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RUNAWAY JUNE

BY GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER AND LILLIAN CHESTER

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ELEVENTH EPISODE.

In the Clutch of the River Thieves.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was a wild clanging of bells on the yacht Hilarity as the sun pushed its scarlet rim up into the edge of dawn. At the foot of the landing stairs beautiful June Warner, her big, lustrous eyes widened in terror, had cast off the swift little motor tender, and the dark, handsome face of the black Vandyked man, peering over the deck rail, was distorted with rage. He shouted again his impatient commands to the officer on the quarterdeck.

Sleepy sailors were on deck now fumbling with the davits on each side. From one swung a little covered cutter and from the other a long, narrow racer. Blythe sprang to assist the sailors lowering the racer.

On the dock as the sun pushed its scarlet rim up into the edge of the dawn stood the well known and justly famous private detective Bill Wolf, his short, thick body stiff with the chill of the long night, and by him stood an overcoat and cap. Bill Wolf's round face and the visor of the cap were turned toward the river, where in midstream streaked the speedy little motorboat Flash, which had been stolen from that dock while the overcoat and cap peacefully slumbered. In the boat at the wheel sat a natty little figure with a chauffeur's cap and a tiny mustache. Upon his face was a beatific smile, and his eyes sparkled and snapped with the exhilaration of this divine moment. Behind him sat, stiff as a ramrod, a woman with high cheek bones and an expression of grimly patient determination on her lips.

"Voila, Mlle. Marie!" cried the little chauffeur as he cut a long, graceful curve between two slow moving barges.

The Escape of June.

"Did I not say we would swish?"

Marie's stiff lips worked for a moment, so that she could enunciate.

"Voila!" she hoarsely uttered. "Voila, Henri!"

For only a moment the well known and justly famous private detective Bill Wolf looked after the swiftly swishing Henri; then he turned and pounded up the dock, racing for the nearest telephone. First of all he called the Eagle Eye Detective agency and secured a report from its wireless department; then he roused out of slumber a sharp faced, long nosed woman with high arched brows, who caught up her bedside telephone with instant alertness in her beady eyes.

"Well, I got him!" came the hoarse voice of Bill Wolf. "He's on board the yacht Hilarity, and, say, with the girl!"

Immediately Honoria moved very swiftly.

The sleepy eyed steward stepped out upon the deck of the Hilarity with his uniformed jacket buttoned askew.

"Beg your pardon, sir," he said. "Don't lower the boats for a moment."

"What!" shouted Gilbert Blye.

"The gasoline sir. It did not arrive until an hour ago."

"And there's no gasoline in these tanks?" roared big T. F. Edwards, pushing forward.

"No, sir."

"You infernal idiot!" yelled Orin Cunningham.

"Lower those boats!" shouted Gilbert Blye. "Wilkins, get downstairs. You can fill those boats in the water." And he looked out across the waves. The escaping beauty was rounding the point.

In the pretty apartments which Ned and June Warner had fitted up to be their nest Ned rose from the couch where he had fallen asleep with the miniature of June in his hand and recognized the rapping voice of Honoria.

"Well, we've located your darling!" And there was a shrill cackle. "She's on board the Hilarity with my husband. And the yacht is anchored outside the bay. Good morning."

[illegible] Bobbie Blythering had a staunch little boat, and Bobbie was routed out of bed immediately, yawning and wondering why the world could never be at peace. But he was ready, though it took his agitated wife, Iris, seven minutes to make him comprehend that the Hilarity was a boat. She had to suppress all her ebullient emotions to do it, but she relieved herself somewhat by telephoning June's mother and father at their beautiful home in Brynport.

As the sun pushed its scarlet rim up into the edge of the dawn and stared in pleased surprise at the beautiful girl who was speeding toward the marshy shore a low, gray skiff with a portable motor attached to its stern skipped in and out of the dimness among the black hulls at the river's edge. In the skiff were three rough looking men and a roughly dressed woman, who sat huddled in the bow. All four were silent, but their furtive eyes roved constantly over every vessel around which they crept. In the bottom of the boat were a huge bundle of celery and a loosely piled tarpaulin.

Suddenly the woman leaned forward and touched the nearest man on the knee. He was a big, rawboned man with a bronzed face and a deep scar on his chin. The woman pointed, and the man turned his evil eyes in that direction. Surrounded by black coal barges was a shining houseboat with brass rails, mahogany cabin and all the fittings and appointments which extravagance could devise.

The man at the stern, a lean, wiry fellow with a hooked nose and a lean jaw which ended in a big knob on each cheek, slowed down the engine until it was noiseless. They completely circled the two adjoining docks before they came back to the slip where coal barges lay; then the skiff glided in beneath the overhang of the barges, and the big man with the scar on his chin knocked on the hull. No noise from within. The man picked up a club and pounded. No stirring.

There was not a living creature in sight except these four early morning birds of prey.

"All right, Babe," growled the man with the scar on his chin.

The woman looked up at the houseboat as if she were estimating for herself its plan, arrangement and all the mysteries which it might contain. She slowly rose and cast aside her shawl. She had been beautiful once. She still bore traces of it, would have shown more traces had she not been unkempt and in frowsy clothing.

"It's a wonder Jake wouldn't take a chance on the break-in once in awhile," she complained. "He's as light on his feet as I am."

"But I ain't so quick in the head," hastily complimented Jake.

"That'll do!" growled the leader of the party. "Up with you, Babe."

The woman shrugged her shoulders and put her roughly shod foot into the big man's outstretched palm. He raised slowly and lifted the woman straight up so that she could draw herself on board.

She disappeared. The three men sat silent.

"All right, Ben." The woman's face peered over the rail. "Say, it's a nesselrode!"

The lean Jake stepped forward promptly and climbed up over the big man's back, perfectly contented now that he knew the silken hung houseboat to be empty. The third man with little patches of half formed beard on his face took the rudder; then the huge Ben jumped up, caught the deck rail and drew himself upward.

For the hundredth time Ned put his head out of the window. At last they were coming! He seized his coat and hat, hurried down to the street and jumped into the mechanic's seat of Bobbie Blethering's roadster before it had come to a full stop; then they turned and whirled away toward the docks. Honoria Blye in her electric coupe was headed for that destination, too, and on the yacht Gilbert Blye was superintending with impatient energy the loading of the gasoline tanks in the two small boats.

The thoughts of all these people were bent upon the poor little runaway bride, who was at that moment skirting the marshy shore and hunting a place, no matter how desolate, in which to hide.

There was an inlet among the marshes. She ventured into it a short distance, but it led to nowhere, and she hurried out again to the open water. A small boat rounded the point, and for a moment June's eyes distended. Involuntarily she crouched.

(To Be Continued Tomorrow.)

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