

Runaway June

By George Randolph Chester and Lillian Chester

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TENTH EPISODE.
A Prisoner on the Yacht.

CHAPTER I.

NED WARNER, in front of the blazing windows of the New York cafe, stood as one in a daze, deaf to all the words of Bobbie and Iris Biehering, who feared, from the ashen pallor of his face, that his murderous frenzy might react upon himself. He saw again his lovely runaway bride being forced out of the cafe against her will by the man with the white mustache and that infernal scoundrel with the black Vandyke, Gilbert Blye! He saw himself prevented by the frightened Bobbie and Iris and the solicitous waiters from dashing among the glittering tables and grappling Blye by the throat and strangling him to death. He saw himself rushing to the ornate entrance through which they had taken his beautiful June and arriving in time only to see her whirl away into the night in Blye's luxurious limousine,



Blye's Face Appeared Above the Rail

the heavy man with the thick eyelids up in front of the driver, the middle aged woman and the vivacious brunette with concern and fright on their pale faces as the dome light of the car shone down upon them, and on the rear seat with June the two men who had carried her away by violence, the white mustached man laughing, and the dark, handsome face of Gilbert Blye bending over June with that suave smile on his lips.

Too late! Too late for anything but his stupor. The limousine had turned the corner. On that side of the cafe there was not a taxi to be seen. Bobbie's car stood in front, on the other street. While Iris endeavored to arouse the stupefied Ned, Bobbie ran around and brought his roadster. They drove up to the corner and turned down the street through which the limousine had disappeared, but where in all that wilderness of moving vehicles could the track of June be found? Nowhere! It was as if the earth had opened and swallowed her up.

It might as well, for June, in a swift motorboat with the gay party which had kidnaped her from the cafe, was then swiftly approaching a long, low yacht which loomed gracefully above them in the misty river.

June's struggles were useless in that heaving water and her cries of protest were unheard in that lonely waste. Strong arms lifted her to her feet; a strong hand from above grasped hers, and she was pulled up to the deck. Below her she heard the laughter of the three men who had abducted her, and with their laughter blended the shrill, high voice of that vivacious brunette, Tommy Thomas. June's heart sent out a wild call to Ned. This had been the first time she had seen his face since the day of their wedding.

At the door of the sumptuously fitted crimson and gold salon on the yacht the tottering June was confronted by a stolid steward with gray mutton chop whiskers and a puckered looking stewardess, who wore, as if habitually, a half stimpet.

"The dearie looks faint," said the stewardess. "Well, bring the young lady a glass of wine, you," gruffly ordered the steward.

Mrs. Villard came in and dropped in a chair, while the vivacious Tommy danced over to the gold lacquered piano, its beautiful marine view painted by the famous Velas. Blye and the white mustached Cunningham and the heavy Edwards followed, laughing, as Wilkins wheeled in from the pantry a portable buffet, its frosty topped bottles packed in glistening ice.

"Have a taste of this, dearie. It will soothe your nerves." The whining stewardess held to June's lips a glass of sherry, but June drew away from it with repugnance, and, rising, hurried away from the sumptuously fitted salon. She did not know where that passageway led, except that it led away from that hateful company. The stewardess followed her, the glass of sherry still in her hand. "Right in here, dearie," and she opened the door of a magnificent stateroom, its mahogany walls paneled with ivory tinted tapestry, its brass bed hung with rich lace.

June hesitated, but down the passageway came Orin Cunningham, his eyes twinkling and the laughter of wine upon his lips. June darted into the magnificent stateroom, hastily shut the door and locked it.

In the crimson and gold salon were the popping of corks, gay laughter, in which even Mrs. Villard joined, and then the loud strains of swift dance music, pounded out by the nimble fingers of Tommy Thomas.

Blye sat quietly, with that suave smile upon his lips and stroking his black Vandyke with his long, lean white fingers, upon one of which sparkled a diamond. He rose presently, and, tiptoeing down the gangway, stopped at June's door and listened. He could hear an occasional stifled sob as June sat upon the soft cushions of the couch. Before her, through a half open door, could be seen a glimpse

of a snowy white bathroom, and in the adjoining little pale blue boudoir stood June's own luggage! Ned! That brief sight of him had filled June's whole soul with longing. Poor little runaway bride! There were the rattle of a diving engine and the scraping of chains on the yacht's floor. The anchor was coming up, and there was an instant change in the easy rocking of the craft. She shuddered, and then there was the sound of seething water as the Hilarity gathered headway. June was on her feet in an instant. She ran to the porthole and gazed out at the barely moving lights along shore. The portholes were too small to let her shoulders through. She ran to the door and opened it stealthily, then closed it and held the knob as Tommy Thomas and Orin Cunningham danced past in the salon.

