


# The Outdoor Chums on the Gulf

## or, Rescuing the Lost Balloonists

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by Captain Quincy Allen



### Chapter XIII: Lost in the Fog

“What’s to be done?” asked Will presently.

“I’m looking the motor over, first of all. Perhaps it’s a small matter, and I can fix it up. Sometimes these new machines act a bit cranky. Want of oil will even bring about trouble. Jerry, you take a look with me. Two heads are often better than one,” said Frank.

“Can we do anything?” questioned Bluff.

“Just try and see if you can hear a sound like water washing up on the beach. We couldn’t land with this boat as though it were smaller.”

“That’s a fact. Say! if we were in our canoes, now, how easy it would be to run up on that same beach, lift the jolly little craft out, and go ashore! As it is, we must stay afloat, and take the chances of a storm coming up.”

“Storm!” echoed Will, looking hastily around. “Oh, come, now! You don’t think there can be any danger of that happening, do you, Frank?”

“Hardly. If a little breeze rises, it may carry this beastly old fog away, and then we can see where we are. Meanwhile, Jerry and I will try to find out what it is that makes our motor balk just when we want it most.”

They sat there for a long while, Bluff and Will looking this way and that, to see if there was any object near by; but only that heavy blanket of sea fog surrounded them.

“Do you hear the roll of the water on the shore still?” asked Frank finally.

“I haven’t for some time, now,” admitted Bluff.

“And I was just wondering, as I sat here and watched the water as it flowed past, whether we were not drifting out further all the time,” suggested Will.

“Say! what makes you think that? Seems to me you’re always scaring up ghosts, and making things look blacker than they are,” grumbled Bluff.

“Well, you just watch that water passing. What does that mean, eh? Something is moving all the while, and it’s either the boat or the tide,” claimed Will.

Frank stuck his head over the side and gave a look.

“He’s right about it,” was his speedy comment. “The tide is carrying us out all the time, and that’s why you don’t hear the sound of the rollers on the sand!”

“Wow! You’re giving it to us good and hard now. That sounds like trouble. This old gulf is some wide, I know, and it’ll take us quite a spell to cross the duck pond at this rate!” exclaimed Bluff in dismay.

“Can’t either of you find out what’s wrong with the engine?” asked Will.

“We think we’ve guessed it, and we’re working on that line now; but it may take some little time, so don’t get impatient,” returned Frank.

If he felt any alarm himself, his manner did not indicate it; but then Frank had a faculty for disguising his feelings when it would add to the comfort of his chums.

So the old state of affairs continued, he and Jerry with their heads bent low over the machinery, and the others sitting there on deck, exchanging doleful words from time to time, and surveying that gray blanket that wrapped them in.

“How far do you think we’ve gone from shore?” asked Will finally.

“I was just trying to figure out from the way that water runs past. It’s going faster than we are, you see. I should say we might have drifted several miles since the motor broke down,” replied Bluff soberly.

“I wonder how deep it is here?”

“Say! what do you talk that way for? Think we’ll have to swim for it?” exclaimed Bluff, in new alarm.

“Oh! I hope not. You see, I was thinking that if we could reach bottom it might be worth while to anchor here. That would save us from getting any further from the shore, at any rate,” replied the other.

“Frank! Listen to what Will says!” called Bluff eagerly.

“What is that?” And Frank’s head came into view.

“He says we might try and see how deep it is here; that perhaps the anchor rope is long enough to reach bottom, and we’d stop drifting out to sea.”

“Good for Will! That’s a bright idea, now. Suppose you two fellows try and see if it will work? Jerry and I seem to be getting on, and there’s hope that we’ll have things moving presently.”

Accordingly, Bluff took up the anchor, which lay forward, and gently dropped it into the smooth water. Then he allowed the rope to pass slowly through his hands.

“Why, it’s on bottom already! I don’t believe it’s ten feet deep away out here, Frank!” he said hurriedly.

