

Runaway June

By George Randolph Chester and Lillian Chester

Copyright, 1915, by Banta Publication Corporation.

SIXTH EPISODE.

The Siege of the House of O'Keefe.

CHAPTER I.

A PLATOON of the finest wheeled out of the station house and down Deshley street, their brass buttons gleaming in the light of the sunset. Opposite the little fountain of the Cupid with the chipped nose and in front of Tim Courky's saloon the platoon halted and saluted the bent and twisted Widow O'Keefe, standing on her doorstep. Had not the veteran Dan O'Keefe been the most popular man on the force? In all his life Dan had never made an arrest off his own beat or on it if he could help it or made trouble for a brother officer or refused to lie for his friends.

Out of the third story window leaped a pair of gleaming guns, surrounding which was the pleasing, high cheek boned face of the one who was known solely as Marie. Sergeant Clancy stepped across to convey the time of day to the Widow O'Keefe. Sammy O'Keefe, a fine, tall boy with a hairy head, came to the door and gripped the hand of Sergeant Clancy with the grip of a man.

Suddenly the red gummed young woman in the window brightened until she glistened and waved her hand energetically, the Widow O'Keefe put twenty additional wrinkles of joyous welcome in her countenance, young Sammy O'Keefe straightened a full inch and pinked with pleasure, Sergeant Clancy and the platoon of the finest saluted and smoked their rough gentles, and the last ray of the setting sun shot across on the cracked nose Cupid and reddened him into life.

A beautiful young girl had come hurrying down from the corner, her fur cap set jauntily on her wavy brown hair and a green tassel dangling over one ear. She slackened her pace as she came in sight of all these friends and breathed a sigh of relief. She was safe here. And as if to reassure herself she glanced back over her shoulder. That had become a habit with her of late. The look of worry swept instantly from her brow as her big eyes turned shyly up to the stalwart platoon. A friendly nod and a radiant smile for each of the big policemen, a word of inquiry for Pat Casey's little Maggie, a wave of the trimly gloved hand to Marie in the window, a sudden flash of mischief as she primly returned the salute of Sergeant Clancy, a pat on the hand of Widow O'Keefe, a touch of silvery laughter for Sammy, and she had hurried up the stairs.

"She's the sunshine of the precinct, the darlin'," declared the Widow O'Keefe.

"She's a lady!" announced Sergeant Clancy with deep conviction.

"I'll tell you somethin'." The widow inclined her head confidentially. So did Sergeant Clancy. So did Sammy. "She's hidin' from some one, God bless her!"

"Oh, is she?" And the officer of the law glanced up at the third story window. It was vacant.

"Whoever it is, they're no good."

"They are not." And the Widow O'Keefe collected all her wrinkles about her lips.

"She's safe here," asserted Sergeant Clancy and, with a grin, jerked his thumb over his shoulder toward the stalwart platoon. "She's in the midst of her friends. Good evenin', Mrs. O'Keefe. Good evenin', Sammy."

He strode across the street. "Boys," said he, "our friend up yonder don't want to be found. Neither does our friend Marie."

As one man the platoon glanced up at the vacant third story window and nodded, and at the word of command they faced left and marched. Then, and not until then, Officer Moran and Officer Toole, the pair in front, dropped out of the ranks and stood at attention while the platoon passed between them, and when the platoon had turned the corner they wheeled. Side by side they marched into Tim Courky's saloon.

"Good evenin', boys. And what can I do for you?" asked Tim Courky.

"A glass of water, Tim," said Moran.

"The same for me, Tim," said Officer Toole.

"It's a fine evenin'," said Tim Courky, and on the bar he set a large glass of foaming yellow water for Officer Moran and a small glass of rich brown water for Officer Toole.

Marie at that moment was brushing the shining hair of her beautiful young mistress, and both were happy in that occupation.

Poor, dear Ned! How June did long for him! But he must be patient, as she must. They would be far, far happier when, earning her own living, she could go to him independently, exchanging love for love, not love for charity.

Ned Warner at that moment was approaching the little cracked Cupid of the fountain, and as he came down angling Duck alley his mind was in a whirl of savage fury. Gilbert Blye! Everywhere that Ned or his detectives had found a trace of June they had found a trace of Blye! Even now the scoundrel was in this vicinity searching, as Ned was, for June. Or was he following to join her? Ned Warner clenched his fists, and his face blackened with passion.

