moaning sound carried on the breeze.

It was a blood-chilling sound, starting as a deep groan and rising to a wailing cry. June shivered slightly despite her wool trousers.

"Goodness! What—what is it, nunky?" she breathed. "It couldn't be a gull—"

Noel struck his head with a pained frown. The wailing had died once more to a hoarse moan, and when it fell completely as the wind veered.

"No sea-bird that I've ever heard of has a cry like that," he declared. "It seemed to come from the direction of that tower."

"Oh!" June gasped as she trotted round.

Her exclamation was caused by the

sudden appearance among the bushes of a girl—a girl whose face was deathly pale, and who was running frantically towards them.

"Have you heard it?" she panted, making a dash for the tower to avoid her companions. "The—the Moaning Tower!"

They both looked at her—Noel with keen interest, June with feminine sympathy for the girl's obvious agitation.

"We heard something," the famous detective agreed. "But what is this about the tower?"

Unexpectedly the girl explained. There was a legend connected with the ruined tower—once the watch-tower of the ancient monastery. In medieval days a band of ruffians came regularly whose stronghold was on the island. They would sit all night on a dark and windy night and defy the watchman.

They remonstrated the monastery, putting the monks to flight, but without finding the treasure they sought. The old abbey—known as the Black Abbot because of his garb—got a solemn curse on the island, and from that day, according to the story, the watchman's groans might still be heard on a windy night, bringing misfortune to any who lived on the island.

A little chill ran down June's spine as she glanced towards the crumbling tower. It looked strangely sinister against the darkening sky.

Noel questioned the girl and learned that her name was Lucy Hadlow; she had come down from London to meet her father, Michael Curtis, who was Professor Strickland's neighbor.

"I say, this is a coincidence!" declared Noel, grinning broadly; and by no time June guessed that he was trying to take the girl's mind off her immediate fears. My niece and I are on our way to visit the professor, as it happens. You are invited to the island!"

The girl shook her head.

"Michael promised to meet me here, at the old tower," she explained. "He said in his letter that he had something very important to tell me. I got here at three o'clock, as he arranged—"

"Three—June murmured, glancing at her watch. "But it's past six now!"

The girl nodded, her lips trembling.

"I've waited all the afternoon,

growing more and more worried. Then I heard that horrible moaning coming from the tower, and I remembered the legend Michael once told me about it. All at once I became scared—afraid something dreadful might have happened to him—"

Her voice broke, and June exchanged a swift glance with her uncle. Noel smiled reassuringly.

"I think you'd better go and have a look at the tower," he declared. "That moaning sound has probably got quite a simple explanation. And I shouldn't worry about your father if I were you, Miss Hadlow. He's usually very cautious by his work—if I know anything of Professor Strickland."

He was leading the way towards the tower as he spoke, and June was conscious of a thrill of excitement as they drew near to the crumbling edifice. Lucy Hadlow's story had awakened her imagination. The wild, stormy background, with a dark glimpse of the sea-washed islet, lent colour to the legend.

Noel led the way into the tower, the two girls following closely, Lucy's fingers resting lightly to June's arm.

Inside the building it was very gloomy, and the sound of the wind and waves were muted. The ancient structure consisted simply of the third outer wall, open to the sky, and the remains of a crumbling stone staircase.

Noel mounted the steps, to peer out of a narrow slit at the top, overlooking the cliff.

"Nothing to be seen from here!" he called, and his voice, sounding strangely hollow, was magnified by echoes. "Where were you standing when you heard that sound, Miss Hadlow?"

"Just—just outside," replied the girl. "I was thinking of Michael and the second wall—"

She broke off with a stifled cry, and June's heart gave a bump as something fell with a rattling clatter on to the stone floor of the tower.

"Hello! What was that?" exclaimed Noel.

"Something—something seemed to fall from up there," June replied, her

In This Exciting Detective Story Noel Raymond And June Gaynor Investigate The Strange Disappearance Of The Bronze Monks From A Locked Room.



"The person I had in mind, sir, would not be deterred by the absence of his visitors." "It's my idea that the Black Abbot himself came back to claim what is his own."

The astounded silence that followed the old man's words was broken suddenly by a scornful voice from the doorway.

"Nonsense!" it remarked. "You're talking through your hat, Vowles!"

They all turned as a burly, middle-aged man strode into the room. His expression changed as he caught sight of the visitors, and the professor hastily introduced his nephew, Conrad Bentley.

"I tried to meet you, Mr. Raymond," said Conrad as he shook hands rather patronizingly with the detective.

"I've read some of your cases in the papers, and I rather hoped that I could have solved most of them."

Jane gave a little gasp as she stared at the cocksure young man. But Neal merely smiled.

"Really?" he murmured. "And have you found a solution to the disappearance of the bronze figures?"

"It's as plain as a pikestaff," declared the elder Bentley. "Young Curtis was the only person, apart from my uncle, who held the key to the study. As my uncle's trusted secretary, no one would have questioned his habit of working at night. He would naturally carry the key on the polished floor, but there isn't a scratch."

"Have you tried lifting them?" asked Neal with interest.

"Easy!" declared Conrad, striding forward and grasping the nearest figure.

He managed to lift it a few inches and put it down with a thud, his face rather red.

"It's not so simple," remarked Neal; "and I see you've chipped the pedestal. One would have thought that Curtis might have left some traces on the floor, or on the polished floor, but there isn't a scratch."

