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RUNAWAY JUNE

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FIFTEENTH EPISODE "At Last, My Love!"

CHAPTER I. AT THE moment that Blye met June, Ned Warner was springing up the stairs, his jaws set and his fists clinched. It was thus that Ned Warner had, after all his weary pursuit, found his bride—in the presence of Gilbert Blye! For only an instant Ned Warner stood unopposed before the door of the room, then he seized a chair, and, standing to the door, he swung the chair while the others of the little throng, which had piled in after him, fell back. Beyond the door the dark, handsome man with the black vandyke had led the beautiful little runaway bride to a heavy man with thick lidded eyes and a round head bristling with short hair. He sat in a chair, and in his hands was money. He rose as June was led up to him, and into her hands he thrust the money. Crash! The door splintered and gave way, and through it burst the wild-eyed Ned Warner, his jaw set and his fists clinched. For a second he stood bewildered by the strange light which flooded this large room; then, with an oath, he sprang for the black vandyke man. He clutched his fingers around the throat and, with a savage roar, bore Gilbert Blye to the floor. The runaway bride uttered shriek after shriek. At the door downstairs there stopped an electric coupe, driven by a sharp featured woman with a long nose and high arched brows. Upstairs there was a scene of wild confusion. The runaway bride, her mother, Iris Blethering and the vivacious Tommy Thomas were screaming in hysteria, while the heavy man with the thick eyelids and the man with the white mustache and Bobbie Blethering and half a dozen other men rushed upon the fiercely struggling men on the floor. "My husband!" shrieked June. "My husband!" My husband!"

Into this tumultuous scene there rushed Marie and Officer Dowd and fat old black Aunt Debby just as Bobbie by main strength dragged from Gilbert Blye the maddened assailant who had sprung upon him. Gilbert Blye rose feeling of his throat, and for a moment he contemplated Ned Warner with dazed bewilderment; then a flush of anger came into his cheeks, and his black eyes blazed. "Let him go!" he yelled, and thrusting the heavy Edwards out of his way, he made a mad rush for the man who had attempted to strangle him. It was huge Officer Dowd who this time jumped in between the two furious combatants and, with the aid of half a dozen young men, prevented the desperate encounter which would have ensued. "My husband!" sobbed June and tried to throw herself upon him, but he turned from her. "Ned! Mr. Blye!" A hand was laid upon Ned's arm—Iris Blethering's. She had forced her way through the excited throng. "Why, Ned!" she called, shaking his arm and looking at the eyes from which the light of reason seemed to have fled. "Ned, listen to me. It's Iris! Don't you see? This is a motion picture studio!" They all had to repeat it again and again before they could reach his dazed intelligence. June! She stood now supported by her father and mother, her large, lustrous eyes turned appealingly on Ned, waiting the moment when she dared approach him again. "Don't you understand, Ned?" she frantically cried. "Won't you understand? It's a motion picture play!" Slowly he turned his glassy eyes in her direction. He comprehended at last, but there was no softening in his face, for there still stood the dark, handsome Gilbert Blye. "You have been with that man ever since you left me!" savagely charged Ned, turning suddenly toward the trembling June and shaking his finger at her. In the abandoned bank room below Bill Wolf stood near a dusty window with Honoria Blye and rolled out before her a bill, yards long, covering all the separate items of his sleuthing on the trail of Gilbert Blye and June Warner. "Go over the list, ma'am, item by item," confidently invited the faithful detective. "You'll find them correct. And here's a check on your own bank all ready and made out for you to sign and here's a fountain pen, ma'am." Honoria Blye took the long list and began to check it off, item by item. In the studio above a score of indignant eyes turned on Ned Warner, and there was a loud chorus of protest as he pointed accusingly at his unhappy bride. "What do you mean?" demanded the cold, stern voice of Gilbert Blye, and he advanced, his black eyes glowing. "This girl has done no wrong!" They all talked at once, and they all talked indignantly at Ned Warner. According to them, June Warner was the sweetest and best little wife any man dared wish for. Iris and Father and Mother Moore bent forward eagerly toward Ned, and all smiled reassuringly. Then Father Moore turned to June. "My daughter," he said, "come home." Mother and daughter wept in each other's arms.

CHAPTER II. "Ned!" It was a pathetic little figure which turned appealingly to the scowling young man. Her big eyes were full of tears. "It was all a mistake, dear!"

