

# Runaway June

By George Randolph Chester and Lillian Chester

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## NINTH EPISODE

### Kidnaped

Continued

FROM his concealment amid the shrubbery Ned Warner rose to rush forward as the brilliantly lighted limousine, with its gay party of five, swept down the drive of the Villard home. His eyes were burning, he was breathing heavily, and his fingers were curved like claws, for in a moment more he intended to grapple by the throat the black Vandyked face bent smilingly over Ned's lovely runaway bride.

At that instant three shadowy figures sprang also from amid the shrubbery, two men and a woman. There was no outcry and scarcely any struggle. Ned Warner found himself suddenly seized from behind, a rough sleeve across his mouth, his arms pinioned. He was lifted bodily and thrown as Gilbert Blye, with the grace and gallantry only possible to a polished man of the world, assisted the radiant June Warner from his luxurious limousine.

The deserted groom, his head still held in a vise-like grip and his mouth stopped, saw his bride enter the house, surrounded by the gay group, the darkly handsome Blye on one side and the white mustached Orin Cunningham on the other.

It was Marie who made the gag to slip in Ned's mouth. Then Marie slipped back of the house. The two men, one apparently a chauffeur, referred to as Henri, and the other a gardener, picked Ned up and followed her. As they passed the brightly lighted library Ned saw June's collic greet her with the height of canine joy, saw Cunningham and Blye making friends with the dog, then saw the twinkling eyed Cunningham sit in a cozy corner with June and begin an animated tête-à-tête. The chauffeur and the gardener shrank back in among the bushes with their helpless burden.

There came a high powered racer whizzing down the drive. The man let himself in with a latchkey

she jumped up and pulled the other thumb. The piano began a succession of silvery notes. June, and over her bent the inordinately tall Villard.

"Well!" said the gardener in the dimness of the garage, and he brushed his arms. It was all the rest they needed. He turned ponderously toward their captive, whom they had deposited in a corner on a bench. The gardener's one word was a question, an exclamation of relief and an expression of complete and thorough bewilderment. He was a broad Swede, and his arms hung scabbled with muscles.

"I know nothing," laughed the wiry little chauffeur. He was a Frenchman with an inhumanly mustache and a quick eye and a chaotic joy in everything. The maid of the charming mademoiselle telephoned from the pantry to the garage that there is a man near the hedge who must not come near mademoiselle, who must not speak, to whom nothing must be said, and all must be prompt! Volia! I am Henri, and all of action. I call my friend Jens." And he tapped the huge Swede approvingly on the chest. "I bring my friend Jens swiftly by the mere force of my enthusiasm. We glide through the bushes so, like a snake. No!" He laughed and smote his friend Jens on the wide chest. "Like a snake and a bull. We creep up behind the interloper. We pounce upon him so, like a cat. No! Like a cat and a hippopotamus. We bear him to the earth. Mademoiselle trips lightly from her car, a vision, a dream, a ravishment!" And he wafled a kiss to the general abstract of beauty. "The charming mademoiselle is safe. The interloper is here. Volia!"

Wide Jens reached his hand into his pocket for a pipe and glanced over to where Ned sat quietly in the corner.

"Well!" he said.

"Wait," replied Henri. "I shall sit here placidly. I shall smoke a cigarette; perhaps two. I shall think."

Ned Warner stirred impatiently. He gave another tug at the ropes which bound his wrist, but it was only an involuntary test. He must rest before he made another determined attempt to free himself.

He gave a sudden wrench at his bonds, struggling so fiercely to loosen them that he rose and reeled toward the door.

Huge Jens Janssen stopped Ned from falling. The chauffeur laughed, and, springing from his seat in the touring car, he jumped up, cracked his heels together and snapped the fingers of both hands. "I have the grand plan to dispose of our

quite solicited. She became suddenly aware that Marie had been in such a state of nervous excitement as she had never exhibited before.

"Nothing, Miss June; nothing at all! I'm afraid of burglars!"

