


The Outdoor Chums on the Gulf or, Rescuing the Lost Balloonists

by Captain Quincy Allen



Chapter XII: The Breakdown of the Motor

"Say! he's going off, dead sure!" exclaimed Will, in distress.

"He certainly seems to be having a free ride out to sea," remarked Frank.

"But that little craft will upset, and let him drown, Frank! Can't you stop him from such mad capers?" continued the other.

Frank put his hands up to his mouth in such fashion that they formed a sort of megaphone, and allowed his voice to carry far.

"I say, Jerry!" he bawled.

"Hello!" came faintly from the onrushing fisherman, who was sitting in such fashion as to properly balance his small pumpkin-seed-shaped craft as it sped over the water, so rapidly as to leave a sheet of white foam behind.

"Cut loose! Danger!" shouted Frank.

"Did he hear you, Frank?" asked Will anxiously.

"I guess so. Anyhow, he seems to be moving toward the bow, where his line is fast. I hope he has a knife with him, that's all," replied Frank, straining his eyes to see what was going on, for the sun had set, and already dusk was just commencing to gather over the water.

"He always carries one in his fishing bag," declared Bluff, not a little alarmed himself over this new source of danger, so utterly foreign to anything they had ever experienced before.

"There! He's done it! Hurrah!" shouted Will in relief.

"I bet he hated to let that thing go!" said Bluff, who knew the determined nature of the fisherman full well.

"And he's lost his line, and the hook, too," commented Will.

"That's of little consequence, for there are plenty more where they came from. I'm glad he was sensible enough not to carry the joke too far," observed Frank.

Jerry came paddling slowly back. Apparently he wanted to continue his fishing, but his good sense told him the hour was really too late.

“Talk to me about your toboggan slides! What could compare with that jolly old dash? Peary wasn’t in it with me. I’ve heard of boats pulled by dolphins, but give me a shark every time for a racer. I’m only sorry I had to cut loose so soon,” he said as he came aboard.

“I see you have one mullet left, Jerry. After supper we’ll get out a couple of lines, and fish from the motor-boat. Perhaps we can pick up a channel bass or a weakfish, which I am told they call a sea trout down here

“A good idea, Frank. I’ll just get the lines ready while you look after supper. Glad to see Bluff managed to find his oysters. Perhaps we’ll have a rest now, and he’ll quit sighing after the same. But they look fine and dandy, too.”

The boys did not wonder so much now at the size of the hooks they had found in Cousin Archie’s assortment of war material, each of them fastened on a heavy but pliable brass snell, and with copper wire instead of thread. Florida sea fishing requires such heavy tackle, because one is never certain whether he may hook a forty-pound channel bass or a shark, and an ordinary hook would be quickly torn loose.

The oyster stew turned out well. Every one was loud in praise of its splendid qualities, and Bluff was given to understand that they did not care how often he supplied the larder with a pail of fresh bivalves.

He did not seem just quite so eager to promise, and Frank suspected that those nasty little cuts on his fingers were beginning to be painful.

The supper over, the boys sat around, taking it easy, and looking out upon the open space where they knew the mysterious gulf lay, about which they had read so much in the past.

Once they saw lights moving along, which must certainly have belonged to some sort of craft, either a steamer bound for New Orleans, or else some private steam yacht, the owner of which was cruising in these sub-tropical waters for pleasure.

Jerry had cast out a line from the bow and a second one from the stern. As the depth of water was good, it did not much matter how far from shore the bait lay.

“Hope something gets hold before we turn in,” he said, after carrying out his part of the program.

“Yes; fresh fish for breakfast wouldn’t taste bad,” remarked Bluff.

“Bah! That’s the only thing you think of, Bluff. Now, if you had any genuine sporting blood in your veins it would be the last thing you bothered about. Let me shoot the game, or catch the fish, and I don’t care who eats them,” said Jerry.

“All the same, I noticed that you passed up your dish for a second helping of stew,” remarked the other instantly.



“Pure philanthropy, my dear boy, that’s why I did that,” answered Jerry.