He choked back her tears, and there was a tense silence, in which Ned Warner stood with cold eyes and folded arms waiting. "Oh, Ned, can't I make you see and understand?" And there was a piteous wistfulness about her. "We were all so happy on the day of our wedding, so happy as we started on our honeymoon trip! And when we stood alone in the Pullman drawing room, surrounded by our white ribboned baggage, there seemed to be no cloud in our sky!" "Then why did you leave me?" Ned Warner's voice was harsh. "It was the money!" Her lip trembled. "Don't you remember when I missed my purse? The porter came in just then, and you gave him a dollar. When he went out you gave me \$50 and in just the same generous way you gave it to the negro. The difference was \$29." They were all startled by the force of the comparison. Only Gilbert Blye smiled, and the smile did not escape Ned. "Do you remember I cried and you put my head on your shoulder? You thought I was tired, but I cried from humiliation. I felt like a beggar. I realized that for the rest of my life I would have to accept gifts of money from you. Then I dreamed about it. And when the train stopped and woke me up I couldn't stand it. I threw down your money and ran from the train."

"To meet this man!" interrupted Ned sternly. "Gilbert Blye was waiting on the station platform at Tarnville." And he noted that June looked at him in surprise. "Hold on there!" Gilbert Blye spoke sharply. "I was waiting, but for a New York train. I had been to our Tarnville factory. I saw this beautiful girl on the platform and thought immediately what a good motion picture subject she would be. I was right. She screens perfectly." And he smiled approvingly at June. "So you were strangers," remarked Ned, and there was an implied sneer in his tone. "You helped her on the train, and I saw you in the car talking with her!" "You?" Both the runaway bride and the dark, handsome Blye asked that question. "Yes, I!" this triumphantly. "I caught an express and overtook your local as we pulled into the station at New York, and through the car windows I saw you bending over her and smiling, and she was smiling up at you!" There was a pause, and the listeners looked from June to Blye and then at Ned. "Oh, yes!" and June's brow cleared. "I had sold my watch to a funny old lady on the train to pay my fare. Mr. Blye bought the watch from her and very kindly offered to let me repurchase it whenever I found it convenient. He gave me his card; that was all."

"All!" Ned thundered. "He chased you from the train in a taxi, and I followed, but I lost you both." "I did not!" Blye heatedly retorted. "I jumped in a taxi and tore straight for Cunningham's hotel," and he turned to the white mustached man for corroboration. "We were due at a dinner party that night and were to stop at Mrs. Russell's, where all the girls of the company afterward boarded." "Why did he go to Brynport at the same time?" Ned glared savagely at Blye. "It was an inspiration," Gilbert Blye smiled suavely and stroked his black vandyke with his long, lean white fingers, and his black eyes glowed. "We had just formed the Blye Stock Company at the dinner party. Mr. Edwards," and he nodded to the heavy man with the thick lidded eyes, "is our leading actor, who has also an interest in the company. I showed them the picture of the beautiful girl in the watch. It had given me a great idea for a motion picture play, 'The Runaway Bride.' They were delighted with it, but we had no girl of the type."

"I remembered hearing Mrs. Warner tell the old lady on the train that she must earn her own living. I was certain that she would screen well. Why not get the original heroine of the idea? Edwards and Cunningham were enthusiastic. I had her address in her watch. I jumped in Cunningham's limousine and hurried right out to Brynport." "And on the way in from Brynport my taxi broke down," June went on. "Mr. Blye appeared out of the darkness as if by magic and offered his limousine." "So I became a temporary member of the Blye Stock Company. I was to play the lead in the future which he elaborated after I told him about my money problem."

"That was a great idea!" Blye was very enthusiastic. "The man, the woman and the money! It will appeal to every class and condition of people. We're spending a fortune in advertising it. Look at this new twenty-four sheet poster." And, moving a piece of scenery, he displayed a big lithograph of "The Runaway Bride," by Gilbert Blye; Portrayed by the Blye Stock Company. "Ned Warner was the only one who paid no attention to the lithograph. His arms were still folded; his eyes were still cold. June looked at him, and her eyes filled with despair. "I saw no cameras at Mrs. Villard's that night." And now he turned sowinglingly to Orin Cunningham. "Yet I saw this man distinctly making love to my wife. And I saw Gilbert Blye doing the same thing!" "We were rehearsing, Mr. Warner," explained Blye quietly.

