


The Outdoor Chums on the Gulf

or, Rescuing the Lost Balloonists

by Captain Quincy Allen



Chapter XIV: A Cry Across the Lagoon

“Keep off, there!” shouted Bluff.

“Luff her, you!” howled Jerry.

“Too-oo-t! too-oo-t!”

Will was the only one of the quartet unable to give utterance to his feelings. He could only cower there, and gape, while the unknown sailing craft was bearing down straight for the little motor-boat, and apparently bound to smash her in two.

Those on the sharpie may have been extremely reckless in thus spreading their canvas to the favoring wind before the fog had lifted enough to allow a decent lookout, but they had some thought for their own safety, however little they cared for that of others.

Hearing the clamor dead ahead, the fellow at the tiller managed to suddenly shift the course of the advancing boat, and just in time. They swept past the Jessamine with hardly a yard to spare.

The staring and shivering boys caught a glimpse of several rough men on board the passing sharpie, and what they thought was a girl’s head thrust out of the cabin.

Some loud and vigorous language was carried back to the ears of the chums as the fleeing sharpie vanished once more in the fog wreaths.

“Talk to me about that!” exclaimed Jerry indignantly. “They nearly run us down through their own carelessness, and then revile us for getting in the way!”

“Some people never believe there can be two sides to any question. They are always in the right,” commented Frank.

He showed little signs of any excitement; yet, did his chums but know it, there was much of thanksgiving in his heart over the narrow escape.

Once again he and Jerry set to work at the stubborn motor, while the others endeavored to keep a sharp lookout. Will, in particular, was holding his head cocked on one side, as though eager to catch the first faint sound of any advancing vessel from windward.



From time to time Bluff amused himself in making dreadful noises with the conch-shell horn, for one has to learn how to sound this before being able to send a ringing blast that can be heard an almost incredible distance.

“Anyhow, the fog’s getting thinner all the while,” remarked Will joyfully.

“That’s a fact,” said Frank, glancing up from his work.

A minute later there was a whirr.

“Hurrah! She works!” shouted Jerry.

“Thank goodness! Then we’re saved!” echoed Will.

“Get up your anchor, Bluff,” remarked Frank quietly.

This Bluff did with cheerful alacrity, and immediately the little motor-boat began to churn the water with her accustomed zeal.

“How long had we been sitting there?” asked Jerry.

“Just two hours,” was Frank’s reply as he consulted his little nickel watch.

“And now what?” demanded Will.

“We’ll move in toward the shore somewhat, and wait for the fog to sweep away. When that happens perhaps we can get our bearings, and find out whether we’ve passed our first intended refuge or not,” returned Frank.

“But you think we have?” queried Bluff.

“Yes; and consequently, as we don’t want to turn around and go back, we might as well head for the second harbor.”

“What sort of a place is that?” asked Bluff, always seeking information.

“As near as I can make out from the chart, it is a lagoon formed by a long island that stands as a shelter between the open gulf and the shore. There are many such along the gulf coast, and small vessels are in the habit of running behind them when the weather outside gets stormy.”

“Hear! hear! Frank’s already showing signs of becoming a real old salt. Look there, fellows! Oh! it’s gone, now!” cried Jerry, pointing.

“I had just a glimpse of it. That was land, all right, Jerry; and perhaps we’d better alter our course a bit now, heading due east so as to skirt along about this distance out.”

So saying, Frank gave the wheel a little whirl, and the motor-boat, in response, curved gracefully a few points to the starboard.

“Don’t she run like a duck?” said Bluff enthusiastically.

“There’s the land again, boys! No question but what the fog is being driven off by the wind,” remarked Frank.

They could see the shore from time to time, and every one realized that the enshrouding curtain was fast vanishing.

“But, my! isn’t it getting rough?” exclaimed Will.

His remark caused the others to look at the speaker.

Frank needed only one glance to tell him the story. Will was already beginning to feel the dreadful nausea of seasickness. The boys were accustomed to spending much time on the water, in their canoes, but little Lake Camalot, at home, and the big Mexican Gulf, were two entirely separate affairs. Indeed, there was only one among them who did not experience at least a trifling indisposition before this first day’s voyaging on the salt water was done, and that was Frank himself.

When the fog had entirely vanished the scene was quite picturesque, with the shore and its palmetto trees standing out beyond the heaving billows; but, alack and alas! the artist of the expedition, for once in his life, seemed not to care a picayune whether he ever took another snapshot again or not.

Even Bluff’s raillery failed to enthuse him, and the look he cast toward the shore was most pitiful and woebegone.

Seeing this, Frank took pity on his sick chum.

“Hand me that camera, Bluff; and you, Jerry, grab hold of this wheel here. Keep her just as we are, and dodge the big waves as they come, or else we’ll all get a beautiful ducking.”

Saying this, Frank waited until a good chance came, and then snapped off a couple of views of the turbulent scene.

