

FLOTSAM AND JETSAM

By S. TEN EYCK BOURKE and CHARLES FRANCIS BOURKE

With his sword by his side and his uniform of blue,
He'll plank the quarterdeck like his daddy used to do.
—SONG OF THE PRIVATEERSMAN.

LEMMIE tell you two kids, you Float-Sam an' Jet-Sam," Long Johnson said grumpily, laying down the law to his casual visitors on the runway of the lifeboat house, "there ain't no use of you pirootin' round Ships Bottom Life Saving Station any more, 'cause ye ain't goin' to get a chance to be life savers. The business o' the beach is busted!"

The two boys in bathing suits looked upstartled. They wore bathing suits, as they generally did, and as they did other things, because they had good reasons. "They're handy, ashore or afloat—pursuin' pirates or redskins," as Flotsam explained. "Gives you two lines o' retreat," Jetsam says, "case o' ole Pop Bird-sall."

There you had them. Old Pop Bird-sall was village constable. Sons of life savers they were, and both Sams originally; so Ships Bottom christened them Flotsam and Jetsam for short—sink and swim driftwood, according to Nature, and both a thorn in the side of the Barnegat crew.

Not that there was anything derelict about Flotsam and Jetsam; they weren't bad boys,—just plain boys of Barnegat village, across the bay from Ship Bottoms Life Station, with four freckled arms and legs on each corner, and a hollow between, like a cuttlefish; not the pair you'd think to play a star part in the strangest, funniest—

But wait a bit! That particular day they came over clamming after visiting an apple orchard,—Flotsam had a man's pea-jacket loaded with them, and Jetsam had on a man's yellow sou'wester which covered his head and shoulders above the bathing suit, like a candle snuffer,—and to watch the Government Inspector try out the new wireless breeches buoy boat. It was the new boat that started it all, the boat that was to revolutionize the whole wrecking beach. And that's how Long Johnson, who was alone in the station, with the rest of his mates up in the Government wireless plant, came to spring the thunderbolt of Fate on those two poor kids.

"'Cause w'y won't we be life savers?" said Flotsam. And, "Why ain't we goin' to jine, Mr. Long Johnson?" asked Jetsam, generally more polite. Sweikhart, Surfman No. 7, was his father, who was drowned in the Regina wreck. Flotsam was Captain Casco's nephew,—Big Jim Casco of Ships Bottom.

"'Cause you towheads better go home an' learn telegraphing, like nice little wireless ladies," Johnson said. "Look yonder an' tell me what ye see!" He swung his arm off the bow of the lifeboat bayward, where the new model life saving boat lay on the water near the inlet, looking like a cross between a Whitehead torpedo and a big black cigar. There wasn't much of a surfboat about her.

"What d'ye know about her? Come now! You two heroes thinks you're goin' to be surfmen, and resky shipwreck mariners on a rockbound coast—'stead o' devilin' folks and making life a burden round this station. What's that porpoise with a harpoon in her back?" Long Johnson said, meaning the little spar that held up the aerial wires on the self-propelling craft.

"Huh! She's that new patent Government torpedo lifeboat," Flotsam said. "Cap and the rest's gone up to the wireless tower to work her from there soon's the weather clears. Rev'nue Inspector's going to prove out whether she can run out to sea an' back—"

"She's a scientific mechanical device for the salvage o' ships an' maritime seamen," Jetsam said, quoting from the prospectus. "She can carry a line where the gun won't shoot, 'n' negotiate a surf where the lifeboat can't. Automatic surfboat, she is. Don't need no men aboard."

JETSAM pulled up, looking scared. "Gee!" he said to Flotsam. The boys were no fools. They caught on quick.

"Don't need no crew!" Flotsam said, pretty faint.

For a week they had watched the experiments with the new crewless lifeboats, not dreaming what it meant to them, when they were grown up big enough to join the Life Saving Service, with their heroes, Captain Big Jim Casco, Little Welsh, Long Johnson, heroes of the wrecking beach who had faced the onslaught of smugglers, pirates, and filibusters, and defied the perils of the midnight and the storm.

That strange looking, decked-over little torpedoboat—not more than twenty feet over all, she was—with the two toy propellers could run herself, that was the start-



They Might Succeed in Getting Their Names Among the Brave.

ling fact. "Go right out, turn right round, and come right back again, all by her lonesome!" as Long Johnson said. In her bowels was stowed a gasoline motor and the steering apparatus, just like those in Ships Bottom's own big white motorboat. Only, in the crewless craft, her little aerial wires caught up the wireless waves shot out from the Government plant up on the bluff, and snatched them down below to the electrical dynamos, which worked the operating machinery, to start or stop the motor, and swing the tiller right or left.

It was all perfectly simple—and the new boat didn't need any men aboard to handle her! That was the fact that stuck out like a sore thumb for poor Flotsam and Jetsam. They were life savers; therefore they kicked on innovations—and, besides, now their own future was in danger. No more surfboat! No more launching from the flat wheeled sand wagon! No more midnight dashes in the big white motor, with the tar barrels blazing on the beach, and fifty men at the breeches buoy stretchers yanking up the long cable clear of the surf, and hauling in shipwrecked men, with seas roaring!

