


# The Outdoor Chums on the Gulf

or, Rescuing the Lost Balloonists

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by Captain Quincy Allen



## Chapter XXV: The Secret of the Sealed Package

“About me!” exclaimed Joe, looking amazed.

“Talk to me about surprises!” ejaculated Jerry. “Frank does love to knock us all silly!”

“How could your father know about Joe, here?” demanded skeptical Lawyer Bluff.

“Joe, what was your father’s name?” asked Frank, eagerness in his bright eyes.

“Joseph Sprague Abercrombie,” came the immediate response.

“Hurrah! That settles it!” shouted Frank, throwing his hat into the air. His chums could not ever remember having seen him one-half so excited before.

“Take pity on us!” cried Will, catching the other by the sleeve.

“Yes, hurry up and tell, or I’ll burst!” ejaculated Bluff.

Jerry shook Frank, in his earnestness, saying:

“It isn’t fair, and you know it! We’re chums, and we deserve to be taken into your confidence.”

“Right you are; and now sit down and listen to me. I’m not going to read this letter out, but you can look it over later, as you please. My father says he was just about to come down to Cedar Keys himself, or send a trusted clerk, for the business is very important, you see.”

“And that was why he smiled when you told him where we meant to bring up?”

“Yes, Bluff, that was the reason. Now you know he is a banker and a capitalist. In times gone by he used to be in Wall Street, so he had connection with many men who were investors. One friend of his, named Joseph Sprague Abercrombie, who was an engineer, entrusted some money to him to invest in certain stocks. By an unfortunate turn of the market those stocks became seemingly valueless. They have lain in his safe for ten years.”

“Say! it’s growing exciting! I can see what’s coming!” cried Bluff.

“Meanwhile, my father had lost all track of his once boyhood friend Joe. Then, by a strange freak of fate, the corporation that had issued those stocks suddenly became alive. Everything they owned began to prosper. Their mines turned out rich



investments, their timber lands found a big market. The apparently worthless stock, taken from the safe and put on the market at its highest point, brought in a fortune for Joseph Abercrombie or his heirs!”

“Hurrah!” shouted Will, embracing little Joe in the exuberance of his joy.

“Talk to me about magic, will you! This thing has the Arabian Nights beaten all to a frazzle, and that’s what I think!” laughed Jerry, pumping the hand of Joe vigorously.

“My father tried hard to locate his old friend. By degrees he found that he had gone South, soon after sinking his little savings in what seemed to have been worthless stock. Then he learned that he had lost his life on the road, and that his family with but scant means, had moved to Cedar Keys, where they were still living, according to what information he could secure.”

“It’s great, that’s what! And to think that we should have run across Joe here in such a marvelous way!” said Bluff.

“Yes,” spoke up the lad quickly, “and I believe you saved my life, too. I’d been killed by them men, my uncle with the rest; or else I’d tried to escape, and might ‘a’ lost myself ashore, to died in the swamps. I’ll never forget it, never!”

After all, that evening was by long odds the happiest of the whole trip. They sat around the fire until long after midnight. Indeed, it was hard to get any one to admit that he was sleepy in the least degree.

“Our last camp, fellows. Perhaps we may never be able to all meet under canvas again,” said Jerry as they finally set about seeking their beds.

If Jerry could have lifted the curtain of the future a bit he would never have ventured that doleful prophecy. There were other camps in store for the four outdoor chums, many of them, and in a country whither their longing souls had often turned—the wilderness around the great Rockies. But it is not our province to mention any of the wonderful adventures that were fated to befall them there. All those things will be duly set down in the next volume of this series, which will be called: “The Outdoor Chums After Big Game; or, Perilous Adventures in the Wilderness.”

When breakfast had been dispatched in the morning, for the last time the four outdoor chums took down the dear old khaki tent and folded it away reverently. They looked upon it as a friend and comforter indeed.

Then they went aboard the Jessamine, and started for the city, which could be seen upon the key, over the gleaming, sun-kissed water of the gulf.

They arrived long before noon, and leaving the boat in the hands of the party to whom Frank bore a letter from his cousin, the four chums accompanied little Joe to his modest home.

Here the delightful news was broken to the widow of Mr. Langdon's old boyhood friend. Words would be useless to describe her joy. The clouds had rolled away as if by magic, and at last she could see a happy future for herself and her family, marred by only one keen regret, and that the absence of the brave man who had died at his post years before.

Our boys spent a couple of days in Cedar Keys. Letters were found there from the home folks. At last they started north once more, to resume their school duties, satisfied that they had enjoyed the finest vacation in all their experience.

Their work in saving the lost balloonists was spoken of in the papers, for the professor would never forget what he owed them. He even took pains to write to Mr. Langdon and praise the conduct of the boys.

Safely landed again in Centerville, and once more taking up their school work, we shall have to part from the boys.

"Well, it was a great outing!" declared Will.

"Talk to me about good times!" came from Jerry. "We never had a better."

"Right you are," added Frank. "And the photos are all dandy."

"They'll certainly be fine, to keep and look over in years to come," remarked Will. And here we will take leave of the Outdoor Chums and say good-by.