And Blye? He was only a few rods away. He was coming down diagonal Deshley street, and he was at about the same distance from the corner of Tim Courky's saloon as was Ned on Duck alley. From her third story window of the O'Keefe house June happened to glance out. In the gathering dusk she saw the two figures steadily approaching the corner, where they would meet under the light; then as Ned Warner's deadly clutch gripped around the throat of Gilbert Blye she would be able to recognize their upturned faces!

It was then that Officer Moran and Officer Toole made a pleasant evening to Tim Courky and strode, side by side, out of the door in the point of the wedge, just as Ned Warner and Gilbert Blye approached the light, Ned Warner with murder in his heart, and Gilbert Blye all unconscious of his peril,

and Officer Moran turned left, and Officer Toole turned right.

"Have you seen a girl wearing a fur cap with a green tassel?" asked Ned Warner and Gilbert Blye almost simultaneously of Officer Moran and Officer Toole.

"I did," Officer Moran replied. "She was here only a few minutes ago and dropped a letter in a box."

"Does she live down this way?" asked Ned. "Never saw her before." Officer Moran impressed Ned's features on his memory. "I think she took an uptown car."

He hurried away. Officer Toole was not quite so quick in his mind, because he was more elaborate. He held a thick forefinger in the deep dimple of his chin.

"A girl with a fur cap and a green tassel over one ear," he repeated, making the normal gesture for the tassel, as the black Vandyke had done. "Oh, yes, a girl with a green tassel over one ear! Yes, there was a girl with a red tassel playin' shindy here this mornin', but she was a little girl. Pat Casey's Maggie. And there was a girl with a blue tassel down here yesterday workin' for an orphan's benefit." All this way of assembling his mind while he studied Gilbert Blye whistler by whistler. "But the girl with the green tassel—rather a small young lady, round-like, and a pretty face, with a smile!"

"Yes!" Blye was all eagerness. "Well, I don't know anything about her myself, but I think I saw such a girl askin' a question of Officer Morrissey, two blocks beyond."

Blye looked up the street to where, against the

tired and half famished, Blye ate his delayed dinner in company with the vivacious brunette Tommy Thomas and the white mustached, pink faced Orin Cunningham and with a heavy, silent, thick eyed lidded man who wore short cropped hair on his big, round head.

Tommy and Cunningham and Blye sat for some time together after the big man had left. They were evidently planning something.

Finally all three went out and stepped into Blye's luxurious limousine. Before they had gone very far Blye, sitting by the girl, leaned toward her and began talking to her in low tones. By and by the trace of a smile came to her lips.

In a tastefully furnished drawing room a kindly looking woman held the bubbling Tommy's hand between both her own while they talked. There was both tenderness and loneliness in Mrs. Villard as she drew Tommy to a seat on the couch beside her, but she had spirit, too, for she displayed a most eager interest in the beautiful portrait of June Warner, which presently peered up at her from inside the lid of June's little gold watch.

When Tommy rejoined the men in the brilliantly lighted limousine she handed Blye June's watch with a triumphant laugh.

CHAPTER II.

JUNE, busy with her own thoughts, did not notice the closed cab which stood at the corner the next morning as she left the house.

As she passed by, however, walking briskly up to the surface car, Officer Mack, who had been watching that cab and the handsome brunette whose vivacious face had occasionally appeared at the windows, saw the cab start and slowly move away.

June had stepped from her uptown car and was crossing to Broadway when a closed cab passed her, turned and drew up from the opposite direction, and a gloved hand tapped on the window. Tommy Thomas, the girl to whom Gilbert Blye had introduced her!

"Which way, pretty maid?" Tommy's glowing face protruded from the door of the cab.

"To the employment office, kind lady," she laughed, and June exhibited her little address slip.

"I'll take you over," offered Tommy.

sprawling collar to where his low forehead disappeared in his sprawling yellow hair.

"D'afternoon, ladies," observed Mr. Grogg cheerfully and bowed his smile in the direction of the severe eyed Mrs. Villard and the shocked June. "Brought you a little present, Louz," and, with as much extravagant importance as if this had been the rajah's jewel, he bestowed on Mrs. Grogg a granium in a papier mache pot.

Mrs. Grogg was a thin woman, chiefly distinguished for droopiness and hollowness as viewed from almost any direction.

"Al"—the woman's voice concealed a tremor—"can we pay Mrs. Villard anything on the rent today?"

"Ain't you got any money?"

"Why, Al, you didn't give me any money."

The man searched unsteadily through all his pockets. He finally discovered a half dollar and a dime.

"Never mind," broke in the soft voice of Mrs. Villard as she saw tears in the eyes of Mrs. Grogg.

Mrs. Villard, who had come to know life in many scoldish phases, took June away.