“Huh! How do you make that out?” demanded Bluff.

“Why, you see, I was afraid you’d make yourself sick eating so much, and out of the goodness of my heart I sacrificed my better feelings in order to save you.”

Bluff said nothing, but the grunt he gave was deeply significant of skepticism.

While they were talking, a while later, Jerry suddenly gave utterance to a whoop, and sprang to where one of the lines was fastened. This he began dragging in, although it seemed to take considerable effort.

“He’s a dandy, all right! Frank, get Cousin Archie’s gaff hook, and stand ready to yank him aboard when I get him alongside!” he called.

This was finally accomplished, and with considerable splashing a magnificent bronze-backed channel bass, weighing at least twenty pounds, was captured.

The boys were delighted. Here was a new treat, indeed. In comparison with the trout and black bass that had, up to now, constituted their only game fish, this was tremendous. Still, later on, Frank was satisfied that a one-pound black bass, held with a light fly-rod, could give more sport to the square inch than any fish in Florida waters.

There was nothing more doing up to the time they went to bed. In the morning they found the hook gone from the other line. Frank said they must have caught a shark, or else another large bass, which, in twisting about, had broken the tackle. Still, they were not sorry, for they would not have known what to do with more.

“That’s what I call fresh fish,” said Bluff, as he sighed because he could not eat another bite of the tempting dish.

“It does go pretty good,” admitted Jerry, with a wink toward Frank.

Sometimes Frank was of the opinion that the name of “Bluff” had been bestowed on the wrong fellow, for Jerry was inclined to play the part much more than the one who bore the odium that went with the name.

“Now to get under way and move out on the gulf!” exclaimed Will, in some excitement, as the breakfast things were put away and the deck cleared for action.

Frank had taken a careful observation, and announced that there did not seem to be any reason why they should linger there longer. His chart showed him a refuge some fifteen miles along the coast, to the east, where they could run in should it be deemed necessary. If the weather kept good they could speed another fifteen miles, and make a second lagoon sheltered behind outlying islands.

These things are easy enough to plan. It sometimes happens, however, that in attempting to carry them out a hitch occurs which no one has dreamed possible. Now, it might come in the shape of sudden winds that kick up a tremendous sea; again, there



might be a breakdown of the motor, as may happen with any boat, no matter how well built.

They made a flying start, and all the boys were thrilled when they found themselves far out from land, and headed along the coast, toward the east. Later on, of course, their line of travel would be south, as the coast turned and they drew nearer to their destination, Cedar Keys.

Everything seemed to be working nicely, and they had soon put half a dozen miles behind them. Frank was attending to the motor, while the others lay about on the deck, watching the heavens or the surrounding water.

Not a breath of wind seemed to be blowing, and the sun came down with summer heat, causing coats to be discarded by all hands.

“Hey! What’s that? Where’s the blooming shore gone?” suddenly exclaimed Bluff. Frank raised his head at the cry.

“It’s a fog coming up!” he said uneasily, for that was the one thing he had dreaded most of all while out upon the open waters of the big gulf, and no haven near at hand.

With incredible swiftness the blanket seemed to sweep over the surface of the sea. In ten minutes they were completely surrounded, and could not discern any object fifty feet away.

“This is awkward, fellows; but perhaps it may not last long. Meanwhile, we will have to steer by the compass. All of you listen to hear the wash of the rollers on the beach, if we happen to get in too close,” said Frank, trying to keep calm.

They continued along for half an hour, under reduced speed. Still the fog remained as dense as ever. Frank was wondering if they might not pass the first haven without knowing it. He thought it was very unfortunate that such a thing as this should occur on their very first day out.

“Hello! What are you stopping for?” demanded Jerry suddenly, as the sound of the bustling little motor ceased and the boat slowed down.

Frank was bending low over the machinery.

“I don’t know, fellows, but something has happened to the motor. That stop was none of my doing; but I hope it won’t amount to much,” he said cheerfully.

The other three looked at each other uneasily. With the motor broken down, and surrounded by a treacherous fog, out there on the big gulf, their situation was one well calculated to cause alarm.