"Why, Marie, come here!" Marie came slowly over, nervously kneading some knotted pink thing in her hands. "Your eyes are feverish. You must go to bed. Marie, wait. Bring me my medicine case and a glass of water."

Meekly Marie took what June gave her, but later she dashed down the stairs and streaked across to the garage. Euphrat!

At that moment Ned Warner, his hands and feet still bound and his mouth still gagged, was being gleefully descended in a deserted wood-chopper's shed in the middle of a vast, blank grove. Through the trees the moonlight glinted on sheets of water, and the shadows of the trees lay in fantastic, twisted patterns on the surface.

Dawn. The red glow of the sunrise, filtering through the mist of the morning, stole in at the open door of the Villard garage and found Marie, with her fists folded under her arms and the tip of her frosty nose in her elbow, loudly snoring.

She limped over to the house, plodded up to her room, dressed herself with numb fingers and after half an hour of dull eyed thought scrawled this note, which she laid on June's bed:

Dear Miss June—I am feeling better, thank you. I hope you will excuse me if I take a few hours off. I will be back for lunch. Hoping you are the same, I remain, yours affectionately,

MARIE.

She tiptoed out and hurried down the hill to the station, where she caught the first commuters' train. Arriving at the city, she sought Officer Dowd and prevailed on him to phone Ned's friends and June's parents that Ned had been kidnaped.

June in a pretty little morning robe was busy among the flowers in Mrs. Villard's boudoir window conservatory and singing softly when she heard a footstep behind her. Turning, she saw Villard towering above her, his hands in the pockets of his lounging robe, and he was grinning.

"Oh!" exclaimed June, startled. "Good morning."

"So this is friend wife's pretty new companion," observed Villard. "Well, friend wife has excellent taste."

June moved away.

"Don't be in a hurry," he chuckled. "We must get acquainted," and, suddenly reaching forward, he put his hand under her chin and turned up her face. She jerked away, but he closed the door

Side by side the two women stood looking at the man and the dog. Mrs. Villard needed no explanation to tell her what had happened. For the first time in her married life she gave way to anger.

"You beast!" she cried, her cheeks scarlet and her eyes flashing. "This is the last! I warned you to leave this girl alone! I hate you! I could see you torn to shreds! Go on, Bouncer!"

The collic crouched at June's feet.

The man rose cautiously.

"You forget!" husked the man. "We have a bargain!"

Mrs. Villard lowered her eyes for a moment. "It is broken!" she suddenly flared. "You have paid me well, and I have served you well! But we were not to interfere with each other's life! You have interfered with mine! I am through!"

She snatched the keys of her rings and threw them at him. She ran out from the room, followed by June and Bouncer. They heard the man telephoning for his racer at a nearby garage, and while Mrs. Villard was still packing her clothing her husband came along the hall. He stopped at the door.

"I don't think you will find that your new line of work will pay you as well as being my wife," the man snarled.

Mrs. Villard sprang to the door and closed it in his face, and Villard laughed mockingly.

"He is a beast!" said Mrs. Villard and sat down, as if she wished to say something more. There was the sound of wheels at the door. Mrs. Villard suddenly buried her face in her hands and cried.

June left her sobbing and went to pack her own apparel.

Money! Again June was face to face with another angle of that eternal problem, which, it seemed to her, had complicated the entire relationship of men and women. Mrs. Villard had plainly and palpably sold herself, and the price is never great enough for any woman who has done that. Always in June's rapidly widening observation the man gave and the woman received, and her very dependence made the question of matrimony one of essential barter and sale. It was wrong! It destroyed the very source and fount of love. Was there no remedy? June, shaken though she was by her painful experience of the morning, was strengthened in her own resolve. The answer to the problem was independence even though she suffered in the attainment of it, even though Ned suffered. Their love would be all the stronger for it, and it would be pure always.

Could she have seen Ned at that moment all her theories and all her deductions would have taken

Henri, and in his eyes was a very great worryman. "Where is Mr. Ned?" screamed Marie.

"Name of the good Lord!" groaned Henri. "He is watching the day perhaps. Such a headache!" And Henri pressed his thumping brow.