"Have you an evening gown, June, dear?" asked Mrs. Villard in a matter of fact sort of way and eyeing June solicitously as she made this abrupt change in her subject of thought.

"Yes," drawled June. "I'll get it tomorrow."

"We are to have guests this evening." And Mrs. Villard studied June's height and figure with a calculating eye. "I have a new little dinner dress which I am sure you can wear charmingly. You are to be my family, my dear," she rattled on to cover June's embarrassed half protests. "I want you everywhere with me. We shall have to do some shopping, you and I, one of these days. You like pretty things, don't you?"

"Why, of course," laughed June.

On the corner of Vander street and Duck alley was Ned, interviewing a skinny legged girl, who sniffed continuously, both while she was pulling up her stockings and while she was not. In her cheek was a wad of gum, and in her eye was all the lively expression found in the eye of a dead fish. Ned Warner dredged for information for two sordid minutes and went away, and Officer Tierman walked straight over to the stocking puller.

"What did that guy want?" he demanded.

The woman looked at her with wild eyes.

The door moved, and Al Grogg appeared in the doorway in his shirt sleeves, collarless, his hair tousled.

"What you got for supper?" he growled.

"Why, Al—I didn't think you'd want any." And the woman's voice was trembling.

"Oh, you didn't think so! Well, I want some supper!"

"Why, Al, I ain't got any money."

"Well, why ain't you? Come here!" His hat went up.

"Al!" A wall of terror was in the voice.

June stepped swiftly from behind the stove and confronted the man, her small fists clinched, her cheeks flaming, her eyes blazing. She glared at him all her contempt and all her loathing and something more—her superiority. The fist which had been upraised came slowly down. His shoulders drooped. He was whipped!

Al Grogg's wife watched that transition in him with amazement, the drooping of the eyes, the lowering of the fist, the drooping of the shoulders. And a small young woman in a duffy evening gown had done this thing!

Smash! A granium pot just missed Al Grogg's head and broke on the bedroom door. Bang! Another spraddling granium which had split down the center brushed Al's cheek as its pot crashed past.

"Looky here!" Al Grogg's tone was chiefly one of surprise.

Other flowerpots followed from Mrs. Grogg's hands. She had at last discovered that Al Grogg could be made afraid.

June looked at her a moment and then trudged up the hill, somewhat frightened at her own responsibility in this domestic upheaval. The guests had arrived when she reached the house. Tommy Thomas! With Tommy was a white mustached, pink faced man. The runaway bride was surprised and puzzled at the appearance of Tommy in this place, but the white mustached man occupied more of her thought. They were finishing dinner when Mrs. Villard was called away. The white mustached man was trying to induce June to smoke a cigarette. June suddenly looked up and saw in the doorway between the portieres of heavy velours the dark, handsome face of Gilbert Blye!

"Tut, tut, Orin!" came the suave voice of the black Vandyke man. "I won't have this little runaway bride taught bad habits!"

June flushed and turned with some embarrassment to Mrs. Villard, who followed Blye into the doorway.

Blye! Always Blye! He hovered about after they had lounged into the billiard room and conservatory, but the white mustached man monopolized June. Every time she tried to get away from him Tommy Thomas managed by some accident to throw them together again. June finally left the guests and went to her room. She had decided to go back to the O'Keefe house of refuge.

Closer and closer had gathered the siege on the house of O'Keefe! Bit by bit, atom by atom, traces had been picked up.

Closer and closer grew the toils until Marie no longer dared stick her nose out of the window lest some one should report her to Ned or to June's father and mother. But Ned's detectives finally got definite information.

One day a long, lean slinker with cadaverous cheeks came up to Ned from Duck alley and looked up at the O'Keefe residence with solemn interest.

"That's the place," he said.

"Yes, it's the place," Ned Warner's voice was hollow, but there was a jubilant ring in it.

"Go and tell Mr. Moore."

The lean individual hurried away and presently came back on the driver seat of a limousine. Inside were the stern faced father and the gentle faced mother of June and June's bosom friend, the excellent Iris Blathering, and Bobbie Blathering.

"This is the place," said stern John Moore, looking up at the narrow front of the O'Keefe residence, and, stalking out, he helped the others alight.

Sammy O'Keefe came to the door in answer to Ned's ring, and a much wrinkled face poked itself out of the second story window.

"Does June Warner live here?" asked Ned.

"No, sir."

The head in the second story window was jerked in immediately, and there was a hasty shuffle on the stairs leading to the third floor, a shuffle made by setting up the right foot first and pulling the left one up to it. Also there was a mad scrambling on the third floor, while Sammy O'Keefe in the front doorway looked the throng in the eye with admirable truthfulness and swore that there was no June Warner there, no June Moore, no June anything.