"Look here, are you suggesting that someone here off with those figures?" demanded Conrad scornfully.

"That's an idea!" declared Neal, gazing thoughtfully up at the ceiling. "It rather bears out Vowles' suggestion about the Black Abbot and the Manning Tower."

There came a rattle of crockery as the manservant passed in the doorway. Jane stared at her uncle, wondering if he could be joking, but there was a tense look in his blue eyes that she knew well.

"When my aunt, Margaret," burst out the professor, "as a man of the world, you surely don't think there's anything in that old legend?"

Neal shrugged.

"There are more things on earth than we dream of, Herrickland," he remarked. "In any case, I think we should take precautions to safeguard your two other figures against the elusive thief, wouldn't you?"

"I'll do that. But do you return" put in Conrad impatiently. "And if he does I'll be ready for him. I mean to patrol the island to-night with Ben Norris, the boatman."

"An excellent plan," declared Neal. "I'll join you when I've made certain that everything is secure here."

Conrad left the room, followed by the manservant. The twilight was setting in and the light had faded from the study; while Jane, her arm round Lucy, looked on with an unseeingness she found hard to explain.

She was thinking of old Vowles' strange idea about the Black Abbot. Could there be anything in the weird suggestion? If not, what was the explanation of the bronze trowel they had found in the tower? And why was her uncle so plainly excited?

He was now gazing at his host about a small skylight in the ceiling overhead, but the professor stated emphatically that no cunning could possibly have scaled the wall or the roof, but none have escaped with one of these weighty figures.

Neal shrugged, and turned his attention to the writing device. He seemed particularly interested in the scribble with the quill pen and ink-bottle. He took out a notebook and his fountain-pen, shaking the latter impatiently.

"What do you a bottle of ink handy, Herrickland?" he asked.

"Certainly," replied his friend. "There's one on the writing-table behind you."

Neal looked himself in filling his pen, while Jane looked curiously round the room, wondering what her uncle had in mind. When she glanced at him again she could hardly believe her eyes. He was handling with care the contents of the ink-bottle from the bronze trowel held by the man behind him.

"I think I've done all I can here, Herrickland," said the young detective, glancing at his watch.

"After dinner I'll join your nephew and the boatman on a patrol of the island. I'll be another morning's night, according to my diary, and the mystery that having succeeded twice, may try again!"

exhausted after the previous working night, had retired to his room, and Vowles and the housekeeper had gone to their own quarters. The hall was in partial darkness, except for the flicker of the log fire.

Jane sat down on the big settle by the fire, idly turning the pages of a magazine, while she kept watch on the locked door of the study.

Outside, the rising gale rattled the windows and the wind moaning reminded Jane of the wind they had heard in the first tower—the sound that had ceased so abruptly.

And then she heard something else—something that caused her to start to her feet, her heart thudding. It was a strange gutturing noise, and it seemed to come from the locked study!

A gleam of excitement in her eyes, the girl detective crossed swiftly to the door and tried the handle. But the door was securely locked, as Neal had left it.

The sound came again—an eerie, fluttering, sibilant noise, followed by a dull thud. Then silence.

A cold chill ran down Jane's spine, but she said nothing.



The professor gave a startled gasp as Neal unwrapped the queer object Jane had found in the Manning Tower. It was a mason's trowel, and it had been broken off one of the bronze statues.

Lucy shuddered, and the professor looked serious.

"I'll leave everything in your hands, Raymond," he said at last.

They left the study, the professor locking the door and handing Neal the key. As though anxious to make amends for his brusque remarks about the secretary, Professor Herrickland escorted Lucy to the dining-room, where dinner was waiting to be served.

After dinner Neal went out with Conrad Bentley to join the boatmen in patrolling the island. The pale had brightened during the meal and the night was soon to break.

Mrs. Prescott, the motherly housekeeper, showed Jane and Lucy to their room—a pleasant room, with French windows opening on the bay. Lucy, distressed by the mystery surrounding her fiance, pleaded a bad headache and decided to rest.

But Neal was very far from Jane's thoughts. Knowing her uncle's ways, she was convinced that his apparent ignorance of the weird legend of the Black Abbot concealed some practical truth of his own.

If, as he suggested, the mystery trowel had been really attempted, then Jane had no intention of remaining idle!

Leaving Lucy dressing in a chair, Jane staid downstairs. The professor,

but her pulses were racing. There was something—something—in the story of the mystery thief!

Jane's first thought was to raise the alarm, but she was afraid that the unknown intruder might escape before Neal and others could reach the house. Then she remembered that her own room was directly overhead. From the balcony she might just be able to see the roof of the study and the skylight that had interested Neal.

Without a word she sped upstairs and opened the door.

"Lucy!" she breathed, and broke off her heart rousing a host.

But Lucy was not in the room, and the French windows leading to the balcony stood open, the curtains billowing in the breeze.

With a sharp sense of premonition, Jane snatched up the lamp from the table and hurried out on to the balcony. Was anything wind raised the alarm of the lamp to head and linker as Jane stared round her. But there was no sign of the missing girl.

"Lucy!" she called unavailingly.

Carried on the wind came a sound which, like a bitter laugh, and it came from overhead.

Jane stared up, and an involuntary scream escaped her lips.

It might have been a trick of the lamp-light, that grotesque figure in