June sat on the couch in her stateroom, with her hands locked upon her knees, staring into the white slice of brightness formed by the tiling of the bathroom, and while she pondered on what she should do Marie and Henri reached the city and stopped at a telegraph office. When they came out of that place a short, wide, thick man had been waddling down the street, with a blunt stub of a cigar in one corner of his mouth and a look of habitual furtiveness in his little eyes, started abruptly at sight of Marie, and when the touring car started the short, wide man hung on behind, his cigar stub firmly clamped between his teeth.

The doorbell rang at the Moore home in Brynport. Stern John Moore, reading his paper beneath the portrait of June, looked up quickly, and there was a slight tremor at the corner of his paper. Aunt Debby's voice was heard.

"Why, it's Mr. Ned and Miss Iris. Why, good evenin', the folks is to home." Stern John Moore listened with silent attention while Mrs. Moore, her hand upon her breast, stifled the emotions to which Iris Biehering gave full play as the "kidnaping" was described.

There was but one conclusion among the men, and Ned, composing his voice as he passed from the mention of Blye, stated that conclusion.



"Our Daughter is in Danger!"

"It is a matter for the police," he declared and picked up the telephone. "Our daughter is in danger," said the grave voice of John Moore.

CHAPTER II.

In the dock adjacent to the one from which the Hilarity's motor tender had departed there paced, almost perceptibly, a night watchman, who consisted of an overcoat, a cap and two glints of eye. To him there came, as the docks intensified their loneliness, a brisk little chauffeur with a thin mustache and a woman with high cheek bones.

"The Hilarity!" stated the little chauffeur, with an accusing tone, and with a sweeping gesture he pointed to that adjacent dock where stood a big hamper with the word "Hilarity" glaring white on its side. "She is gone!" Then Henri stepped back.

"Yep," rambled a frosty voice. "But her tender," objected Henri, "also is gone. Listen, my friend," insisted Henri, stopping in front of the overcoat and cap, but moving aside as it came irresistibly on. "The facts are like these. Mademoiselle has gone on board the Hilarity. Behold, here is the maid of the charming mademoiselle. She was also to have gone on board the Hilarity. How, then, shall she go?"

"Dunno." The maid of the charming mademoiselle now stepped forward.

"Can you drive a motorboat?" she asked. "Volla!" And Henri snapped the fingers of both hands, snapped them three times. "Volla, mademoiselle, Marie! If it goes I can drive it."

"Can't we hire this boat?" and the resourceful Marie pointed to a trim little craft.

The overcoat and cap wheeled slowly in Marie's direction and shot forward a frosty breath.

"Nope." "But, comrade." And Henri jerked his cap on the back of his head as he wheeled at right angles.

"It is important. Look. Here is money. I take the swift little boat. I wish out of the slip. I wish down the river. I wish across the bay. Like lightning I wish, and I overtake the yacht Hilarity. I deliver the charming maid—a little bow here—and a kiss from the finger tips to the charming mademoiselle, and immediately I wish back. Nothing is lost! All is safe!"

"Get off the dock," came the answer. "But, monsieur." "I like."

"I, Henri, detest you," was the angry response. And he followed Marie off the dock.

Up on the street stood the Villard touring car, and as Marie and Henri climbed in it a fat figure slunk out of the shadows and hung on behind, gripping a thick cigar butt between his teeth. Up and down the docks ranged Henri and Marie, but not one motorboat could they find. Wherever they stopped the thick, fat figure dropped off the car and slunk into the shadows.

Henri had another idea. He drove to a nearby saloon and procured a bottle of whisky, which he offered to the man on the dock.

"Thanks." The voice was one degree less frosty.

The neck of the bottle disappeared into the slit of the overcoat collar, and the gleaming bottle turned heavenward.

"Volla," Henri himself took a sip and stuffed the bottle in his pocket. "I shall go away, my friend, but I shall return." He hurried back to the touring car up on the street and drove away, and the thick figure slinking out of the shadows hopped on behind.

In the ivory tapestried stateroom, as the Hilarity steamed slowly across the bay, June Warner suddenly rose and rang for the stewardess. That pucker person came with alacrity, but before she went to June she stopped in the door of the crimson and gold salon and, catching the eye of Orin Cunningham and Edwards, with a hand on a shoulder of each, the stewardess, with a sidelong glance at the quiet Blye in the corner, hurried over to the group on the bench.

"She wants some water," she whispered, bending over and grinning her ugly grin.