"Where is Jens?"

"Vanished! I wake up. Jens is no more! He has had a fight, they say. He has been licked, they say. The enormous ruffian who is strong enough to box my friend Jens has stolen the machine. Here it is. Volia! Jens must have returned!"

"Where is Mr. Ned?" she demanded.

"In the woods," Henri waved his arms comprehensively.

"Not tied?"

"As you saw him, Miss Marie." And once more Henri was able to laugh. He blew a kiss to the sky. "It was well executed, mademoiselle. It was Henri, myself, who—"

"You take me right out there," she ordered.

"Bravo!" he approved. "It is another good enterprise! I have enthusiasm!"

"Then don't talk about it!" snapped Marie, and lightly as a cat Henri climbed over his spare tires, plumped into the seat beside Marie, and away they sped.

At 7:15 that night Bobbie and Iris Blyethering, the latter June Warner's bosomest of bosom friends, strolled into the Cafe New York. Suddenly Iris grabbed Bobbie by the arm, and he turned to her in surprise. Iris for the first time in her life was speechless, and her face was pale, but she could look. She was staring at a table in the corner. There sat the runaway bride, laughing and chatting happily with a vivacious brunette, a pleasant faced lady of mature years, a dark, handsome man with a black Vandyke, a pink faced, white mustached man who bore all the evidences of a bon vivant and a heavy, round headed man with thick eyelids!

Her moment of paralysis past, the hearty Iris made a straight dive for June's table, and it was Bobbie's turn to clutch her by the arm.

"Look here," he whispered in her ear while he held her, "what can we do? We interfered once and messed it all up. Now, the right thing to do is to telephone Ned."

"I'll sit right behind this post and watch that table!" Iris promptly decided. "You telephone, and hurry up. But I do wish I had a good place to cry!"

Ned was at home when Bobbie called. He was ready to start on any journey in search of June and Gilbert Blye! When he arrived at the cafe he found Iris and Bobbie Blyethering in a state of quivering excitement.



"WHAT'S THE MATTER MARIE?"



NED A PRISONER



"THEN ABOARD THE YACHT!"



THAT'S MY BEST TRICK"

and, with his hands in his pockets, strolled nonchalantly into the parlor.

Mrs. Villard, talking with Gilbert Blye and Tommy Thomas, turned, and as she saw the newcomer her eyes widened imperceptibly and a look of concern flashed down across her gentle countenance.

"Well, Bert, you're a surprise," she said.

"That's my best trick," he drawled, kissing Mrs. Villard perfunctorily. "Hello, Tommy! Howdy do, Blye?"

Villard was impressed as his eyes fell upon the fresh beauty of June.

"Mr. Villard, Mrs. Warner." The introduction was very cold, and again that concern flickered for a moment on Mrs. Villard's face as she saw her husband's eager interest. "My companion," she added, and Cunningham and Tommy Thomas, glancing at each other, smiled.

With a careless nod to Cunningham, Villard walked over to June and, taking her hand, held it while he smiled down at her with such obvious admiration that the helpless bound and gagged man beyond the library window lurched free from his captors and tugged at his bonds until they almost cut into his wrists.

Marie came back from the corner and motioned. The chauffeur and the gardener followed with the husband of the beautiful young girl, who was then smiling her courteous responses to the dissolute Bert Villard. Marie sped quickly across the shadowy back lawn to the garage and opened the door.

"He's not to talk, and he's not to come near the house," she whispered as the men passed her with their burden. She caught Ned's indignant eyes fixed on her, and that glare threw her into a panic. "Whatever you do, don't hurt him," she hastily added. "Don't hurt him!"

Outside the door Marie paused. Her eyes were distended until they were perfectly round, and her high cheek bones gleamed white. She put the knuckles of her right hand against her teeth and looked over at the garage. She pulled at the lobe of her ear with her left hand and looked in the house. She started back, and she started forward, and she turned around in a half circle. She was well nigh distracted with the weight of her great secret, was Marie. If she told Miss June that Mr. Ned was in the garage there'd be an end of everything, and maybe it would be all for the best, or Miss June might run away again from such comfortable surroundings, and it would be all for the worse. Marie sat down and pulled her thumb; then

friend the interloper! We shall teach him a ride of joy!" He pointed to a car.