"What's the matter here, Sammy?" the Widow O'Keefe herself asked, frowning considerably.

"Come, search the house!" she proudly dared them. Some of them were for holding back, but Ned Warner was perfectly cautious as to whether or no he took any one's word or doubted it. He meant to find his wife.

By the circumstance of bringing home a gen'ris goord to little Maggie Casey, June came home around by an extremely back way and so missed the searchers.

"Search the cellar, if you please!" mocked the Widow O'Keefe, leading the way. "Maybe you'll look in the kindy bin! And here's the coal chute! Now come on upstairs! Here's the ball that you saw before, and here's my son Sammy, a fine young boy still, and this is the parlor. The organ there, sir, is not hollow, as you can tell by lifting up the lids! Open all the doors and see."

The place was vacant! No one was there. Ned Warner, puzzled and determined, inspected the third floor. No results. The Widow O'Keefe had gathered up all the clothes and belongings and put them in a sheet and poked them into Mrs. McPherson's third story window.

June Warner tripped lightly across the street, let herself in at the Widow O'Keefe's front door and trotted briskly up the stairs. She swung round the curving banister.

"Maybe you'd like to look up the chimneys," suggested the Widow O'Keefe to the searchers on the third floor.

Ned Warner walked toward the ball door. June Warner started up to the third floor!

[TO BE CONTINUED.]



"YOU LIKE PRETTY THINGS, DON'T YOU?"



WITH TOMMY WAS A WHITE MUSTACHED MAN



NEVER SAW HER BEFORE



"IT'S A FINE EVENIN'"

The two girls laughed together as they drove away, but at the next corner Tommy excused herself for a moment and ran into a drug store to telephone. Tommy hurried out and returned to her place in the cab with June, but Mrs. Villard, to whom she had phoned, remained at the telephone and called up another number.

When June walked into the Acme Employment bureau, having chosen a new one, quite naturally, since the old one had sent her to a gambling house, she found a new address ready for her. A lady wanted a companion.

Her eyes widened with pleasure as she saw the beauty of Mrs. Villard's home. It was scarcely visible from the street, set back and below a tangled profusion of shrubbery and trees. Before it rolled the broad, smooth Hudson. Her timidity was set entirely at rest when in the cosy parlor just back of the stiff drawing room she met the kindly faced Mrs. Villard.

Companion? She was not to be a companion to this charming and sweet and yet sometimes sad lady. She was to be a friend, a sister, a daughter. They knew that much in the first three minutes of their conversation, and then Mrs. Villard took June up to a wonderful bedroom which had once been a child's, upon the walls of which were peaceocks and roosters and gnomes and elves. It was visiting day among the Villard cottages, and June had the joy once more of giving, mingled with the sorrow that there was need.

It was late when they arrived at the cottage of the Groggs, and as they entered the front door Mr. Grogg came up from the lower road and entered the back door, fully ten feet behind his breath. He was a red faced man with no blend in his countenance whatsoever. Nose, ears and all, he was the same tint of red from where his neck rose out of its

"He was astin' about a girl."

"This party described the girl, didn't he?"

"Un-huh—sawed off blond. Say, what's it to you?" And she sniffed away.

Officer Tierman walked back to his post with a troubled brow, and he shook his long, narrow head as he looked after the industrious Ned Warner.

CHAPTER III.

JUNE sprang suddenly from her little bench overlooking the river. Mrs. Grogg and her intolerable position persisted in jumping into June's mind and staying there. The guests had not yet arrived. The impulsive girl hurried down and out of the back door, across the beautiful rear porch and down the winding and twisting little steps toward the Villard cottages. Mrs. Grogg was sitting in the kitchen in stony silence when June arrived there, a silence from which weeping had long since passed.

"Sit down." And Mrs. Grogg gave up the unbroken chair. "Ais sleeping it off."

"I just ran in," observed the girl.

"Yes. Tell Mrs. Villard that if Al gets home with any money tomorrow I'll save her out what I can."

"Oh, I didn't come about the rent!" June returned hastily. "I just ran in to see if there was anything I can do."

"No, there's nothing can be done. Al drank before I married him and he drinks yet."

June's eyes contracted.

"Why does he have his own way about it?"

"Because he's my husband. I'm scared of Al when he's drunk."

"And you're not afraid of him when he's sober?"

"Well, no. There don't seem to be anything particular about Al to be scared of."

The horror of drunkenness—that was it!

"I wouldn't be afraid of him!" June suddenly popped out.