"Oh, yes." Again the grin. "Young ladies always trust me. Say, I think she wants to escape."

Blye, with a frown on his dark, handsome face, walked across and spoke to Cunningham. Orin nodded and, his eyes twinkling, went to the portable buffet, where he selected a long stemmed, gracefully shaped, gold incrustated goblet of Venetian glass. He filled it with ice and set it to one side.

Then, while the others watched him, Tommy Thomas with a half sneer and Mrs. Villard with shocked concern, he took from a locked case a tiny stone bottle. Now he emptied the ice from the beautiful goblet and poured into it a few blood red drops. Mrs. Villard half rose and looked toward Gilbert Blye; then, with a catch in her breath, she sat down and was silent.

Blye went to the door as the stewardess came up the gangway and called her in with a jerk of his head. On the lips of Edwards there had come a firm set, and his heavy lidded eyes had narrowed. Without a word Cunningham handed the glass to

her purse. After all, she had no proof that the woman meant anything but kindness.

"Is this breakage charged against you?" asked June.

"Why, yes, dearie." A sniffle went with the whine. "How much will it cost you?"

"Twelve dollars!" Sniffle. "But it's all a part of our job, so never mind, dearie."

"I do not wish you to lose the money," and quite thoughtfully June counted \$12 from her slender store. She added another for the customary tip and gave one to the man, and they thanked her most obsequiously. As June returned to the boudoir their suppressed voices broke out again.

"No," protested the woman in that whining hiss; "that's my money—the dollar's mine, anyhow."

"Nothing yours except what I give you," stated Percy Wilkins gruffly. "That's the law, and you know it. Clean up that mess, you," and he left the room.

The woman's whining mumble could be heard all the while she was cleaning up the fireplace. She was gone when June returned to the stateroom, but on the floor near the door was a yellow leather bound book, its side worn like glass from the constant friction of a pocket. June picked it up and opened it with idle curiosity. On the first inside page, at the top, was the big scrawled word "From." At the top of the opposite page was the word "To." The first item on the "From" page was dated four years back.

"From Sallie Fish, wedding portion—2,000 pounds." Beneath this was the item—

"Savings, Percy Wilkins—102 pounds." On the opposite page the first entry was:

"Looking to the States." "Percy and Sallie Wilkins, 22 pounds." After that the entries were all in dollars. On the "From" side they were chiefly the wages of Percy Wilkins and Sallie Fish Wilkins, for they had apparently gone into private service immediately. On the "To" side, which represented the expenditures, there were very few entries, but they were interesting. In the four years the woman had had four cheap dresses besides her uniforms and very scant accessories. The last entry among the receipts was June's \$14 under the head of "Tips." On that page the book showed an item, "Banked to the credit of P. Wilkins, \$12,000."

And it all belonged to the man, every penny. If the woman had anything it was a gift.

A startling thought came to June. Suppose she achieved her independence, suppose she earned her own money, so that she could go to Ned, asking from him nothing but love in return for her love, would he own what she had earned? If so, what would become of the principle for which she had run away? She paled at that thought, and then she laughed. She did not know the law in this matter, but she knew Ned. Dear Ned! She hunted her handkerchief in a hurry.

CHAPTER III.

THE arrival of an envelope by messenger rendered unnecessary the immediate need of police aid for the Moore family.

With fingers which trembled in spite of his habitual control, the letter of June opened the telegram and read this strange message:



June and the Conspirators

"I am sorry I had a certain party tied and left in Hunter's woods. Please find him and tell him I am sorry. I am going to join our darling. I will protect her until we meet again, when all will be happy. Your faithful MARIE."

New plans were made accordingly. On the dock against which rocked and grated the swift little motorboat Flash the lonely overcoat and cap pursued their almost imperceptible way. A touring car stopped on the street up the hill.

"It is cold, my friend, is it not?" called Henri as he rushed forward, bottle in hand. "Shall we warm ourselves—yes?"

"Yep," rolled up the somber voice, with frosty cordiality, and the neck of the bottle disappeared in the slit of the overcoat collar.

"The motor tender from the Hilarity—it is not yet returned, eh?"

"Nope." "Volla!" Henri is even cheerful as he races back up the dock. "I shall return, my friend Monsieur Frappe."

As Henri jumps into his car a dim, fat figure slinks out of the shadows and hops on behind.

Left alone momentarily, June threw open the door which she had just locked and dashed back along the gangway toward the pantry. At the end of the passage she found a companionway which led her up to the deck. She rushed forward to the prow, taking in at a glance that they were far from shore and in the open water. The distant lights glowed dimly through the mist, but just ahead of her, on the port side, bore down the red and green lights of a tug.

