

A woman with long, wavy hair and sunglasses is looking up at a sunlit forest canopy. The sun is shining through the trees, creating a bright, warm glow. The background is filled with the silhouettes of trees and the dappled light of the sun filtering through the leaves.

***EDWARD  
STRATEMEYER***

***DON STURDY  
ON THE OCEAN BOTTOM  
OR THE STRANGE CRUISE  
OF THE PHANTOM***

**Edward Stratemeyer**

# **Don Sturdy on the Ocean Bottom or The Strange Cruise of the Phantom**

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Contact: [DigiCat@okpublishing.info](mailto:DigiCat@okpublishing.info)



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# DON STURDY ON THE OCEAN BOTTOM

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **Reckless Driving**

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“Say, Uncle Frank, did Uncle Amos tell you of the letter he received last week from California?” asked Don Sturdy of Captain Frank Sturdy, as the two, together with Don’s sister Ruth, sat in the family automobile at the Hillville station. They had driven there to meet an expected visitor.

“You mean the one that invited him to take part in an expedition to explore the bottom of the sea off the California coast and to gather specimens for the new marine museum of that State?” returned the captain. “Yes, Amos spoke of the matter to me, but we haven’t had time yet to discuss the matter thoroughly.”

“You don’t know then whether he intends to accept or not?” went on Don.

“No,” replied his uncle, “though I think he’s rather favorably inclined toward the proposition. It’s a big thing and needs to be looked at from every angle before one decides either for or against.”

“The bottom of the sea!” exclaimed Ruth with a little shudder. “Sounds awfully creepy and crawly to me. Water snakes and sharks and those things with waving tentacles—ugh! They’re enough to give one the horrors. I do hope that Uncle Amos won’t go.”

“There’s the girl of it,” remarked Don. “Getting cold feet at the first hint of danger! Wanting to wrap the men of the family in cotton wool so that they shan’t be hurt! Where would science and discovery be today, if the men had

listened to their women and stayed snug and safe at home?"

Ruth made a face at him.

"They might do a great deal worse than listen to their women," she declared with spirit, "and when you talk of science and discovery, you make me laugh. What you're really after is change and thrill and danger and excitement."

"Now, now, Sis," protested her brother.

"It's so, just the same," persisted Ruth. "A lot you cared about science and discovery when you risked your life among the gorillas and the head-hunters! You were just aching for adventure."

Don looked a little disconcerted, and his discomfiture was increased by the quizzical glance that his uncle shot at him.

"Did she hit the bullseye, Don?" the latter asked teasingly.

"I wouldn't go as far as that, though I'll admit she grazed the target," returned Don. "Of course, I'm fond of adventure \_\_\_\_"

"Of course," mocked Ruth.

"But all the same," Don went on, "I—ah, there's the train at last!" as a long whistle came from up the track.

"It'll be too bad, if Teddy isn't on it after all this waiting," remarked Ruth.

"Oh, he's on it, all right," asserted Don. "Gee, maybe I won't be glad to see the old rascal!"

He jumped out of the car and ran through the waiting room of the station and out on the platform, where the train from New York was coming to a stop with a great grinding of brakes.

It was a long train and Don hurried along the platform, his eyes running hastily over the passengers that came from each car, in the hope of discovering the one he sought.

He had begun to fear that his friend, Teddy Allison, had missed the train, when he caught sight of a youth with flaming red hair coming down the steps of a car carrying a couple of valises, while a porter behind him bore as many more.

Teddy caught sight of Don at the same moment that Don perceived him, and threw up his hand to wave to him.

As he had forgotten for the instant that that hand held a heavy bag, Teddy's gesture was an unfortunate one, especially as he was just in the act of taking the last step from car to platform.

He staggered, sought to save himself by dropping a bag and clutching the rail, stumbled over the dropped bag and did a bit of ground and lofty tumbling that would have done credit to an acrobat, sprawling finally at full length on the platform.

Don rushed forward to pick him up.

"Hurt anywhere, Brick?" he asked, using the nickname applied to Teddy because of his red mop of hair.

"Only in my dignity," replied Teddy with a sort of shamefaced grin, as he looked around to see if many had witnessed his mishap.

"Oh well, if that's all, it doesn't matter," laughed Don. "You never had enough of that to count, anyway."

Teddy made a pass at him which Don adroitly ducked.

