


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

by Captain Quincy Allen



Chapter IV: Jerry Meets Trouble Half Way

“Ain’t she a beauty, though?”

“Finest thing ever put in the water! And to think we’re going to live aboard her for nearly two weeks! It’s the greatest luck ever!” observed Will.

“Talk to me about your automobiles and aeroplanes, give me a neat little motor-boat for mine. I wouldn’t change places with King George just now.”

Frank said nothing, but the smile on his face was a satisfied one. Indeed, it could not well be otherwise. Any boy who loved camping and cruising as much as he did must have been thrilled at the prospect of running that jaunty little craft for a spell, navigating new waterways and making discoveries constantly, such as are calculated to please the hearts of hunters and water-dogs in general.

The motor-boat was one of the most modern make. It had an automobile hood for the front, and this could be so extended that the entire boat was shielded. On the other hand, on sunny days it could be pushed back, allowing of perfect freedom.

The journey south had been effected without any accident. They were now stopping at a little hotel in this town on the river where the railroad crossed. It was a section of Northern Florida. The great and mysterious Gulf of Mexico, they knew, lay not a far stretch away toward the south. Indeed, Jerry had declared he could already smell salt water, though his chums laughed at him, and declared that it was more likely the odor of the mud along the bank of the narrow but deep stream down which they expected to cruise shortly.

“All the same, I’ll be mighty glad to set eyes on that same gulf,” said Jerry; “I’ve always wanted to see it, ever since I read about the doings of those old filibusters who used to lie in wait and seize the treasure ships going home from the Spanish Main.”

“Listen to him, will you?” broke out Bluff, laughing. “Honest, now, I believe he expects to run across a few of those old fossil pirates, Blackbeard, Captain Kidd and their kind.”

“Well, hardly, but it may be we’ll meet up with a few up-to-date pirates before we get through—chaps who can charge ten prices for something you just feel you must



have. The times are out of joint, boys. Things have changed a little, that's all, but the world is just as full of human sharks as ever," argued Jerry.

"I guess Jerry's right, fellows, and when that gaunt landlord of the inn presents his little bill perhaps you'll say that the buccaneer came sooner than you expected. Besides, who can say what lies before us? There are many swamps to be passed through, I'm told, and they say that more than one fugitive black, wanted for some crime, lives out in those places. We must keep our eyes open all the time."

"And depend on it, Frank knows. He's been picking up information right and left ever since we got here," remarked Will, who was, of course, carrying his beloved camera, with which he had taken many splendid pictures of the past exploits of the four chums.

"When do we get under way?" asked Bluff, eagerly, as he examined the provisions made for cooking, with a battery of little lamps fashioned to burn kerosene in the shape of gas—Bluff was always interested in all that pertained to the cooking parts of an expedition.

"Everything is ready now," remarked Frank. "We'll go back to the inn, all but Will, settle our score, and fetch what few things are left. I've got a rough chart of the river, you know, boys, on which we'll have to depend until we get to the gulf."

"And then?" asked Will.

"Oh, the Government charts will carry us, then, the rest of the way. They have everything down, up to several miles off shore, and all the bayous and cuts besides. Come on, Jerry and Bluff; get busy."

Left in charge of the boat for half an hour, Will sat there in the warm sunshine, trying to picture what it looked like up around cold, bleak Centerville just then. As he fondled his camera other memories were called up, in which it had done its share in the way of perpetuating the exciting events connected with the various outings enjoyed by the four chums.

While Will sits thus and lets his mind wander back to other scenes it may be just as well for us to take a quick survey of these same events, so as to understand something of the ties that held these four boys together.

They formed the Rod, Gun and Camera Club, and their first outing had been at the time a storm took part of the Academy roof off, allowing a short Fall vacation on the part of the scholars. At that time they had gone into the woods, and there encountered a variety of stirring adventures, as set forth in the initial volume of this series called: "The Outdoor Chums; or, The First Tour of the Rod, Gun and Camera Club."

At Thanksgiving time they planned for another little camping trip, over on Wildcat Island, which had quite a bad name on account of the ferocious animals known to exist in its dense thickets, and also because a wild man was said to have been seen there many times. What the four chums saw and did there, and the multitude of remarkable things that came to pass while they were off on this trip, from the robbery on the steamboat to the discovery about the wild man, are told in the second book of the series, entitled: "The Outdoor Chums on the Lake; or, Lively Adventures on Wildcat Island."

In due time came the summer vacation, and as they had a couple of weeks to be together before going away to seashore or mountains with their parents, the boys arranged to spend this time in the Sunset Mountains, that lay ten miles back of Newtonport, which place was on the west shore of the lake, opposite Centerville. The rumor of a ghost that was said to haunt Oak Ridge did much to draw the boys, and it can be readily understood that before they left their camp in the hills they had succeeded in discovering the astonishing truth about that same spectre. Just how this was done, together with many other thrilling episodes, you will find in the record of the outing as given in the third volume, called: "The Outdoor Chums in the Forest; or, Laying the Ghost of Oak Ridge."

By the time Will had run the gamut of these adventures, some of which caused him to shiver, while others brought a smile on his face, he heard the voices of his chums drawing near.

They soon joined him, each burdened with some more of the outfit in the way of blankets, and clothes-bags made of waterproof canvas.

These were hastily stowed away, after which the boys began to get busy. Frank had, ere now, closely examined the engine of the launch, and even started it going so as to get "the hang of the thing," as he said. He felt that he had nothing to fear with regard to his ability to handle it.

"If anything does happen we will have to use the push-poles, and in that way float down on the swift current until we get to a town," he said, laughingly; but not one of them had the slightest fear.

"All aboard for the gulf!" called Will, as he stood by the rail watching Jerry unwarp the hawser that held the nose of the boat down-stream, another securing the stern above.

Just as soon as this latter was unfastened the boat would begin to move with the rapid current, and at that time Frank wanted his engine to be working.

"Ready, Frank?" called Jerry from astern.



He could cast off there, recovering the rope as they moved along.

The engine began to whirr.

“Say, doesn’t that sound encouraging?” ventured Bluff, as the cheery cough smote the air, and announced the whole power of twelve horses to be at their disposal.

“I only hope she turns out one-half as good as she looks,” remarked Frank, who believed that the proof of the pudding lay in the eating of it.

A minute later, satisfied that everything was working, he shouted:

“Let her go, Jerry!”

Immediately the motor-boat commenced to glide down-stream. Frank found that his engine worked like a charm. He could apparently do anything he wanted with it, and the whole apparatus seemed more like a plaything than a powerful motor.

“A good beginning. Hope it keeps up,” remarked Bluff.

“Me for a life on the ocean wave,” sang Jerry as he coiled the rope ship-shape, and then going forward climbed up on the bow to look out for “snags.”

There were numerous abrupt bends to the river just below the Florida town, and with that swift current it was difficult to navigate around these places successfully. By degrees, of course, Frank expected to become more familiar with both the engine and the only way these things could be successfully met. He was always wide-awake, and eager to learn.

Jerry had perched himself on the forward rail, where he could survey the scenery. Will had his camera in his hand, and seemed ready to snap off any remarkable picture that presented itself to his vision. He was keen on taking some views that would embrace the weird, hanging Spanish moss, though Frank told him to have patience, and any number of these would come in time.

There was not the least warning when the shock came. The boat suddenly brought up with a bang on some hidden snag, and as Frank involuntarily shut off the power he had a rapid view of poor Jerry taking a header over the rail. Immediately after, a tremendous splash announced that he had struck the water all right; indeed, as he sprawled with hands and legs outstretched, one would half suspect it was a gigantic frog that leaped from the boat into the deep river.