"Ahoy!" she cried, lifting her hands to her mouth like a megaphone. "Ahoy!" she screamed.

Strong arms seized her—the heavy jawed officer she had seen as she had come on board. Two others came running up, Edwards and Cunningham. Close behind were Tommy Thomas and Mrs. Villard, the former laughing, the latter pale stricken. A hand-

kerchief was pressed against her mouth, and the tug flashed by.

It was Edwards and Cunningham who dragged June down into the crimson and gold salon, and as June was jostled in the first thing she saw was the dark, handsome face of Gilbert Blye! He was standing at the portable buffet, quietly drinking a glass of wine!

P. Wilkins and wife came running in, and Edwards, panting, his heavy lips parted in a half snarl and half grin, released his hold on June.

"Lock her up," he ordered and joined Blye at the buffet. Blye lifted his glass, suavely smiling, as June, now unresisting, was led away.

Inside her stateroom June locked her door and at the same time heard it bolted from the outside.

On the dock the overcoat and cap watched the figure of Henri with drowsy interest, also a short, thick figure.

"Say, what do they want?" the short, thick figure asked, with stiff lips.

"Didn't I tell you before to hike?" barked the warm steam of breath. "Get off the dock."

"The beautiful little motorboat!" interrupted Henri, with ingratiating enthusiasm. "My friend Monsieur Flambeau, would it not be possible—"

"Nope."

"Volla!" Henri was quite cheerful. "I shall return again, my friend Frappe."

Henri was just starting his car and the short, thick figure had just slunk out of the shadows to hop on behind when the overcoat and cap sat on the edge of the dock, with their feet dangling toward the water.

"Ah!" breathed Henri to the stiff figure beside him. "At last it arrives! We shall wait!"

"Is there any left?" barked a voice.

"Pardon," stammered Henri—"a thousand pardons, Monsieur Marie." And he produced a fresh bottle.

The thick, short figure slinking back into the shadows wiped its lips with its tongue and slivered. Dawn—sloped the chill, gray mist which lay upon the river began to clear.

"Volla," cracked the voice of Henri, but the tone was cheerful still. "He sleeps!"

It was true. The overcoat and cap, after bobbing and swaying dangerously over the water's edge for hour after hour, had at last stretched out on the dock for the slumber due to a night watchman who was thoroughly at ease and thoroughly warm.

Henri and Marie, with all the mental effect of stealthiness, sprang into the swift looking little motorboat.

A short, thick figure came painfully waddling out on the dock and shook the overcoat. The cap wobbled.

"Hey!" This was from the short, thick figure, over the aperture through which the sound came was a stiff that the result was only a wheeze.

A snore came from the overcoat.

"Hey!" A punch, a kick, but a stiff kick which had no force.

"Ugh!" The grunt was from the night watchman.

"Well, you with the distillery breath. I tried to tell you all night, didn't I? Oh, get alive! This is Bill Wolf, the private detective, talking to you."

"Ugh!" The cap moved, but the overcoat was still asleep.

"They stole the Flash. I say, they—"

"The Flash!" The overcoat straightened. It rose. The cap stiffened its angle. The combination scrambled to its feet.

"They stole the Flash."

"Stole it? Who?"

"Oh, who? The tone was one of infinite contempt. "Why, the little pink whiskered guy and the bony dame! Stole it! And now where did they go?"

"The yacht—what's her name?" The overcoat and cap were still hazy. The cap turned gropingly toward the hamper, on the adjoining dock, where the name stood out in blunt white letters, "Hilarity!"

"The—"

"The Hilarity!" Bill Wolf stooped with his hands on his knees to stare at that information which had been in plain sight all night. Me for a telephone. Gee, look at that boat go!"

Upon the swelling waves rode the Hilarity, and all on board of her, save the officers of the night and one other, were sound asleep.

That one was June Warner. She had noiselessly dressed herself in a yachting costume, and now she slowly removed a bar which held the sliding of a secret panel she had discovered in the wall of her cabin.

Swiftly, silently, June gained the deck. Creeping close to the cabin, she rounded the stern. The Hilarity had dropped anchor, and the landing stairs with their silken hand rail had been let down. At the platform bobbed the motor tender.

Swiftly, silently, the runaway bride crept out and down the side of the yacht and dropped as noiselessly as a cat into the motorboat while the long pink fingers of the dawn swept athwart the yellowing sky.

With a thumping heart June started the motor, and at the sound Gilbert Blye's dark, handsome face appeared above the rail.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]