Jens Janssen stooped and circled one arm around Ned Warner's middle and deposited his violent load in the tonneau.

Marie in the pantry hall stood wringing a corner of her dainty little lace apron; then she dashed back into the servants' hall and folded her arms tightly upon the hollow at her waist. She dared not leave Mr. Ned where he was! She dared not do anything, and yet she must! She burst out of the rear door, was across the porch in two strides, down the steps in one jump and went swishing for the garage. As she came the touring car shot from the opposite door and went whizzing up the drive, Henri in front and in the tonneau Ned and huge Jens Janssen.

CHAPTER II.

AT parting Gilbert Blye held June's hand between both his and patted it gently, his black eyes glowing down at her, and he was smiling upon her with that suave smile which she had come to trust.

"Tomorrow night at dinner," he said, lowering his voice the slightest particle as if the remark were addressed in confidence to her, though the others were crowded eagerly round.

There was an instant of hesitation.

"Then aboard the yacht!" exclaimed Tommy Thomas. She was looking at June, her deep red lips parted in a smile, June's cheeks paled. After all, as Mrs. Villard's companion it was her duty to go on this trip.

"Shall we take Bouncer?" suggested the pleasantly modulated voice of Blye.

"Of course, Bouncer shall go!" June declared, and this time the handsome collic, on his feet in an instant, wagged his tail so vigorously that his hind feet slid.

There was instant gratification in the faces surrounding June.

Far away in the night Henri was speeding northward. Every now and then he turned to look back and laugh, where Jens Janssen sat stoically puffing his pipe, one immense hand constantly on the arm or the knee of Ned Warner.

"Volia!" cried Henri in high glee as the sharp night wind cut past his face.

"Well," granted Jens in huge content.

June put herself into the hands of the agitated Marie very thoughtfully after the visitors had gone.

"What is the matter, Marie?" June's tone was

toward which she darted and, gathering her in his long arms, crushed her to him, raining kisses after kisses upon her suddenly cold cheek, his light gray eyes flaming. June's struggles were futile and her shrieks muffled, but one pair of ears heard. There was a crash of glass, the flash of a long, lithe, white and brown body through the room, and then, with an oath, Villard released his hold on the fainting girl. Bouncer! He had sunk his teeth into Villard's arms, and now he was a whirlwind of canine fury.

The man turned pale with fear, kicking and striking at the enraged animal.

"Bouncer!"

That cry from June saved Villard's life, for the dog, with a yelp of joy, was springing for his throat as he fell. The man lay back. The dog stood still, motionless. The man's hand moved nervously. The collic moved precisely that same amount. Villard did not twitch a muscle from that time on, except to speak.

"Call off the dog!" he ordered.

"Watch him, Bouncer," said June quietly.

June rose from the chair into which she had limply sunk, but a cold anger had come to replace her weakness. She walked from the room and, going to the house phone in the hall, called to the kitchen.

"Has Mrs. Villard returned?" she inquired of the maid who answered.

"Not yet."

"Do you know where to reach her?"

"Any one down at the cottages will hunt her up and give her your message."

"Ask her to come home immediately, please. Tell her it is quite important."

She walked back to the boudoir and glanced in at the door. The two statues were as she had left them. At the sound of her footstep Bouncer wagged the tip of his tail, but not for one fleeting instant did he remove his fiery eyes from the pale gray eyes of Bert Villard.

Mrs. Villard, hurrying up the stairs within a few moments, found June in the landing alcove white, shivering as if with cold.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Villard, but I am going at once," she said before the older woman had even a chance to speak.

"Why, child!" Mrs. Villard's face was full of concern, but as she stared at June her brows knotted and a flush crept into her cheeks—"what—what is the matter?" she faltered.