"Gee!" said Flotsam and Jetsam. Derelicts of Fate they were, in dead earnest, cast up by the sea of misfortune!

The two of them had fought the ravaging sea with Ships Bottom, the crack life crew on the coast, and rescued ships and downed shore pirates a hundred times on that same wrecking beach. Sometime they were going to do it in real life; but it was no use now! The surfmen of Barnegat had disbanded, pirates had quit pirating, and life saving was a lost art.

It made the outlook black for the crews of the old fashioned lifeboats if the wireless boat could pick her own way through the reef channels, dodge Gridiron Reef, and wriggle over the rocks of the Giants Fingers to make the open sea. If she could do that she could do anything on the Atlantic seaboard. Of course Cap Casco would be in the tower telling the wireless fellows how to steer her, navigating her to sea through his glasses. That was tough! Take a man's job away, and make him help—

Johnson's voice, sounding far away, roused them. "Better git to your clamming—ye got a monopoly on that! You'll be in luck if they don't put girls up in this here wireless tower to operate them there new automatic lifeboats!"

Long Johnson grinned to himself, going off to his kitchen. "That'll hold them kids for awhile," he chuckled. "It'll learn 'em they got to fit in or fight, sooner or later."

LONG JOHNSON was a philosopher; but grown up philosophy didn't suit Flotsam and Jetsam, aged fourteen or thereabouts. It never occurred to them that their future wasn't wrecked and they couldn't make good.

For a long time they sat on the boathouse runway, wriggling their freckled toes and scowling at the black, cigar shaped thing out there that was going to torpedo all their hopes. It was getting thicker instead of clearing out at sea, and the pound of the surf on Gridiron Reef that forced in the inlet a hundred yards away sounded sulky and booming, as it always did when the ocean was fixing for trouble; but they didn't care. They were busy hating the torpedoboat.

"Jest the same, they couldn't work her by wireless, an' send her off an' beat up a crew o' Malays an' Lascars, an' fetch 'em ashore, that thought their ole sea wagon hit on a cambered coast, an' fit," Flotsam said sulkily, all in a breath, "like Cap an' the bulks done the Injy Prince! She couldn't do that, just workin' with that darn wireless juice!"

"Ner she couldn't command a der'lict, gone adrift from a tow, same's Sandy McGregor o' the Light House, full o' pianos an' a big chunk o' salvage that he ketches on that W. & O. large las' fall," Jetsam said hopefully.

"Le's skip down to the boat," said Flotsam. Anything was better than just sitting there feeling miserable—and the "Ships Bottoms" were coming down from the wireless tower.

Long Johnson's old fishing dory lay pulled up on the sand where they had left her near the inlet. He saw them going out through the "sword cut in the sands," as the beachmen called the wicked Barnegat Inlet, Flotsam in his overgrown pilot coat stuffed with apples, and Jetsam in the big sou'wester extinguisher.

"See ye fetch that boat back!" he called after them, too late to renege any other way. "An' look out for that old Whitehead torpedo that she don't sink ye when she goes rammer-vinger out to sea!" He knew the kids could take care of themselves.

Flotsam and Jetsam knew every inch of the Gridiron beach, tides, channels, and shore lights. Either of them could take a ship through on the darkest night. They had lost interest in the forthcoming exhibition, the Government Inspectors trying out the new torpedoboat. The way boys do, they were rearranging things to suit their own notion, before Ships Bottom Life and the groaning Gridiron began to get misty behind them.

"Le's play pirates," said Flotsam.

"Le's play sharks instead," said Jetsam. They looked at each other. "I was readin' in Jack Harkaway about a Kanaky that saves another Kanaky that a man-eater was chasin'." Dived for him, he did; on'y he lost his knife an' had to go down again. It was all black—

"Did he get her?" asked Flotsam, interested.

"The shark? He rips up the belly—"

"Now, the knife!" They were both thinking of the same thing; but Flotsam shook his head.

"'Twouldn't be fair—she's made o' iron, anyway," he said.

It was a temptation to two boys of fourteen, that iron thing that would be coming through the surface fog pretty soon, the crewless lifeboat that was going to do away with all life savers on the coast, as they thought.

But Flotsam and Jetsam had been brought up among men to whom duty and self sacrifice is law, who never count the cost of "running straight." Far better for them to make the best of the little time left to them, to rescue the shipwrecked while there were yet such things as life savers left. Perhaps, even, they might succeed in getting their names enrolled among these men of the beach who did brave things, before it was too late!

The little spritsail they had rigged on the dory was carrying them seaward and up shore on a long slant, the wind, what there was, blowing easily from the southeast. Suddenly Flotsam, who was steering, swung round, shading his eyes.

"Thought I heard her! What away?" he cried.

"W'ales!" said Jetsam, blinded by his big sou'wester, and play acting, as boys do. "The Japs is shooting a torpedo at us. Turn loose the turret gun!"

"Turret gun your aunt!" said Flotsam. "By Ginger! That's that Whitehead torpedoboat snorin' right out at us!"

A LONG black shape shot out of the mist, between them and the shore, working erratically, as if the mysterious power that steered her had not complete control of the delicate machinery in her hull. Jetsam