"Give me one of those bags," said Don, grabbing the one that Teddy had dropped. "For the love of Pete!" he

exclaimed, as he noticed the porter's load. "How much baggage have you, anyway? What are you going to do with it all? Open a general store? Or set up housekeeping?"

"I oughtn't to satisfy such vulgar curiosity," replied Teddy, "but I'm too big-hearted to let anyone suffer, no matter how low or ignorant he may be. So let me whisper into your shell-like ear that I'm bringing this stuff along so as to be ready for any emergency. If any of you globe trotters should start off in the middle of the night, Teddy Allison is going to be Johnny-on-the-spot, all ready to the last shoestring and belt buckle."

"From all of which I gather," said Don, "that the trip you were thinking of taking to Mongolia with your father has petered out."

"The trip hasn't, but I have," returned Teddy regretfully. "I certainly talked plenty to be permitted to go along and bring you with me. If Dad had had the say, I'd have carried my point, too. But, you see, he himself made connection with the expedition only at the last moment because one of the party fell sick, so he didn't feel free to press the matter of taking us along."

"It's too bad," observed Don. "I'd have liked nothing better than to have gone to the land of Chinese. Chopsticks, you know, and tom-toms and coolies and rickshaws and sampans and all sorts of queer things."

"Maybe bandits and pirates," put in Teddy wistfully. "There'd sure be no lack of thrills on that trip."

"Never mind, old scout," Don comforted him. "There's something else in the wind right now that may develop into a bang-up proposition. But here we are," he said, as he



paused before the door of the automobile. "Look what I found on the station platform, Ruth," he grinned, indicating Teddy. "I wish you could have seen him getting off the train."

"I don't care how he got off as long as he's here," smiled Ruth, her eyes sparkling and her cheeks dimpling as she extended her hand to Teddy. "Awfully glad to see you, Teddy. Seems an age since you were here last. Step right in."

Captain Frank's greeting was quite as cordial, for Teddy was a prime favorite of his, as he was of every member of the Sturdy household.

"Welcome to our city," smiled the captain, as he opened the door of the car. "Just throw your bag in here, jump in yourself and we'll get going."

"Bag!" exclaimed Don. "That's a good one. There are four bags at least in sight, and I don't know but what he has a trunk or two in the baggage room."

"Nary a trunk," denied Teddy, "but it is an imposition to ask you to take all these bags in the car. I'll arrange for an expressman to bring the lot of them up to the house."

"Nothing of the kind," declared the captain. "We can make room for one or two of them in the tonneau and strap the others on the running board. Lend a hand there, Dan," he directed Dan Roscoe, the chauffeur and man of all work about the Sturdy place.

Dan complied, and in a few minutes the baggage was neatly stowed and secured.

Don mounted beside the driver, while Teddy ensconced himself between Ruth and her uncle in the tonneau.

To Captain Sturdy he related, as he had to Don, the reasons for his failure to connect with the Mongolian Expedition.

The captain listened intently.

"Just as well, perhaps," he remarked, when Teddy had finished his tale of woe. "Things out that way are in bad condition just now. With civil war and famine threatening, Mongolia is a good place to keep away from. Once get in and it might not be so easy to get out."

"There wouldn't be any fun, if it were too easy," observed Teddy with conviction.

Captain Sturdy laughed.

"A hopeless case!" he chuckled. "I wonder if you and Don will ever get your fill of adventure."

"You needn't talk, Uncle Frank," pouted Ruth. "You're just as keen for it as they are. You know you are."

It was the boys' turn to laugh, and the captain did not deny the impeachment.

"I guess it's in the Sturdy blood, my dear," he said, patting her hand. "We certainly feel the lure of the unknown and answer the call of the wild. The same is true of Teddy, too. His father is a daring explorer, always on the go, and Teddy is just a chip off the old block."

"Don was telling me that there was something in the wind up here, something that might be a bang-up proposition," said Teddy, looking at the captain hopefully.

"Something in the water rather than in the wind," smiled the captain. "Yes, there is something more or less definite. Professor Bruce has received an offer to head a marine expedition—perhaps it would be more correct to say a

submarine expedition—to secure specimens from the ocean’s bed for a California museum.”

“Gee, that would be swell!” exclaimed Teddy, his imagination catching fire at the prospect. “Davy Jones’s locker! The graveyard of ships! Sunken treasure! Sponges! Coral rocks! Mermaids——”

There was a general laugh.