June was already halfway up the stairs. She turned. Mrs. Villard, without a word, followed her

swift flight, and she would have bathed with her tears the swollen wrist which he had just freed from the rough rope that had bound it.

Slowly and with infinite pain Ned finally freed his hands. They were quivering as, with a mighty effort, he raised them to the back of his head and fumbled with the knot which held his gag in place. It seemed ages before he was able to remove that tight bandage. He removed the tight thongs from around his ankles. He limped awkwardly for half a mile, bent and stooped like an old man, but exercise restored him, and by the time he found a road he was his vigorous self again and full of the dogged determination which had led him so far in the pursuit of his runaway bride.

Down the highway a mile or so he found an obscure roadside, and he strode in at the saloon door.

While ordering a "brucer" for his shattered nerves he rashed his two captors sitting at a table. He rushed madly at them and knocked them both to the floor. Dashing out of the place, he saw their auto. He jumped in, pressed the starting button and sped away.

The house of Mrs. Villard was closed and locked when Ned arrived there at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

In the meantime June and Mrs. Villard and Bouncer were snugly ensconced in a pleasant hotel downtown, and before her at the writing table Mrs. Villard held open a bank book. Its figures represented the price she had received for the sale of her ten best years, and she had spent an hour in the debate of whether to give up her earnings. June had been taken into that debate, but she had been able to offer no argument on either side. She had realized at last a great and saddening truth—that every woman's problem must be for herself alone.

Marie meantime, with Officer Dowd as Interpreter, had telephoned everywhere for news of Ned Warner, but without result; then in despair she telephoned the Villard house to excuse her absence to June. That number did not answer after repeated trials. Marie, more frantic now than ever and feeling sure that she was about to lose her mind, hurried straight down to the station and took a train to the Villard place. It was closed, locked.

Just as Marie was pondering over this remarkable circumstance there came trudging down the drive a natty little figure, its limbs neatly incased in leather leggings, its cap pushed on the back of its head, but its face all the more all fuzzy. It was

"You're just in time!" gasped Iris.

"They're leaving," said Bobbie.

All the pent-up murder which had seethed in Ned Warner's heart for days flamed into his eyes as, with an oath, he started for the table.

"Stop him, Bobbie! Stop him!" suddenly cried Iris Blyethering, and, jumping in front of Ned, she threw her arms about his neck and hung her weight upon him, while Bobbie, also frightened by the terrible expression of Ned's countenance, impeded his progress on the other side.

Ned had turned to shake off his clogging friends when June, drawn by some intangible force, wheeled slowly and looked in that direction.

"Ned!" she cried.

Both Cunningham and Blye paled as they saw that movement and what had caused it. As by a simultaneous impulse they took her by the arms, one on each side, and turned her toward the corner entrance near which they had sat.

"I won't go!" she declared and tried to hang back, but they forced her out of the door.

Ned Warner saw June's piteous face as she half turned it to look back, saw her being kidnaped from under his very eyes, and, bursting through the group which impeded him, he made a dash among the tables and across the restaurant.

Too late! He reached the corner entrance only in time to see Blye's luxurious limousine whir away up the street. June was frantically determined that she would not go where they were taking her. Mrs. Villard was pale and panic stricken, but the other three carried out their pretense of laughing coercion. On the front seat with Scott, Blye's wide featured Italian chauffeur, sat T. J. Edwards, the round headed, heavy man, and his thick lidded eyes peered constantly back through the glass, and there was a firm set to his thick lips.

There was no one at the lonely dock upon which the swiftly speeding limousine stopped abruptly, no one to hear or heed the call for help which June tried to send up above the noisy laughter of five of her companions, for now Edwards and Scott joined loudly in the hilarity.

There was a cold, stern voice in June's ear.

"We've had quite enough of this hysteria. You're going along!" It was the voice of Gilbert Blye.

It was he who, with Orin Cunningham, forced her from a lonely dock into the motorboat which lay alongside, and in another moment all except Scott were speeding swiftly away toward the long, low yacht which lay midway of the misty river!

[TO BE CONTINUED.]