“Yes, I’ve always read that it was shallow along this coast. That makes it more dangerous for vessels of any draught, for they’re apt to go aground. Fasten the cable to



that cleat, Bluff. Make it secure, for we don't want to lose the whole outfit overboard," remarked Frank.

"That feels a whole heap better," remarked Bluff, settling down again.

"Yes, for we're not moving out further all the time, anyway. Hang this old fog! Why did it want to come up on our very first day, and before we had become used to our strange surroundings?"

"Well, we've got to just take things as we meet 'em, as Frank does. You notice that he seldom finds fault with the way things happen; just puts his shoulder to the wheel and lifts it out of the rut," remarked Bluff.

"Yes, I know that; but every fellow doesn't happen to be built just the same way. I wish I could take things as cool as he does; but I never even snap off a picture without feeling more or less excitement quivering my nerves."

"I don't suppose, now, you could get a decent picture of this?" Bluff suggested.

"What! The fog? Bless your innocent heart, no! What do you think it would be like—just a dreary blank plate. You can't see anything, so how could it show up in a picture?" jeered Will.

"I wonder some bright genius hasn't discovered some sort of magic glasses that will let a fellow see through fog? What a blessing they would be to sailors, and the pilots of ferryboats in New York harbor," observed Bluff thoughtfully.

"Suppose you devote your spare time to solving that riddle? Listen! Was that a shout then?"

"Sounded like it to me; but who would be shouting out here in the fog?" replied Bluff scornfully.

"Come, now. We may not be the only pebbles on the beach. Perhaps there are others marooned out here in the fog, and they may be shouting just to keep their courage up, or for some other purpose," replied Will stoutly.

"Well, the fog won't last much longer, anyway, and that's a comfort."

"How do you know that?" asked Frank, looking up.

"Because I just felt a puff of air. The wind's going to rise, and that means an end to the fog," replied Bluff confidently.

"Well, I only hope we get this motor fixed before it rises too much," and once more Frank gave his full attention to his work on the obstinate engine.

Bluff and Will looked uneasily at each other.

"What does he mean?" asked the latter.

"I think he means that if the wind came up strong the sea would rise, and we couldn't hold out here with our anchor," replied Bluff.



“In which case?”

“We’d either be blown out to sea, and be in danger of foundering, or else driven toward the shore, perhaps to stick half a mile off and be wrecked.”

“I don’t like either of those propositions any too well. Oh! I hope they get the motor working! I’m so nervous I feel like shouting; and it seems to me I can hear something moving all the time,” went on Will.

“Something moving?” echoed his companion, looking at him as if he wondered whether the other could be going out of his mind.

“Yes, over there to windward, which, I take it, is about due west just now. Hark! Didn’t you hear that?—and close at hand, too! What can it be?”

“I don’t know. Something is moving through the water! I can hear a gurgle and a creaking noise. Do you think it could be a boat bearing down on us? Oh! what if they ran us down in this fog? I say, Frank!” called Bluff, also excited by this time.

“Well, what now?” demanded the other, again appearing in view.

“There’s something doing over here. Will thinks it may be a boat coming down on us, full tilt, and liable to grind us to powder.”

Frank listened for just three seconds. Then he made a dive for a locker, as if he thought the situation more or less desperate.

“What’s he after?” exclaimed Will, amazed.

“That blooming conch-shell horn of Cousin Archie’s. He’s going to let those chaps know there’s another boat out here, and that they don’t own the earth, that’s what.”

And that was just what Frank meant to do. Seizing the conch-shell, from which the point had been cut, he blew a piercing blast that could have been heard a mile off. Again and again he sent out the warning sound, and presently an answering blast came through the dense fog, now swirling madly with the increasing breeze.

“They’re right on us! There! I can just make out the top of a mast! Frank, they will run us down!” shouted Will, while the other continued to blow his horn with renewed vim, and the advancing gulf sponger came plunging straight toward the anchored Jessamine! It was a thrilling moment for the four chums.