"I'll swear it was not a moving picture rehearsal the night you dragged my wife out of the New York cafe and took her on board your yacht." "You bet it wasn't!" It was the heavy T. J. Edwards, and he was bobbing his round head vigorously. "A contract is a contract. When your wife saw you she wouldn't go on board the yacht; she wouldn't finish the pictures; she couldn't do anything. My

heavens, man, do you know I had already spent \$75,000 on this feature? And if this girl quit we couldn't get another one to take her place, could we? So we dragged her on board the yacht." And he glared his defiance at all of them. Money was money. Ned Warner had been sitting on the edge of a table. Now he sprang to his feet, and his eyes flamed. He caught his wife by the wrist and pulled her away from her mother. "Here's one thing you can't explain," He dropped her wrist, and she stood swaying with half closed eyes, but there was no mercy in him. "I saw you rush from a house in a filmy stage costume." There was a strained tenseness in the group which surrounded them. John Moore started to come to his daughter, but Ned fiercely waved him back. "It was moving picture work. Very well. But tell me this—how could any girl who could not endure the humiliation of accepting money from her husband consent to appear on the street for any purpose in such a costume?" There was a deathlike stillness among them, broken by a wild sobbing from the little runaway bride. "Ned!" she cried. "Oh, Ned!" And she clung upon his arm. He held coldly rigid. "Forgive me! You can't know how I've suffered! You can't know how I've loathed it all! I was so mistaken, so wrong! I thought I had such a wonderful ideal. When I had achieved my independence, when I need no longer look to you for money, I was to return to you, and we were to walk hand in hand through life in that love which can be founded only upon mutual respect, which asks love for love and nothing more. I meant our love to be without a flaw. No man can understand the hurt to a woman when after marriage she becomes absolutely dependent on his charity." "Why, Junie!" The small, mild voice of Mrs. Moore, and she stepped forward with deep concern on her gentle face. "What is all this talk about a husband's charity?" And she turned with wonder to Father Moore. "A husband makes only one gift to his wife, and that is at the altar. After that everything he has is hers, if people will only remember the marriage service. Your ring is a symbol of it. 'With all my worldly goods I thee endow.'" "And you, my son!" She turned with surprising severity on Ned Warner. "Have you forgotten that you promised to love, cherish and protect my daughter?" There was a cry from the little runaway bride and a sob from Ned Warner as, oblivious to all around them, they clasped each other in a solemn embrace. From that loving clasp the beautiful wife of Ned Warner raised a radiant happy countenance to her mother. "Where are they? Where are they?" shrieked a shrill voice, and Honoria Blye burst into the group. Gilbert Blye walked serenely over to meet her. "You may go home to your parrot, Honoria," he advised her quite happily. Then there came a cold combersness in his black eyes. "You can't interfere with my business this time, as you have done ever since we were married, and you can no longer assume a dominance over me with your money." Suddenly the glow returned to his black eyes, and he looked to June and smiled his suave smile. "I have worked out my independence."

CHAPTER III.

There was a gay supper party at the New York cafe that night. The Blye Stock Company entertained their departing star and her friends. Ned Warner sat beside his happy June. There seemed an extra affection to-night between Father and Mother Moore and Bobbie and Iris Blethering, and Tommy Thomas was the guest of the gay. The eyes of the white mustached Orin Cunningham twinkled incessantly, and heavy T. J. Edwards sat with a smile of intense satisfaction on his thick lips. The feature was finished without an accident, and the first of the films was a fine. Bobbie Blethering and Blye took an instant liking to one another. The old feud was entirely forgotten. Up rose Gilbert Blye at the head of the table. In his hand he held a small shining object. He made a wonderful speech about it, a speech full of wit and sentiment and good will and things which made everybody happy, and with an extraordinary flourish of words he presented that watch to the little runaway bride. Amid whacking applause the little runaway bride made a blushing speech of acceptance; then there was a whispered consultation between herself and the deserted groom, begun by a suggestion from the latter. Then up rose the beaming Ned Warner and made a manly speech, a generous speech, a speech full of heart bursting happiness, and amid great applause he presented that tiny watch to the dark, handsome, black vandyked Gilbert Blye. Then up rose Bobbie Blethering and looked at the clock and motioned to the head waiter.

"Well, it's train time," he proudly announced. Two of the party looked up in perplexity. Everyone else was grinning. "Goodby, Junie, dear!" And Iris Blethering, jumping from her chair, threw her arms around June's neck and sobbed happily. "Here are your tickets, Ned," called smiling eyed Father Moore, tossing over an envelope, and at that moment the doors of the private dining room opened, and in marched Aunt Debby and Marie laden with white ribboned honeymoon luggage. June's mother smiled with Father Moore at the thought that the happy couple did not know that on the back of the Moore car which was to take them to the railroad station to finish their uncompleted honeymoon was this legend: JUST MARRIED.

THE END.

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