“Thank you, Frank, for I couldn’t have stood up to do it, for a kingdom. I reckon I’ll never forget this experience, and every time I see those pictures I’ll have a qualm. Oh! I feel so sick, fellows!” wailed Will.

They laid him, groaning, on a blanket, under the protecting hood. No one cared to stay with him more than a minute, for, truth to tell, neither Jerry nor Bluff were in a condition to say how long it might be before they would be feeling just as badly as their chum. Fresh air was invaluable under such circumstances.

Frank, as they boomed along in this boisterous manner, was watching the shore. He expected at any time, now, to discover signs of the refuge which he had mentioned to the others, though it would require sharp eyesight to distinguish the island from the background of shore line.

“What time is it, Frank?” asked Bluff finally.

“Oh, about three, I should say. Time has slipped away, you know.”

“What! And nobody ever thought of eating a bite about noon?” exclaimed Jerry.

“Eating!”



Bluff uttered only the one word, but his horrified expression struck Frank as being so comical that he roared with laughter.

“I give you my word, fellows, that this is the very first time since I’ve known Bluff that the idea of a meal seemed repulsive to him,” he declared.

“Please don’t, fellows!” came from Will, under the shelter; and in sympathy for him the subject was dropped then and there.

Jerry interested himself in keeping watch with Frank. Between them they managed to decide just where the expected island held forth. The course was altered enough to bring them closer, yet at the same time avoid falling in the trough of the great waves, that might have capsized the motor-boat, once they got a fair sweep at her, broadside on.

“It’s the island, all right!” exclaimed Bluff presently, as they drew nearer.

“And we will have to take some chances in getting back of the shelter. You see how the wind blows, and the waves run. Now, please don’t bother me. It will require some close calculating to just scrape in without a disaster.”

Frank set himself to the task. Mentally, he hoped most fervently that the motor would not take a notion to act contrary just when so much depended on its stability and faithfulness.

Gradually the island began to stand out more distinctly, on their right.

“We’re making it, I do believe!” yelled Bluff.

“Why, sure; and the water is getting less rocky already,” declared Jerry.

“There you go, copying Frank’s salty ways. But I’m not going to dispute it now. I’m only too glad of the chance of resting on smooth water again, whether it happens to be dusty or rocky,” avowed Bluff, looking cheerful again.

Even poor Will managed to drag himself out from his shelter to take a dismal, though eager, look. He had the appearance of one who had passed through a long siege of illness, such is the rapidity with which this dreadful malady downs its victims.

“There’s one boat already anchored behind the island further on,” remarked Jerry.

“I was looking at that fellow,” remarked Frank, “and unless I’m mistaken, that’s the identical sharpie which came so close to running us down in the fog a little while back.”

“You don’t say!” exclaimed Will, beginning to grow interested.

It is wonderful how quickly one recovers from an attack of this sort when smoother water is reached. Will was commencing to lose a little of his ghastly whiteness already, while Bluff had started to sigh, as though he thought of supper.



After they had found a safe asylum behind the island Frank thought it best to anchor. He did not care to go too near that sharpie, for the recollection of the three rough spongers or fishermen on board deterred him from wanting to renew their acquaintance.

Bluff immediately bailed out the little dinghy, and set himself to the task of hunting along the shore for oysters. They saw him dipping his arm down again and again, which would indicate that his quest was proving successful. Even Jerry declared that he was now becoming fairly ravenous, and could enjoy a solid meal.

“It’s going to be a gloomy old night, fellows. Clouds gathering there in the southwest. From what I’ve read about the signs, we may have one of those northers boom down on us before morning,” remarked Frank.

They were sitting around, enjoying the supper, as he made this remark. Evening was close at hand. The sun had set in what seemed to be an angry glow, with yellow predominating.

“Are we safe right here, if the wind chops around, and comes out of the north?” asked cautious Will.

“Yes, for that arm of the land will shield us all right,” declared Jerry.

So the night set in. Darkness gathered unusually early, it seemed to the chums. They had made all arrangements looking to the raising of the complete automobile cover of the boat in case of a downpour.

“I guess there’s nothing to fear from the elements,” remarked Frank finally.

“Can there be from any other source?” demanded Will, quick to take the alarm from the tone of Frank’s voice.

“I bet Frank’s thinking of those three blooming pirates who wanted to smash us out on the big water,” declared Bluff quickly.

“I confess they were in my mind; but, so far, they’ve paid no attention to us, and we’re a quarter of a mile away from that sharpie. Don’t bother your head about them, Will. Of course, we’ll keep a watch, as usual, though.”

“You just make up your mind we will, now. I didn’t like the looks of the crowd a little bit. Some of these wild waterdogs along the gulf coast, they told me, wouldn’t object to a little piratical business on the sly when—”

Jerry stopped short. Over the water, from the direction of the mysterious anchored sharpie, had come a strange cry, that seemed to be in the voice of either a woman or a child. The four chums sat there and stared at each other in consternation, for it seemed as though that pitiful cry was for help!