“Don’t let your imagination run away with you,” remarked the captain. “All the mermaids you’ll see will probably be armed with terrible rows of teeth. You’ll make tracks when you see them coming.”

“Likely enough,” admitted Teddy. “But what about this offer? Has the professor accepted it?”

“Not yet,” replied the captain, “but he’ll probably reach a decision in a day or two.”

“And if he takes it up, will there be room for Don and me in the expedition?” queried Teddy.

“That’s more than I can say,” replied the captain. His eyes twinkled. “I don’t know exactly what your scientific acquirements are,” he drawled. “For instance, are you an ichthyologist?”

“No,” replied Teddy, “I’m an Episcopalian.”

He joined himself in the roar that followed.

“But really,” he went on, “there ought to be some place where Don and I would fit in. We won’t charge a cent for our services, which ought to count for something.”

“You’ll have to put it up to the professor,” said Captain Sturdy. “I imagine he’ll have a pretty free hand in choosing those who are to go with him. Perhaps he can squeeze you in somewhere, though for the life of me I don’t see how he

can use anyone but a trained scientist. Still—hello, there! Look out! Sheer off!”

His shout was evoked by a car that was passing them at a reckless rate of speed and pressing so close that it threatened to drive them into a ditch at the side of the road.

The captain’s protests passed unheeded.

The oncoming auto scraped the side of the Sturdy car, crumpled a mudguard as though it had been so much paper, tore Teddy’s bags from the running board and scattered their contents in the road!

# CHAPTER II

## Hot Words

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There was a scream from Ruth and angry shouts from the others as the force of the impact almost made the Sturdy car turn turtle.

"Are you hurt, Ruth?" asked Don anxiously.

"No," replied Ruth tremulously, "but dreadfully scared. I thought we were all going to be killed."

"No credit to that driver that we weren't," stormed Captain Sturdy, bristling with indignation. "I'd like to have hold of him for just one minute."

"Swell chance of that!" exclaimed Don. "He hasn't even looked around. He's streaking it for all he's worth."

"One of those hit and run skunks," growled Teddy. "See what he's done to my bags. Scattered my things all over the road."

"I'll help you gather them up," said Don. "By the way, did any of you folks see the number of that car?"

None had, it developed, except Dan, the chauffeur.

"I didn't see the whole of it," he explained. "But it had '83' as the last figures."

"Was it a New York license plate?" the captain asked.

"No," replied Dan, "it commenced with a 'C.' Looked to me like 'Cal.' or maybe 'Col.' I can't be certain."

"Well, it doesn't matter much," observed the captain. "We'll probably never see the driver again, as he's putting on speed to get as far away from us as possible. If I had

him, I'd do my best to have his license taken away from him. Fellows like him are a menace to all decent people."

"Has he hurt the car much?" asked Ruth, who was still trembling from the shock of the experience.

"Crumpled up the mudguard and scraped the paint," reported Dan, who had been sizing up the damage, "but as far as I can see, he hasn't hurt the running qualities of the car. Can't tell for sure, however, till I look it over carefully after we get home."

In the meantime, Don and Teddy had been gathering up the contents of the broken bags and stowing them in the tonneau.

"The valises themselves are done for," stormed Teddy, whose temper was as fiery as his hair. "Here's a pair of field glasses that has been knocked flooey and a part of my best collapsible fishing rod broken. Gee, I'd like to take it out of that fellow's hide!"

"Hard luck, old man," sympathized Don. "Still, it might have been worse. One of us or all of us might be on our way to the hospital by this time."

"Or to the undertaker's," added Captain Sturdy. "But climb in now, if you boys have gathered up everything, and we'll get going."

Don and Teddy resumed their seats, Dan threw in the clutch, and the party proceeded on its way.

In a little while they had reached the Sturdy home. They passed through the gate and were halfway up the drive, when, as they turned a curve, Ruth gave vent to an exclamation.

"We have visitors, I guess," she remarked, as she pointed to a car standing in front of the main door. "I wonder who it can be. I don't think Mother was expecting anybody."

Teddy leaned out with sudden interest.

"Geewhillikens!" he exclaimed. "I'll bet a dollar to a plugged nickel that it's the same car that ran into us a few minutes ago. Yes, it is," he went on, his excitement growing. "See, there are the figures '83' at the end of the plate and there's 'Cal.'"

They were near enough now to the rear of the car to see that Teddy was correct. The legend on the plate was "Cal. 24,683."

The occupants of the car stared at each other in surprise.

