


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

by Captain Quincy Allen



Chapter XX: Lying in Ambush for Big Game

"Nobody lives in that old shack, then?" inquired Will.

"Only when the turtle season is on, which doesn't happen to be now," replied Frank.

"I was afraid there might be a bunch of criminals ashore, and that Jerry had tumbled into a peck of trouble," continued the other.

"Oh, it happened to be only a hollow tree he dropped into," said the hero of the adventure, who could take a joke even when it happened to be on himself.

"There it goes again! Just think what beastly luck! I'm a Jonah, that's what! Oh! why didn't you ask me to go, instead of Bluff, Frank? I could have snapped him off when he was crawling out of that hole. Just think what a lovely reminder it would have been in times to come!" wailed Will, pretending to be bitterly disappointed, though Frank imagined he was assuming this to tantalize Jerry.

"Talk to me about your artistic temperament! What d'ye call that? Me crawling out of that old bee tree make a beautiful picture! Yes, I guess it might, for the rest of you, but I'm satisfied to let the episode die a natural death. But wait till we fill up our spare pots and pans with that delicious honey! Um! um!" And Jerry smacked his lips as he contemplated the feast in store.

They spent the night quietly enough. Nothing occurred to bother them, save the one annoyance they experienced from sandflies. The tiny creatures attacked them as soon as the breeze died out, and for an hour or two proved irritating in the extreme.

Bluff executed a war dance as he slapped at his invisible persecutors, and wondered if he were going into a fever, his face and neck and arms burned so. Luckily, a night breeze coming up, drove the horde of tiny insects away, but for several days the boys were rubbing and scratching at the irritated skin.

"Skeeters ain't in it with the little pests!" vowed Jerry, and the whole party seemed to be of the same opinion.

After an early breakfast they made preparations looking to a raid on the rich stores of the bee tree. An old piece of netting was made into nets, so as to cover their faces, while gloves protected their hands fairly well.

Jerry took them ashore, all but Bluff, who elected to stay by the boat. The others jeered him, and declared that he was afraid of stings; but Bluff was not to be taunted into going.

Joe, who had been up a bee tree before, offered to ascend, and do the work. So the balance of the party were only too glad of the chance to escape that duty.

The hive was in a big limb that jutted out just above where Jerry had crashed through a rotten place marking the spot where another limb had broken off long years before.

"It looks easy. I reckon I can chop her some, and she'll drop of her own weight," called the boy.

He began to use the small camp ax with telling effect. After half an hour of this there was an ominous crack.

"Look sharp, down there! She's a-comin'!" called Joe.

Hardly had he spoken than the limb came down with a roar. Instantly the air was filled with a swarm of thousands of dazed bees. The limb had split open from the concussion, and a wonderful store of honey was displayed to view. Jerry was wild with delight.

"Gallons and gallons of the lovely stuff!" he shouted. "Come on, fellows, and get the pails filled! Ouch! That little imp got me, all right! Say! he's inside my veil! Whoop! There's another! I must have left an opening!" And for a minute or so he danced around madly, slapping and pawing, until he had managed to dispose of the furious insects.

By the time he had adjusted his net the others were busy at work.

"Take only the lighter-colored honey. That dark stuff is old, though I suppose it's all good still. We can't use a fifth of what there is. I imagine I know what will happen around here to-night," said Frank.

Joe looked up and grinned.

"Bear come, sure. Smell the honey a mile away," he remarked, and Frank nodded.

"And if we were wild to get a bear, all we'd have to do would be to sit here and wait," remarked Will, who had, of course, snapped off a few views while his chums were busy, particularly remembering Jerry while he pranced around and fought the busy bees that had invaded his head net.

"I leave that to the rest," remarked Frank.



Having secured all the honey they could carry away, they once more returned to the shore, and by degrees their sweet cargo was ferried out to the motor-boat. Of course, more or less washing up followed, for they were all sticky.

“What is it to be, fellows—go, or stay over?” asked Frank a little later.

Bluff had been told about the chances for bagging a bear, but he did not seem to care much about it.

“I say go on,” he remarked indifferently.

“Bear for me,” declared Jerry.

“How about you, Will?” asked Frank.

“Oh, I’m with Bluff this time. If it was in the daytime, now, and I thought I could get a picture of the shoot, I might look at it differently.”

“You happen to have run out of flashlight cartridges, then? That’s too bad! Well, I side with Jerry,” remarked Frank, smiling.

“But that makes it a tie. We’ll have to toss for it, fellows,” came from Will.

“You forget Joe, here. Let him cast the deciding vote. How, Joe?”

The boy grinned, and looked affectionately at Frank.

“I like bear steak,” he said simply.

“Hurrah! That settles it, then!” shouted Jerry.

They just loafed through that day.

“Take it easy, boys. Strenuous times may be ahead of us yet. Who knows? Besides, we are doing finely. Half the time gone, and we’re surely more than half way along our journey, counting the river trip. We can easily spare the day.” And Frank set each to amusing himself after his own particular fashion.

Jerry went in the dinghy to try the fishing where the water was deeper, and it was not half an hour before they heard him yelling with delight as his little shallop was being towed around this way and that by a fish.

“Another shark! He’d better cut loose!” exclaimed Will, in some alarm.

Joe shook his head.

“No shark this time. I think he has got fast to a big channel bass. It runs and then stops, then runs again. Shark keeps on all the while,” he explained.

It proved to be the case, for when Jerry came back he proudly exhibited a monster bronze-backed prize that must have weighed more than thirty pounds.

Of course it was hung up, and a picture taken, with the gallant victor in the contest standing alongside, stout rod in hand.

So the evening came at last, and they turned their thoughts to big game.



Will and Bluff were elected to remain on board, as a penance for having voted against staying over.

“We’ll stand for that, all right; but if you should keel over a Bruin, don’t you fellows think we’re going to let you fool us out of our share of the prog,” said Bluff.

It took two trips of the dinghy to land the three hunters. Of course, Joe had only gone along to see the fun, for he had no gun.

Still, he was capable of advancing some good suggestions, calculated to be of value to them while lying in ambush for the expected bear. It was to be expected, for instance, that Bruin would make his appearance from the dense thicket beyond the bee tree, so the boys hid themselves in a semicircle, with the broken honey storehouse in plain view.

A fire had been started at a little distance, for otherwise they must have been in absolute darkness. Joe said a little thing like that would not keep the bear from coming after he had gotten a good whiff of the powerful odor of sweetness that filled the air.

The bees had been hard at work carrying a portion of their store to some new hive, but there were gallons of it still there. Everything was smeared with the sticky substance, and Frank felt sure that if a bear existed within miles of the spot that odor would be a magnet to draw the animal straight to the spot.

Talking was positively prohibited, and all the boys could do was to sit as still as the hovering mosquitoes would allow, and watch.

Once or twice, Frank thought he heard a slight rustling somewhere near. It was not what a lumbering bear would be apt to make, however, and he concluded that in all probability it must be caused by prowling ‘coons.

For the third time he felt positive that his ear had caught a sound, as of a stealthy movement. To his surprise, it seemed to come from the tree under which he had taken up his station. So he naturally bent his head back in the effort to locate the little animal that must be curiously observing him.

A thrill passed through his frame as he first of all caught sight of two yellow eyes that glared at him not more than ten feet above his head. Then he could make out a dark body, about five feet in length, and with something moving back and forth at its extreme end.

Frank caught his breath, and his hands clutched the gun he held. He did not need any one to tell him that he was gazing up at a panther, crouching overhead, and possibly getting ready to leap down upon him at any second!