"What in the mischief is the fellow doing here?" asked Don blankly.

"We'll soon find out," declared Captain Sturdy, as he jumped out of the car with an agility surprising in so large a man. "Come right along with me."

They followed him into the house and proceeded in the direction of the library, from which came the sound of voices.

One of them they knew for that of Professor Bruce, quiet, cultured, restrained.

The other was unfamiliar to them, and there was something about it that aroused instinctively dislike and distrust. It was loud, arrogant and full of self-complacency and conceit.

"As I was sayin', purfessor," the voice boomed, "they ain't any question of money in this. We're willin' to shell out all the coin that may be necessary. We know that you're the

real cheese when it comes to this science stuff an' we want to get our hooks into you before you come to a showdown with the other guys. We want to knock them fellers for a goal."

There was a moment's pause before the professor replied.

"I do not care to be drawn into any controversy," Professor Bruce observed. "Strife of that kind is distasteful to me. Until your visit today I had no idea there was any thought of a rival expedition."

"Well, you know it now, since I've given you the lowdown," interrupted the visitor.

"I had been inclined to accept the first proposition," went on the professor. "In the first place, it came from the Governor of the State. That gave it an official touch that is always of value in an expedition of that kind. Then, too, it gave me a free hand in the selection of my assistants. In the third place, it provided ample funds for the carrying out of the project."

"Ample funds!" snorted the visitor. "Where is the money to come from? From the treasury of the State. It's always easy to be generous with other people's money."

"I understood that the legislature had put the money at the Governor's disposition," interposed Professor Bruce mildly.

"Yeah?" sneered the man. "He's got them birds eatin' out of his hand. They're just rubber stamps. Whatever he wants they say 'yes' to."

"I take it that you're no friend to the Governor," observed the professor. "I suppose you belong to the opposite political



party.”

“You’re just shoutin’ I do,” bellowed the visitor. “Why, I wouldn’t be found dead with the bunch that bozo trains with. But that ain’t neither here nor there. This ain’t politics. It’s business. We’ve got the kale an’ money talks. I’m makin’ you a straight up an’ down proposition.”

With a premonitory cough to announce his coming, Captain Sturdy entered the room, followed by Don and Teddy.

Professor Bruce looked up and greeted the captain with an expression of relief.

“Not intruding, I hope,” remarked the captain, looking from the professor to the visitor.

In the latter he saw a burly, thick-jowled man, loudly dressed, wearing much jewelry. He had shaggy brows, jutting jaw and a domineering manner. He glowered at the newcomers as though he did not greatly relish the interruption.

“Not at all,” declared the professor in answer to the captain’s question. “I was wishing that you were here. This is Mr.—Mr.—” he looked at the visitor inquiringly.

“My moniker is Rufus Gold,” the latter said curtly. “I told you that when I first came in.”

“True,” murmured Professor Bruce. “I had forgotten. Pardon me. Frank, this is Mr. Gold. Mr. Gold, this is Captain Sturdy, a relative of mine by marriage.”

There was no warmth on either side in the acknowledgment of the introduction. The captain ached to bring up the matter of the automobile collision, but refrained for the moment out of courtesy to the professor.

"Take a seat, Frank, and you too, boys," invited Professor Bruce. "I think you will be interested in the matter that Mr. Gold and I were discussing."

"I didn't know that this was to be a mass meetin'," remarked Gold ungraciously.

The professor flushed, but retained his temper.

"Hardly that," he said. "I have no secrets from Captain Sturdy. We seldom embark on any enterprise without talking it over with each other."

He then turned to the captain.

"Mr. Gold has called with an unusual proposition, Frank," he said. "Perhaps he will be willing to re-state it for your benefit."

The visitor scowled and hesitated.

"I ain't keen about sellin' my cabbages twice," he said surlily, "but here's the long an' short of it. I'm here to make an offer to the purfessor to do some scoutin' on the ocean bed—collectin' specimens and things like that for a museum. We got to have a highbrow with a big reputation, an' that's why we hit on the purfessor."

"Very interesting," remarked the captain. "It's rather a singular coincidence that the offer should come so closely on the heels of the other—the one that came from the Governor of California."

"My offer's a mighty sight better than that guy's," declared Gold, "an' if it ain't, I'll make it so. Whatever the Governor's offer is, I'll top it. The sky's the limit."

"I don't think the professor would care to put himself up at auction," observed the captain icily. "There are other things than money that would determine his course of